Connect
supporting student participation

32-page super holiday issue

Following up student participation issues for 30 years!

Also in this issue:

• 30 Years of Journeys Supporting Student Participation
• Switched On to Learning: New Resource from Connect
• Speak Up: Increasing student voice and participation in classroom meetings
• Giving Students a Voice in School Improvement
• Leaders as Mentors: Modelling and mentoring values to younger students
• Students Act to Improve Transition: Student Action Teams approach
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• Resources: Student Action Teams: articles in Connect

NEW! from Connect: page 9
This Issue:

I have already included much of what I normally editorialise, in the lead article about 30 Years, so maybe a more personally reflective note is appropriate here.

I want to start by saying thanks - first to all of you who have subscribed and contributed over various lengths of time. A small magazine like Connect can only continue if it keeps meeting needs, and the evidence of that is that people (students and teachers in particular) have continued to write for Connect and have continued to subscribe. In particular, thanks go out to the ‘first 100’ group who have subscribed since the very early days in the early 80s, and to those who have been supporting, sustaining and half-lifetime subscribers - thanks for your generosity and belief.

Secondly, thanks to those organisations that have enabled Connect, by explicitly or implicitly supporting my work on it while in various salaried positions: teaching at Lynall Hall Community School, as a consultant with the Transition Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) and the Participation and Equity Program (PEP), as a staff member at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YAC Vic) and as a researcher at the Australian Youth Research Centre (AYRC – at The University of Melbourne). It has been invaluable to have access to resources and networks in all those jobs.

Finally, overwhelming thanks to my partner, Pat, who has supported me and the production of Connect in un-numbered ways, including agreement to add an extra storey to the house to hold the archives!

That Connect room is overflowing with resources collected over 30 years. There’s even a huge light table built to enable easy layout – from a time before Connect was put together inside a computer. (And there’s still the old electronic typewriter on which the articles were typed-up!) How production methods have changed over 30 years!

Yet in reflecting on what has changed, I’m struck by the thought that the principles underlying the approaches outlined in Connect, have remained consistent. We still talk of an active and heard voice for young people, as we did 30 years ago; we still talk of giving young people important things to do as part of their education; we still talk of roles of value for young people; we still talk of young people as partners in education. Perhaps some of our statements are now tighter, with more evidence for their truth and importance. Perhaps the examples are more diverse and with a greater store of experience.

But, Lyn and others, while there are no plans to ‘really retire’, we have to plan for succession and sustainability – especially if we’re thinking about the next 30 years!

Roger Holdsworth

NEXT ISSUE: #181: February 2010
Deadline for material: end of January, 2010
30 Years of Journeys ...  
Supporting Student Participation

In 1979, I was teaching at Lynall Hall Community School in Brunswick (in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne). I'd set up a cross-age tutoring program at Brunswick Girls High School, was working on Ascolta – a student-run five-language community newspaper, and was active in the STC Group – student-negotiated curriculum in an alternative Year 12 Course. I was getting lots of queries: practical questions about how to do this and that, how to set up a program and so on.

I'd also, because of the involvement with Ascolta, been to a US conference on student-led oral history publishing that year. This was organised by the Foxfire project (which was starting to realise that they were really on about active student participation in curriculum and community, and that oral history collection and publication was one vehicle for this). They also published a national journal called Hands On, and in discussion with them, I was inspired to investigate whether an Australian version might be possible and useful.

And so, at the end of 1979, I hesitantly put together a 16-page roneoed and stapled newsletter (we had no photocopier and off-set printing only became an option with the next few issues), called it Connect, and sent it to a few contacts. I wrote in that first issue:

"In recent years, a number of projects have sprung up that involve young people actively and meaningfully in their own education, projects that emphasise participation over passivity. These projects vary in style, format and emphasis. What is such youth participation is often difficult to define, especially from outside... All are united in the belief that people learn by doing and that young people can do things - they have capabilities."

I outlined areas such as media productions by students, cross-age tutoring programs, student governance of schools and other examples.

Over the next few years, more and more people wrote about their own experiences. These were teachers and students, parents and administrators, consultants and youth workers - and more. Their stories expanded and clarified what student participation might be – but also raised questions and concerns. This was a 'practice journal' before such terms were used.

Now Connect has reached its 30th anniversary, and continues to publish stories from primary and secondary schools around the country, about student-led and purposeful curriculum, about authentic student participation in school governance, and about the resources to support this. It continues to celebrate and explore and challenge practices. Along the way, it's published five books (see this issue for the latest one!), been involved in training days and conferences, appeared at professional development seminars and had a national and international profile. At times it felt as if Connect were a lone voice, advocating and arguing for real roles of value for young people in schools. But it kept going and, I think, has had a profound impact on what now happens in and between schools.

Connect thanks the many supporters who, through subscriptions and generous donations, have kept the journal going – Connect has totally relied on such income for its publication and distribution costs. Over the years, there have been over 2700 individuals and groups who have subscribed – but never more than about 600 at any one time (a concern that still needs to be addressed – please tell others about us!). And there is still a valiant band of eight subscribers (from the 'first 100') who responded to the 1979 issue and have been on the mailing list ever since (you know who you are: Peter C, Graeme/Julie J, Jan H, Tony K, Jackie Q, James O, VASST/SEV and SRCS)!

For this issue, I again asked people to tell us all what they think the significant achievements of the last 30 years have been, and what they see as the challenges for the next 30. Their comments are included in the next pages. Read on and respond; we need to set the agenda together!

Roger Holdsworth
Each time I open my mailbox to see a newly minted Connect, I am filled with enthusiasm and the expectation of a good read. I have never been disappointed. My good fortune is that I was present at the first edition.

During all of my years as a teacher-educator, my university students were introduced through Connect, to a constantly evolving series of school and classroom projects, where school students were initiating projects, and developing as problem-solvers and classroom researchers.

The 30 years of developing practice can be classified as longitudinal research, through the use of action-research, and a developing theory of school learning (student learning through practice); theory was generated from data emerging from actual community and school-based programs, run by students and teachers. This learning practice was invaluable for teachers in training, as it made a very important addition to their knowledge of teaching and learning practice.

Learning ‘to risk’ was an important component for the school students involved in the learning process. Over time, school students moved from personal to community issues that they saw as important. Local issues were a starting point that led to broader themes to be debated and researched.

All of this practice and student school-based research stretched university students toward newer forms of classroom teaching and learning practice. It became known, in an abbreviated form as, ‘learning by doing’. Other contributors will talk of the valuable contribution made by students and teachers; however Connect also added to teacher education as a much valued research teaching model.

Well done Connect; it is 30 years of invaluable service to education in general.

Main Challenges for the Next 30 Years
Connect was a critical addition to our (with Art Pearl) collective successes and failures, in developing our understanding of democratic education.

The next development for Connect, as I see it, is an emphasis on developing forms of democratic education a part of everyday schooling. The concept of democracy is cited regularly in educational circles, however there is a hidden curriculum involved in almost all contemporary writings, ie a process of osmosis. Such a process cannot achieve a democracy.

Over the past 30 years, no one or nothing has done as much as Connect has in bringing much needed student voice and substance to education.

Now, when democracy is endangered of being overwhelmed by unbridled global corporate power, and as the world faces new and more ominous challenges, the role that Connect plays in preparing tomorrow’s citizens grows ever more important.

Art Pearl
Professor Emeritus
University of California, Santa Cruz

It cannot be achieved from outside the school, nor from top-down administration. It must be learned by active practice, by a ‘doing’ on a daily basis. Each step will include a hard combination of vigorous debate and practice. Connect is well placed and situated in schools to start small, and expand when ready. Our premise here is that students will learn democracy by practising democracy, by learning to change their world, and reflect on that action.

What are the principles being proposed for this democracy within schools? For example, how do students address authority (always problematic in a democracy)? How do students/schools achieve inclusiveness? How do students learn to be democratic citizens? What inalienable rights do students have? How is racism defined?

Well, that is a full agenda, and a good start for the competent student and supportive teachers to take on.

Tony Knight
Visiting Scholar, Victoria University
As Connect has been going for longer than I’ve been alive, I’m not entirely sure what the key developments in student participation have been in the last 30 years! However, there is no doubt that the developments and achievements that have been made have created a great foundation for where we are today.

However, I can say that I think we still have a long way to go before student voice is valued as highly as it should be, both by educators and by their governing systems. Really allowing students to play a leading part in decision making and in having a say in the way they are educated is vital if student participation is to be taken seriously within all schools.

The VicSRC is constantly working to make this a reality in Victoria and the endless support we receive from Roger Holdsworth, our ‘student participation guru’, is invaluable.

Thanks to Roger and Connect for constantly reminding us that student participation is not just a catch phrase but a real and dynamic approach to connecting students with each other and their education.

Happy 30th Birthday Connect!

Kate Walsh
VicSRC Coordinator

Congratulations on the 30th birthday and Connect’s role in stimulating and fostering student participation as a dynamic process in education. Connect has showcased a myriad of ways of ‘how to’ from right across the globe – the achievement needs CELEBRATION in capital letters.

We’ve benefitted hugely here in the Nathalia district: from your ongoing personal input, from being able to also have a voice through your magazine and from being able to ‘connect’ with others.

Our Reaching High organisation (using student participatory principles to develop annual camps for secondary students with learning differences) has just had its 18th birthday. We have seen what full student participation and ownership of a program can achieve over all those years. Here’s our latest example:

Our 18th birthday lunch was designed and prepared by Barbara Hopkins, a couple of months away from being a chef at Letizia’s restaurant in Shepparton. Barbara was a Nathalia Secondary College Year 8 camp captain of a student team who worked all year to develop a regional camp for students with learning differences in 1998. She never gave up her goal of being a chef and is nearly there. Barb now wants to come out to the next camp as an adult role model for others. Student participation and empowerment builds an “I can achieve” attitude that transfers into adulthood. It acts to bond and build bridges that can foster a reaching back to others. We know this because we live it. Fantastic!

Here’s why, however, it’s essential to keep promoting the process. It’s why we need to celebrate the editing and publishing of Connect for so many years. We have found, as we have moved into the greater complexity of cross sectoral delivery of the program, that, allied with those advantages, real threats to student participation emerge. As organisations grow, naturally they streamline their programs, restructure their workforce and build their administrative infrastructure. In our experience, it’s the students, still at the grass roots level, who, inadvertently, can be negatively affected by all this. They can get left behind. How? Time originally allocated for programs can be reduced, workers can change rapidly, students tend to be ‘serviced’ and organised for, rather than have to use student participatory principles to achieve their goal. Student participation takes time; it takes facilitation; it requires a democratic approach. It will always be a process, a journey taken towards personal and team development.

So, you can’t retire just yet, Connect. We need a vehicle that continues to celebrate the joy and the spirit of achievement that use of such an approach brings. Plus, for the future, there’s a lot of work ahead to promote the advantages, but also to assist in resolving the tensions inherent in cross sectoral practice. Hmm, another 30 years should do it. How about it, Connect?

Lyn Loger
Nathalia, Vic
In the mid 70s, I thought that educational approaches that kids found novel, challenging and exciting would become ubiquitous. My list would have included work experience (we called them work-outs), cross age tutoring, Ascolta-type publishing, running a radio station, community action, community research, investigations (this was our term for kids going out on their own or in pairs to ‘investigate’ what different organisations and agencies in the community do) and mini-enterprises. Only work experience ‘took off’, when other activities probably had much more going for them in terms of breaking down barriers, building team work skills, helping others, and supporting students’ academic and personal growth. In particular I thought cross-age and peer-tutoring would take off and be adopted by every school. The research associated with the benefits for both student tutors and tutees was and is very compelling. Perhaps when I developed the work experience kit for the Department, I should also have set up a working party and written a cross-age tutoring kit to give it legitimation.

Idle thoughts about an opportunity lost.

Peter Cole
Port Melbourne, Vic

Challenges for the future: Institutionalising the idea of students as partners rather than tokenised participation.

Dana L Mitra
Assistant Professor
Education Theory and Policy
Penn State College of Education, USA

I think one of the key developments is the linking of student participation to the growing field of youth development research. This research highlights the assets and strengths of young people as opposed to focusing solely on what needs to be ‘fixed’ in youth.

Looking Back ... Looking Forward ...

Second Strike has been providing tailor-made SRC Training Days to primary and secondary schools’ Student Representative Councils and teachers across Australia for ten years now. In that time we have noted some significant changes that have occurred. More schools are recognising the need for training (on-going training in particular), and are making that available to their students. SRCS can’t be expected to function immediately at peak level when there is little prior experience with the systems involved.

More primary schools are recognising the need to include all students in the process, including the very youngest students, even though this is often difficult to achieve. This point is particularly pleasing as, when Second Strike started operations in 1999, it was felt that many primary school teachers would exclude students younger than Grade 3 or 4 as being too young to understand what an SRC was. Students have proved them wrong on many occasions and this attitude is reversing.

SRC support teachers appear to be staying longer and are often feeling more valued in their role. This is a change from the days when the job went to the last teacher to take on a portfolio.

Perhaps the slowest change to occur, but one of the most satisfying, is the trend for SRCS to focus less on fundraising and running social events, in favour of asking students for their opinions and making submissions to the school administration for changes to occur in the school environment. This has been the slowest occurring trend because fundraising and social events are considered the easiest and most fun activities for the SRC to engage in; it is gratifying to see the transition to activities more consistent with the real purpose of an SRC.

It is difficult to say what these changes can be attributed to, as there are many factors present that support and challenge SRCS to do more and be more. I propose that this changing of attitudes is largely due to the perception by students, teachers and other professionals working with the student participation field that the leadership opportunities for students that were being offered were too often meaningless or trivial. This has meant that, even where a high functioning SRC has existed, they have been challenged to reflect on their purpose and reconsider what activities they should really be engaged in.

David Mould
Second Strike, Vic
Reminiscences on Student Voice

I began teaching English and history in 1977, and so my teaching career coincides almost exactly with the existence of Connect and its support for student participation. While there had been student unrest in universities and some schools in the late sixties and into the seventies, the idea of ‘student voice’ was not on any agenda that I knew of when I began teaching. Student involvement was almost totally confined to Student Councils and they had little impact on serious issues of education or school governance – and many (most?) schools did not even have a Student Council at the time.

In classes, I always hoped to encourage students to express their opinions, once I had got over the new teacher’s fear that doing so would allow them to eat me alive, but I had no concept of students having input into pedagogy (a word I didn’t know at the time) and curriculum. However, even in the vastness and heat of western Queensland in the late mid-eighties, rumours of change trickled in and the words ‘negotiating the curriculum’ were whispered in darkened corners of staff rooms by the occasional wild-eyed devotee. The idea of giving students at least some choice in what they studied seemed to offer a way of having them connect more to their education, and so I made some tentative steps in that direction, which were enthusiastically welcomed by the students, not entirely to my surprise – I always remembered feeling powerless to influence what happened in classrooms when I was at school.

Moving to a new school, we were introduced to the idea of a vertical timetable, and while the experiment only lasted a couple of years before a change of administration and less than enthusiastic support among most staff led to its demise, it did lead to the creation of a unit structure within the English department through which students could (as a class) negotiate with their teachers which unit they would like to do. This was not an ideal set-up, and was embraced with varying degrees of enthusiasm by English teachers, but it has survived in various forms and does give students some degree of choice. Similarly, a culture has grown of students having some choice of the type of assessment to be done (within the constraints of the curriculum) and of the texts to be studied.

Gradually, I came to the realisation that students had a great deal to offer in terms of insights into what happens in the classroom, and beyond, which led, in a moment of desperation because of a virtually unteachable class, to the implementation in a year 9 classroom a few years ago of a process of negotiating both the curriculum and the pedagogy with the students (see issue 168 of Connect for the 90 story). To the students and my surprise, this was a huge success with a previously unmanageable class becoming enthused and involved in their learning and developing a strongly supportive culture within the class. Building on that, we put together a group of students interested in developing a dialogue on teaching and learning with their teachers, with some success, before it was shut down by the administration. Finally, last year we developed a students-as-researchers project in which students successfully researched science teaching in year ten (see the previous issue of Connect – #179 – for an account of this project).

So what are the lessons to be learned from this 30+ years’ journey? Firstly, students will eagerly embrace student voice initiatives and have an enormous amount to offer in both improving teaching and learning and in school-wide issues. Secondly, students gain a great deal from being able to have this input, in terms of their engagement with learning, their academic achievement, their relationships with, and understanding of, teachers. Teachers gain a similar greater understanding of their students and a renewed excitement about teaching, along with fresh ideas for the classroom.

However, some teachers and administration can be suspicious, even resentful, of student voice and it is very difficult to initiate and sustain by an individual teacher working in a school environment that is not sympathetic to student voice. Still, it has been an interesting journey and one that will continue to provide challenges and a certain amount of excitement.

Ian Fraser
HOD English
Nanango SHS, Queensland

What have been the gains? There has always been the potential to achieve great things but somehow we consistently seem to miss. Many of the ideas, issues and strategies have been talked about, developed and even acted upon for short periods of time but there has been no great change. With each new endeavour, it seems we go back to a new starting line (sometimes further back than when we finished the last time).

Future

However, the opportunity for change and progress remains. Education systems need to acknowledge the changes that have occurred and adopt approaches that are based on empowering and building cooperative relationships with young people and communities.

Young people are optimistic – and this is what gives us hope for a better future.

John Stafford
Catholic Education Office, Melbourne

Many thanks to all these contributors (who each get, as promised, a 12-month extension to their subscription.) Connect welcomes continued reflections on the journey traveled and the paths yet to be taken.
Switched On to Learning

... is a book for teachers and others, written in 2009 by members of the Student Action Teams at Pender’s Grove and Preston South Primary Schools in Melbourne.

These students have been investigating student engagement with school and have written about their work and their learning in a 52-page cartoon-style book. The book covers ideas about what engagement is and how it can be ‘measured’, and why it is important. Then it goes on to look at the factors that influence engagement with school and what can be done to improve student engagement. In the final chapter, the students describe their journey — and how this approach was itself an engaging one.

This book is essential reading for teachers, students, principals, consultant, parents and others, who want to learn how schools can become more engaging, who want to hear what experts (students from Grades 4, 5 and 6) have to say, and who want to consider how to develop their own approaches to engagement.


Also available from Connect:

Student Action Teams:
Implementing Productive Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms
Student Action Teams, 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 2006 book, primary and secondary schools tell how to establish and implement Student Action Teams, with examples in traffic safety and the environment. The principles and approaches outlined here can be used to guide developments in any school - acting alone or in a cluster.


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.

ISBN 978-0-9803133-1-4; A$33

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.

First published by Connect in December 2006; A$33; ISBN 978-0-9803133-0-7

Connect Publications

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Connect 180:
Switched On to Learning is a new resource for teachers and others, written by Grade 4, 5 and 6 members of the Student Action Teams at Pender’s Grove and Preston South Primary Schools in Melbourne.

The students from these schools have been working for three years to investigate student engagement with school. They’ve now written about their work and their learning in a 52-page cartoon-style book. The book covers ideas about what engagement is, how it can be ‘measured’ and why it is important. Then it goes on to look at the factors that influence engagement with school and what can be done to improve student engagement. In the final chapter, the students describe their journey – and how this approach was itself an engaging one.

Switched On to Learning is an outcome of the Student Initiatives in School Engagement (SISE) project at these two schools, funded by a School Engagement Grant (2007-2009) from The CASS Foundation Limited (www.cassfoundation.org).

This book is essential reading for teachers, students, principals, consultants, parents and others, who want to learn how schools can become more engaging, who want to hear what experts (students from Grades 4, 5 and 6) have to say, and who want to consider how to develop their own approaches to engagement.

Students from these schools have recently ‘launched’ it and presented their work to their local Member of Parliament, to officers of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to the Directors of The CASS Foundation, and to a meeting of teachers and principals from other schools. Further copies are being distributed by the schools, the Foundation and through Connect.

With support from The CASS Foundation through the project, Connect is able to make a limited number of copies of this book available for $5 (including GST, postage and handling). There is a limit of 10 copies per order. An order form for Switched On to Learning (and other Connect publications) is included on the next page. Copy this and fax or mail it to Connect.

Switched On to Learning
by the Student Action Teams at Pender’s Grove
and Preston South Primary Schools

First published November 2009
by Connect Publications
ISBN 978-0-9803133-3-8
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Do students feel empowered by the current structures and processes of classroom meetings that cater for student voice and participation? Our school wanted to work collaboratively to address how to increase students' sense of empowerment and participation in class meetings. In particular, we planned to revise existing processes in ways that were inclusive of the diverse range of cultural and language backgrounds in the school.

The issue of student voice and participation was important to the school community. Recent survey results on student connectedness, and discussions at a school leadership team meeting, identified raising the profile of students within the community as a priority, with a long-term goal to increase student connectedness to school. When this information was presented to the Student Wellbeing Core Team (SWCT), it was decided to review and build upon our existing class meeting structures, in order to broaden student voice and participation skills. We wanted to enable students of varying skills, abilities and literacy levels to speak and be heard.

Whilst the school agreed that “children should be free to express their views and to be heard” (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. Article 12), the SWCT felt that not all students were participating within the current structures. Authentic student voice could not be achieved unless all students were empowered and free to participate. The question emerged for us: “Who is being heard and who is feeling empowered by the current structures at Trinity Catholic School?”

The leadership team suggested that further research and action be conducted within one classroom, so we could filter ideas through the school once successful actions had been established. A test class was selected based on the willingness of the class teacher to participate, and then I sought the participation of the Year 5 class. This class had 23 students, of whom 33% were female, 85% were from an ESL background and 17% were migrants. 48% of the students were from a low socio-economic background. These demographics were representative of classes throughout school. The diverse language and cultural backgrounds within the school raised questions about how equipped students were to speak up in a public forum and how their literacy skills and cultural beliefs may impact on their participation.

Existing Approaches

The school’s existing student wellbeing policy suggested that classes hold weekly classroom meetings to discuss successes and challenges faced by students in their life at school and to problem-solve issues of concern. These meetings were aimed at building relationships and providing a platform for student voice, and were also a means of promoting civic knowledge. Class captains then referred any recommendations from the meetings to the existing student representative body for consideration and action.

My observations of class meetings indicated that less than 30% of the students participated in any discussion and that a further 10% did not demonstrate listening behaviours that might indicate that they were participating or even engaged in the meeting. This suggested that class captains could not fairly represent the views of the whole class if its members were not skilled in representing themselves.

Getting Ready for Action

Some existing structures within the school provided a platform for school improvement and positive change, in
particular the School Leadership Team of the Principal and Deputy Principal and Religious Education, Student Wellbeing and Curriculum coordinators. This team met weekly to work on the implementation of the Annual Action Plan and to discuss issues arising from this. The Student Wellbeing Core Team (SWCT) consisted of the Student Wellbeing Coordinator, the Principal and three volunteer staff members. The SWCT meets weekly to plan and maintain strategies that support the wellbeing of students and to address any areas of concern regarding student wellbeing that have arisen during the week. These existing teams were key stakeholders and contributors to the project.

By its very nature, this action research project demanded that students participate, not only as a target group, but also as key stakeholders in the conduct of this project. Therefore a Student Focus Group was established to support the SWCT and the Leadership Team by assisting with the exploration of the factors influencing who was being heard and felt empowered (eg: culture, class, year level, teacher).

### Data Collection

A variety of methods of data collection, qualitative and quantitative, were used to drive this action research project. Initial surveys were conducted with all students from Years 3 to 6 to identify whole school needs that would underpin all action taken. Further information was collected from the target group before, during and after the actions, to steer the direction of the action and to rate the success of strategies trialled. Using the smaller target group of Year 5 allowed for a greater use of observational data, informal chats and interviews than would have been practical if the actions were implemented in a larger group.

Once the data was collated, I identified key areas for action (Table 1), then presented this to the School Leadership Team, the SWCT and the Student Focus Group for discussions and recommendations.

#### Quantitative

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<th>Participation rate</th>
<th>32%</th>
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<td>Satisfaction with organisation of the meeting</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>Satisfaction with the way issues were addressed</td>
<td>59%</td>
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#### Qualitative

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<th>Reasons for not participating</th>
<th>Most common responses, in order of occurrence, referred to:</th>
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<td>• shyness/lack of confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• lack of thoughts/ideas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• oral English</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• not enough time</td>
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<th>What makes a good class meeting?</th>
<th>Most common responses, in order of occurrence, referred to:</th>
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<td>• student participation: speaking</td>
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<td>• student participation: listening</td>
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<td>• issues are addressed with positive outcomes</td>
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<td>• collaboration</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What prevents a good class meeting?</th>
<th>Most common responses, in order of occurrence, referred to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• not enough time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• not getting a ‘turn’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• not enough people speaking up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Implementing Action

Discussions with each of these parties and the target group resulted in the formation of some key actions to be trialled with the target group. (Table 2)

#### Key Actions to Improve Student Participation in Classroom Meetings

- Scaffold thinking and appropriate English speaking and listening for participation using prompt cards.
- Use silent statements to introduce the concepts of agency and opinion.
- Use co-operative learning strategies such as ‘Think-Pair-Share’
- Apply some fixed organisational procedures to class meetings
- Use a problem-solving framework to process issues and concerns raised in meetings.

#### Table 2: Key Actions to Improve Student Participation in Classroom Meetings

These strategies designed to increase student participation in classroom meetings were introduced, trialled and monitored weekly over a three-month period. Participation gradually increased over this time, from 32% of students participating at the beginning of the project, to 87% at the end of the study.

Here are some more details of each of these strategies:

- **Scaffolding thinking, speaking, listening and participation**

The most common causes for non-participation were shyness and lack of proficiency in using English. The classroom teacher’s anecdotal notes also demonstrated that students from non-English speaking backgrounds were less likely to participate and that a small percentage of confident children held the floor during discussion time.

The first step in this action plan was to assist with ‘learning to’ using the implementation of palm cards to prompt student thinking and scaffold their vocal participation. The cards contained sentence starters for generating ideas and responding to the thoughts of others. They were colour coded according to three main purposes: listening and responding to others; expressing positive
observations; and expressing issues of concern.

Following this action, observations indicated a much more participatory style of classroom meeting. In a ‘hands-up survey’, 78% of students suggested that the cards had aided their participation in the meeting. Notably, of the 22% of students who indicated that the prompt did not help, most were the English speaking students, suggesting that their non-use of the cards was related to the lack of need.

**Silent statements**

Whilst the language skills of the students needed to be addressed explicitly with the target group, it was also important to the stakeholders of this project that the students were able to develop a sense of agency. Promoting agency in students is not only ‘about ensuring that people have real choices about their lifestyle’ (Watts, 1995: 101 cited in Holdsworth, 2000: 5) but also that they know they have such choices. Since students’ vocal participation was hindered by certain barriers, it was essential that strategies used to develop agency were separated from such barriers.

The use of silent statements eg: “move spots if you think...” required the skills of active listening and demanded response from the target group without the pressure of having to compose thoughts and speak. It allowed students to consider what ‘real choices’ they had. This strategy combined many of the skills required of genuine participation and allowed students to experiment with expressing opinions.

Results of a ‘Hands Up’ survey indicated a participation rate of 95%. Whilst this was only a drill in participation, it did indicate that students have a sense of personal agency and were willing to participate when the conditions were suitable.

**Cooperative learning strategies**

Cooperative learning strategies were introduced to the class meeting to aid participation in a less confronting way.

The ‘Think-Pair-Share’ strategy suggested by the classroom teacher engaged all students in discussion on agenda items. Even if student voices were not shared with the larger group, students had at least been provided with opportunities to practise the participatory dialogue. The use of this collaborative teamwork strategy enabled students to speak, listen and opine within the safety of a smaller group and later, when they felt confident, transfer the skills to the whole group. The use of the ‘Think-Pair-Share’ strategy allowed for consolidation and revision of voice.

**Problem-solving framework**

Responding to challenges presented by class members during class meetings was identified as an area that required action. Responses regarding how well specific problems were solved tended to be on the lower end of the scale, with 59% of students indicating that they were very satisfied with the outcomes. The students were familiar with the ‘Two Minute Model’ that had been used with the students in other curriculum areas. It was suggested by the classroom teacher that the same skills and framework be applied in classroom meetings to assist students to analyse and resolve problems that arose. After some explicit teaching of problem-solving skills, including some practice with simulated scenarios, the application of a problem-solving framework was introduced for use during classroom meetings.

Observations of student interaction during a ‘think-pair-share’ activity highlighted the use of language such as “solution”, “solve it” and “let’s think” which indicated that, by scaffolding student thinking with frameworks and providing appropriate language, student participation and efficacy in managing issues can be increased. Surveys administered during and after the action research project showed a steady increase in satisfaction with the way challenges were addressed during meetings. At the end of the project 95% of students suggested they were very satisfied with the way problems had been addressed, indicating that explicit teaching of required skills and the use of a model to scaffold student participation has enabled students to use the skills required.
Organisational procedures

The initial survey indicated that organisational issues hindered the smooth operation of a classroom meeting. Meetings were often “rushed” (male student, 9) and “slotted in” (classroom teacher) at the end of a busy day when students were tired. In an early observation, the students were unclear as to the details of the running of the meeting. Who was to be the chairperson, the minute taker? Where were the minutes from the previous meeting? These observations were presented to both the SWCT and the SFG and some recommendations were made to make the meetings more organised and consistent.

These recommendations were raised at the subsequent class meeting and the students voted upon some suggestions they thought were feasible. This resulted in the class captain drawing up a roster so that roles were clear and known in advance. Volunteers from the class agreed to list and collect all materials required for a classroom meeting and keep them together in a ‘Class Meeting Box’ to be kept in a fixed location within the classroom. Finally the SWCT recommended to the leadership team that a set time be stipulated so that the whole school would participate in Class Meetings simultaneously. This was to counteract the problems of meetings being “rushed” and squeezed in at the end of the day.

The classroom teacher reported at the end of the study that having a set time did “relieve some of the pressure of trying to fit the meeting in; it feels less rushed, less frantic”. Post survey results showed an increase in student opinions that the meetings were organised, from 26% at the beginning of the project to 87% by the end. Further observations indicated a more organised meeting and less time spent trying to find materials required for the meeting. The class captain, who is generally responsible for the running of the meeting, commented that he felt “much more confident” as he had everything he needed in the ‘class meeting box’.

My Reflections

Class meetings can be an effective medium for providing student voice and participation in schools. As all participants are known to each other and the classroom is a familiar environment, the class meeting can create “an open, trusting atmosphere for risk taking” (Marshall, 2001: 6). However, in order for genuine participation to occur, it is essential that student voices be nurtured and a sense of agency be developed, so that student participation platforms are utilised properly and are accessible to all students. These issues are essential:

Organisational Structures

Holding an effective class meeting where students can participate and express their voice relies heavily on good organisational procedures. This involves allowing sufficient time and ensuring that the physical environment and requisites are available so that the class meeting can occur promptly, and run smoothly and efficiently.

Developing a sense of agency

Using strategies that develop student sense of agency and internal voice are essential. Explicit teaching and modelling of the skills and behaviours required for student participation need to occur to develop the students as participants. Once school structures are created to provide for student voice and participation, consideration needs to be given to equipping the students with the necessary skills to participate. Educators cannot take for granted that all students recognise that they have a place in society or understand that they do have choices and can contribute and assert voice in order to influence matters that concern them.

The explicit teaching of the language and behaviours required to participate in class meetings needs to be a focus. This ensures that students can be situated effectively in the student voice and participation platforms provided. Particularly in schools with high multicultural and ESL enrolment, explicit language and behaviours need to be modelled, observed and rehearsed so the students are on equal footing with their peers and so they can be genuine participants. The knowledge of appropriate language is also important because “the language that we use frames the way we can think into issues, and this in turn shapes what we do”. (Wieranga et al, 2003: 31)

Working collaboratively and transparently

As a researcher and a change agent it was essential for me to work collaboratively with stakeholders and to be transparent about what was going on at all times. The success of this project hinged closely on the willing participation of the students, staff and leadership team. Their willing participation was nurtured by being clear about the goals and actions of the project at all stages. Throughout this action research project, forums, personal chats and questionnaires were arranged regularly so that staff could provide ongoing feedback and ideas about how they felt the project was going and provide input regarding possible directions it could take.

Including stakeholders in the decisions and problem solving

Including the key stakeholders in the decisions and directions of a project was an important facilitator for this action research project. The key stakeholders in this project were the students. The school created class meetings for students as a platform for student voice and participation. Therefore it was essential that they be included in discussions and decision-making at all stages of the project.

Conclusion

If organisational structures are put in place and if students are equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge, class meetings can become an authentic platform for them to have a say in matters regarding their life at school. Class meetings can serve as a powerful strategy in developing and nurturing the skills and behaviours required in order to be participants not only of class meetings but in any platform provided by the school or society.

References


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Giving Students a Voice in School Improvement

In the early part of 2009, our school was part of a Values Education Project, a three-month project exploring best practice Values Education pedagogy. This project saw the implementation of a Student Action Team that researched the question: “How can we ensure all our voices are heard?” This question formed the basis of a whole school inquiry unit in Term 2.

The project involved a team of Year 5 students investigating the opportunities for student voice in the Year 3/4 level over a 10 week period. The students examined the participation rates in classroom meetings and surveyed students to discover their understandings about what student voice meant to them and why it was important.

Background

The Student Action Team model has been introduced in many school settings as part of the Values in Action Good Practice Schools Project. These Student Action Teams can be defined as a group of students that identify and tackle a school or community issue. They research the issue, make plans and proposals about it, and take action on it. (Holdsworth, 2002)

The principles that underline the Student Action Team model reinforce the notion that:
- students can make important decisions;
- they can do important things; and
- action can be undertaken as part of a student's learning in school.

Michael Fielding further supports this with his notion of 'students as researchers' (Fielding 2001: 123) where students identify a topic that is of importance to them, and teachers work alongside them in facilitating and enabling roles. Through such participatory research approaches, students and teachers act as co-researchers and students, becoming "radical agents of change". (Fielding 2001: 123)

Our Research

The Student Action Team (SAT) collected data on participation rates in classroom meetings (quantitative data) and conducted interviews (qualitative data) with 39 Year 3/4 students about their understanding of student voice and whether they believed they had the opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways during their class meetings.

We found that 85% of the interviewed students said student voice is important and understood that student voice could make the school a better place to learn in, whereas 15% said student voice was important but were unable to articulate why. Comments included: “everyone gets to feel important,” “because students have important things to say,” “because students can help other students and help make our school a better place,” “it depends who’s listening!” and “because people don’t feel respected when they think no-one is listening.”

While 54% of students said that they thought their voice was heard, 46% of the students believed that they didn’t have a voice.
The SAT also observed class meeting participation. In Meeting 1, 11 of 25 students contributed to the meeting, either answering or asking questions, and in Meeting 2, 10 of the 25 students contributed.

The SAT presented this data to the teachers at a staff meeting in Week 2 of this project. The teachers were impressed by the work that the SAT had done, but somewhat surprised at the data collected. They were surprised to find out that not all students had the confidence to speak up during class meetings and that class meetings were dominated by a few more vocal students.

Planning Action

As the group entered the reflective phase of their first cycle of action research, we began identifying ways to take action to improve the opportunity for student voice in our school. At a second student forum, the SAT were invited to identify the things that they could change, and they began thinking about the ideal/perfect student voice at our school. Discussion followed and an action plan developed.

It became apparent to the group that a possible action could be to improve the way classroom meetings were conducted. The aim was to improve classroom meetings by introducing a ‘Circle Time Strategy’. The students’ data showed inconsistent practice of the circle time strategy across the 3/4 year level:

- In Class A, classroom meetings were conducted only once a month and the circle time strategy not used as part of the meeting structure;
- In Class B, classroom meetings were conducted once a fortnight and the circle time strategy used but not effective (circle time rules were not enforced); and
- In Class C, classroom meetings were held on a needs basis.

The Student Action Team believed that, if the Circle Time Strategy was used more effectively and consistently across classrooms, then opportunities for student voice would be a more likely outcome. This belief was based on the effective implementation of the Circle Time Strategy within their own classrooms and their successful experiences with this.

Although the school had leadership opportunities for the Year 5/6 students, these were limited to traditional areas of responsibility, such as sports captains and SRC leaders. Opportunities for students to contribute beyond opening school gates and organising fundraising events were largely non-existent. The responses of students from the first action research cycle showed that members of the SAT experienced high levels of engagement. They said things like: ‘I feel mature and responsible’, ‘it is great learning outside the classroom’ and ‘I am really proud of what the Student Action Team is achieving’.

I was keen to ensure that the Student Action Team had a sense of being able to plan, act, observe and reflect. It was important for them to act on the research they had collected so they also could develop their own sense of moral purpose. This provided a real opportunity for students to lead change in their school, change that was driven by their own research.

As stated above, one of the main principles of Student Action Teams is that ‘students can do important and valuable things’.

After collecting and analysing the data, the students’ investigation had bought us to the point where they could now have an impact on improving the teaching practices in our school. Mitra and Frick argue that ‘real change in schools result when a school takes the risk by offering students opportunities to build adult-student partnerships’. (cited in Student Voice: A Historical Perspective and New Directions, 2007) This project promotes this partnership with both teacher and students as was evident in the next phases of action.

Taking Action

The Student Action Team recommended to the school leadership team that Classroom Meetings needed to be improved. It was their belief that, if there were better practices in place for the efficient running of class meetings, it would in turn allow more opportunities for students to have a voice. The students from the action team were familiar with the circle time strategy as it was used consistently in their classrooms.

In Week 4, I held a staff professional learning session on class meetings and the use of the circle time strategy to improve the opportunity for student voice. I was drawing on my understanding of social and emotional learning to support this approach. What better way to teach and reinforce this learning and its values than through class meetings? Prior to the professional learning activity, I collected some information from teachers about their current understanding of the circle time strategy. I was seeking to find out whether, as a staff, we had a shared definition, a clear purpose of the strategy and an indication of teacher confidence to deliver this practice in their classroom.

During weeks 5, 6 and 7, as well as developing and conducting this circle time Professional Learning activity for the staff, the Student Action Team and I began designing a teaching tool to present to the year 3/4 classes. After much discussion, it was decided that we needed to model an effective classroom meeting using the circle time strategy as a framework. The SAT decided to produce a video that modeled both ineffective and effective class meeting practices. They would then take this instructional video to the students in Year 3/4 and conduct a training session for both students and teachers.

The production of the classroom meeting DVD was a time-consuming but highly engaging task. The SAT needed to write the script, decide on roles, and identify the technical skills required to complete this task. We worked side by side as we problem-solved these questions. This was especially critical when we were challenged with the restrictions of time and resources, as the school did not even have a video camera! And as I wasn’t the classroom teacher of the SAT students, we
relied on the time I am allocated as part of my leadership role to work together. This wasn’t always suitable and we needed to find other opportunities to meet.

The school community was continually informed of the work the SAT was doing by regular articles in the school newsletter and by a display board in the playground that told the story of the action team. The board was also used as a catalyst to engage other students in conversation about student voice. It included open-ended questions such as “who is listening to your voice?” and “do you know the three rules of circle time?”

Observations/Evaluation

We used various methods of data collection to evaluate our progress. These included anecdotal evidence, personal journal writing, student journals, tallies and formal and informal interviews with students and teachers. The Student Action Team collected a lot of the data for this project: they interviewed the Year 3/4 level but across the school as a whole. Observations of children articulating the three rules of circle time were recounted by teachers in the staffroom. The language used by the students and the teachers is now a shared one.

Following the SAT presentation of their DVD, the students from the 3/4 Level were asked to complete a reflection. They were asked to highlight the positive aspects of the class meeting that they observed, and then list all the features that did not illustrate a positive class meeting. This reflection clearly indicated that there had been an increase in students’ knowledge and understanding of what a good classroom meeting should look and sound like, as they were able to recount when the rules of circle time were broken and the negative consequences of that.

The Student Action Team were “proud” of what they had achieved (Student A Journal entry). While both the classroom teachers of the Student Action Team members were positive about the project and spoke of students’ motivation and a sense of empowerment and importance, they also expressed some frustration with the project as it interrupted other classroom routines.

The Team’s Reflections

One of the main objectives of this project was to improve student engagement in learning using a Student Action Team approach. In the final meeting of this team, they responded to three main questions:

Question 1: How do you think being on the SAT has changed you?

- Student A: “I didn’t care about student voice before but now I do and I have helped other kids have a voice in our school.”
- Student B: “I used to ignore some kids in the playground but now I don’t; I am committed to listening!”
- Student C: “I feel like I can do important things in our school to make it a better place to learn.”
- Student D: “If I want people to listen and hear my voice, I need to listen to them.”

Question 2: How do you think you have changed other students?

- Student E: “If they (students) feel heard, they feel safe and there will be less issues in the playground.”
- Student F: “We can actually do something about things. I am learning how to do things individually, together and as part of a team.”
- Student G: “More students know about the rules of circle time so we are all using the same language.”
- Student H: “We have taught and learnt ourselves but we have also taught others.”

Question 3: How have you changed the school?

- Student I: “We have changed what the teachers do. They listened to our research and said that they will use the circle time strategy in their classrooms.”

Our Student Action Team was formed from interested students. The students who became part of the team were
In my role as Student Wellbeing Leader, I remain committed to the implementation of Student Action Teams. I will continue to rely on the support of the Leadership Team to identify further opportunities for implementation in 2010. Next year we propose to introduce the concept of Student Action Teams to our new school leaders. The Student Action Team for this project was made up of students from Year 5 and their selection was a deliberate attempt to invest in program sustainability beyond the life of this project and into next year. It is my hope that their commitment and enthusiasm will continue into Year 6. Our students have the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to lead school change and we, as teachers, need to be mindful not to underestimate them! That has certainly been a key learning for me.

I imagine brainstorming with the students at the beginning of the year all the issues of school and community life that they have passion for, and using this knowledge to identify possibilities for Student Action Teams to be established. I imagine we might see Student Action Teams that take on research and leadership of environmental issues, student safety, community and/or service learning. They will become real opportunities to see values in action.

The experience of this project has provided a model and been a catalyst for professional dialogue amongst our teachers. It is within these professional conversations that knowledge and understanding will be built on and relationships and trust established.

References:

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St Paul’s campus of Emmanuel College has had a rich 44 year tradition of developing fine young men within our community. The drive of the leadership team to introduce cutting edge teaching practices is helping propel our College from being a very good school to a great school with a 2020 vision. Our ambition to ‘raise the bar and narrow the gap’ in student learning and academic performance has complemented and worked in partnership with a core objective: to develop moral young men with strong Catholic values. These dual obligations empower the community to live out our philosophy of ‘Life to the Full’.

Four years ago, St Paul’s Campus evolved into a vertical House structure whereby students would move through each level in the same homeroom and House. Each homeroom has an even spread of students from Years 7 to 12 where students meet every morning to share in morning prayer and form positive relationships with each other and their homeroom teacher. This structure has allowed for an abundance of opportunities for older students to act as good role models and mentors to the younger students with whom they have daily contact. Four years down the road, we recognised a need to further empower senior students to develop their skills as models and mentors for younger students. The Values are Invaluable: Leaders as Mentors program has allowed this to occur.

**Aims and objectives**

1. Develop senior student leaders with an awareness of their values and the capacity to confidently live them;
2. Senior leaders building relationships with junior students to discuss and model good values;
3. Senior leaders mentoring junior leaders; and
4. Teachers reflecting on the values of the College, reviewing policies and modelling these values for students; a common language of values amongst staff.

**Leaders Development Day**

This day was attended by the 20 senior leaders in Year 11 and 12, with the core objectives of:

1. Developing a strong senior leadership team;
2. Identifying personal strengths which make them great leaders, and areas of challenge which need to be further developed;
3. Recognising what our core values are as individuals, as a team and as a College; and
4. Strategically planning how they can leave their footprint on the College by imparting values.

Various activities were used to create the appropriate culture for the day, develop trust and best achieve our objectives. Each of these activities were evaluated by the students involved at the end of the day. Students left the day feeling confident, energised and determined to be the change they wanted to see in their College community. Their action plan was to model good values by spending time in junior classes during their study periods, running a leadership development session with junior leaders and mentoring junior leaders in private sessions.

After the leadership day, students reflected on the value of the day:

**How significant an impact did each activity have to bring unity to the team, develop an awareness of our core values, or allow us to develop an action plan?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership day activities</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory game (my name is ... and I like ...)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working agreement</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to know you activities (things in common)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopes and fears</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick shots: circle activity</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self concept wheel</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength cards: what values/ strengths do I have?</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Values continuum</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm: leadership qualities, relationships and opportunities</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball pass</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School SPIRIT</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One special moment: closing discussion</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: 5 Very High; 4 High; 3 Moderate; 2 Low; 1 Little or None

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values I identified with on the Leaders Day</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self confidence</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing your best</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving others a fair go</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty &amp; trustworthiness</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Tolerance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
Senior Students Modelling Values to Younger Students

The core objectives of this section of the program were:

- Junior students to be aware of who their senior leaders are and develop a positive relationship with them.
- Senior leaders to discuss core values with the students, framed around the way we treat each other and show respect for ourselves.
- Senior leaders to model our core values.

In the first session, the students attended Year 9 classes, which many found confronting and challenging. They walked away from the session feeling a degree of disempowerment and questioning the validity of the program. This led to a crucial discussion where the students laid bare their fears and vulnerabilities. In this defining moment, the student leaders were challenged to question what they believed in and how they would respond to hurdles in their life. The leaders unanimously responded that they believed in the notion of leading their community to live strong values and were too morally courageous and strong willed to allow setbacks to get in the way of them living their ideals.

So together we put better structures in place to give a higher chance of success. We decided that for the remainder of this year, the leaders would work exclusively with Year 7s and develop better communication with the classroom teachers they would be working with.

The sessions with Year 7s was hugely successful as the leaders developed good relationships with the juniors, discussed and modeled good values as they interacted with them in their classes. By the end of the program, the climate in Year 7 was evolving whereby they became more adept at recognising good values, naming them, affirming others who exhibited them and living these values themselves (see table below).

Senior Student Feedback:

"I was able to show true values and ethos to the younger students and demonstrate to them what it is to be a true person and how important commitment and dedication is to the world."

"It was great and really fun. There was a growth in the communication between leaders and younger students. The community atmosphere is definitely much more obvious with younger students saying hello in the playground."

"I thought the session was really good because it allows the younger students to know the student leaders more and see what they can strive to be like."

"I felt that this session in the classroom was extremely successful. I felt really welcome in the classroom and the students were really responsive to me. I was able to successfully portray the values and messages I wanted to convey."

Junior Student Feedback:

"The leaders I worked with helped me and gave me tips on how to resolve conflicts and how to help people who are upset."

"They have helped us improve the way we treat each other."

"The values we learnt were: teamwork, supporting one another and leadership."

"Yes, I was impacted by the Year 12 leaders, because they showed a lot of responsibility and leadership. I hope I could be like them one day."

"Yes, I was impacted by the Year 12 leaders, because I really look up to them."

"I think when the seniors talk to us, the Year 7s feel special – that they are being recognised by the bigger kids."

"We will know more of the values needed to build better relationships with each other."

"I took the Year 12s as a guide of a better leader. I'll take those qualities into my own leadership."

"This program has particularly helped me develop my leadership skills. The senior leaders were great at helping me improve my knowledge."

Senior Leaders Mentoring Junior Leaders

This was an opportunity for senior leaders to run a leadership development session with the junior leaders. From this they were then able to develop personal ongoing mentoring relationships with Year 7 leaders. The core objectives were

1. **Senior leaders mentor junior leaders to:** develop unity; develop awareness of personal strengths and areas of challenge as a leader; identify core values as individuals and as a College; identify how can I make a difference as a leader; impart values.

2. **Ongoing mentoring:** Junior leader and senior mentor to meet fortnightly during homeroom to discuss progress and development as a leader.

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**Session 3: Leaders’ Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a senior leader I understood the requirements of me in the classroom</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>session</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I felt prepared for the classroom session understanding the outline of</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the course</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The classroom teacher made me feel welcome into the classroom</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was easy for me to contribute effectively to the session</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students responded well to my involvement</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher encouraged the communication between myself and the</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
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</tbody>
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**Key:** 5 strongly agree; 4 Agree; 3 unsure; 2 Disagree; 1 Strongly disagree
Staff reflection on values
The Pastoral Care Team wanted to provide a time and space for teachers to recognise the work the senior student leaders have been doing with junior students to promote our values and for staff to reflect on the values of our College. We asked teachers to reflect on and discuss how often they recognised and affirmed students living these values and how often they modelled these values for students.

Perhaps the aspect which had the greatest impact on staff was when we discussed the concept that we should be unwavering in our values: they shouldn’t be dependent on how others treat us. So for instance, if a student regularly treats them with disrespect, does this mean it’s acceptable to treat the student with disrespect? If a student never greets you with a smile or a compliment, does this mean you should stop being friendly to them?

Key lessons
Student Action Teams are probably harder to implement in the secondary sector than in primary schools. There are many structural demands which one needs to be aware of and cater for. There is also the need to minimise the amount of time senior students are out of class and reduce the stress and expectations we have on them at such a crucial time in their learning.

The key learning we have taken is to negotiate everything with the students and give them as much control over the implementation of the program as possible. Put structures in place to facilitate clear communication between all teachers and students involved, so that everyone shares the same vision and expectations.

Finally be grateful for everything that comes out of the program – the true rewards may not be seen for years to come.

Mark Sciberras
Head of House
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Students Lead Geelong March Against Violence

A March Against Violence was organised by the Catholic Leaders of Geelong Schools (CLOGS) in September 2009. The formation of this group came after the success of the Tri UMPH festival in 2008 (see Connect 176, April 2009) in which $40,000 was raised by the students at a rock concert with eight bands.

CLOGS was formed with the inclusion of St Ignatius College with the original three schools. This leadership group formed to make a difference in the community by raising awareness about important issues, along with building relationships throughout the four Catholic schools.

This event started back in March. The idea was proposed by one of the CLOGS members who noticed that there was a lot of violence in our community and that young people seemed to be getting all the blame. We realised that everyone knows someone affected by violence, particularly alcohol fuelled, and that it should not be accepted. It is seen in the paper everyday and has become a common event and we, as young people, are getting stereotyped. So, as leaders of Geelong, CLOGS wanted to show that we care about the community and that we are sick of the violence.

The march was conducted by the VCE students from four Catholic secondary schools. The CLOGS organising committee worked in conjunction with the Geelong police, the Geelong City Council, St Mary’s parish and the Geelong Advertiser. Whilst the police provided an escort through the streets stopping traffic, the Parish and schools cooperated with marshals for safety. The 1800 students marched peacefully through the streets to Johnstone Park where they were addressed by guest speakers including the Police Commissioner and Council representatives. The march was reported on TV, in the Geelong Advertiser, and on 3AW. The Premier, Mr John Brumby, requested a private interview with the Captains from the four Colleges.

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CLOGS committee
with support from the Student Leadership Coordinator, Mr Simon Cahir
simonc@sjc.vic.edu.au
On Friday the 27th of November, the VicSRC Executive was invited to attend the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development: One Year On forum. The VicSRC was involved in the original consultation process for the Blueprint and was very happy to have been included in this important forum. Ten of the Student Executive attended, along with VicSRC Coordinator Kate Walsh, and definitely made known the views of students to the delegates and Government.

Forum delegates were treated to presentations by Prof Peter Dawkins, Secretary of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the Hon Ministers Maxine Morand MP (Children and Early Childhood) and Bronwyn Pike MP (Education). Deputy Prime Minister and Federal Minister for Education Julia Gillard was also to attend, however due to events transpiring in Canberra at the time was unable to do so, and instead sent a message to delegates which was read by forum facilitator Tony Mackay.

The VicSRC Executive delegates were involved in several different workshop topics, including:

• Integration and transitions;
• Excellent school education;
• Working with families, communities and business;
• Opportunities for all Victorians; and
• A culture of strong leadership and professional learning.

While students had strangely enough not been a focus of the Blueprint, the VicSRC’s delegates made it very clear that it is essential for students to be partners in their own education.

The Forum also provided a great opportunity for networking and exposure for the VicSRC that, while receiving increased recognition from school administrations and education organisations, is still not as well known among classroom teachers, who formed a large number of Forum delegates.

The VicSRC looks forward to the next year of implementation for the Blueprint and hopes it will continue to be included in future consultations.

Georgia Kennelly
VicSRC Executive

2009 VicSRC Congress Report

The full report of the 2009 VicSRC Statewide Student Congress is now available. Copies have been sent to all participating schools and further copies are available from the VicSRC Office or website.
Bullying Forum:

Sticks and Stones and Mobile Phones

On the 27th of August 2009, I was invited to be a panelist at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria’s Bullying Forum: Sticks and Stones and Mobile Phones, providing a young person’s perspective on this huge subject. Also on the panel were people from Sport and Recreation Victoria, the Education Department, Young Unionist Network, Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society as well as the Youth Disability Advocacy Service.

Unfortunately bullying, in all forms, is happening everywhere in our day to day lives and there is no easy solution to this massive social problem. In recent bullying cases in the media, we are able to see the repercussions of bullying.

At the forum, there was a strong emphasis on bullying in the new millennium. This includes covert bullying and the most heard of, cyber bullying. Social networking sites, chat rooms and mobile phones are rising up to be a deadly poison in many young people’s homes. In the morning, it was great to hear Dr Barbara Spears talking about Bullying and Peer Relationships. Dr Spears made a very good point in saying that student voice is the best way to combat this issue.

As a student body, we met together at the VicSRC Annual Congress in Mt Evelyn and carried two resolutions about bullying. The current VicSRC executive will be working to implement these resolutions.

Ryan Lim
VicSRC Executive

Some sites for information about bullying

Bullying. No Way:
www.bullyingnoway.com.au

ReachOut Australia:
au.reachout.com/find/articles/bullying-what-it-is

Health Insite:
www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Bullying

National Centre Against Bullying:
www.ncab.org.au

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies:
www.acys.info/resources/topics/bullying
Youth Media Project Produces Radio Shows for Parliament for the World’s Religions

Santa Fe’s Youth Media Project was selected to produce radio shows for the international conference of the Parliament for the World’s Religions in Melbourne, Australia in early December 2009.

After five years working in Northern New Mexican schools (USA) teaching digital literacy, the Youth Media Project (YMP) has climbed into the forefront internationally. A team of three YMP young people from area schools was selected to be the first youth media group to ever cover events at the 9,000-person global conference. They were chosen on the basis of a portfolio of work submitted to the Council of a Parliament for the World’s Religions at its headquarters in Chicago. The student team will create radio compositions about interfaith issues to be broadcast globally. The YMP group will try for an interview with his Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Youth-Powered Radio Broadcasts from Australia

The YMP’s involvement in the huge conference will assure that key events will be shared among many thousands more via radio broadcasts across the globe. The YMP student team is a diverse group of practiced radio producers, interviewers, hosts, and editors. Last summer, they covered a national leadership conference called Global Youth Leadership Institute. Broadcasts from that event impressed those deciding about Australia and helped win their assignment.

The Youth Team

Carmen Gallegos is a Mexican immigrant raised in New Mexico and now a proud US citizen. Carmen joined the YMP as a freshman at Capital High School, where the idea of speaking out and expressing herself held great appeal. She attended the YMP after-school and dual-credit (high school and community college) classes, producing radio pieces which garnered national recognition. Carmen went on to work with KUNM’s Youth Radio as a senior (when her parents divorced and her mother moved to Albuquerque). There she continued to produce stellar radio pieces and attended the Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007. Carmen has worked her way through high school and now college, at times acting as the sole support to her family. Her first trip out of state was with the YMP where she received a scholarship to attend the National Federation of Community Broadcasters conference in Portland, Oregon.

Dolna Smithback is currently a sophomore at the New School in NYC and this past semester served as an intern at Democracy Now! Dolna came to the YMP as a high school junior at Monte del Sol and as a result of meeting Amy Goodman (of Democracy Now!) at a TV broadcast in Albuquerque from that experience Dolna found the YMP in Santa Fe and joined the after-school production team to produce stories about diversity, human dignity, and environmental justice. Dolna’s first piece “How Can Humans Get Along,” was a result of attending the PeaceWorks Conference sponsored by United World College and Monte del Sol Charter School. Born in India, Dolna has always been interested in telling the stories of those impacted by poverty, oppression and injustices.

A Chinese student from United World College will be announced soon.

Adult Sponsors


John Braman works with YMP and also for United World College as Director of Outreach Programs. Formerly president of the Independent Schools Association of the Central States, he is an educational consultant and also volunteers with the Santa Fe Public Schools on the Strategic Planning Oversight Committee.

The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions (CPWR)

www.parliamentofreligions.org

CPWR was created to cultivate harmony among the world’s religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

Youth Media Project

Youth Media Project (YMP) teaches the art of digital storytelling for a socially responsible world. It is funded by New Mexico Community Foundation, McCune Charitable Foundation, Santa Fe Community Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Vessel Foundation, SFCC, United World College, Earth Care International, ENLACE/GEAR-Up, and Santa Fe Public Schools.

In partnerships with schools and colleges, YMP trains young people to address local and global issues affecting their lives. YMP partners with eight distinct educational institutions and youth oriented programs. Annually, YMP serves roughly 200 students. Participants may receive high school and college credit, stipends for additional work, a portfolio of edited radio compositions (good for college applications), and the opportunity to have their work broadcast on local, regional and national radio shows.

Contacts:

Judy Goldberg, Executive Director, Youth Media Project: judy@youthmedioproject.org

John Braman, United World College: johnbraman@gmail.com
Transitions and changes can be times of challenge, excitement or fear. They have been associated with risk factors: handled well, they can be productive and purposeful; handled badly, they can create discontinuities in learning and problems for engagement.

While transitions occur within schools all the time, the most significant are often when students change from one school to another – such as from primary to secondary school.

A group of students from four schools – two primary schools and two secondary schools – in Melbourne’s southern suburbs have been working together to investigate and act on transition issues in 2009. They took up a challenge to examine transition practices in their schools, and then to either recommend changes to their schools – or to design and implement student-led changes.

Because the ways in which schools respond to students’ needs, hopes and fears is, in essence, about good practice in teaching and learning, it was appropriate that these schools gained support from the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program (AGQTP) - Modelling Good Practice within the National Safe Schools Framework. Funds for this Transition and Engagement in Catholic School Communities project were directed through the Catholic Education Office Melbourne, which identified particular clusters and invited them to be part of the project.

The schools – St Peter’s Catholic Primary School, St Andrew’s Parish School, St James’ College and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College (OLSH) had heard of work in other schools and clusters through Student Action Teams, and wondered whether such an approach might be useful in this case.

The first step was to find out more. They met late in 2008 to talk about their approach and receive some professional development. They suggested that students from the primary schools might investigate the transition concerns of students, research answers to students’ questions and then, for example, publish an information guide for other students. At the secondary colleges, students could investigate students’ experiences of transition, and then develop action plans for changes.

In each of the schools, there were already some initiatives, often around ‘buddy systems’, but these were largely teacher-directed. The commitment to a Student Action Team approach would aim at increase and maintain student engagement in this issue – and in the schools generally.

It was decided to organise a student forum early in 2009, at which teams of students from the four schools would come together to be introduced to the topic and decide whether they were interested to pursue it. Time was able to be set aside within schools for teams to meet, to research and plan action, and further inter-school forums organised – all in time for action proposals by about August 2009 (to feed into transition planning for 2009-2010).

First Student Forum

At the start of 2009, each school chose 10 students to be their team. They did this in various ways. For example, OLSH selected one student from each Year 7 and 8 homeroom, plus one extra student (to make up the 10). The students were selected by the homeroom teachers in consultation with the Year Level Coordinators; some of the students (but not all) were the class captain. At St Peter’s, the students were the ten Year 5 and 6 members of the Student Representative Council. All Year 6 students at St Peter’s nominate themselves to be part of a Student Action Team in the areas of Student Representative Council, Sustainability Team, Religious Education Team, Library Team and the Peer Support Team. The SRC students were also elected by Year 5 and 6 students to represent the school as part of this project. At St Andrew’s, five students were chosen from each of Years 5 and 6 – in Year 6, chosen by their classmates; in Year 5, chosen by the teacher.

These students met in March for a half day at one of the secondary colleges. After some introductory activities to encourage students to meet each other, the four teams each developed a short presentation to introduce their particular transition issues to the other schools. Some students made posters to name and explain their concerns about transition; others created role plays to illustrate fears or occurrences.
They were then asked: "What is common about these presentations? Do we share similar issues?"

Students identified issues around the anxiety, fear of change and possible humiliation associated with transition. Specifically they identified concerns with getting used to new subjects, having more than one teacher and many different rooms, confusion about responsibility and support, loneliness, fears of bullying and peer pressure, workload and homework, and so on.

At this point, the four groups of students were asked whether they thought this was something they wanted to investigate and take further – and possibly to act on. They discussed this briefly, and each agreed that it was – in fact, they said they were excited to be part of a group aiming to improve their schools.

They were then challenged: Are these concerns and issues the main ones shared by other students back at the schools? What is behind these issues – what is causing them? These were research questions, and so we talked for a while about what research was, what questions needed to be answered and how students could find out some answers. We did some trial runs: some simple examples of data collection and analysis.

The first Student Forum closed with a commitment from each group to return to school and investigate aspects of transition – and to come back together again with results of their investigations.

Student evaluations of this first gathering were very positive. They were positive about the activities including the practice surveys, and about the interaction between schools: "Today was great; it went well because we got to learn so much about transition, and it was fun when we mixed in groups and met heaps of people!" They suggested that the forums could be longer: “maybe a whole day program” and involve even more activities.

Researching at School
The students met regularly over the following weeks and developed their research questions and tasks. At St Peter’s, they decided to survey the Year 6 students to find out specific information about how our students felt about their transition to secondary school. They decided not to reinvent the wheel with a new survey, but to use one that they believed covered the main questions they wished to ask. It was a simple survey to give out, but required much time for the team to analyse and decide what the main issues were. They presented information to the Year 5s and 6s outlining what they wanted to research and what they had done so far as part of the project.

The OLSH students put together an on-line survey on the topic of transition. This was then e-mailed to all Year 7 and 8 students. About half the students completed the surveys during class time, with the remainder having the option to complete it in their own time. The Student Action Team then reviewed and summarised the survey results.

The St Andrew’s SAT designed and carried out random surveys of parents, students and teachers about transition fears. They compared parents’ memories of going from Year 6 to Year 7 with those of current students.

Second Student Forum
The second forum was held in June at the other secondary college. Again it was planned at meetings of the teachers, and aimed to report and share results of the Student Action Teams’ investigations. Each school was asked to prepare and bring two posters outlining the work they had been doing: one showing the processes used (research approach); the other showing the results of their investigations.

The morning again started with some mixing activities, then each team had two minutes to invite others to visit and look at their displays. There was then some extended time for all students to read the displays and answer questions about each school: What research did this team do? What did they find out? What is the big transition issue they will work on?

The Student Action Teams’ research uncovered a great deal of valuable and interesting information, all of which generally confirmed what the students in the cluster teams had discussed at the first forum. There is general anxiety about transition particularly in the following (in order): being taught by good teachers, feeling safe, enjoying yourself, making new friends, feeling good, and learning more than primary school.

In comparing between and within schools, it seemed that girls had more concerns than did boys. Managing homework emerged as a strong concern.

Back in school groups, this was then summarised by asking the teams to nominate schools – with reasons – under four headings: The school team that had the best way of finding out information; the school team with the most significant or important finding; the school team that had the most interesting or different idea; and the school team that now has the biggest challenge. They used post-it notes to highlight their nominations.

The second part of the morning involved visioning of what could be. Through this process (see Connect 173, October 2008), students ‘dreamed’ about the ideal transition process in and between their schools, captured these ideas in drawings or words, and then shared them to form some common visions within school groups. We used Y-charts to summarise agreed visions, and then each
team produced two more posters about the **changes** that would need to occur if these visions were to become real, and about the possible **actions** they could take to develop these changes. They shared these with other schools.

Finally, we talked a little about action planning and introduced what each team might do back at school to refine and prioritise their action, and then take and evaluate that action.

Again, student evaluations were very positive. They appreciated hearing from other schools: "the time when we looked at what other schools did", but also many found the 'meditation' on a vision for improved transition to be positive: "I really liked the 3-stage dreaming": "The point became clearer," wrote one student.

### Developing Action Ideas

In the action phase, the SATs began to plan what they could do in their own school to improve the transition process.

The students from **St Peter's** decided that the many issues relating to their anxieties about going to secondary school required some creative ideas that would promote better communication between the students and all of the feeder secondary schools that they would be attending. Meeting together as an SRC, the students came up with the following ideas: set up an e-mail system with feeder secondary schools; get together with St Andrew's students for Forum days to further explore issues at a primary school level; research school websites for further information about feeder schools; organise school visits on the theme of 'be a secondary school student for a day'.

Some ideas were ruled out because of lack of time or safety issues (eg with e-mailing). The students were keen to use technology to help their actions, so they interviewed the IT coordinator to enlist support and to further develop ideas. The students finally came up with one main idea to support all schools to improve communication and allay the main fears about transition to secondary school. The idea, which they have now put into action, was to develop a myclasses page on **Transition to secondary school**. The myclasses page is now up and running and includes a class journal through which primary students can ask questions about transition, which are then answered by secondary students. It also includes links to websites of all the feeder secondary schools, most of which have developed information on transition. Links to websites on bullying are also available, with particular links to Cyberbullying websites planned to be included soon. A class calendar is also available for all schools to add and promote upcoming events being planned by any of the primary or secondary schools.

At **St Andrew's**, from a vision that "there are no fears in transition from primary to secondary school", the SAT decided on four main actions: student visits to secondary schools; inviting secondary schools to visit their school; an information night for parents about secondary schools; and putting information on the school website for parents who couldn’t attend. They phoned and e-mailed secondary schools about their transition programs, compared this information, and placed links on their school's website.

The **OLSH** student team met over four or five lessons. They decided to focus on two things: improving the interaction between Year 6 and 7 students (who would then follow on into Year 7 and 8 next year); and improving communication with Year 6 parents. They put together a checklist with things they felt were important for the Year 6 students and parents, investigated the cost of a **Welcome Pack** for new students, and discussed ways of building the relationships between the Year 6 and Year 7 students that would start on Orientation Day. Finally, they made an appointment with the Principal to put their proposals forward.

The students at **St James’** identified several areas for action. Two of these were to improve the Peer Support Program (which helps Year 7 students to settle in), by expanding the peer supporters from Year 10 to also include Year 8 students; and putting tips about bullying, homework, exams, making friends and getting help, on the back of the student library card.

### Third Student Forum

The final student forum was held in September, to report on and celebrate the actions taken by the Student Action Teams. This time, each school had a longer time to make a formal report on what they had done and were achieving. It became obvious that each team was still in the process of implementing action (and that time to meet and plan had become an issue in the schools).

Teams used PowerPoint to summarise their actions, but also organised these to be **interactive**, getting the teams from the other schools to take part (sometimes in the activities they had been conducting at their school, and sometimes in ‘were you listening?’ type quizzes).

The **St Peter’s** students presented their myclasses page as a resource for the cluster. It has the capacity to be further developed and be used by all schools in a variety of creative ways. These students also reported that further actions were planned for term four including another forum day specifically for St Peter’s Year 6 students, with all feeder secondary schools invited to send a teacher and two Year 7 students to share more information to support the Year 6s.

In the **OLSH** students’ presentation, they summarised their goals and
actions taken: pairing Year 7s with Year 6s, proposing a second student-run Orientation Day and developing a Welcome Pack, as well as sending a letter and information checklist to new Year 7 students and their parents, and informing Year 6 parents about upcoming functions.

Has this project made a difference at these schools? We asked students this directly, and used a quiz-game process to engage them in thinking about and reporting on impact. ‘Where’s the Evidence?’ is an activity in which student representatives from each team formed a panel to be confronted a question. This happened in three rounds, with a pair of students from each school being asked to return to their whole group and gather ‘evidence’ for changes because of their work: What difference has it made to Student Action Team members? What difference has it made to other students? What difference has it made to the school?

Students brought this evidence to their panel and presented it – in one case, the students presented their teacher to the panel to describe how they had changed school approaches to transition. The panel representatives reported on increased confidence that had developed from the chance to speak, and of increased links with younger students and with communities. Student groups and student actions were now more recognised by staff, as students and teachers interacted in different ways. “All age groups provided ideas,” said one group. Another added: “The schools have taught each other” and provided examples.

They said that the project had already made transition better in their schools – and there were continuing ideas to make it even better in the future. They knew more about what students’ fears were, and also increased their own knowledge of what was involved in transition. The project also had built strong primary-secondary relationships, plus supported teachers. They identified that important aspects of this approach were that they, as young people, felt in control of what was happening. This gave them the confidence and skills to be active leaders. “We learnt,” they said, “that students can have a say.”

There was recognition that the Principals of the schools were responding positively to the ideas. “We have made the school better,” said some students, “and students are now excited about peer support.” They then went on to recognise that they would need to collect further information in 2010 to see if attitudes had also changed.

Finally, the students met in mixed-school groups to reflect on the overall process, what had been learnt and what a good transition process might be. In their perfect school, they said, transition would involve good communication and understanding for all (eg using myclasses pages); it would be a fun, exciting and stress-free time where students would want to go to school – and look forward to a new school. Homework would be increased gently. There would be a strong buddy system to abolish bullying and create good senior-junior student relationships. Students would have a say in designing the transition processes and be part of continuing projects, including days in which Year 6s stayed with Year 7s, and classes were mixed across year levels.

Later, students at St Andrew’s reflected on the overall project. Two of them summarised their evaluation:

“Positive things:”
- developing confidence
- visiting high schools
- making new friends in grade 6
- team work
- communication to different year levels
- students had the voice to speak
- being proud of ourselves
- getting excited because you didn’t have any experience doing it before
- doing presentations in front of the whole staff

“Negative things:”
- being in mixed groups without knowing who they are
- missing out on art time, free time, lunch and playtime

“What we learnt:”
- we learnt team work
- we developed our confidence
- public speaking
- cooperation
- commitment
- learning proper surveys

“Areas to improve:”
- set a time for a meeting
- get an AGQTP badge
- present out information to the school once a week
- put information on the school website for parents to see
- continue transition and engagement*

YooMin and Varshini (Year 5)

Summary
The project enabled all students to look at big picture issues related to all schools and to act on these issues as a cluster. It also enabled us to pinpoint our own issues and empower the students themselves to take action related to their own schools’ research findings. The students believe that, as a team, they now
have a better understanding of how the work of Student Action Teams can make a difference in their school. They feel more confident in knowing what it means to establish SATs, how to gather quantitative and qualitative data, how to research the needs of students and schools, set goals and develop effective strategies to lessen the anxiety currently being felt by students in embarking on this important transition in their lives.

Knowing that they are not alone and can work effectively with other schools – both primary and secondary – has highlighted the value of community partnerships, which opens up exciting possibilities for the future. The schools have planned continuing events to strengthen community partnerships and relationships between schools. For example, St Peter’s worked closely with St James’ College in a Student Leadership forum day in November for the Year 5s, preparing them for the transition to Year 6.

The continuation of this project in 2010 and into the future will ensure the model of Student Action Teams continues and grows. The cluster is keen to continue meeting, to include current students as mentors for developing SATs into the future (particularly the Year 5 students who were part of this project) and also involve the Year 6 students going into Year 7.

Our cluster work on Student Action Teams has empowered all concerned to better understand the power of team work, and that the students can make a difference to their school community and the wider community. They can leave their mark and know that their work has made positive changes for themselves and for their communities: “From little things, big things grow”.

Contact:
For further information about these transition and SAT initiatives, contact:
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College:
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St James’ College:
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St Peter’s Catholic Primary School:
Joan Carrazzo jcarrazzo@spbentleigheast.catholic.edu.au
St Andrew’s Parish School:
Joyce Henderson jhenderson@saclaytonsth.catholic.edu.au

Student Action Teams: Previous Articles in Connect

**Background:**
Overview
Connect 179 (October 2009), pp 10-11
Implementation Stages
Connect 154-5 (Aug-Oct 2005): 11-12
Student Action Teams book
Connect 158 (April 2006): 3-4

**Statewide Victorian Program:**
Student Action Teams
Connect 119 (October 1999): 20-21
Winter Fire Campaign at Springvale
Student Action Teams: 8 Schools Report
Connect 128 (April 2001): 15-22
Student Action Teams: Manual
Connect 130 (August 2001): 29

**Traffic Safety & Environment:**

**Darebin Cluster:**
Traffic Safety
Connect 140 (April 2003): 3-4
Traffic Safety
Connect 142 (August 2003): 17-18
Traffic Safety
Connect 143-4 (Oct-Dec 2003): 3-15
Environment
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Environment
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**Manningham & Darebin Clusters:**
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Connect 157 (February 2006): 6-7
Teacher Reflections: Manningham & Darebin Clusters
Connect 166-7 (Aug-Oct 2007): 5-20
The ‘Museum of Values’ Activity
Connect 172 (August 2008): 6-7
The ‘Dreaming’ Exercise
Connect 173 (October 2008): 9

**Engagement:**
*Pender’s Grove & Preston South PS:*
Connect 168 (December 2007): 3-9
Connect 172 (August 2008): 3-5
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**Others:**
Local Council and North Adelaide PS, SA
Connect 141 (June 2003): 3-7
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Connect 151 (February 2005): 4-5
St Charles Borromeo, Templestowe, Vic
Connect 152 (April 2005): 9
Language Centre Transition, NSW
Connect 166-7 (Aug-Oct 2007): 21
International Year of Sanitation:
Three Primary Schools, Vic
Connect 176 (April 2009): 3-6
Resurrection School, Keysborough, Vic
Connect 177 (June 2009): 9-11
Aboriginal Student Action Team,
Northcote, Vic
Connect 177 (June 2009): 3-8
Giving Students a Voice in School Improvement, Ashburton, Vic
Connect 180 (December 2009): 13-16
Leaders as Mentors, Altona, Vic
Connect 180 (December 2009): 17-19
Students Act to Improve Transition,
Bentleigh, Vic
Connect 180 (December 2009): 23-26

**International Links:**
‘Student Action Teams’ &
‘Public Achievement’:
Connect 171 (June 2008): 3-8
Student Government at Bellarine Secondary College

Student Government at Bellarine Secondary College (BSC) (near Geelong, Victoria) has had a very successful year in 2009. We have participated in many different activities to help make our College a more positive place and to help raise school spirit. We believe our activities and participation in Student Government increased the rate of attendance in our College through our positive attitude and endeavours to make our time at school more enjoyable.

In response to the bushfires on Black Saturday, we organised an extra mufti day to donate to the Red Cross Foundation. Over both campuses we raised approximately $4000, which is a fantastic achievement.

Our other four mufti days were to fundraise for the Relay for Life campaign, Juvenile Diabetes, school equipment, and the Spirit of Christmas appeal. All of these days were very successful. The money that we raised for school equipment was donated to the music department and was then used to purchase a new keyboard.

We have additionally purchased a scientific calculator to be donated to the well-being area and have donated money to the Drama department to assist with the purchase of a new class set.

Student Government has started a fairly new project called Adopt a Classroom, where a small group of committed students take responsibility for renovating their designated classroom within a price range. Currently we have renovated the Student Wellbeing and Careers foyer. We are continuing this project next year.

We also ran three Student Forums and discussed issues such as Cyber Bullying, School Pride and Solutions to Littering at BSC.

The Student Government body has been supporting World Vision by sponsoring a young boy from Nepal named Bimal. We have been sponsoring him for two years and are hoping to continue sponsoring him next year. Student Government has also been supporting World Vision through the 40 Hour Famine.

At the beginning of the year, Student Government was nominated for an award at the Impetus Youth Awards, and the Coordinator of our Student Government left with an award as a result of our team work.

We also had two of our representatives attend the VicSRC Congress. The VicSRC is a statewide council of SRCs that aims to make learning more enjoyable and to make Student Representative Councils more valued in the education system. Fortunately one of the two representatives was elected to be on the Executive of the VicSRC.

Overall, Student Government has had a fantastic year, and has given students many opportunities to excel at their strengths. Well done to the entire Student Government representatives and we hope to have you back next year.
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:**

- **At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling** (Final report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project - Stage 2; Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne, Vic) August 2008
- **Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria** (John Polesel, for LLEN and YACVic, Vic) 2009
- **Dream Catchrz** (City of Greater Dandenong, Vic) Issues 4, 5; August, September 2009
- **FYA Newsletter** (Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Vic) 05; Spring 2009
- **Many Voices, One Story** (Centre for Multicultural Youth, Carlton, Vic) Celebrating 20 Years; 2009
- **Parents Voice** (Parents Victoria Inc., Brunswick, Vic) Vol 36 Issue 7; November 2009
- **Research Developments** (ACER, Camberwell, Vic) No 22; Summer 2009-2010
- **Switched On to Learning: Student Initiatives in School Engagement** (Student Action Teams, Pender’s Grove and Preston South Primary Schools, Vic; Connect Publications) December 2009
- **TLN Journal** (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 16 No 3; Spring 2009
- **Unleash: Young Opinion and Action** (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) Issue 4; December 2009 - January 2010
- **YAPRap** (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) Vol 19 No 8; December 2009 - January 2010

**International:**

- **Education Revolution** (AERO, New York, USA) Vol 21 No 3; Fall 2009 (Issue 58)

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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description/Pages/Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>630</td>
<td>Rhettoric, reality and resilience: overcoming obstacles to young people’s participation in development (David Driskell, Kanchan Bannerjee and Louise Chawla; Environment and Urbanization, Vol 13 No 1: 77-89; April 2001) (13 pp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>631</td>
<td>Pushing the Boundaries: Critical Perspectives on the Participation of Children in South and Central Asia (Claire O’Kane and Ravi Karkara; Children, Youth and Environments 17 (1): 136-147, 2007) (12 pp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>632</td>
<td>Chief Executive’s Student Forum: Student Handbook 2009 (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training; 2009) (15 pp)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**ASPRINworld: the Connect website!**

http://www.asprinworld.com/Connect

**Connect** has a website (address above).

ASPRIN is the Australian Student Participation Resource and Information Network (“a cure for your student participation headaches”) – a still-emerging concept. The Connect section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, some back issue contents and summaries of Student Councils and Beyond, Student Action Teams, Reaching High and Switched On to Learning.

**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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Connect Publications:
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• Reaching High ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) 2006-7 $ ..........
• Student Action Teams ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) 2006 $ ..........
• Student Councils & Beyond ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) 2005 $ ..........
• Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work 1996 $ ..........

Foxfire Publications (stories of a US-based student-run oral history publication project):
• Sometimes a Shining Moment and Foxfire: 25 Years ($22 each) (limited copies) $ ..........

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