Connect
supporting student participation

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More STARs of Science: Student Researchers Speak

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Also in this issue:
Observeant readers of Connect should have noticed a couple of changes to the magazine in the last couple of issues – and one change now that is hopefully not visible.

First, instead of wrapping copies of Connect in an A4 sheet of paper, I’m now enclosing the magazine in a sealed plastic wrapper. At the moment, this plastic is recyclable, and I’m investigating biodegradable options. This has been a remarkably painless change: just the purchase of a small heat sealer and bags. This eases the physical work of the mailing process, and still enables it to be a ‘table top operation’.

But the main purpose of this change has been so that I can mail copies to you flat. I’ve been worried for a while about sending copies out with a crease down the centre and what that signals about the value of the magazine. A further implication however has been that I’m now able to include a slightly more substantial front cover, so that copies should be more durable and better presented.

What do you think?

... That’s the good news!

Mailing lists and databases!

The bad news is that the trusty computer that has held mailing lists, accounting spreadsheets and databases for a decade (and that was, admittedly, overdue for updating!) suddenly starting making horrible noises and refused to operate. So, a new computer. But most of the databases were lost – and, of course, I’d been going to get round to backing up the information!

I think I’ve correctly reconstructed the Connect accounts and the mailing list, but if you’re getting reminders when you think you shouldn’t be – or if you’re suddenly credited with more issues – please let me know and I’ll check it.

The database of listed articles still exists and is fairly much up-to-date; but the database of the contents of back issues is no more (not that there have been many requests for it). So I don’t think I’ll reconstruct this one; I suggest you check the Connect website: www.asprinworld.com/Connect where contents of quite a few recent issues are listed.

Salutary lessons for all of us: update hardware and back-up your files!

Roger Holdsworth

This Issue:

Next Issue: #183: June 2010
Deadline for material: end of May, 2010
Developing reciprocal connections in a community of learners

This article presents some of the findings from my PhD research (Sewell, 2006), the motivation for which drew from four months at the Australian Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne. I’m delighted to be able to write this brief paper for Connect in appreciation of my time spent with researchers at the Centre who helped me begin my PhD journey. The research investigated the development of a community of learners in four New Zealand primary classrooms and explores the teachers’ and children’s pedagogical perspectives and the impact of these on the change in their participation in learning and teaching.

A community of learners reflects the sociocultural view that learning is a socially and culturally shaped process to which others contribute in the context of real world participation (Cullen, 2003, Fleer, 2002; Rogoff, 1998, 2003; Wells, 2002). This relational and collaborative view of learning differs to the one-sided nature of more traditional transmission or acquisition views which see either the teacher as active or the child as active – but never active together. While these one-sided models satisfied the demands of mass education in the early 20th century, they have little relevance in the 21st century call to develop confident, connected, active, life-long learners (Ministry of Education, 2007). The New Zealand Curriculum1 advocates pedagogies of ‘shared learning’2 wherein teachers and students work together in a learning community, each contributing expertise to a shared endeavour.

This challenge calls us to see learning as a process of joint participation – of participating with others. When children engage in these kinds of ‘conjoint experience’ (Dewey, 1916) in a community of learners, they become active partners with their teacher and with their peers – both ‘contribut[ing] support and direction in shared endeavors’ (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996, p. 389). Findings from a wide range of international studies across learning areas show the benefits to intellectual, social and emotional and spiritual growth when children have been afforded the opportunity to engage in shared learning in a community of learners (eg. Brown & Campione, 1998; Brown & Renshaw, 2000; Elbers & Streefland, 2000; Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004).

Using a collaborative action research design, I worked with a team of four Year 3 and 4 teachers in a large full primary school3 in a low socioeconomic area of a provincial New Zealand city. Over one school year (2003), I acted as ‘participant-as-observer’ (Glesne & Peshkin, 1999) interacting extensively with the teachers and children in their classrooms and recording field notes of the interactions. I interviewed the teachers and 16 focus students at regular intervals throughout the year to talk about their pedagogical perspectives and practices. The teachers and I also developed our own professional learning group and met regularly at the university for what became known as our ‘RaP days’ to reflect on our personal theories of learning and teaching and to plan together to make small changes that aligned broadly with a guiding sociocultural principle: ‘instruction hallmarks of a learning community, as well as to feel what it may be, “it will forever remain a fragile entity if no parallel community exists among teachers” Thomas, Wineburg, Grossman, Myhre & Woolworth, 1998, p. 12). One of the teachers in the study captured the importance of our own professional learning community.

I am one of those people that finds it difficult to step out and I’ve needed this (RaP days)... it’s made me view teaching in a completely different way... we all stood on each other’s shoulders...

Over the year of the research, new and tentative forms of community began to emerge in the four classrooms as the teachers began to think critically about their taken-for-granted perspectives. While the shared learning activities that emerged were all different, they bore the reciprocal and responsive hallmarks of a community of learners. Further analysis across the four classrooms showed that the nature of teachers’ and children’s participation in a community of learners comprised cognitive, social and emotional connections with spiritual and physical dimensions evolving from and further strengthening these connections (see Sewell, 2009 for further exploration of these spiritual findings). The new ways of

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1 An electronic copy of The New Zealand Curriculum can be found at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum

2 Seven effective pedagogies, shown consistently to have a positive impact on student learning, are described (full details can be found on http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Effective-pedagogy

3 A full primary school runs from New Entrants (5 years of age) to Year 8 (12 years of age)
participating were heard in the teachers’ and children's dialogue about the content of learning (cognitive), seen in their reciprocal and responsive interactions (social), felt in their honest and sensitive expressions (emotional), sensed in their selfless reaching out to others (spiritual), and observed in their closer and less hierarchical configurations (physical).

Changing practice began by challenging beliefs about learning and teaching

The teachers began the research with perspectives that reflected mainly traditional one-sided views of learning. For instance one teacher, Rhys, believed that the teacher was in control of the learning program: 'I tell my kids my classroom is not a democracy... I'm the boss...'. Another teacher, Amy, believed that she knew what was best for children: 'I love being able to decide what we're going to do.' Evident in the data was the shift in the teachers’ thinking at the conclusion of the study that pointed to learning and teaching including shared activity - responsive, inclusive and dialogic in nature. A third teacher, Tiare, upheld the importance of 'covering' and 'delivering' the curriculum, yet by the end of the research she realised the importance of listening to children and being part of deciding a curriculum relevant to their interests and needs.

The teachers developed their pedagogies in different ways

As the teachers began to develop new perspectives of learning and teaching, they went about developing their learning communities in quite different ways. Four examples are provided here to demonstrate that diversity.

Rhys set his first goal for developing a community of learners as learning to share their out-of-school lives in the classroom. He recognised the importance of giving children opportunities to talk about their everyday lives and to 'validate feelings, park issues and feel safe so we could move on ready to learn.' He wanted to support the children to share these cultural activities, to listen and to respond respectfully to the issues in each other’s lives. The ritual typically began with him saying: ‘Let’s catch up on each other’. The children formed their What's on Top circle, with Rhys just another member sitting on the floor with them. The children talked about their friendships, their sport, their family lives, while others decided to ‘pass’. When it came to Rhys's turn, he told them about his life - how rushed it had been at home that morning or how his daughter had started kindergarten. If a child shared something particularly personal, he made a mental note to work with that child's group immediately after the circle.

What’s on Top became the most anticipated time of the day. He believed that the circle time had set them up as a community, and that participation in this daily ritual had provided opportunities for children to talk openly, to feel valued and to listen with empathy. It was also a time for Rhys to show himself as someone other than their teacher – he was a father, a husband and avid hockey fan. Rhys noted that, as they began to share responsibility and decisions in their learning and change the power relationships (Bishop, 2001), some children ‘had been turned on to learning’ By the end of the research, he noted how the culture of the classroom had changed; sharing had become a legitimate learning activity - it was acceptable to be seen as having expertise to share. As Rhys noted:

It's the community of learners, that's what it is. It's valuing each other... It's OK to be smart! OK for Ikani to say in a loud voice: “I'm really good at spelling. If you need a hand with spelling, ask me.” Sakura’s comfortable to say in class: “I'm smart”
A second teacher, Kelly, set one of her goals to develop their learning community as learning to use dialogue in their learning, instead of her typical initiate (a question), response, and evaluate (IRE) which reflected the norms of one-sided participation. At the start of the study, she noted they were not happy to share their ideas about the content of their learning with others. She heard comments such as: “that was my idea... you stole it” ... “you copied me... you're cheating”. While the children naturally talked and shared ideas in settings beyond the classroom, trying to get them to share ideas in a dialogic inquiry in the classroom was ‘like pulling teeth’. Kelly decided to learn about an approach to teaching reading called ‘reciprocal teaching’ (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Having read about the reciprocal nature of this approach she set about teaching it to two reading groups. One reading group was unable to develop this shared learning, with the leader directing the activities without inviting others to contribute their ideas or expertise. However, the other group did develop these connections in their respectful listening, mutual encouraging and building on each other’s ideas. One member of this group commented that she preferred this shared learning because instead of ‘just reading the whole thing and getting sent to your desk to do something... you ask questions, summarise it and do the clarifying together... sort of like helping each other’.

These children, like those in Rhys’s classroom, came to recognise their individual expertise and the power of distributing it in a shared activity. Instead of regarding sharing as an unlawful and dishonest activity, and keeping it to themselves, they realised the legitimacy and value of talking as a means to learn.

The third teacher, Amy, set a goal to formalise a place to learn together where all could share and respond. On one occasion, quite late in the study, Amy, a passionate dancer, shifted the desk and spontaneously joined in with the children as they rehearsed a dance for an upcoming school concert. The dance was choreographed mainly by Amy. I watched as they shared responsibility for each other’s spacing, moves and timing and shared the joy of moving together to music.

I showed Amy photos of her dancing to reinforce the look and feel of joint participation, and to seed the idea of her dancing with the children at the concert. Amy was taken aback by my suggestion: ‘Oh no I couldn’t. It’s theirs... it belongs to them!’ Amy justified her decision by saying that the children would interpret her participation with them as her not believing in their competence to dance. Her justification was echoed by one of the children: ‘I’d feel like a baby because people would think we couldn’t really dance and that we needed our teacher on stage with us.’ Their similar reaction suggests that while it may have been acceptable to engage in joint participation in the classroom, to do so in a public forum, especially in front of parents, was breaking the sacred bounds of being a teacher and a student – a one-sided activity.

A fourth example comes from Tiare, who was interested in supporting the children’s joint participation in real-world activities. She wanted to use the children’s prior knowledge they had developed about plants with a local agricultural researcher, to care for the school environment. Tiare responded to the children’s motivation to have their own garden at school and worked through a decision-making process with the children to consider possible ways to go about this social action. They decided to
create a garden using large tractor tyres, to fill them with fresh topsoil and fertiliser, plant their seeds, and build screens to protect the seedlings.

Tia’s goal to create opportunities for children to participate in authentic activities didn’t stop there. Inspired by creating their tyre gardens, Tia and the children walked around the school grounds to photograph areas in need of beautification. With permission from the school management, Tia and the children adopted a small area of the grounds as their own to care for. Letters were written to request native seedlings, holes were dug, stakes painted, seedlings planted and a roster developed to care for the area. The children’s sense of belonging as well as their new understandings of gardening were evident as they talked about caring for ‘their trees’ so that in years to come these trees would remain when they had left the school.

**The struggle and the support to develop shared learning**

These four snapshots reveal some of the pedagogical changes the teachers made as they learned more about how children learn from a sociocultural perspective. These changes were hard won with a range of constraining factors made evident in the ongoing data analysis process. The most pervasive constraint was the persistence of teachers’ one-sided perspectives which acted to inhibit or delay understanding of joint participation. Despite talking about learning being a socially and culturally shaped process and experiencing it in our own professional learning community, the nature of shared activity remained elusive to one teacher. The students themselves also resisted their teachers’ initial attempts to change the way they went about their learning as it contravened their traditional perspectives that teachers should direct learning and be the fount of knowledge of which they were the passive recipients.

The study also revealed that a range of enabling factors supported the teachers’ change process. The school’s valuing of relationship-driven teaching (Rogers & Renard, 1999) created a school-wide culture of valuing the learning-teaching relationship that was central to developing joint participation. In addition, the schools’ trust in these teachers to make professional decisions based on outcomes-linked evidence, and their willingness to forgo traditional documentation such as submitting long term plans in advance of learning, were also key enablers. The caring, open and responsive relationships that developed in the collaborative action research also provided intellectual and emotional support for the teachers as well as an ongoing experience of what it felt and looked like to learn together.

The launch of The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) has signalled new directions for teaching and learning in New Zealand. This national curriculum calls for learners who are confident, connected, active, life-long learners, and who are able to relate well to others and manage themselves as they participate and contribute to society. A call of this nature requires teachers and students to participate in the classroom in new ways – ways that are broadly reflective of the Maori 4 concept of ako which legitimises each member of the classroom as a teacher and as a learner (Bishop, 2001) as is the relationship in a community of learners. Change of this nature is never easy, it ‘depends on what teachers do and think – it’s as simple and as complex as that’ (Fullan, 2007, p. 129).

The study revealed the demanding, complex and mutually constituting nature of pedagogical change as well as the importance of building teachers’ professional capacity to include shared learning activities in a community of learners in to their pedagogical repertoires. This process of change starts with teachers’ taken-for-granted perspectives. The change process also includes supporting children to change their personal theories of learning and teaching. A community of learners builds on theories that view learning as a social and cultural process characterised by responsive and reciprocal connections. In the words of one child: ‘It doesn’t have to be the telling, you can be part of it... sort of like helping each other to learn.’

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References


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4 Maori are the indigenous people of the land or tangata whenua


The VicSRC is proud to announce the inaugural round of SRC Recognition Awards, for SRCs that are truly representative of their students and operate to a high standard. The 2009 VicSRC Congress decided to establish these SRC Recognition Awards. It was argued that schools spend time, effort and money on competitions in areas such as debating, music and sport, as these provide some level of school recognition for these areas. The VicSRC hopes that the SRC Recognition Awards will, over time, encourage much greater recognition for the work of SRCs in all schools in Victoria.

The Awards are available in three categories:

**Award 1: Integration:** recognising an SRC that is strongly connected to the school’s decision-making processes, that is strongly responsive to student needs and voices, and that is linked strongly with its School Council/Board and its committees.

**Award 2: Enterprise:** recognising an SRC that, through use of strategic planning and a strong leadership structure, has completed a highly successful school or community project.

**Award 3: Informed Representation:** recognising an SRC that is truly democratic and fully representative of students.

Applications for the SRC Recognition Awards are open NOW. Visit the VicSRC website at: www.vicsrc.org.au or email awards@vicsrc.org.au for more information and an entry form.

The VicSRC would like to thank the Award sponsors - Connect magazine, Second Strike and the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, along with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for their support of this project.

The VicSRC encourages all schools with a strong SRC to apply for one of these outstanding recognitions of achievement.

Good luck!
Georgia Kennelly, Michael Kurtanjek and I attended the State General Meeting of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP) to launch the VicSRC’s new resource: Developing Student Participation, Engagement and Leadership: A Guide for Principals.

The meeting was held at Moonee Valley Racecourse and was extremely beneficial for all of us who attended. Dina Guest from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was attending, with the VicSRC, to officially launch the resource on behalf of the Department. I feel that we, as the VicSRC, had a very positive impact on the Principals of Victoria; being the only students there, it was great that we were able to show just how important student leadership – led by students – really is.

After Dina’s introduction praising the VicSRC, Michael spoke to the Principals about how best to use this Guide, and encouraged all Principals to better resource and utilise their respective SRCs. This really meant so much more to the Principals as it was coming from a student. Michael was also able to launch the VicSRC’s SRC Recognition Awards - see the article on the front page of this newsletter for more details!

Following the speeches, the VicSRC Executive members met Principals over lunch. This was a valuable opportunity, as many Principals had not heard of the VicSRC previously and some did not have much interaction with their SRCs.

The Guide for Principals will be mailed to all school Principals who were not in attendance at the VASSP State General Meeting. We would encourage all SRCs and SRC Support Teachers to check with your Principal whether they have received (and read!) this great VicSRC resource. It will also be available on the VASSP website: www.vassp.org.au

Our thanks go to Marion Heale (Executive Officer of VASSP); Philip Gardner (the writer); Roger Holdsworth (VicSRC Supporters Group); Kate Walsh (VicSRC Coordinator) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for their contribution and assistance on this project.

Overall, it was a great day, with much gained for all who attended – and a fantastic resource was well promoted.

Tiffany Chapman and Michael Kurtanjek
VicSRC Executive
The 5th Annual VicSRC Congress
Victoria’s Peak Representational Forum
for Secondary School Students

For more information contact
Kate Walsh, VicSRC Coordinator
(03) 9267 3744 or 0411 679 050
coordinator@vicsrc.org.au
Judy Chow, Congress Coordinator
congress@vicsrc.org.au

When: Friday 6 – Saturday 7 August 2010
Where: Oasis Camp Mt Evelyn
Who: Year 7-12 Students
Cost: $60 for VicSRC members,
$80 for non-members
(Price includes accommodation,
all meals, registration & materials)
Register by Friday, 4 June 2010
Full supervision provided

The VicSRC is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early
Childhood Development and auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.
VISTA, the Victorian Institute of SRC Teacher Advisors, is the professional association for both primary and secondary teachers, working across government, Catholic and non-government school sectors, who are responsible for working with student councils.

VISTA President, Scott Duncan stated: “Other subjects such as English or Maths or LOTE have subject associations to support them. SRCs are worthy organisations within schools and the teachers who oversee Student Councils are equally worthy of support and recognition.”

To support SRC Teachers, VISTA has planned a series of Wine and Cheese Nights for 2010. These nights allow SRC Teacher Advisors to meet and chat with those from other schools working in similar roles.

Future planned VISTA Wine and Cheese Nights are:

**Tuesday 27th April 2010; 6-8 pm**
**Topic:** SRC Fundraising
As the SRC Teacher Advisor, is your pigeon hole becoming the dumping ground for every organisation that wants you school to sell something, raise money for something or hold another “day” for them? Join us as we explore why SRCs need to fundraise, how to manage your money, what to do with it when you get it and new ways you can earn your SRC some cash.

**Tuesday 22nd June 2010; 6-8 pm**
**Topic:** Motivation
It’s half way through the year - Is your SRC feeling flat? Started off the year full steam ahead, but now feeling burnt out? Join the VISTA team as we explore solutions with SRC teachers about how to keep your students enthused.

**Tuesday 24th August 2010; 6-8 pm**
**Topic:** Local Clusters
Kate Walsh, co-ordinator of the VicSRC and student members of the VicSRC Executive join us tonight and talk about how schools can establish networks with other local Student Councils.

**Tuesday 26th October 2010; 6-8 pm**
**Topic:** Increased Participation

Participants will also receive a complimentary Resource Kit from Second Strike.

Teachers can register their interest in attending these sessions by e-mailing their contact details and the session they would like to attend to vista@srcteachers.org or by calling the offices of Second Strike on (03) 9853-0600

Those wanting to participate in the online sessions can register through the DEECD Virtual Conference Centre at www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/virtualconferencecentre or through the VISTA Website at srcteachers.wikispaces.com

Should you be unable to attend the session in person or through the live presentation online, recordings are made available via the VISTA website.

**We look forward to seeing you there!**

Scott Duncan
President, VISTA
Enviro Inspiro! is the NSW Department of Education’s environmental competition. It runs each year during Terms 1 & 2 as a project of the NSW Student Representative Council. Annual funding is provided by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change and Water.

Enviro Inspiro! provides students with opportunities to engage with their local community in meaningful learning experiences to improve the environment. Student teams engage in ‘hands-on’ community based learning.

The winning entry of Enviro Inspiro! 2009 ($3,000) was Keira High School’s The Organic Garden. This entry showcased the efforts of a group of students who created a working organic garden in the school. The project demonstrated the benefits of growing organic produce. The entry showed how students researched school recycling processes, developed a school improvement plan and implemented a construction project to build a school compost heap and organic garden. These are now used by secondary students studying courses such as Food Technology.

Enviro Inspiro! is definitely not an ‘SRC only’ project. Any interested group of school students in a NSW public school may enter. Student teams can win one of three major school ‘prizes’ valued up to $3,000.

Teams of students or Student Action Teams create a five minute DVD to showcase their successful student-led school environmental project. The media and supporting two page overview of the project has to demonstrate how students have:

• researched the need for improvements to the school or local area environment
• successfully implemented an environmental project
• enhanced the environment.


New for Enviro Inspiro! 2010

• In 2010, joint entries from clusters of schools or school communities are encouraged. A group of students from a primary school can enter as long as the school partners with a secondary school.
• Schools can partner with community organisations to showcase community environmental projects in which students have taken a significant role, not just projects to improve the school environment as in previous years.
• The environmental projects can be completed in 2009 as long as the media component of the entry is completed in 2010.

Full details about Enviro Inspiro! 2010 were made available on the Department’s competition website at the start of the 2010 school year and notifications appeared in InPrincipal during Terms 1 and 2, 2010.


Why not organise a student team to start preparing your school’s entry right now!

Noel Grannall
Coordinator
Student Participation and SRCs
on behalf of the NSW SRC

Resolutions passed at the Student Forum at the 2009 State Student Representative Council Conference

At the Student Forum held at the 2009 NSW State Student Representative Council (SRC) Conference, nine recommendations were debated and four were passed. The 2010 NSW Student Representative Council is responsible for taking action on these resolutions during their term of office.

The resolutions passed are:

• that the 2010 NSW SRC encourage regular meetings between school executives and SRCs in NSW secondary schools.
  Moved by: Western Sydney Region

• that the 2010 NSW SRC raise awareness and promote the use of the link to the DET student leadership website and its resources to students.
  Moved by: Hunter/Central Coast Region

• that the 2010 NSW SRC promote the use of video conferencing at regional and state levels to enhance communication between SRCs.
  Moved by: North Coast Region

• that the 2010 NSW SRC promote and support the implementation of the revised SRCs: a practical guide for students and teachers.
  Moved by: Hunter/Central Coast
Green Day is an event run by students for students to help improve the environment. It’s held during the month of September. Any team of students in a NSW public school can participate!

**Why September?**
September is Biodiversity Month. Check this out: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/month.html

**What happens?**
Teams of students (‘green teams’):
- raise awareness of environmental issues
- get involved in environmentally friendly activities
- find ways for students to have a positive impact on the environment.

**Register first!**
Email student.leadership@det.nsw.edu.au

This email need only be two sentences that state: ‘...school intends to participate in Green Day!
The contact person is ...’


Find lots of useful tips for your Green Day at:
- Sustainable Schools NSW www.sustainableschools.nsw.edu.au

**More info!**
To find out more, email: student.leadership@det.nsw.edu.au
In last October’s issue of Connect (#179), I reported on a ‘students as researchers’ project investigating teaching and learning in Year 10 Science. In April 2008, I was approached by the Science Head of Department (HOD) to oversee Year 10 students researching student viewpoints on science teaching.

As he explained:

*Personally, I am trying to get out of this the following:*

1. genuine improvement of teaching and learning;
2. another pathway for students to grow, develop, take responsibility, instigate and conduct beneficial agendas. (Science HOD, personal communication, April, 2008)

I developed a plan based on the belief that “students are the experts on their own perceptions and experiences as learners” (Oldfather, 1995, p. 131); we asked for student volunteers and were surprised when 38 of 100 Year 10 students put their hands up.

In 2009, I worked with a representative group from the original team to try to understand their perceptions of their experience as researchers and this article reports on that research.

The students came up with the name **STARs of Science (Students as Researchers of Science)** and a logo; a contract was drawn up and seven students volunteered to keep journals to record their experience. We conducted a series of workshops (including an off-campus Training Day) focusing on ethics, research methods and data analysis before the students began their research.

At each of the STARs meetings (held in science classes or lunch breaks), refreshments were supplied to the students since “providing food and drink is a way to treat students as other adults would be treated in a similar situation” (Fielding & Bragg, 2003, p. 37). Later, five students made impressive presentations at conferences for science teachers in Toowoomba and Brisbane. At the conclusion of STARs, the student groups each made presentations to the Year 10 student body, science teachers and representatives of the school administration. The whole process took seven months and finished with a barbeque to celebrate the students’ success.

How the students saw STARs

This article will not examine the conclusions of STARs itself, which were reported in the previous Connect article, but focus on the most significant findings of the students’ experiences of the project, which were:

- Students were initially sceptical about the possibility of actually changing science teaching or of having any real control over the research process;
- Having a voice in the school was very important to them;
- Being treated as adults is critical to students in the middle years of high school;
- They appreciated that, in STARs, they were treated very differently from their normal school experience;
- They want teachers to care about them and to receive personal recognition for their hard work;
- Concrete outcomes and feedback were important to the students but, despite not receiving feedback, they were very positive about, not disillusioned by, their experiences of STARs.

All quotations from the student researchers were obtained from interviews in late 2009 and from journals and evaluation surveys in 2008; they were all 16 years at the time of the interviews and the names used here are pseudonyms.

All students agreed that one of the main reasons for joining STARs was that they wanted to change science since “this was a chance for us to work...”
together to make a change in science because it’s not a very likeable subject as it is” (Alice). However they hadn’t given much consideration to how this would be accomplished as they believed teachers would essentially tell them what to do. Vince summed up their expectations with: “I just thought we’d like go there and you guys (the teachers) would be like, ‘Hey, do this’ and we’d be like ‘All right’ and we’d change science”. Their years as students in the school system where teachers control their daily activities has led to scepticism about them being allowed to have any real say in what happens in school because “that’s what ten years of our schooling has taught us” (Richard).

Students were vocal about the importance of having a voice on issues that mattered to them. “Teachers should JUST TAKE ME SERIOUSLY!! Just take me seriously,” said Belle in an interview. They were excited about STARs because “it’s great that students can express their opinions”, as one student wrote in her journal, while Belle appreciated that “we had the right to say what we wanted with no-one telling us it was wrong”. The desire to be taken seriously (and the fear that it would not happen) can be clearly seen in a late entry in her journal:

We are nearer the end of the process; we have put in a lot of work and I am glad that it’s almost over. We have put in a lot of time for this. I hope something comes out of this. Or otherwise I would be really annoyed.

They believed that they could make a difference and develop a partnership with teachers, as Vince explained: “If the teachers work with the kids, it’s hard to get any problems because, you know, if the teachers are happy and the kids are happy, there really shouldn’t be any screaming or any problems”. Time and again, students emphasised how important it was for them to be heard and for their opinions to be respected, and STARs did lead to some changes in this area as the science HOD explained:

I will always now, in my future planning, have a bit more of a basis to (consider) the students’ viewpoints on things, and that’ll either implicitly or directly inform, you know, a lot of the future things that I do.
For the students, it was very important to "be treated like an adult" as, too often, they feel that "they treat us like kids; like, I know we’re kids but we’re not ..." as Tom explained, a little paradoxically. The critical thing here is that students want to be treated with respect and not spoken to condescendingly or ignored, something one student said she "hated." She explained:

We're not stupid you know; you don't need, you know, to talk to us like we're three. We actually have, you know, some (ideas) ... we're not allowed, you know, we can't speak up, you can't voice opinions or ... it annoys the hell out of me (Belle).

This confirms research findings that "high school students ... resented school authorities that dealt with them as if they were children" and that "students ... remarked with some sadness that their opinions were rarely sought after" (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 527). STARs gave them the opportunity to do this as it allowed them to think for themselves, to grow personally and to be trusted - Vince said that one of the most important aspects of STARs was being "treated like an adult; first time ever in high school."

That STARs was a very different experience to their normal school routine was an important part of its appeal. This feeling special was stressed in the evaluation by one student who wrote that "we are part of something that has never happened before" which, while not true in the wider scheme, is true of this school. Particularly, students saw the off-campus Training Day as a highlight of STARs. James explained that there was "no uniform - it was a lot more casual; laid back, so to speak" while Vince said:

(There was) far less pressure, you feel more comfortable and you feel, like, almost you're not a student, not a school kid anymore; you're just in some kind of, like a group kind of thing and you're out of school and you just feel more relaxed and comfortable and you can be yourself more. No timetables, really, and bells ringing, which was pretty good.

Students wanted more personal recognition than they were given by the teachers. Because they saw little interest from the teachers in STARs, they felt the teachers did not really care as Belle argues:

I reckon we should have got more teachers involved. So that they would show that they actually did care what we were doing. That's the thing that we were missing - teachers caring.

The HOD believed that the staff did respond as the students "were mentioned, apart from the whole school parades, the newspaper articles, the celebration, all those ... quite a comprehensive range of acknowledgements." However this was not what the students wanted – public recognition on parade or in the media was nowhere near as powerful as a teacher personally acknowledging them in a conversation or thanking them. They wanted people to take an interest in their opinions and, in their view, this rarely happened. This shows an interesting difference between teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the kind of praise that is seen as most effective and desirable. Public recognition of the kind that that has occurred in schools for years – praise on parade and in school publications – is not what the students valued most.

Unfortunately, the STARs team received no feedback on their recommendations from the science faculty even though changes were made to the teaching of science as a result of their reports. They were not even aware if their reports had been considered by the science staff. All students were critical of the lack of feedback on their reports as Melanie made clear:

I reckon that (feedback) would have been a really good thing because we all like worked so hard on doing those reports. Everyone was there and they're just like "Oh, yeah, really good speech, rah, rah, rah", but they didn't say anything about what we had actually mentioned and didn't carry it on.
Fielding (2004b, pp. 306-7) wrote that students will “soon tire of the increasing number of invitations ... that seldom result in actions or dialogue that affects the quality of their lives” yet, while they saw few concrete results from their work, the students did not become disillusioned. Other factors – the pride they felt, the belief they had worked very hard, the personal growth they felt had occurred, the skills they developed, the sense of camaraderie engendered, the belief that their voices were at least heard, the fun they had, and their real sense of accomplishment – all counteracted any possible disillusionment from the failure of the science faculty to give them feedback.

Conclusion

It has been a privilege to work with these engaging, dedicated young people who have provided unique insights into their experience of school. Their opinions, as represented here, indicate that STARS was a very positive experience for them all, even though they did not receive any feedback from the science staff. They have criticisms of how the program was organised and the time it took, but found the responsibility they were afforded, the learning they experienced and the fact that for a short time they were treated like adults and their opinions respected more than overcame these shortcomings. As Jenny said, “I think the overall result, it was something special” while Belle explained that “we did achieve what we wanted to achieve. We may not have done it perfectly, but we achieved what we wanted to”.

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References


Ian Fraser is HOD of English at Nanango SHS in Queensland and was the coordinator of the STARS project in 2008. This article is taken from a research report originally written as part of a Master of Education study undertaken through the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba. The photos accompanying this article are not necessarily of the students who gave their opinions for this research.
Mitchell High School, NSW

Student Engagement in Transition

A Student Action Team approach

What was the hardest thing about going to high school? What was the best thing about going to high school?

Our team of 10 students from Year 8 at Mitchell High School in Blacktown (western suburbs of Sydney) investigated this in 2009. We wanted to improve the process of transition from primary to secondary school, with students leading the research and action.

The project started with a Student Forum in Sydney, where we joined with five other schools to be introduced to the topic. After some getting to know you activities, each of the schools talked about the transition issues in our school and presented some posters or role plays to the whole group. What were the common themes coming through from these presentations? We all agreed that ‘fitting in’ and ‘bullying’ were two common concerns.

We then learnt about how to do research: about forming questions, about quantitative and qualitative information, about sample sizes, about collating results.

We went to the city to see primary schools and high schools. What we learnt was what we had to do. We did a play about what happened at school involving bullies and unpleasant situations.

Back at school, our first step was to work with our whole class on the questions we wanted to ask. We typed them up and refined them. For our quantitative survey, we made up 15 questions to ask students and they had to answer: ‘almost always’, ‘usually’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘rarely’. Then we worked out some qualitative questions – about why students thought things. We also asked students which feeder school they came from and whether they were male or female.

In Step 2, we worked out who we would ask. We decided on a sample of 120 students in Year 7 and 8, and got this sample by selecting every third student.

Our team then issued surveys to all 120, in groups of 15, and we also interviewed each student in the sample separately.
The team then entered the quantitative results into a chart and collated the qualitative results. This enabled us to draw up some graphs of the results (below opposite).

While we were doing this, we kept learning journals. Here are some of the comments that we noted down. Firstly, we said things about what we learned from the surveys and interviews:

“That most people worry about making new friends, assessment, studying and marks. Some forget where they need to go and some are bullied.”

“That Year 7 love meeting new friends and it was the easiest thing about coming to high school. Year 8 were more worried about coming to high school.”

“By participating in this project, I have learnt that many children in both Year 7 and 8 had a lot of trouble making friends.”

“By participating in the project, I have learnt that a lot of children reacted differently to high school.”

“What I have learnt throughout this event is many people come from Shelley or Blacktown South (feeder schools).”

“That if you had different people, like boys and girls, they had different opinions.”

We also said what we had learnt about doing research:

“I have also learnt the process and the results of the surveys and how they are counted.”

“I also felt I had a lot of responsibility.”

“I learnt how the data were collected and turned it out. I have done a good thing by participating in the project.”

“I have also enjoyed participating in this project and am happy to see the result.”

“I have also learnt we are the first students to help with the responses and use Excel to analyse results in this way.”

“It was fun taking down other people’s opinions. It was interesting to hear what they had to say.”

After our research, we had a sharing conference with the other two local primary schools who were also doing their research about transition. We analysed our results and presented them (below).

We agreed that our results showed:

What was the hardest thing about going to high school?

The fear of the unknown: fears about being bullied, getting lost, mean teachers, hard work. Most students (over 80%) enjoy school, their friends and subjects.

What was the best thing about going to high school?

Making new friends, excursions, sport and the subjects.

We continued to work together on action from our research. Our primary school teams gave us questions to brainstorm and we ran information sessions at the primary schools based on our research. We then analysed the results again, based on the questions asked by our primary schools, and presented information to our primary schools in small groups and later in a large forum.

In our learning journals, we noted the following things about our sharing day:

“I made friends and did a good job. Next time we may need labels and we might use the hall. Perhaps a drink to make them feel welcome. I think the role that I completed was very exciting and fun.”

“It was great. I met new people.”

What did we achieve?

We were able to give students in years 5 and 6 at Shelley and Bert Oldfield Public schools answers to the questions that they were concerned about. It was more believable coming from students.

We were concerned about other primary students who could not come up to our school as part of the
transition lessons that are currently operating. We first brainstormed and took photos of things that would give them some understanding of life in High School and placed these into a DVD that has been posted on our website.

And for us:

I believe that by doing this project we definitely have a better understanding of school students, about high school … about what worried and excited them in Primary School.

What I achieved was being a leader. I learnt how to work with other primary school students.

What we achieved was a diary, a DVD that other schools can watch and find out about what Mitchell is like. We also went to the Department of Education and worked with other schools.

I felt happy when participating in the project. I felt happy that I got to help some of the primary school students, getting the chance to interact with them and help them made me really feel good. Getting the chance to speak in front of people has boosted my confidence.

I have learnt that when children go to high school most have a lot of worries and fears and most of them guessed and had different opinions of what high school would be like. By completing this I feel like I have helped children in Year 6 get a clearer vision of high school and I have helped the kids know what to expect.

We need to update our transition DVD and perhaps go to Bert Oldfield School once a year as they do not have a specific feeder school. This should be carried out by the current Year 8 as they are closer to the issues.

Thank you for listening to our story and being part of the journey!

Year 8/4 Student Action Team
Mitchell High School

For more information, contact Tanya Baghurst (Deputy Principal): Tanya.Baghurst@det.nsw.edu.au
Some state secondary schools in England already encourage significantly more student participation than others. There is evidence that these schools also have better than average GCSE results across the full range of academic ability compared with schools in similar social situations. They also appear to have less bullying and anti-social behaviour, reflected in lower and declining rates of exclusion.

Giving students a voice as partners in the processes of school improvement and self-evaluation helps the school to become a more effective learning organisation. It also helps to create a positive, purposeful, inclusive and safe school ethos that gives students a greater sense of ownership of the whole school experience.

Effective student councils empower students with positive attitudes and approaches to their learning, the way they behave in and out of school, and their relationships. Young people develop the self-esteem to play an active part in the caring process and to offer positive peer leadership. They are able to challenge antisocial attitudes and to influence those students – usually in the minority – who have a negative outlook on school in general.

In schools with effective student councils, a significant number of students talk of having a growing interest in politics and government as a result of their experience of participation in democratic processes in their schools.

Schools with effective student councils are a good place to be. Both students and teachers say that school becomes more interesting.

- The school has a culture of respect for rights and responsibilities.
- A lot of listening goes on, both by students and by teachers.
- There is a widely held feeling that the school is improving.

- Relationships between students, and between students and teachers, seem to be open and friendly.
- People tend to be confident and unafraid.

It is easy to recognise these schools. They are schools where most students can:

- tell you what their student council has done to make life in school better for everyone
- tell you who their representative is and how often the council meets
- take you to a school council noticeboard and show you the minutes of the last meeting and the agenda for the next one.

Unfortunately, more than half the existing student councils are not seen as effective by the students. These schools are also easy to recognise. They are the schools where most students:

- do not know whether there is a student council
- cannot say what it does
- know about it – but say that although suggestions are made, nothing ever happens.

Student participation takes many forms, but the single common feature is a structure that gives students the opportunity to take part in decision-making about real issues, enabling them to develop:

- the skills needed to participate as a citizen in a democratic society
- an understanding of how representative structures become effective
- the capacity to devise rules for democratic processes and to evaluate them
- other life-skills – such as information-gathering, collaboration, budgeting, evaluating priorities, reflecting on outcomes and communicating with others, and so on

- self-confidence and self-esteem
- a responsible attitude to the immediate and wider community
- a sense of personal efficacy that will continue after leaving school.

Creating an ethos of participation

Student councils succeed only if schools have a vision of students as active partners in their own education rather than just as recipients of it. Student councils can never succeed in an unfriendly undemocratic environment.

Research shows that genuine democracy in schools generates powerful motivation and commitment. Student councils can promote the social inclusion of those students who are most likely to give up on themselves as learners and to feel alienated from the school.

But students are not fooled by a kind of tokenism that simply goes through the motions of participation. Creating a school that has a positive ethos of student participation requires staff to take the opinions of students seriously, to listen to their views and to act upon them where possible. This is much more likely to happen where everyone is aware that student participation is one of the main aims of the school.

Most schools with an ethos of participation refer to the importance of student participation in their public documents and in their development plans. For instance:

- the mission statement
- the school prospectus
- the school development plan
- subsidiary plans for curriculum and staff development.

from Secondary school councils toolkit: Students and teachers working together

(Di Clay, with Jessica Gold and Derry Hannam: School Councils UK, 2001)

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2 L. Davies, School councils and pupil exclusions: Research project report (Birmingham, School Councils UK, 1999)

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7 Hannam
Teachers and students talk about effective SRCs

Teachers say:

School life
- The school is a more positive, listening and friendly environment.
- Students become more aware of the organisation of the school and who’s responsible for what.
- Mutual respect develops between staff and students.
- Not so much ‘them and us’. Students are on our side – therefore get it right more quickly.
- Academic achievement is enhanced.

Personal development
- Staff and students have a greater sense of feeling valued.
- Students gain confidence and higher self-esteem.
- Students develop a sense of responsibility – especially boys. For instance, Year 11s give very mature advice to Year 7s about homework.
- SRCs provide a platform for students to air views and grievances. They become more articulate and develop listening skills.
- Students become involved in, and proficient at, decision-making.
- Students have avoided exclusion through becoming involved in the SRC.

Students say:

School life
- School life is better so that everyone feels part of the school.
- Communication improves and students have opportunities to voice opinions and sort out problems. Students and teachers are able to see things from each other’s point of view.
- We learn to understand and respect everyone’s opinions, and to accept the need for compromise.
- We have responsibility for handling matters and can finalise issues and see decisions through to their conclusions.

Developing skills
- Teamwork skills develop between students, staff and the outside community.
- Good experience in running meetings.
- Preparation for leaving school.

Teachers and students talk about ineffective SRCs

Teachers say:

School life
- It needs to become part of the culture of the school and have a higher profile.
- Students don’t feel the SRC is taken seriously by the Principal or valued by members of staff.
- Some staff have a fear of giving too much power to students.
- Students don’t feel much is achieved and feel let down when things don’t work.

Structure and organisation
- Students don’t set the agenda.
- Over-dependency on heads of year.
- Use of curriculum time has not been properly discussed with staff.

Students say:

Status of the councils in the school
- The SRC has no real aim – it has no profile and SRC business is not made a priority.
- Staff don’t think the SRC is important and tend to dismiss issues.
- Not consulted in big decisions. Things have been banned without consulting students.
- Things we ask for get turned down. No follow up to find out progress.

Practical problems
- Should be run by the students but tends to be run by support teacher.
- Meetings every half term not frequent enough to get things done.
- News bulletins not always read out to students – form teachers need reminding.
- Not enough time for reps to report back. Form teachers tend to say ‘That can wait till next time’.
- Members of staff don’t know when and where the meetings are.
- The SRC has no budget and no treasurer. Unclear about how much money is available for student use.

Lack of interest among students
- Form not always interested. Time slot once a week for 15 minutes in forms – but no one listens.
- Students don’t want to be involved – ‘too much work’, ‘a nerdy thing to do’.
- Some students on the SRC don’t get their views across. Discussions ‘go nowhere’.

Student Participation Statement

Student participation is a major way to build opportunities for all students to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens (as per the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians: www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf).

This practical guide brings together two key areas which, when combined, can significantly improve learning outcomes for all students and reduce the achievement gap based on students' social class backgrounds. These fundamental areas are:

1. **Talk.** The work of schools in building students' capacity for talk and public speaking can propel powerful learning.

2. **Action.** Students' active participation in school and community problem solving through the student action teams program.

The guide has been developed by Nicholas Abbey and Deborah Robinson. Deborah has led public speaking programs in schools.

The guide also draws upon the pioneering work of schools and others in developing student action teams.

For further information and if we can assist your school with its student participation work, please contact VICSSO.

### Combined power of ‘talk’ and ‘action’

The success of all educational experiences - in creating powerful learning - obviously depends on the quality of teachers’ and students’ talk. As Professor Robin Alexander suggests:

> “We need to move from a view of talk as about 'communication skills' ... to a recognition of the neuroscientific and psychological evidence of its unique status as a sine qua non for all learning, especially during the first 10-12 years of life” (2004).

Likewise, when students feel responsible for important matters and can be actively involved in their school and community to make a difference, their learning and motivation are strengthened.

For many young people, deferred outcomes (eg. distant goals of work, citizenship and acknowledged community roles) are not sufficient to sustain their motivation and commitment to learning.

With implications for their motivation and school ‘success’, students are unsettled by their deep-felt sense that their ‘only value’ is what they will become, not what they can do today. (For an excellent discussion of this, see Roger Holdsworth’s *Engaging students in purposeful learning through community action* paper - linked on the website: www.sapmea.asn.au/conventions/middleschool/papers/Holdsworth,%20Ro.pdf).

But when students’ talk and school and community actions are combined, the educational results can be phenomenal.

This happens when students select specific topics that are the focus of both a public speaking program in the classroom and their problem solving work in the school or wider community.

### What is involved?

Over several sessions (each of one to two hours’ duration), participants learn how to prepare and present a speech, how to conduct meetings and effective speaking and listening skills.

Alongside this is the option of forming student action teams. These teams consist of groups of students, teachers and, where appropriate, other adults, including parents and community-based workers. These teams tackle school and community issues.

Public speaking is a key part of their work. Team members need to present information about their plans in many different forums and speak in support of their recommendations, including reasons.

They thus need training and practice in public speaking, including the use of notes, voice projection and body language - as well as opportunities to develop confidence by speaking within the school.

Combining public speaking and practical actions in the school and community can provide all students with opportunities to:

- Communicate the depth of their knowledge, clearly articulate their ideas and have their views and suggestions heard;
- Develop effective communication skills and public speaking;
- Develop roles as change makers in the school and community;
- Increase their power as decision makers to ‘make a difference’; and
- Develop leadership skills and a stronger sense of responsibility.

### Talk and public speaking

What is talk? The form of a student’s oral intervention (clearly audible, well-articulated and grammatically correct) together with intonation, changes of speed, and even facial expression and body language are no less important than its substance.

As discussed in *The Power of Talk* on this website, when talk is working well and consistently in classrooms, students routinely talk to the class as a whole, read aloud, come out to the whiteboard, write on it and explain in detail and in depth what they are doing.

Reinforcing this work, participants in public speaking programs in schools can acquire the knowledge and skills to:
1. Overcomethenervousnesseveryone feels when asked to speak before an audience or in a meeting;
2. Organise and present their ideas logically, coherently and convincingly (in classroom and community settings);
3. Prepare and employ presentation aids for speeches (e.g. drawings, graphs, maps, photos, PowerPoint presentations and posters);
4. Use humour, personal stories and conversational language;
5. Listen carefully to, and learn from, others’ ideas, and
6. Participate in, as well as lead, group discussions or meetings.

The program is conducted by a coordinator for a group of students via sessions of one to two hours each. Over the course of these sessions, participants learn about effective public speaking and have opportunities to practice.

**Classroom public speaking**

The coordinator or teacher outlines the program and what is required for the ongoing development of effective public speaking.

The philosophy and rationale of public speaking is also discussed, i.e. if students’ voices are not adequately valued, they may learn passivity. Schools that do aspire to cultivate, however, every student’s voice support students to contribute to the collective vision of how a school, community and society ought to be.

In starting a public speaking program, warm-up exercises involving all participants may comprise:

- Asking each participant to choose a partner, preferably someone he or she doesn’t know particularly well;
- Participants then interview each other, with each having three minutes in which to ask questions of his/her partner;
- After partners have interviewed each other, each person introduces his or her partner to the whole group, using the information obtained from the interview.

Students also begin to talk about each of the following:

1. **Organising the content.** Students write down three or four main points to keep their thoughts focused. They look at how best to research the topic - which may be a school or community issue as part of a student action team project;
2. **Opening, body and conclusion.** Students discuss parts of a speech (e.g. an interesting opening sentence, what needs to be developed in the ‘middle’ and how to conclude well);
3. **Connecting to an audience.** Ways to connect, use of presentation aids, good eye contact and body language and knowing how to think and speak quickly on one’s feet;
4. **Voice and vocabulary.** How best to be heard, clear enough to be understood and expressive enough to be interesting, how to ‘write for the ear’ and selecting clear, accurate and colourful words and using language economically;
5. **How to evaluate speeches.** Participants learn how to evaluate and improve their own speeches as well as provide specific suggestions to others for improvement via evaluations that are positive, precise, friendly and personalised.

With a student action team topic, the participants (individually or collectively as team members) may prepare a speech that:

- States what the school or community problem or issue is;
- Describes what the immediate and longer-term impacts are;
- Shows how the problem can be fixed; and
- Informs the audience about what they can do.

**More information**

For further information and advice about public speaking in schools, please contact Deborah Robinson at VICCSO.

**Student action teams**

Since 1999, schools in Victoria have been developing student action teams. The program began as a joint initiative of the Department of Justice and the (then) Department of Education.

A student action team consists of a group of students, their support teacher or teachers, and, where appropriate, other adults, including parents and community-based workers.

A team enables and supports students to:

- Decide what are important community or school issues;
- Research a community or school issue;
- Make plans and proposals and take actions to address the issue;
- Achieve valuable outcomes for the community or school; and
- Learn deeply through school and community contexts.

The choice of team members will be influenced by the school’s intent for initiating the program. Schools consider:

- Where and how the action teams will be located in the school’s curriculum program
- The number and year levels of students to be involved (whether mixed year levels or a targeted age group or year level)
- The particular issue or issues that the teams will tackle.

**Which issues do we work on?**

Teams look for issues or problems that they can work on. These might be obvious, with relevant issues at that time emerging from discussions and being generally known.

Schools also survey the students at the school or the wider community to find out what the important issues are.

Many agencies and organisations other than schools have also been involved in action team projects. Examples include local councils, youth agencies, environmental groups, police and emergency services, local media, state government and federal government departments and members of parliament.

There is value in working with the community around issues such as safety, environmental sustainability, health, etc. in that this can assist teams in deciding what is worthwhile to act upon.

Once teams decide on topics and projects, they develop a plan of how to achieve goals. These plans foster a shared understanding of the topic and what is required to bring about change.

**Examples of student action teams**


- Altona Secondary College. The team investigates and recommends on truancy;
• Taylors Lakes Primary School. The team investigates student concerns about transition, finds answers and publishes a booklet for all families;
• Preston/Reservoir primary and secondary schools cluster. Teams of students from many schools worked together to investigate road safety;
• Doncaster Secondary College. The team investigates bullying and leads school initiatives;
• Wanganui Park Secondary College. The team investigates the ‘image’ of the suburb and takes action to improve it; and
• Primary school in Geelong. The team investigates the location of a school crossing and approaches the local council to change it.

A ‘how-to’ manual
Further ‘how-to’ information can be found in the Student Action Teams Manual (www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/curricman/middleyear/StudentActionTeamsManual2003.pdf) written by the Australian Youth Research Centre. It discusses and provides practical examples in relation to:
• Why have a student action team?
• Establishing a team
• Training and team building
• Decision-making in the team
• Choosing a topic
• Community liaison
• Developing a project plan
• Doing community based research
• Presenting and publicising
• Where in the curriculum?

Conclusion
When schools provide opportunities for all students to combine classroom talk and public speaking and school and community problem solving, learning outcomes can be improved significantly.

School communities and school councils may thus want to develop their own student participation policy and action plan. The Victorian Department has an example of a student participation policy (www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/schacc/SCstudentparticipationpolicy.pdf).

Green Day
Green Day is an environmental initiative of the NSW Student Representative Council (SRC) to be held during September 2010.

Teams of students or ‘Green Teams’ in secondary schools are encouraged to run an environmentally themed Green Day school assembly or larger-scale event in collaboration with their school communities.


NSW government schools should register their interest by emailing: student.leadership@det.nsw.edu.au

Junior Primary Student Action
We are still doing Action Teams at Magill Junior Primary School, South Australia, and the students are as keen as ever. The whole school is involved – although there is always continuing work to be done to ensure students are actively participating in real and important things.

Patricia Lutz

Tell Us - 5,000 strong and growing
Close to 5,000 students have already joined the Foundation for Young Australians’ Tell Us movement, a nation-wide call for secondary students to act now and change how schools measure success. So far students are saying they want the Australian school system to:
• Recognise more than academic achievement
• Put a value on broader skills and talents
• Give students more of a say in their education

Tell Us aims to amplify the student voice in the debate about school success. In a few months time, FYA and student representatives will take the findings to Julia Gillard and other State and Territory Governments.

Do you know a student who wants their say on what school’s all about? Make sure they join Tell Us before June 30.
Switched On to Learning is a 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 back page of this issue. Copy this and fax or mail it to Connect.

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

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Local and Overseas Publications Received

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

Australian:

Developing Student Participation, Engagement and Leadership: A Guide for Principals (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) March 2010

FYA Newsletter (Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Vic) 06, 2010

Learning Matters: Student Wellbeing – Who Cares? (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, Vic) Vol 14 No 2; 2009


Parents Voice (Parents Victoria Inc., Brunswick, Vic) Vol 37 Issue 1; February 2010

Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 3 No 4: October 2009; Vol 4 Nos 1, 2: February, April 2010

Student Wellbeing Newsletter for Engagement and Learning (DEECD Gippsland, Vic) Issue 1; Term 1, 2010

Unleash: Young Opinion and Action (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) Issue 6; April-May 2010

WYPIN Newz (WYPIN, Footscray, Vic) Vol 1 Issue 1; January 2010

YAPRap (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) April-May 2010

Yokes (YACVic, Melbourne, Vic) Volume 8 Editions 1, 2; February, April 2010

Youth Studies Australia (ACYS, Hobart, Tas) Vol 29 No 1; March 2010

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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!

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