Thumbs up for students as researchers:

STARS of Science

- Refocusing the SRC: Tooleymbc Central School, NSW
- Supporting Effective Student Participation:
  - Building Student Participation: 1986-2009
  - Criteria for Effective Student Councils
  - Informed Representation
- Environment and Cluster Resource Kits: VicSRC
- Regional Student Conferences: VicSRC
- Resources: Frenzy rescheduled; Form One Lane; Jump Start - SRC Seminars; Youth Development and Support Program; ASPRINworld and Connect on-line

Almost 30 Years of Connect: An Invitation and Offer – too good to refuse... see page 14!
This Issue:

Pardon me if I’m a little obsessed with turning 30!
No, not me personally (passed that long ago!), but in relation to this small magazine. Before Connect started, there was a saying: ‘Never trust anyone over 30!’ I wonder if that applies to magazines?

In the next issue I’ll reminisce a little more – with your help (see page 14 of this issue) – but a few comments at this stage might be appropriate.

In particular, I need to say (again) that Connect has been produced six times a year, for almost 30 years, without any institutional structure. It has had implicit or explicit support along the way from my various employers who have seen it as valuable, and who have been tolerant of my use of time, and provided access to photocopiers, printers, fax machines and postage. It has had consistent support from my partner, as we built a second storey onto the house to locate the archives. However, Connect has essentially remained a one-person operation, totally supported by subscriptions, which cover printing and postage.

I’ve been asked some questions along the way.

**Question 1:** *Doesn’t each issue take a long time to put together?* It doesn’t seem that way. Most of the time is spent in encouraging contributors to put together articles for each issue, and working with you to edit and develop your ideas. The actual compiling and laying out is fairly fast. And not painless, as I really enjoy the creative process of bringing your experiences to others.

**Question 2:** *Is Connect available electronically and if not, why not?* At the moment, Connect is just a print publication, though its contents are now being archived in the Informit database. That’s about what I can cope with. If anyone would like to work with me to develop an electronic version – maybe even one available for free – I’d be happy to talk with you about this.

**Question 3:** *After almost 30 years, why do you continue to publish Connect?* I suppose the basic answer is that I still enjoy doing so, am still passionate about the issues, and believe that Connect is making a difference. Along with your contributions, I’ll ruminate in the next issue on changes and developments over the 30 years, but I don’t think I’d have continued if I thought the ideas in Connect weren’t falling on fertile ground.

Your continued interest, through subscriptions and contributions, is what keeps Connect going!

Approaching 30

In Issue 180 (in December), there will be a little stock-taking of where we’ve come and where we’re at. How have participatory practices changed in the last 30 years? What are the prospects and challenges for the next 30? Your reflections or stories are critical - by November 27th please!

Roger Holdsworth

**NEXT ISSUE: #180: December 2009**

Deadline for material: 27th November 2009

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**Connect Number 179: October 2009**

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**Cover:**

Thumbs Up for STARS of Science at Nanango SHS: see pages 3-6. Photo courtesy Ian Fraser

**Why does Connect exist?**

Connect has been published bi-monthly since 1979.

It aims to:

- document student participation approaches and initiatives;
- support reflective practices;
- develop and share resources.

**Connect:**

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Connect acknowledges the support of the Australian Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne
The process

After a plan was developed, a meeting was held with the Year 10 science staff to explain the whole thing; while having questions, most teachers were enthusiastic about the possibilities. We then met with the whole student group to explain the process and to call for volunteers. We were surprised by the number of volunteers as 38 out of the cohort of 100 students initially agreed to be a part of the project. This did necessitate us proposing a range of possible research questions as it seemed overkill for all 38 students researching the one question on science teaching. The students then selected six questions that most interested them as a group, and the particular question each would like to research. With a little tweaking of numbers, we ended up with six groups with between five and seven members.

The six research teams investigated the following areas:

**Team 1:** Analysing the original surveys: the main purpose of the analysis was to detect common themes and any interesting or challenging ideas.

**Team 2:** Interviewing individuals or focus groups to get greater depth...
and richness of information based on the first group’s analysis.

**Team 3:** Researching and planning topics for a less academic science subject in Year 11 in 2009.

**Team 4:** Researching available extra-curricular science activities.

**Team 5:** Researching student views on the value of science as compulsory or an elective in Year 10.

**Team 6:** Researching student views on ways of making teaching and learning in Year 10 science more effective and fun.

We then came to a mutual agreement on expectations for students and staff and this was formalised into a contract, signed by the science HOD, the student and their parents. It was felt that this was important to highlight the seriousness of the undertaking. Two students dropped out at this stage. At the same time, a logo to represent STARs was devised by the students to help give the group a separate identity (see previous page). Each group selected a member to keep a journal of their perceptions of the process for evaluation purposes and to record their journey, while a few students volunteered to form a media group to provide reports to the school community and to local media in order to raise the profile of STARs. Throughout the period of the project, these students made occasional reports to the Year 10 student body, the school administration and the science staff, and wrote articles for the media.

We trained groups for their roles in research methods, ethics and protocols, analysis of information, report writing and report presentation (a full day training session off-campus plus follow-up workshops). Much of this training was based on a number of UK programs that included PowerPoints on aspects of students-as-researchers, training activities and role plays, workshop suggestions and worksheets (see appendix). The training day was a great success, enjoyed by the students because they were off campus and didn’t have to wear uniform; snacks, drinks and a BBQ lunch were provided and “we had fun and weren’t treated like kids” as one student put it. From there, meetings were conducted in science lessons or in lunch hours every couple of weeks to further develop students’ skills and to give time for them to conduct their research and complete their reports. Individual groups also met at other times to continue their research while my task was to keep them moving forward and to liaise with the school administration.

Through the connections of the science HOD, five students led workshops on STARs at two conferences for science teachers in SE Queensland in October of that year, which was extra work for those students but also very empowering for them and recognition for their efforts. On completion of their reports, the student groups presented their findings to the science faculty, school administration and Year 10 students, mainly in the form of PowerPoint presentations and written reports. We hosted a celebratory BBQ lunch late in the year to thank all those involved. Since then, some action has been taken on the recommendations. Evaluation of the success or otherwise of STARs is underway.

**Student findings**

Some of the most significant findings by the students included:

**Assessment**

There was overwhelming support for hands-on assessment. Assignments should allow students more time to complete them, be more interesting and allow more in-depth investigation.

**Teaching and learning in science: what do you enjoy?**

- Students often found science as it is taught to be boring;
- Practical activities were preferred over theory;
- Students wanted less writing;
- Electronics, robotics and hands-on activities were by far the most popular learning experiences;
- Teachers need to explain things clearly (and in a number of different ways to cater for different learning styles);
- When given reading in class, students suggested it be done cooperatively and with discussion during the reading;
- There was strong support for work for the top academic group being more complex, more “in-depth”;
- A large range of extra-curricular science activities are offered at the school but students were not always aware of them; and
- Extra-curricular science activities offered a more hands-on, activity-based approach to science than classroom science.

**Science as an elective**

- Evidence was split 50/50 on whether science should be an elective in Year 10 (though there is some question as to whether the
students answering the survey understood the question); • Science was much more strongly supported as a compulsory subject by girls than boys in younger years; and • There was a fairly strong belief that science widens options and job opportunities (and is necessary for some jobs).

Reflection

Initially, we were surprised by the number of students volunteering to be researchers. It is a powerful testament to the desire that students have to express their voice, summed up by many students who told us that “I wanted to make a difference” and “I want to help make science better for future Year 10 students” or similar statements. This supports evidence from research that shows that students are eager to express their opinions and that “students think deeply about educational issues, they have striking insights into them, and they have a great deal to say about them” (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001: 71). While some dozen students dropped out during the six months of the project for reasons ranging from moving to a new school to lack of time, and others were less committed, a core group of students remained highly involved throughout, driving the research to its conclusion.

In many ways, some student findings were unsurprising – most students prefer hands-on learning and practical activities such as experiments in science – and teachers predicted this at the beginning of the project, but it would be useful to explore further what possibilities exist for hands-on learning here. Equally interesting were the messages about pedagogy: the recognition by the students of differing learning styles and the need therefore for teachers to explain things in different ways; the desire for classroom reading to be a cooperative rather than an individual activity (recognising how students can help each other); and the desire for less writing (which raises interesting issues of what are the purposes of writing in Year 10 science classes, something that the students did not investigate). The desire for more challenging material, particularly for the more academic students, is indicative of the seriousness with which the students approach their learning.

Why did you join STARs? To make a difference in science. To make it better, let students have an opinion.

Did it live up to your expectations? Yes and no. It was fun, but some parts were boring.

What was the most important thing you learned? To work as a team and pull your weight.

What was the best thing about STARs? Changing the science for the younger kids.

Unfortunately, the STARs researchers did not have time to research the student experience of streaming in Year 10 science, though some comments were made about it, both positively and negatively. Another disappointment was that the hoped-for dialogue between teachers and students about science teaching and learning did not eventuate to any great degree as students were more concerned with ascertaining the views of their fellow students and opportunities to develop such a dialogue were rare. It should also be mentioned that it is sometimes hard for teachers to be under the critical microscope of students and this is a very real issue for teachers embarking on such a project.

Ultimately, while STARs did not revolutionise science teaching at the school, the advantages were many, both for the individual students and the science faculty. It is also true that the project was driven by teachers more than students and the research questions initially developed by teachers: a more empowering model would have seen these coming from the students themselves. Nevertheless,
some of the student suggestions have been acted on, particularly regarding the development of a science subject in Years 11 and 12 for less academic students. Perhaps equally important are the research and other skills the students developed, the confidence that they found within themselves, the sense of achievement they expressed, the friendships made or enhanced, the changing relationships with some teachers, and the sense that they could, indeed, make a difference.

**Conclusion**

Alison Cook-Sather wrote that we “must seriously question the assumption that we know more than the young people of today about how they learn or what they need to learn in preparation for the decades ahead” (Cook-Sather, 2002: 3). STARs offered a possible way of tapping into the unique knowledge and insights that students have about teaching and learning in a way that was exciting, empowering and challenging for both teachers and students.

Fittingly, it is best that the students have the last word on their experiences:

**Dean:** *It has made the teachers respect me a lot more. It has improved my ability to work with all sorts of people and taught me new skills such as interviewing people as well.*

**Emily:** *During the program, I have developed new friendships and a sense of belonging. I believe that it has definitely opened my eyes to new possibilities and it’s helped build better relationships with teachers. I’m really glad I joined this program as it has helped me mature and hopefully become a better person.*

**Karlee:** *I think this program has been a great success and has benefited not only us and the Year 10 body, but many of the future Year 10 science groups. During the STARs of Science project I believe we have learnt some very interesting and valuable skills, which we can use throughout our lives.*

**Fiona:** *We have gained more friends and learnt many skills that will help us in many ways in the years to come. I believe this has also helped us to build much better relationships with our teachers.*

**Appendix**

The following offer practical advice (including workshop activities) for developing a students-as-researchers program:


- Ian Fraser and Peter Cavallaro

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**Why did you join STARs?**

Because I could think of some things in science that I didn’t like and thought I’d be able to change it.

**What was the best thing about STARs?**

Free food and knowing that we were making a difference in science.

**What was the most important thing you learned?**

That we can change things if we work hard and well.

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Adam Fletcher (2006): *Washington youth voice handbook.* Olympia: Common Action *(This includes a series of workshop on youth-adult partnerships in general rather than focusing on students as researchers.)*


Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (2007): *Student voice: Training for students and staff (CD)*

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**References**


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Ian is HOD English at Nanango SHS and is currently on leave, completing his Masters at USQ. Peter is HOD Science and Agriculture at Nanango SHS and initiated the STARs project. Ian can be contacted at frase@dodo.com.au
Refocusing the SRC

Tooleybuc Central School is a small NSW school near the Victorian border. We have 76 primary students and 57 secondary students. Over the last few years, the Student Representative Council (SRC) seemed to have lost direction; the students who ran the Council for years completed their HSC and left the school. It was time to make some changes.

In November 2008, four of our students (three from Year 7 and one from Year 5) set out on an excursion to Melbourne to be part of a workshop being held by Second Strike (www.second-strike.com). In 2009, the school’s focus was to be on leadership so we thought we would get a head start by seeing how other schools run their SRC.

During our visit to the Second Strike workshop, we were fortunate to be the only school that involved students in the workshop and were therefore treated to a lot of one-on-one attention. In the workshop discussions, there was general consensus that most of the SRC groups within schools have turned into fundraising committees. It was also felt that, whilst fundraising is certainly a role for the SRC, it should not be its prime function.

At the Second Strike workshop, we were also lucky enough to meet Roger Holdsworth, editor of Connect. While our teacher, Mrs McKindlay, was chatting to Roger, he said he would be more than willing to visit Tooleybuc for a couple of days to work with our students. Wow – we were on our way ….

During the five-hour car trip home, we discussed our options and came up with some ideas to present to our Principal in the anticipation that Roger would visit us early in 2009.

Early 2009

True to his word, Roger arrived in Tooleybuc in February. He worked tirelessly for two days with the current SRC committee, as well as with our Junior Leaders in Year 6.

The discussions with our senior students focused on how to raise the profile of our school. Our secondary numbers are dropping and a large number of our students are starting to travel to Swan Hill. Our senior students felt that if we could promote the opportunities available at our school and the benefits of a small school maybe more students would stay. It was thought to target this year’s Year 5s in a hope to keep them through secondary school. Subsequently, parents of Year 5 and 6 students were invited to the school for an informal discussion with secondary school students and teachers. Students from Years 8, 10 and 11 volunteered to talk about what makes our school special and how they find life in secondary school. Parents asked questions and the students answered honestly and sincerely.

We held a competition about ‘What I Love About Tooleybuc’, which was to be written in a sentence. A Year 2 student won the competition and entries were printed fortnightly in The Bridge (our school magazine) and several were sent to The Guardian, the local Swan Hill newspaper. Photographs of students achieving and happenings at the school are sent to The Guardian each week and a large number of these have been published.

Roger and the senior students had many other ideas to promote our school – a mural at the school, a photograph display – which are all projects that will stay on the back burner for future years.
Restructuring the SRC

From the discussions with Junior students, it was decided that the junior members of the school tend to get lost in the secondary SRC and, although it is not intentional, do not have a strong voice here.

The students (with Roger’s advice) decided to form two Student Councils. One would be the Senior Student Representative Council (SSRC) and the other would be made up of Year 6 to Year 8 students and would be known as the Middle Junior School Council (MJSC). Both Councils would have a committee consisting of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer and would be open to any class members who wished to attend and contribute to meetings.

Our supervising teacher got to work and created booklets that outlined the role of each position on the committee. Once committee members were chosen, workshops were held at lunchtimes to train us up to be ready for our specific jobs.

Off and Running

Mrs McKindlay was happy to sit at the back of the room and offer encouragement or ideas whilst we got the hang of running meetings – but this was only required for a few weeks. Meetings are now run by the students, minutes are typed up on a laptop and distributed to our members, and our treasurers are responsible for keeping a record of all our income and expenditure. A notice board was purchased with our profits and all happenings and copies of minutes are displayed each week for all students to see.

Now that we are into Term 3, our Students Councils do so much more than raise funds. Yes, we still do our charity work and have raised money for the homeless, for Jeans for Genes Day and for Red Nose Day. But we have also been involved in:

- writing a mobile phone policy for the school;
- assisting the school in writing our Bullying Policy;
- raising the profile of our MJSC by reintroducing effective classroom representatives;
- holding free sausage sizzles at the end of each term to congratulate our students on the completion of another great term; and
- heating up lunches and toasted sandwiches during the winter months in the canteen.

Action Groups

We have also started running several action groups.

The Student Councils felt there was a lack of activities to interest students at lunch times. Last year a group of Year 7 students ran an art-craft group on Monday lunchtimes for Primary students and the response was overwhelming. The MJSC members surveyed our students, offering a range of activities that could become available for lunchtime action groups. Once several activities were agreed on, students had a choice of one to two groups they may like to join. Two teachers were allocated to each action group, along with one or two SRC and MJSC members. We are very lucky to have teachers in both our secondary and primary departments who are all willing to take a role in each of our action groups – so we have several available:

- We now have lunchtime sport in the secondary school on Wednesday lunchtimes and we have a very competitive teachers’ team.
- Our Green Action Group (GAG) meets on Tuesdays and has successfully started worm farms, introduced recycling into our school by providing orange wheele bins and chook buckets in eating areas, and are currently working on a vegetable patch over in the Ag Plot. Our GAG group have just been awarded a bronze certificate from Sustainability Victoria.
- Our Values Promoters Group meets on Wednesdays and has started rewarding and recognising students in the primary years for upholding the weekly value. Each week, students who have been chosen by the group are presented with a certificate and reward at the Monday morning assembly;
- A school band is in the making with all our talented/musical
students working together to form a band that will hopefully be ready to perform for our end-of-year Speech Night. Some of the money raised by the MJSC is going towards fixing all the musical equipment and purchasing a new bass guitar and amplifier.

- **Art-Craft** is offered to younger students and works within themes such as Spring, Father’s Day and so on.

Each action group reports to the MJSC once a month through the MJSC member involved in each group. The groups talk about their progress and any problems they are having or any funds they may require.

**Continued Training**

Another initiative to support our leadership this year was a visit from **Rising Generations** (www.risinggenerations.org.au), a NSW-based organisation that is committed to equipping students with dynamic leadership capabilities, who worked with all of our students from Year 5 to Year 11. One day was spent with students from Years 5 to 8 and the next day was spent with our seniors in Years 9 to 11.

In Term 4 this year, **Second Strike** will be visiting our school to do workshops with next year’s SRC representatives. Elections will be held before the end of the term and a change-over will take place during the **Second Strike** visit.

Tooleybuc Central School is moving forward with our leadership goals and we are excited to be part of it. From being in a stale patch, unsure of where to go, we have refocused and, as we visit new workshops and have programs come to school to work with us, we continue to move forward.

For more information, contact **Belinda McKindlay**: belinda.mckindlay@det.nsw.edu.au
Definition:
*Student Action Teams* (SATs) involve a group of students who work on a real, identified issue of community interest. The students carry out research on the topic and develop solutions – either proposals for others or action they then take.

Principles:
- An active role for young people as part of their community;
- Young people as community investigators;
- Young people doing something that makes a difference or brings about change;
- Programs that involve learning and meet academic goals.

Student Roles in SATs:
There are changed roles for students in their learning through SATs:
- **Purposeful**: students see outcomes that are important to them;
- **Productive**: students create something that makes a difference;
- **Communal**: students work together with fellow students, teachers and others.

Processes
The Student Actions Teams approach isn’t a set program; it is a learning and teaching approach, that is adapted to circumstances in individual schools and clusters of schools.

However, we have found ourselves using fairly consistent processes in practices so far:

- **Engagement Event** *(Forum 1)*
- **Research Phase**: what is the issue? what do we know about it?
- **Research Reporting Event** *(Forum 2)*
- **Action Phase**: what will we do? what will we change?
- **Action Reporting Event** *(Forum 3)*

Some Previous Examples of Student Action Teams
*These are just a few topics for SATs that we know about:*
Community safety *(Vic Statewide, 2000, 2002)*
Traffic safety *(Darebin, 2003)*
Environment *(Darebin, 2005, 2006; Frankston 2009)*
Police relations *(Wembee, 2003)*
Intergenerational conflict *(Bright, 2000)*
Bullying *(Doncaster, 2002)*
Sanitation *(Box Hill/Vermont, 2008)*
Values *(Manningham, 2006, 2007; Darebin 2007; Ringwood 2009)*
School engagement *(Preston/Thornbury, 2007-2009)*
Transition *(East Bentleigh, 2009; Western Sydney + Illawarra, 2009)*
Student Voice *(Ashburton, 2009)*
Alcohol Abuse *(Warragul, 2009)
Resources on Student Action Teams
& Links to Values Education and Service Learning

A. Student Action Teams


2. Research Publications (Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne):
   Print copies available from the Youth Research Centre: 03 8344 9633

3. Connect:
   bi-monthly magazine with many stories about Student Action Teams etc.
   Available on subscription from: Connect, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070 Vic
   Information at: www.asprinworld.com/

4. Student Action Teams documentation:

B. Values Education and Student Action Teams

www.curriculum.edu.au/values/


C. Service Learning and Student Action Teams

Holdsworth, R., Lake, M., Stacey, K. and Stafford, J. (2005). Doing Positive Things: “You have to go out and do it”: Outcomes for Participants in Youth Development Programs: A Report of a Three Year Longitudinal Study. Canberra: Australian Government Youth Bureau, Department of Family and Community Services; see: catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/3707792 (it no longer seems to be on-line, but it may now be online at the Youth Research Centre website - www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ycr/)


D. Some International Links

Check articles by Dana Mitra (USA), Adam Fletcher (USA): www.soundout.org
   Michael Fielding (UK), Sara Bragg (UK) and Pat Thomson (UK); also:
   www.pupil-voice.org.uk/ and www.consultingpupils.co.uk/
Minister visits Congress and launches VicSRC Environment Resource Kit!

The Victorian Education Minister, The Honourable Bronwyn Pike, attended the VicSRC Congress to listen to student views and show support for the work of the VicSRC. Minister Pike spent time touring workshop groups and engaging with the students on the issues they had chosen.

She then launched the new Environment Resource Kit produced by the VicSRC with funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This kit was the fulfilment of a resolution passed at the 2008 Congress and provides a brief introduction to some of the best services for schools that want to become more environmentally friendly.

A hard copy of the VicSRC Environment Resource Kit has been included in a recent newsletter mailout to all Victorian secondary schools. You can also download copies of the VicSRC Environment Resource Kit from the website or contact the VicSRC office if you would like additional hard copies.

The VicSRC has been working in 2009 to develop a kit to support the development and operation of SRC Clusters in the local area.

The draft kit includes definitions, purposes, ideas of agendas and possible job descriptions for those supporting clusters. There are also several small case studies of clusters.

The SRC Cluster Kit will be soon available on the VicSRC.

Meet the 2009-2010 VicSRC Executive Members

Tiffany Chapman (Toorak College)
Judy Chow (Mentone Girls Grammar)
Jenesse Cruz (Caroline Chisholm Catholic College)
Laura Dick (Goulburn Valley Grammar)
Angus Goodman (Myrtleford P-12 College)
Ryan Gunn (Lowanna College)
Georgia Hunt (Melbourne Girls College)
Elizabeth Kalas (Taylors Lakes SC)
Georgia Kennelly (University High School)
Michael Kurtanjek (University High School)
Emma Lewis (Bendigo Senior SC)
Ryan Lim (Taylors Lakes SC)
Cian McShane (Bellarine SC)
Emma Morrison (Templestowe College)
Sam Mountford (Melbourne Girls College)

The VicSRC receives funding support from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and is auspiced by and based at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on 1300 727 176; or by email: vicsrc@yacvic.org.au
In September and October, it was the Northern, Southern and Western Metropolitan SRCs’ turn to attend a VicSRC Regional Student Conference. Six schools participated in the Northern and Southern conferences, while seven schools took part in the Western Region.

These regional conferences give students and teachers an opportunity to meet in their local areas and form local networks to share information and learn about what other local school SRCs look like. We encourage all conference participants to take part in regional cluster meetings on a regular basis to ensure that the local network remains active and invigorated. The focus for the latest conferences has been on evaluating SRCs’ strength and weaknesses, developing leadership skills, networking between students in local areas and learning from other SRC representatives.

The mornings began with a ‘Getting to Know You Game’ after which we broke into small groups to complete case studies about our school SRCs. Students from different schools interviewed each other to find out all the relevant information and compare notes. For the second half of the day, there were training sessions on How to Audit Your SRC, Public Speaking and Tackling an Issue, as well as a discussion about why SRCs exist, what SRCs actually do, and how we determine what effective SRCs are. The training was run with the idea that students could bring their newly acquired skills back to their schools and, in turn, train their peers. It was fantastic to see the enthusiasm and drive of the students present and their hunger to learn new skills to become more effective SRC members!

Thank you to all schools who participated, with special thanks to Bentleigh Secondary and Keilor Downs Secondary College who kindly provided the locations for the Southern and Western Metro Conferences. Thanks also to Helen Cridland, Fiona Waugh and Louisa Ellum from the Bayside-Glen Eira-Kingston LLEN and to Kim Stadtmiller and Lucy Thornton from the Hume-Whittlesea LLEN for being our conference partners and providing morning tea and lunch on the day and to VicSRC Student Executive member Ryan Lim who organised the Western Region Conference.

Kate Walsh, VicSRC Coordinator

Extra Funding to VicSRC for SRC Resources and Training!

In June this year, the VicSRC received a special grant from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to enable us to work further towards strengthening SRCs and representing Victorian secondary school students.

The extra funding (until May 2010) demonstrates the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the work of the VicSRC as the official body for student voices in Victoria.

The extra funds will be used to produce:

• Resources to support SRC teachers in their roles of supporting student leadership;

• Resources to assist principals to support student voice as part of a school improvement process;

• Resources support students involved in SRCs in the induction and skills involved for operation of an effective SRC, for example, communication skills, leadership development, effective meeting skills and the running of effective events; and

• SRC training sessions in induction, communication and leadership, and student participation.

The VicSRC wishes to thank the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for their continued support and belief in the importance and good work of SRCs throughout Victoria.
30 Years On!

The next issue of Connect (#180, December 2009) will mark 30 years of publication of this small journal supporting student participation. Did we think we’d last this long when we published the first issue at the end of 1979? Did we think we’d still be following up this issue so passionately? (Answer: Nope: we were never thinking that far ahead!)

As we’ve tended to do at these regular intervals (5 years, 10 years, 20 years etc), we’d like to reflect a little on the path traveled and the path that lies before us.

We’d like you to join us in this reflection!

An Invitation to You …

And therefore, we invite you to respond to two questions - in writing, in pictures, in cartoons - whatever works for you. Long answers (well, not too long) or short answers:

Question 1:
What do you think have been the big achievements and changes in ‘student participation’ in the last 30 years? (or a lesser time, if you’re younger!)

Question 2:
What do you think we should be aiming at for ‘student participation’ in the next 30 years? What are the big challenges that we’ll face?

Our Offer to You …

In return, we’ll offer everyone whose responses we use (and we’ll try to use as many as we can - and try to get a range of responses from students, teachers, consultants, parents, principals etc) a free one-year extension on your subscription to Connect!

Or if you’re not a current subscriber, we’ll give you a free one-year subscription to Connect ... to start the next 30 years!!

Deadline:
All contributions to us by Friday November 27th, 2009

How?
By e-mail to r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au or mail to: Connect, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070 or use the form on the website: www.asprinworld.com
Supporting Effective Student Participation

Originally from Connect 40 (August/September 1986): the cover of a report of an in-service on ‘Bringing Student Participation Support Teachers Together’
Supporting Effective Student Councils

Criteria for Effective Student Councils

What makes a good Student Council or SRC? If we are to recognise Student Councils that are doing well, or others that need improvement, we need to have some idea of how we judge this.

In a previous article in Connect (initially in # 75, June 1992, and again in #116 in April 1998) it was suggested that a Student Council needs a vision of what it can and should do, and that it should monitor what actually happens and match the work of the Student Council against that vision. This was mainly concerned with the sort of things that the Student Council worked on, but it didn’t talk about how the Student Council was structured, how it related to other students, or how it connected to the school’s decision-making.

It’s now suggested that there are 10 possible criteria (or definitions) for a successful Student Council. Your Student Council can use these to think about how well you are doing – but you need to be brutally honest with yourself. You also need to collect views about the Student Council on these ten criteria from different people; a junior member of the Student Council may see some things differently from a senior member, or from a student who is not on the Student Council, or from a support teacher, or from the Principal. So ask a range of people.

Put your results onto the graph at the end of the criteria, so you can show and compare your results.

The importance of the answers you get is more to do with how they help you to improve your Student Council. These views give a glimpse at one time, but this might (and probably should) change with time, especially if you use what you learn to help you improve.

(In several areas, these criteria also recognise that there are different ways for the Student Council to be structured and operate, reflecting the different sizes and structures of the school. A Student Council in a school of 15 or 150 students should be very different from a Student Council in a school of 1500 students.)

Roger Holdsworth

Criterion 1: The Student Council meets regularly

- It has a clear timetable for meeting
- It notifies all members (and other students) when the next meeting is to be held
- There is good attendance of members
- It meets in various forms and groups (eg as a whole Council, in sub-groups etc)

Criterion 2: The Student Council has clear structures and processes

- There is a clear and known process for students to become a member of the Student Council through election or appointment
- There is a known and written constitution describing how the Student Council works
- This constitution and how the Council is working, is reviewed regularly
- The Council has internal structures and processes that are appropriate to the work of the Council (including chairing, recording decisions etc)
- Meetings are well run, effective (productive) and enjoyable

0 Not at all
1 Poor
2 Some
3 OK
4 Good
5 Brilliant
Criterion 3: The Student Council is broadly representative of students

- Students are elected or appointed through democratic and representative processes (that could be by election, or from volunteers or by other agreed processes)
- There is a range of students on the Student Council – in age, ability, school engagement, race, gender etc – that broadly represents students in the school
- No significant group of students is, or feels, unrepresented on or by the Student Council
- Being on the Council is a desirable outcome for a broad range of students

Criterion 4: The Student Council reports to students and gets advice from students

- Student Council representatives get advice and support from other students in different ways
- Time is available for the Student Council members to report back to other students and to get advice
- The views of other students are considered and taken seriously by the Student Council

Criterion 5: The Student Council deals with a range of issues

- The Council is aware of the different things that a Student Council can do
- The Council actually does a range of things, including advocacy for students, putting forward student views (on curriculum, rules, uniforms, facilities etc), organising events, supporting agreed causes – ie it is not just restricted to fundraising or social activities
- The Council controls the time that it allocates to different issue and topics – it makes sure that one or two things don’t dominate
- The Council sets up appropriate internal structures to deal with different issues eg sub-groups or working parties
- The Council is effective in implementing and working on this range of issues
- The Council completes its plans and achieves what it sets out to do

Criterion 6: The Student Council is trained and networked to be effective

- Appropriate training events are organised within the school and made available to all members of the Student Council
- Members of the Student Council get follow-up support and informal training in the skills needed to do their work
- The Student Council has access to inter-school and statewide networking opportunities
- The Student Council is a member of the appropriate statewide organisation (eg VicSRC) where it exists
Criterion 7: The Student Council has time to do its work and credit for its work

- The Student Council meets at a time convenient to all members
- Time is provided, as part of the school curriculum, for Student Council members to do their work
- Credit is provided for Student Council members to recognise their contribution to the school and to their own learning
- The Student Council is publicly acknowledged for its work

Criterion 8: The Student Council is connected to the school’s decision-making

- Students are represented on the school’s decision-making body, either from the Student Council, or directly from the student body; there is more than one student appointed
- Students are represented on a range of other committees within the school eg uniform committee, canteen committee, curriculum committee, facilities etc
- Student views are heard and considered seriously in all these forums
- The Student Council is asked for its views on all important matters

Criterion 9: The Student Council has teacher and principal support

- There is a Student Council support teacher who has time release to support the Student Council
- This teacher supports and advises the Council without taking over
- There are regular meetings of the Student Council with the Principal and other appropriate members of the school administration
- The views and suggestions of the Student Council are seriously considered and discussed

Criterion 10: The Student Council has the resources it needs

- The Student Council has a budget that it controls and allocates
- It has access to practical resources such as photocopying, mailing etc
- It has a Student Council noticeboard that it controls
- It has a space of its own – eg an office, a filing cabinet etc

This is a first draft of a criteria-based tool to help you to reflect on the effectiveness of your Student Council. It was tried and amended by students at a recent Western Metropolitan Regional SRC Conference in Victoria. We'd like you to try it too and see if it's useful.

The descriptions are meant to show that there are many possibilities; some are essential (at least the Student Council should be like this), and others are desirable (and not all Councils may be like this).

Are there other criteria that could be used? Are the descriptions appropriate?

Let Connect know how you have used this and what you think.
Informed Representation

If you’re a representative, when people ask you about an issue, you don’t just present your own ideas. If you’re a representative of other students, you need to be finding out what they think too, and making sure you present their ideas. And you’ll also need to find out about the topic, so you know what you’re talking about; usually you shouldn’t just give views ‘off the top of your head’.

We talk about this as informed representation. This article explores some ideas about what that means. It developed from a brainstorm with the Student Executive of the VicSRC.

Why is informed representation important?

First of all, to speak about any issue, you’ll need to know more about the issue. Yes, as a student, you know and experience certain things – in fact, your experience gives you an expertise that others (particularly teachers and other adults) do not have. But that knowledge and experience will also be limited. So the first part of informed representation is knowing the facts about the issue. Otherwise you’ll come up with incorrect views and maybe even look foolish.

Secondly, the issue is likely to be complicated. Any one person knows some of the details, but there are many more to be considered and taken into account. You’ll need to weigh up different ideas and some of them might be contradictory.

Thirdly, there are probably many different views on the topic, from different students – who have different experiences and needs. You are not representing just your own views, but seeking to give some idea of the range of views that exist. This is even more important when you remember that you were probably elected or appointed as a representative because you were confident and wanted to ‘step forward’. That’s well and good, but that then means you may not be a ‘typical’ student. Indeed, is there such a person?

So, if you are to provide a student perspective, you need to be finding out what other students – and a range of many different students – think about the topic. Otherwise, you are misleading whoever is asking for your views. And other students have a right to have their voices and views heard – just as you do.

What is informed representation?

From this discussion, we can then think of informed representation as having three dimensions: depth, breadth and history.

Depth means finding out as much as you can about the topic – as much detail as you can. What does the topic mean? Why is it important? What are the possible differences and complications?

Breadth means finding out what a range of other students think about the topic. What is their experience? Are there different experiences? What do other students think should happen? Why? Which students have different views?

History means finding out what has already happened or is happening now. What have people tried before? What have students already suggested? What happened? Who else is working on this topic? Why? And this also includes future history: what you think should be happening.

How do you become an informed representative?

Thinking about these three dimensions helps us to define how we can go about being better informed as representatives. When you’re asked for a student perspective on a topic, you should be trying to get as much information as possible, within the time available.

First, research the topic in all the usual ways: use internet search engines, look in the media (papers, TV, radio), find some articles about the topic, interview people working in the area. Try to use a diversity of sources, and talk with a diversity of people. You may be able to use ‘professional connections’ (researchers, teachers, community workers) to help you to what will be useful.

Secondly, make a special effort to find others who are particularly interested and working on the topic. They should be able to help you with some history and background, and let you know who has a special interest in the topic – the ‘stakeholders’.

Thirdly, find out the experiences and views of other students. You can do this formally, through surveys and questionnaires, but this might take some time. If you have a limited time (as is usual), at least try to talk with and interview a range of other students. Don’t just choose your friends: choose students from different groups, different ages, different backgrounds – even different schools if possible. You will want to know both what they have experienced on the topic (what is and has been happening) and what they think about this – and about what should be happening.

Fourthly, involve other students actively in the topic. If other students are actively interested, and have different experiences, set up a working group to advise you, and to act with you on the topic.

In this way, when you get up to speak, you’ll know what you are talking about, you’ll know what other students think, and you’ll be able to be an informed representative in suggesting positive and practical possibilities.

Roger Holdsworth
with VicSRC Executive members
**Student Councils and Beyond:**
Students as Effective Participants in Decision-Making

The first *Connect* publication (from 2005) supports effective and relevant participation of students in decision-making in primary and secondary schools. It brings together a collection of practical ideas and articles about how Student Councils can go beyond tokenism ... and make a difference. Case studies, ideas, worksheets!

Order NOW from *Connect*: $33 or $27.50 for *Connect* subscribers.

**Student Action Teams:**
Implementing Productive Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms

*Student Action Teams* - teams of students who, as part of their school curriculum, adopt a community issue that they care passionately about, research it, decide what needs to be changed or improved and take action to achieve that.

In this book (April 2006) primary and secondary schools in Melbourne’s northern suburbs tell how to establish and implement *Student Action Teams*. They describe their students’ work researching and acting around traffic safety and the environment and reflect on what they have learnt: the basic principles of *Student Action Teams*, their practical operation, and the stories of successful approaches and outcomes in two projects. The principles and approaches outlined here can be used to guide developments in any school - acting alone or in a cluster. Includes sample worksheets and proformas.

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**Reaching High:**
A Program Promoting Positive Approaches to Learning Differences

*Reaching High* tells the story of 14 years’ work around literacy in north central Victoria. Student participatory approaches are central to a program that caters for students with learning differences, with an annual student-run three-day *regional camp* as the culmination of that program. This camp brings in *adult role models* who have, or have had, learning differences, to act as mentors for students. Past student participants now also act as leaders, adult role models and assistants.

This inspiring and exciting 120-page book documents the development and operation of the *Reaching High Program*. It outlines the theory and community links behind the program, and how it is built on the active and strength-based participation of students. Includes a DVD of practical ideas.


Order now: $33 each ($27.50 for *Connect* subscribers)

Watch out for a new *Connect* publication planned for late 2009; more details (hopefully) in *Connect* 180 in December!
The Frenzy Expo and JSC Congress that was outlined in the last issue of Connect – for Victorian primary school Student Councils – was postponed. It has now been rescheduled for Wednesday November 25th at Moorabbin Town Hall.

Form One Lane: SRC Teacher/Advisers Professional Development Seminars:

NSW Secondary Schools: Monday 30 November; UNSW, Kensington
NSW Primary Schools: Tuesday 1 December; UNSW, Kensington
Vic Secondary Schools: Tuesday, 8 December; Kew
Vic Primary Schools: Thursday 10 December; Kew

Jump Start: Getting Your SRC Ready for 2010

NSW: Wednesday 2 December; UNSW, Kensington
Vic: Friday 4 December; Victoria University - Queen Street Campus, Melbourne

Get all the details from Second Strike:

www.second-strike.com
or info@second-strike.com

Youth Development and Support Program:

The Federal Minister for Youth, Kate Ellis, recently launched a new Federal funding program to support the development and participation of young Australians, aged 12 to 25.

The Australian Government will provide $500,000 a year to eligible non-government, not-for-profit organisations through the Youth Development and Support Program.

The program will give funding to projects that will inspire young people to achieve their true potential.

“The Youth Development and Support Program will fund community-based projects aimed at helping young people in their transition to independence and adulthood,” Ms Ellis said.

Eligible groups are invited to apply for grants up to $75,000 towards projects that focus on the participation and social inclusion of young people.

“This new investment will support events and activities that give young people new skills to deal with the difficulties life sometimes poses and encourage them to take up an active role in society,” Ms Ellis said.

“This Government wants to see more of our young people grow into confident and resilient citizens with the skills and enthusiasm to contribute to Australian life.

“This Government wants to see young people involved in decision making and putting forward solutions to the problems we face as communities,” Ms Ellis said. “Through the Youth Development and Support Program we can help achieve this.”

Applications for funding are now open and close on 4 November 2009.

For more information visit the Youth Website: www.youth.gov.au/ydsp.html or call 1300 363 079.

Have a look!

Connect available electronically:

http://www.informit.com.au

Current and recent issues of Connect are now available on-line to libraries that subscribe to RMIT’s Informit site – a site that contains databases of many Australian publications. You can access whole issues of Connect as well as individual articles. Costs apply, either by a library subscription to Informit’s databases, or through individual payments per view for articles.
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Local and Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can’t lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on: (03) 9489 9052 or (03) 8344 9637

Australian:
Darley Primary School Big Book (Darley PS, Bacchus Marsh, Vic)
Environmental Communication (Pam Davis; Primary English Teaching Association, Marrickville, NSW; PEN 147) 2005
FYA Newsletter (Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Vic) 04; Winter 2009
Schooling for the Knowledge Era (David Warner; ACER Press, Vic) 2006
The Places We Call Home (e:lit and Murray-Darling Basin Commission, NSW) 2008
TLN Journal (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 16 No 2; Winter 2009
VicSRC Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 3 No 4; October 2009
Yikes (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 7 Edition 4; September 2009
Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tas) Vol 28 No 3; September 2009

International:
Schools and Communities: working together to transform children’s lives (West-Burnham, Farran and Otero; Network Continuum) 2007
Influences of Mediated Violence: A brief research summary (Cecilia von Feilitzen; International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, Nordicom, Sweden) 2009

Documents

The documents listed in this column may be of general background interest. You may be able to find these on-line or a photocopy could be made available for research purposes. Please order by code number.

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

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<td>Pupil Democracy in England (Professor Lynn Davies, University of Birmingham, Child Research Net, UK; 2002) (4 pp)</td>
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<td>621</td>
<td>Rights Respecting Schools (Edward Waller, Respect and Wellbeing, UK; 2009) (3 pp)</td>
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<td>Strengthening Student Voice Initiatives in High Schools: An Examination of the Supports Needed for School-based Youth-Adult Partnerships (Dana L Mitra; Youth &amp; Society: 40; 2009) (26 pp)</td>
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<td>Collaborating with Students: Building Youth-Adult Partnerships in Schools (Dana L Mitra; American J of Education 115; May 2009) (30 pp)</td>
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<td>Balancing power in communities of practice: An examination of increasing student voice through school-based youth-adult partnerships (Dana L Mitra; J Educational Change 9; 2008) (22 pp)</td>
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<td>Adults Advising Youth: Leading While Getting Out of the Way (Dana L Mitra; Educational Administration Quarterly 41; 2005) (35 pp)</td>
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<td>The Significance of Students: Can Increasing ‘Student Voice’ in Schools Lead to Gains in Youth Development? (Dana L Mitra; Teachers College Record 106 (4); April 2004) (38 pp)</td>
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<td>The Role of Intermediary Organizations in Sustaining Student Voice Initiatives (Dana L Mitra; Teachers College Record 111 (7); July 2009) (36 pp)</td>
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<td>628</td>
<td>What counts as student voice in active citizenship studies? (Hamish Ross, Pamela Munn and Jane Brown; Education, Citizenship and Social Justice 2 (3), 2007) (20 pp)</td>
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<td>629</td>
<td>‘We don’t learn democracy, we live it!’: Consulting the pupil voice in Scottish schools (Henry Maitles and Ross Deuchars; Education, Citizenship and Social Justice 1 (3), 2006) (18 pp)</td>
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• 1996 Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work Case studies of Primary School SRCs ($6.60 or $11 for two copies) $ ...........

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• Foxfire: 25 Years (Doubleday) ($22) $ ...........

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