“I really like this idea of the grade 6s actually doing something to change the school in some way before we leave. I am not being rude or anything but I think some of the teachers underestimate us. But I know that we can do it.”

(Grade 6 student)
It might be that it’s just the mid-year season when student conferences and similar events occur, but this issue of Connect is unusually full of stories about Student Councils, SRCs, JSCs and the like. In Victoria, Frenzy has just been held, attended by approximately 120 representatives from 20 primary school Student Councils. It generated a collection of short stories about what these groups do – written by the participants. The VicSRC Congress is fast approaching in August, as is the NSW SRC State Conference. We look forward to more insightful and inspiring stories from these and other events.

And the other stories in this issue are equally as fascinating. From Bhutan comes a great account of Design for Change - very similar to the work of Student Action Teams (see Connect 179, October 2009) or Public Achievement (see Connect 171, June 2008). From South Australia, a Student Voice initiative in one primary school (under the title of Student Power) entered some troubled waters – and a teacher has been brave and honest enough to write about it, and to chart some of the lessons learnt.

Connect isn’t just about telling ‘good news’ stories. It is important that we’re critical about what we do, analysing successes and problems – and sharing the lessons. That’s sometimes hard to do, especially in a public forum, but a vital approach to being reflective within a supportive environment. Thank you Julie.

Double issue coming up ... but not just yet!
I’m thinking ahead and planning the future issues for this year. At the moment it appears that next issue will appear as normal: #184 in August. However, I’ll amalgamate the following two issues and put out a larger double issue (#185-186) in November. The deadline for that issue will be the end of October. That will have the benefit of also avoiding the rush to publish and distribute an issue before schools close for Christmas.

I will, of course, rely on you – as always – to contribute your stories to make sure that both these publications are fantastic reading.

Roger Holdsworth
It is Tuesday, and the students are excited because Tuesday mornings usually mean it’s QST or Quality School Time at Thimphu’s Early Learning Centre (primary school) in Bhutan – a time when everyone gets together to share and learn as a school community. After meditation and prayers, students sit in their class lines, eagerly waiting for the Assembly Performance by Class VIA, who have worked on a skit about healthy living to celebrate World Health Day. This is followed by a Q&A session and feedback by the audience. After that it’s anybody’s guess what the topic of discussion might be on ... and anyone is welcome to participate. But today, students will be asked a question that has the potential to change lives.

“Is there something about your lives you want to change?”

Ears perk up.

“If you are someone who is bothered by something around you; if you are someone who wishes something could be different: sign your name here.”

But there’s a catch. Students who add their name to the list, which is growing by the second, are told that signing means they must be willing to stay long hours after school, miss occasional classes to visit other schools, and have one-hundred percent parent support.

“Did you sign up for change?” one small boy asks another beside him.

These brave students later found out that they had signed up to be part of a global contest: Design for Change (DFC). The contest is circling the globe and gaining momentum daily as students become empowered by their newfound ability to change it. So with one idea and seven days, students feel a problem, imagine a solution, and do something to change it for the better. The contest inspires children to tune into what tugs at their heartstrings and empowers them to tap into that source and mobilise for change. The role of adults is strictly to be a guide and facilitator, leaving kids in the driver’s seat.

DFC in Bhutan

The contest comes to Bhutan at an exciting moment in this country’s future. The small Himalayan Kingdom is poised to enter the global arena for educational innovation. Educating for Gross National Happiness is becoming a reality as students practice meditation, mindfulness, and social responsibility. A student-driven undertaking that offers authentic experience as the basis for learning is exactly the enterprise this country is looking for – that will ignite critical reflection in the younger generation of thinkers.

Initially, relinquishing the driver’s seat was not easy for adults facilitating DFC. Dozens of students showed up during the feel stage, voicing their annoyances about everything from bothersome younger siblings, to how growing numbers of cars are polluting the air. In the midst of all the irksome and agonising realities children face, there was one that surfaced time and again: litter. In Bhutan, a country where nature is ever-present and towers around in soaring mountains carpeted by evergreen trees, the litter contrasts sharply. Students were quick to identify this increasingly serious problem.

The contest centres around a seven-day structure in which students (8 to 13 years) are to feel, imagine, and do. At ELC, those days were filled with intense ideating, discussion, and planning. Students signed up on their own to devote long hours after school, that often went late into the evening. They had to balance the Design for Change Contest work with music lessons, sports, homework and any other extra-curricular activities they had. They learned to communicate despite differences, learned to be proactive, and mustered up the confidence to address the entire student body in an effort to share their newfound knowledge. The DFC students came to be regarded by their classmates and teachers as vocal, confident and capable young people.
Researching Packaging

With food packaging as the central issue of their plight, they delved into on-line research, their own observations of their community, and conversations with classmates, to form a deep-seated understanding of how plastic contributes to the degradation of their environment. To teachers’ delight and amazement, very little coaxing had to be done to get students in the know about waste. Students were completely self-motivated to seek out knowledge and interpret their findings.

Plastic, they learned, never goes away. Even when sent out of sight to the landfill (which all students have visited), it festers and multiplies. On their own, they decided that plastic packaging should be phased out of society, beginning with their school. The result: a student-imposed ban on packaged snacks was immediately enacted, leaving Wednesdays as the only day packaged snacks are permitted on campus, with the goal to eventually enforce a total ban.

Leading to Nutrition

Hand-in-hand with the issue of waste, students stumbled upon the issue of nutrition. The food that comes in the problematic packages is not healthy. DFC students realised that, along with educating their schoolmates about the dangers of packages, it is their responsibility to educate them about the dangers of the ‘food’ they contain.

They organised Food Focus Days. Monday became Fruit Day, Tuesday Salad Day, Wednesday Trash Food Day (packages are permitted), Thursday Homemade Food Day and Friday Traditional Bhutanese Food Day. Food Focus Days give snackers alternatives to their usual packaged foods and draw awareness to foods that are healthy. DFC students drafted and sent out a letter to parents, asking for their participation in reducing trash and promoting healthy eating.

Parents were the first population besides students to be informed about the changes coming about at the school, but DFC students did not stop there. Their idea was to reduce waste on a much larger scale.

Spreading the Action

Students established a goal for themselves to get as many other schools as possible involved in their idea to say no to packaged foods. They prepared a presentation about their idea and took it to the top. The Thimphu Principals’ Conference was their first outside presentation. A room full of Principals sat spellbound as the students clearly and thoughtfully articulated the idea they had engendered. The press showed up to document the presentation and spread the idea to reduce waste to a larger audience. By the end of the presentation, Principals were signing up to pledge their support for the cause. DFC students were elated and their excited chatter as they exited the conference hall was enough to inspire even the toughest critic to stop consuming packaged snacks.

Now the ball is rolling and it is not going to stop any time soon. DFC students have appeared on national television, accepted numerous invitations to present at various schools around the capital, and designed a public service announcement to show at all of their school-related functions. One presentation was given to an audience of 1400 plus. The effects of their efforts are clear: their campus is litter free and the student body at ELC is hypersensitive to all waste generated from packaging. It is hoped that, as a result of the DFC students’ tireless effort, this atmosphere will be replicated at schools all over Thimphu.
Once upon a time, when things went wrong

A cautionary tale

Once upon a time there was an Australian suburban Primary School located in a picturesque beachside suburb. The school was a happy place, with around 600 smiling students from Reception to Year 7. The happy beachside suburban school included a Centre for Hearing Impaired Children and happily catered for those students who were School Card holders (supported low income families). It prided itself on being a very inclusive place, and on its ties with and service to, the local community. It held to a tradition of open and democratic decision making in all areas of school life. It really was a fairy tale place to be – or so everyone thought.

The school also had developed a strong tradition of methodically teaching a Civics course to all the happy students. To complement this course, the school implemented a practical and 'hands on' way of giving students the opportunity to put their Civics theory learning into meaningful practice – so the Student Voice program was born. The happy students joyfully called this new addition to the school culture 'Student Power'. The school’s Civics and Citizenship (C&C) Guru was immensely pleased.

Over time, models of Student Voice programs in other school sites were investigated by the eager and enthusiastic teachers, supported and guided by the C&C Guru. The information they gathered was used to grow a beautiful and healthy Student Power program, which soon became an integral part of the happy school’s customs. The happy smiling students involved themselves in many engaging service activities like gardening, intra-school sports, monitoring the use of power and energy, developing recognition awards for other students’ achievements, supporting the RSPCA, supporting an orphanage in Bali, and refugee awareness and support. The types of services that the happy students offered changed from year to year, but they always remained faithful to the idea that they would provide services to satisfy needs and grow a hearty democratic spirit that would be infused in the hearts of all the young citizens. At the end of each year, the work that had been undertaken was reviewed by the students as everyone was keen to take care to include student view points!

So the C&C Guru thought.

From the reviews, recommendations were drawn up for the continuation and expansion of the Student Power program for the following year. Student Power grew and grew and grew. Many new student groups evolved or emerged, and the happy students immersed themselves in a culture of service to others through:

- **Power Softballers**: Students learnt the skills involved and then taught these to other students in lunch time sessions.
- **Peer Tutors**: Students worked in co-operation and collaboration with junior primary classroom teachers to help younger students in their learning. This engaged the lively youngsters most effectively and made the junior primary teachers very happy and content.
- **Power of Musicians**: Students learnt music and songs to perform at special community events and local kindergartens. Joy abounded!
- **Weather Watchers**: Students used meteorological equipment to measure temperature, rain, wind velocity etc and used the data to report to a television station.
- **Dancers**: developed health hustles to teach other students and to lead them in the warm-up for Sports Day. They also developed small concerts to perform at assemblies.
- **Asia Group**: Students learned about Asian arts and crafts and the cultural relevance of these. They
taught their skills and developed activities for other classes to be involved in. The SOSE teachers were enraptured.

- **Gardeners:** designed and redeveloped a garden in the school grounds after researching plants and gardening through contact with the local Council and visiting officers at the local National Park.

- **Sports Forum Members:** taught skills and developed tournaments held at lunchtimes for volleyball, hockey, hand tennis, handball and basketball.

- **Peer Mediators:** undertook training sessions and provided mediation at lunchtimes for the student community. It was a harmonious place to be!

- **Lost Property checkers:** sorted all lost items and attempted to reunite them with their owners. Data was collected about lost property and used in school newsletters to inform parents about the problem. There were happy reunions reported between long lost items and their owners.

- **ITAGers (Information Technology Action Group):** Students were responsible for assisting younger students during their computer sessions. They maintained the cleanliness of the computer suite, performed trouble shooting activities, set up ICT stations around the school and worked on developing the school web site.

- **Ambassadors:** conducted tours of the school for new and prospective parents and students, developed a new school brochure, logo and colours, and worked on organising sponsors and prizes for the school Walkathon.

- **AUSLAN Group:** Members learned signing and how to sign to songs to perform publicly. They taught some signing to other classes. Communication with the Hearing Impaired had never been so good.

- **Friends of the Library:** Students were responsible for conducting the Book Week Assembly, running the annual Book Fair, helping in organising the Premier’s Reading Challenge, assisting with lunchtime borrowing and in purchasing fiction material for the Library collection. Reading had never been better.

- **Environmentalists:** took care of the School Peace Garden by weeding, repairing, and tidying, and keeping the environment safe and healthy for all to enjoy.

- **The School Image Group:** covered the events and achievements of the other groups and reported them in the school newsletter.

  Everything seemed to be progressing wonderfully, and the C&C Guru was so pleased! The school was a happy and productive place where the smiling students smiled even more because they were doing things that were purposeful and meaningful. Even though all this activity made for an impressive workload for the C&C Guru, she was satisfied that the students’ efforts were being valued and she was immensely happy.

**Junior Primary**

But things were not just humming with the older students. Junior Primary classes initiated **Student Power** Groups in their own classes, with class teachers facilitating groups at times that were convenient to their class programs. Junior Primary Students were involved in **acknowledging the achievements and successes of others,** developing **play boxes** to be used in class work shop times, and **gardening.**

**Principles**

The C&C Guru worked hard behind the scenes to make sure that everything was working smoothly and to ensure that the school community understood that:

- Students are able to make serious and important decisions;
- Students require opportunities to develop and nurture the **skills** needed to do valuable things for their school and wider communities;
- Students working in **Student Power** groups forms a valuable part of their learning;
- Students need to be supported to carry out work in their **Student Power** groups;
- Students need to be provided with opportunities to explore and develop their leadership and organisational skills in creative and innovative ways;
- Students need the opportunity to participate in the life of the school and to share in the decision-making processes; and
- Students learn to respect others by being respected and are given opportunities to be heard and valued, opening the door to life-long learning.

The C&C Guru supported the facilitation of **Student Power** Groups by supplying all teachers with a pack of materials that included a copy of **Acting for Change** (Australian Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne) and a blank copy of the school’s **Student Power Group Action Plan.** This planning document allowed everyone in the **Student Power** group to state the group’s aims and objectives, rationale for the group, how reporting to others in the community would occur, strategies, responsibilities and timelines for completing tasks, ways of linking with other groups both inside and outside of the school, listing resources needed and how evaluation will occur.

**Skills**

The document also provided a checklist of possible skills that might be developed by students through their involvement with the group, such as:

- Looking up phone numbers
- Making telephone calls
• Taking notes
• Finding an address
• Writing letters and e-mails
• Managing funding
• Using a microphone
• Speaking confidently
• Using effective body language
• Writing for publications
• Drawing up surveys
• Presenting data
• Liaising with school administration
• Identifying school decision makers and approaching them
• Filling in forms
• Breaking tasks into steps
• Drawing up action time lines
• Reporting back to group members
• Using ICTs for research, reading and collating, communicating and presenting

Remembering that parents and caregivers are an important part of the school community, the C&C Guru offered them information sessions to inform them about the philosophies and practicalities of Student Power and to allow them the opportunity to put forward, along with staff, their ideas towards developing a vision of Student Voice in the school. Everything seemed to be going so well. The C&C Guru was most satisfied.

But, she had not noticed the tiny smouldering undercurrents of concern and dissent in the ranks of teachers.

Information Sessions
The C&C Guru held Information sessions for teachers at the beginning of each school year, especially for the benefit of new teachers who knew little or nothing of Student Voice or Student Power. The sessions supported teachers through training and development, helping them access web sites such as RUMad?, the Student Action Teams support booklet, and the teacher support pack issued to aid facilitation of Student Power meetings.

Many had little background in the concepts involved, particularly that it is imperative to the success of the program that it is a dynamic program and is always in a state of flux. They didn’t know that it is dependent on continual regular review that seeks input from all stakeholders in the school community, nor that its success is dependent on the commitment of staff to support the program. They needed to come to see that their own professional development was needed in this area, and that they would need to commit time and energy to enthuse students to engage in these groups. Some teachers did not believe in their own abilities to engage students in having a voice and, even worse, some seemed to believe that students had no business having a voice at all! While the C&C Guru endeavoured to educate newcomers and help them make the transition to a culture of real Student Voice, the dissent began to smoulder more intensely than before.

And so, believing that everyone in the happy beachside suburban school was indeed happy, the C&C Guru ploughed on with the task of allocating students to groups. Little did she realise that this was the catalyst for calamity: trouble erupted like Krakatoa.

The C&C Guru supported teachers to understand that Student Power was a student driven program as opposed to being a teacher driven program. They were encouraged to let students make mistakes and learn from them. The teachers were taught that Student Power was a program that was authentic, dynamic and constantly in a state of flux, where students were encouraged to be risk takers with high self esteem and a sense of achievement. Students were deemed to be confident, empowered, discerning, able to question, interview, discuss, negotiate and reach consensus, problem solve, set goals, prioritise and organise. They were also able to value difference and to learn respect. Quite a bit there for very busy teachers to handle and understand.

The smouldering undercurrents of concern and dissent were about to burst into flame. But the unsuspecting C&C Guru went merrily about her business.

A New Year and New Teachers
A new year commenced and with it came an influx of many new teachers to the happy beachside suburban school. These teachers were new to the ways of Civics and Citizenship Education, let alone Student Voice and heaven forbid, Student Power!
How did this program set up the Student Power groups? As had occurred previously, students had preferentially listed the names of the groups that they wished to join for the year. A team of student volunteers (after all, this was ‘student voice’, not ‘teacher voice’) then sorted students into the Student Power groups, trying to place them in a group that was one of their preferences. The operation went like clockwork. The student volunteers had admirably performed the task, ensuring that students’ preferences were considered, and were balanced with the need for groups to contain manageable numbers of students for teachers to mentor.

The lists were published, the happy smiling students checking them to find out which group they would be working in for the year. They were enthusiastic and eager to make a start. The C&C Guru was pleased too. She had been invited to attend a conference with other C&C Gurus and felt comfortable enough to leave the school.

Turmoil Breaks Out

But, in her absence, turmoil broke out amongst the teachers at the weekly staff meeting. The happy beachside suburban school was no longer such a happy place!

There were cries of: “Who sorted these kids out!” “The groups are too large!” said some teachers, while others cried: “Some groups are too small. It’s not fair!” Others said: “Why can’t I choose which students I have in my group?” or “I refuse to work with this group of kids!” or “Why haven’t kids been placed with their best friends?”

Some knew certain students: “Why do I have to have Billy in my group? Everyone knows he’s trouble!” or “Whose idea was it to put Tessie with Bertie? That’s a recipe for disaster!” or “We all know Fred will never be able to manage himself in the ITAG group!”

And finally… “We simply can’t run with Student Power if kids have been configured this way… Too hard!… Can’t be bothered!… Not happening!… No way!… No how!…”

So the not so happy teachers at the now, not so happy beachside suburban school, rebelled and refused to run Student Power. The staff meeting that night had not been a happy event.

On returning to the not so happy school the next day, the C&C Guru was, to say the least, unpleasantly surprised. She was dismayed to find that the wonderful Student Power program was well and truly gone. She felt that the staff training and development, the information sessions, the support packages for the running of Student Power, and all the measures put in place to educate and support the running of the student voice program had been for nought. She felt as if the rug had been pulled out from under her. What could she do? Students were disappointed (and, she felt, were being disadvantaged) with the program stalled and the future looking bleak.

It was at that very moment of deepest despair that the C&C Guru summoned the Principal Fairy Godmother.

The Principal Fairy Godmother listened sagely to the C&C Guru’s sad tale. Together they talked at length about how the once happy beachside suburban school had sunk to these apparent depths of disunity and unhappiness. Together they fathomed reasons as to why this awful scenario had erupted and threatened to destroy the landscape of student voice at the school.

They devised a clever plan.

The first step was to hold a staff meeting to find out the real concerns of the unhappy, disgruntled teachers. This gave all staff the opportunity to talk calmly about their concerns – and to devise some solutions. It turned out that many teachers were already feeling overwhelmed with the challenges of commencing a new school year. Many of them were new to the school and felt uncertain about learning the ropes. For these, grappling with an unfamiliar Student Power approach, as well as addressing all the other stressors in their lives, was overload.

Once it was reinforced that the Student Power sessions were run by students, not by teachers, their fears seemed lessened – they were to act as mentors to students, facilitating the groups and supporting them in their work. And once it was recognised that Student Power was to be held fortnightly for a 60 minute session and that well trained, professional people
could be counted on to capably supervise any cohort of individual happy, smiling students, group composition was hardly a cause for immense concern.

Even so, the second step of the plan was for the C&C Guru to concede that processes could be improved and reach a compromise in which staff volunteers worked on the composition and membership of the groups. Depending on the nature of the group they were to mentor, some teachers were allowed to compose their groups by having students apply in writing. They then selected students who they thought had the aptitude and abilities for membership of the group. This worked well for groups like ITAG for example, that needed students to have strong ICT capabilities. Everyone seemed much happier with this arrangement and groups were re-organised to the satisfaction of staff.

The Principal Fairy Godmother then left the much happier C&C Guru to re-implement Student Power. While she was disappointed that the program now commenced much later in the year, and that students lost valuable Student Power group time, the C&C Guru took time to reflect on how such a catastrophe could have happened and pondered on the lessons learned.

Lesson 1: Always keep in touch with your Principal Fairy Godmother. Keep her in the loop and do nothing without her support and knowledge. Get student voice written up as part of the Site Learning Plan and point it out often to teachers. This keeps the C&C Guru, the Principal Fairy Godmother and the staff happy and on their toes, knowing that student voice has an ‘official mandate’.

Lesson 2: The C&C Guru needs to be a clear communicator. Leave nothing to chance. Make sure the happy teachers know exactly what is going on. Keep them in the loop at all costs, especially the newcomers to the happy beachside suburban school. Even if the C&C Guru thinks that everyone understands, check and check again – never assume that teachers new to the school have a fully absorbed everything that is going on. Be prepared to ‘hold hands’, support staff where necessary and keep them informed and happy.

Lesson 3: Provide ongoing support to the happy teachers to keep them happy. Point them in the direction of appropriate training and development, and resource materials; provide them with a support pack to help them mentor their Student Power group. Try to infuse enthusiasm for student voice.

Lesson 4: Don’t feel you have to do it all alone. Set up a small support team of happy teachers to assist the C&C Guru to run the Student Power program. This aids communication to other teachers and makes them happier, knowing they are a part of the program and have input into what is happening. Try to rotate membership of this group if possible, in order to maximise all teachers’ happiness and contentment and to aid their professional development where it concerns Civics and Citizenship Education. Create allies and keep them close.

Lesson 5: The C&C Guru may need to compromise at times for the benefit of the whole student voice program. However, hold to the program’s principles and never give away too much ground: two steps forward and one step back.

Lesson 6: Always take time to reflect, self assess and take steps to improve and polish. This is a work in progress and it should never be forgotten that the program is in a constant dynamic state of flux.

Lesson 7: Keep smiling, and keep going. Never give up. There is too much at stake. An effective student voice program is a highly effective ‘hands on’ way to equip students with the skills, knowledge and experience they need to be active and effective citizens both now and in the future, with the ability to make a difference.

Once the C&C Guru had reflected on how things had so sadly gone wrong, she immediately took steps to correct the mistakes and shortcomings of the past and promised to remember the lessons learned.

And they all lived happily ever after (or so it was anticipated).

Julie Murray

AST Program Manager and Certification, Department of Education and Children’s Services, South Australia; previously a Primary School teacher-librarian and Civics and Citizenship specialist

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Note: the images used to illustrate this article are not from the school concerned.
SRC Recognition Awards:

Have you nominated your SRC?

The VicSRC is organising the first ever SRC Recognition Awards – open to all secondary school SRCs 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 (sponsored by Connect magazine).

**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 (sponsored by Second Strike).

**Award 3: Informed Representation:** recognising an SRC that is truly democratic and fully representative of students (sponsored by the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals).

Applications for the SRC Recognition Awards are still open but will close on June 25th! Visit the VicSRC website at: www.vicsrc.org.au or email awards@vicsrc.org.au for more information and an entry form.

The VicSRC receives funding support from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and is auspiced by and based at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC). It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on 1300 727 176; or by email: vicsrc@yavcic.org.au

www.vicsrc.org.au
Representing for Change

A young woman from Frankston High School who is in her final year of secondary schooling shared with the VicSRC Southern Metropolitan Conference participants her involvement with Vision Generation. This inspiring young woman raised her concerns for the environment and growing poverty in Australia and internationally. Her concerns led to her actively incorporating an international and humanitarian aid focus into her SRC, which is currently advocating for student and teacher consumption of Fair Trade products.

‘Fun, exciting and informative’ is how one student described the Mildura Regional Conference, one of 10 VicSRC Conferences run across Victoria since the beginning of the year.

Conferences aim to further develop participants’ leadership skills, present students with opportunities to exchange ideas and share information, whilst providing specific skills and knowledge to build and improve SRCs. They also provide a platform for students to share personal experiences, exchange ideas and engage in thought provoking discussions that examine issues of concern within their schools and SRCs.

Suggestions to incorporate tree planting into the Year 7 curriculum, upgrade of sport facilities, a review of food provided in school canteens, strategies to reduce littering, and cyber bullying awareness campaigns were several suggestions put forward by student representatives to respond to issues identified by students. Each suggestion was put forward in a motion that was debated in a Mini-Congress. One student who participated in the Northern Metropolitan Conference recommended that “the idea of having a motion system will be good for everyone”, providing a democratic and organised setting to discuss ideas and reach a resolution.

Conferences provided participants with practical tools and knowledge to take back to their SRCs. Eastern Metropolitan Conference participant stated that they will take back to their schools “concepts such as Forums and Congress to more interestingly allow students to participate.” Students practised and experienced a number of creative ways to engage students, and how to identify issues of concern within the student body by holding a Forum.

A young woman who attended the Grampians Regional Conference commented that she has “been planning to do a forum at (her) school about the discontent and un-involvement in the school and now has some vital skills for executing that plan.”

The VicSRC has a voice at the Public Education Forum

As a member of the VicSRC Executive, I attended the Deakin Public Policy Forum: ‘My School? Whose School? What’s on the table for public education in Australia?’ I spoke on the panel and highlighted the importance of student consultation in relation to these issues. There was much discussion of an ‘education revolution’ but to achieve this we need to be treating students as partners in their own education – which is still not happening. There were many other fascinating speakers that it was an honour to be on the panel with and I thank Deakin for giving the VicSRC the opportunity to have their voice heard. You can see my speech and many of the other discussions here: communities.deakin.edu.au/ppf2010/node/76

Georgia Kennelly
VicSRC Student Executive 2009/10

The VicSRC Conferences have been “very inspirational,” with many students commenting that they “had a great time and learnt a lot” that “will go a long way to improve our SRC.”

The VicSRC will continue to deliver Conferences into the future, providing students with practical skills and knowledge to grow and strengthen SRCs across Victoria.

Erin Young
VicSRC Conference Facilitator
Student Representative Councils (SRCs) in Victoria

Three SRC Stories

Student Representative Councils (SRCs) are set up in many different ways. These depend on the size and structure of the school, the history of student representation and participation, and on the understanding the school has of what students can do.

In 2009, the VicSRC collected information from schools for a series of case studies that would show what SRCs were doing in some different schools.

These case studies were compiled from information written by the schools and in visits to schools. During SRC conferences in 2009, students were asked to provide information about how their SRC was structured, what sorts of actions the SRC had participated in during the year, what the biggest issues facing students in the school were and the nature of support offered to SRCs in their school. Then, during visits to several schools by the VicSRC Coordinator, students and support teachers provided further understanding of how their SRCs functioned.

The following three stories provide very different pictures of SRC operations, in the three schooling systems: Catholic, Government and Independent schools. Each school was at a different phase in its operation. The SRC at School A was well established and functioned strongly, within a committed ethos of support from the SRC support teacher. School B also had an extremely supportive teacher in charge of SRC business, with great rapport with students. This SRC is in a strong growth phase, aiming to implement new initiatives every year. School C had a different SRC structure, where students run their Senate (as they call it) with no teachers present at meetings. Students report to the Principal and Deputy Principal after meetings. However students were somewhat unsure of what they could achieve and have identified a need for training so they can truly represent students and the student voice within the school.

School A

School A is a large coeducational Catholic School in Melbourne, with students from Years 7 to 12.

The Student Representative Council consists of approximately 60 students, with one student appointed per homeroom plus the President, Deputy President and VicSRC Executive member elected by students. Because there are three campuses (two Year 7-9 campuses and a Year 10-12 campus), there are three SRCs and a coordinating SRC Executive drawn from each of these three SRCs.

The SRC exists “to be the voice of the students, find out what students think, help make the school a better place for everyone, have an impact on decision making in the school (not just more toilet paper needed etc.), and to have impact on teaching and learning and student behaviour.”

Structure

SRC elections are held in Term 3 each year for the President and Deputy President. Students fill in a nomination form, then meet with the Deputy Principal (Student Wellbeing) to discuss their nomination. The Year 11 students who want to be President speak to all the Year 10 and 11 students, and the Year 11 students then vote for their candidate of choice in a preferential election. The current SRC President is present during the vote count.

Kate Walsh
Coordinator, VicSRC
For the general SRC representatives, the election takes place at the start of each year within each home group. Students give a speech and the home group votes. Elections for the SRC Executive take place at a Student Leadership Day in Term 1. Only the SRC representatives vote.

Within the SRC there are Executive positions of President and Deputy President, plus an SRC Executive team. This team is drawn from the three school campus SRCs, so that in Years 7 to 9 there is one boy and one girl elected per year level and in Years 10 to 12, eleven students are elected (including the President and Vice President).

The Executive and the three SRCs meet on alternate fortnights. Executive members also attend the general SRC meetings as well. Executive meetings are for 50 minutes during lunch plus one 50 minute lesson directly after lunch. The general campus SRC meetings occur during lunchtimes.

Issues
From SRC surveys and discussions at SRC Executive meetings, the SRC has nominated the biggest issues being faced by the SRC. These are that students are not always engaged in some classes (this came from an external review of the school in 2009), all students in Years 9 to 12 to have laptops (but they need to work out how to use these most effectively), and encouraging more students to be involved in Student Leadership Programs.

Recently, the SRC has been involved in the following initiatives:

- VCE Kitchenette: This has been opened in the Year 11 and 12 common room after a proposal was made by the Executive. The kitchenette is run by students, who are also responsible for monitoring its responsible use.
- Homework guidelines for staff have been created by the SRC. This guide is to assist teachers to know how much homework can be given in any fortnight to students. The formula to help assist teachers was developed using statistics created by Year 12 students in their maths classes.
- Awareness raising: about important issues such as White Ribbon Day, AIDS Day, National Volunteers Week, and Drug and Alcohol Awareness.

Issues
This year, the SRC is ready to have a greater voice. Students are being more and more involved in policy writing and reviewing school initiatives. The Student Leadership Policy (which has been developed with Executive consultation) will be put to a staff meeting for endorsement. The SRC is interested to look into and lead action around restorative practices and classroom behaviour. It also has $17,500 (which came from a 2009 Chocolate Drive) to spend for the benefit of all students.

Finances
The SRC’s annual income is approximately $7,500. This comes from the School Council and from SRC Fundraisers. The school allocates $5 per student at every year level in the school to the SRC every year. The money is also allowed to roll over from year to year. Three casual days each bring in about $2,000.

Some of this money is given to charities, but other funds are for the final celebration meeting of the SRC (as a thanks to the SRC members), gifts for SRC convenors, lunches that are provided at every meeting, SRC projects within the school, and other initiatives decided on by the SRC.

Support
The SRC Teacher has worked with the SRC for several years and is a Deputy Principal within the school. This position gives students an adult or teacher perspective so that students can better understand the processes that are in place in a school. The school has surveyed students about teacher role and received positive responses. The teacher offers opinions when asked, and puts things on the agenda (as do students). The teacher position has a time allowance for the SRC support.

In addition, home group teachers from each level also take on the role of SRC Convenors. These convenors report to staff year level coordinators meetings about the SRC work.

SRC members receive academic credit for the work they do. They are given certificates at end of year. Badges are also given to SRC members at the beginning of the year in front of the whole school. The Principal attends the SRC Leadership Day to congratulate students and let them know that the work they do is valued and important. Student Leadership photos are posted in the front of the school in the reception area.

Reporting
The SRC Executive reports to each SRC meeting, and SRC representatives then report to students via homegroups. This is not always successful, and needs to be improved. The SRC teacher convenors report to year level coordinators who then report to other staff. The Deputy Principal for Student Wellbeing (the SRC teacher supporter) reports to staff and the College leadership team.

In addition, SRC Executive members write fortnightly articles for the College Newsletter and report to whole school assemblies.

Students have places on all important committees at the school, with two students on each committee with full voting rights. There are two students on the College’s Board of Management. “Staff take the SRC very seriously and are happy to help out where possible and make themselves available to students where necessary. They are happy to attend meetings.”

Successes
The school sees their SRC as being very successful. They have good structures and processes in place. This hasn’t happened overnight but has taken time and effort. Being on the SRC is no longer just a popularity contest; students are elected because their peers think they will do a good job.

As a consequence, the SRC has a high status in the school. The SRC is valued and students are motivated and keen to get involved. It provides students with the opportunity to understand in greater depth how schools operate (especially from being involved in the Board). In turn, students are interested in their schooling and how they can make necessary changes. Students get something important out of getting involved: giving of themselves and getting something back in return. There is a real sense of achievements from students on the SRC.
School B

School B is a moderate sized coeducational Government school in a regional centre. The school has students in Years 9 to 12 (and is linked to another ‘junior secondary college’).

Student Government at the school is involved with “school spirit, fundraising, organising events, having a voice – if students want to change something we try and get it known and happening.”

Structure

The Student Government involves over 50 students through an open structure: students come along to advertised meetings. There is a concern that voting for SRC representatives would just result in a popularity contest, however there is a need emerging to investigate implementing a more formal approach to SRC membership that is balanced with an understanding of the school culture and what works within the school.

Within the Student Government, there are the roles of President and Vice President, Seniors (who have been on the SRC for at least two years) and SRC members. In addition, Student Government is based around teams that students form around particular issues and events of interest to them. While there isn’t a formal Constitution, SRC members have a role statement.

Issues

The biggest issues facing students in the school are seen to be bullying, litter in the school yard, and a small issue with classroom behaviour and student motivation at times. These have emerged from student forums, from the yard cleaning committee, and from student feedback after SRC members have spoken at assemblies.

Recently, the SRC has worked on organising Mufti Days: five casual clothes days to raise money for international, national, local and school equipment. They held an extra Mufti Day in 2009 due to the Victorian bush fires. The SRC also runs an Adopt a Classroom program, revamping classrooms and office areas and organises Youth Fest, which is run every two years as a one day event where local schools come together to take part in a variety of fun activities. Year 7 and 8 student forums have been run by the SRC on cyber bullying and school pride.

Future plans are to bring in a Merit Point System where students are rewarded for good work and good behaviour instead of only being punished through a demerit system). The SRC will keep working on new spaces within the school in the Adopt a Classroom program.

Year 8 students at the other campus have been participating in leadership activities aimed at preparing them for Student Government in Year 9. This will continue as a method of getting students ready for leadership roles and what they entail. Further training will be offered to student leaders so they know what is expected of them and what they can achieve.

Finances

The Student Government has an approximate annual income of $2,000 and has its own account. This money comes from fundraisers. On Mufti Days, the SRC keeps 20% of the money raised for its own operation and the remaining 80% goes to charity. Student Government sponsors a child through World Vision using this money. Other funds are used for school equipment and the Youth Festival.

Support

The SRC Teacher has worked with the SRC for two years and is the Coordinator of Student Government. She meets with the President once a week to complete SRC work, comes up with ideas for the SRC or hears of good ideas from other sources that she then passes on to students. It is this strong collaboration between the Support Teacher and the SRC President that drives the SRC’s work. In 2009, students successfully nominated the support teacher for an Impetus Youth Award for her work with the Student Government. She receives an allowance for her support work.

While the SRC members don’t currently receive credit towards their studies for the work they do, badges are given out to SRC members at the beginning of the year.

Reporting

Students speak about their roles and work at assemblies and to individual classes. The support teacher also speaks at morning staff briefings.

Two students are members of the School Council and report there, where student voice is considered important in overall school governance.

Successes

Student Government is seen as having been particularly successful in recent years. It has been more organised and the support teacher has been gaining in experience. The President is very active and works collaboratively with the support teacher.

Student Government is constantly learning from experience and working to make improvements and increase student participation.
School C

School C is a moderate sized Independent girls school in Melbourne, with students from Kindergarten to Years 12. The student organisation in the school is the Senate, which consists of 23 girls from Years 5 to 12. This year’s Mission Statement for the Senate says:

“We, as Senators, represent the voice of the school. As the Senate, we are committed to inspiring leadership in all levels of the school by actively upholding the School Mission to aspire to excellence, make a difference and rise boldly to the challenges of our times.

“Our main objectives are to:

• Demonstrate a political awareness, and to imbue in our peers an understanding of global issues, and a passion to shape our future and lead with wisdom by contributing positively to the international community.
• Develop confidence, skills and passion in leadership, and nurture young minds to think creatively and communicate articulately in their leadership role.
• Initiate dynamic discussion to give students a vehicle to further help develop our school.

“As Senators are elected by their peers, they therefore have a responsibility to represent the school in their dress and conduct, and to represent each girl’s voice. We hope that their experiences in the Senate will groom them to lead the school.

“As a microcosm of the school’s mission to become a confident, creative and articulate woman, we aim to develop Senate’s abilities to encourage student opinion and communicate this to the School Leadership and Management Team. This should be complemented by an ability to manage the practical aspects of leadership including the skills to run a formal meeting, set goals and put systems in place to achieve them.

“In 2010, we plan to inspire our Senators to look beyond the school community and to embrace opportunities to make a difference to the lives of others, especially through our Social Inclusion Project. We hope to lift the portfolio of Senate within the school, and to make Senate’s successes visible to the school body in order that other students can recognise and become excited about the contribution they can make. We wish to initiate a new and vibrant political outlook, informing students about the importance of understanding Australian and international politics.”

Structure

At the beginning of Term 1, each homeroom nominates, votes for and elects a Senator for the year. Within the Senate, there is a Student Executive of three Year 12 students: one Head Girl, and two deputies. The Student Executive leads the Senate. The Student Executive members are selected through a rigorous process when they are in Year 11; they must be nominated by other students, write an application, attend an interview with the Principal, and make a speech to the whole school (after which, students from Year 7 to 12 vote).

While the Senate doesn’t have a formal constitution, it has a clear mission statement that is revised annually (above).

Senate is completely student run and is not supervised by a teacher. Plans and achievements of the Senate are reported to the whole school at weekly assemblies, and to the Principal and other key teachers including all Year Level Co-ordinators, at weekly meetings.

Issues

Senators are responsible for asking students in their homeroom for their opinions on issues, and they encourage students to provide any suggestions that they may have. For example, Senators obtain student opinions through surveys and suggestion boxes. At weekly assemblies, the Student Executive reinforces that encouragement and regularly holds presentations to show students that they have the power to make a difference.

From these consultations, the Senate has found that some bullying seems to be occurring in some year levels. Especially with the advances in technology, such as email and mobile phones, cyber-bullying seems to be a growing issue with students in the senior school, ie. In Years 7 to 12, but particularly in Years 8 to 10. As a girls’ school, the effect of body image issues is relatively large. Several girls throughout the school, from as young as Year 4, have suffered from weight disorders such as anorexia. But our students are also concerned with how they can become better global citizens and wish to be more informed on how they can make a difference to the rest of the world.

Action taken

Senators represent the students of the school. As leaders, they are responsible for attending many leadership conferences throughout the year including the VicSRC Congress, and the State and National United Nations Youth Association (UNYA) Conference. They also attend services such as the RSL ANZAC Day Service and Church Services.

Senate has launched their ‘You are the voice’ campaign and have been working to ensure that all girls in the school are aware of their potential to make a difference in the world, and that they should express all their opinions. Senate also provides support
to other committees in the school, and participates in their fundraising efforts such as the Social Service Committee’s Bushfire Appeal, and the Environment Committee’s campaign to help save the endangered Lead-beater possum.

At the end of last year, there was a luncheon for the previous Student Executive and the newly elected Student Executive to ensure that a smooth transfer of the positions occurs. This gives the old Student Executive the opportunity to pass on advice and insight to the new Student Executive. Weekly Senate meetings will continue, and the Student Executive will attend several leadership conferences such as the Young Leaders Conference.

**Finances**

Student representatives note that: “We do not think the Senate requires funds; we are leaders of the school and only responsible for representing the voice of our fellow students. However, Senate provides support to other committees in our school such as the Social Service Committee, Environment Committee, International Relations Committee, and IT Committee who run fundraisers regularly to fund themselves. All student run committees are self-funded.”

**Successes**

With a clear mission statement, the Senate always has goals that it aims for and strives to achieve. Each Senator works to serve the school community to the best of her ability. The Senate is completely student run and is led by a Student Executive (Head Girl, and her two deputies), who report to the Principal and School Council regularly to express the views of the student body.

Senators say that: “We feel that giving every student the opportunity to make a difference makes our Senate a very successful team.”

They also note room for improvement and a challenge for this year: “Students have a voice within the school, however, some students do not necessarily value this as they are not sure what to do with it. The Senate in 2010 will be working to promote student voice and what can be achieved by students within the school.”
How do student representatives see their own student organisations?

There was an opportunity to find out at the recent Frenzy day in Melbourne (at Box Hill Town Hall, June 3rd), when 120 students representatives from approximately 20 primary schools Student Representative Councils (SRCs), Junior School Councils (JSCs) and Student Leadership Councils (SLCs) came together. In one of the short workshops, students were challenged to write quick descriptions of their student groups. Fourteen of the schools responded, and the following is what they wrote. (In some cases, students added a little more back at school, but basically these are the ‘first words’ describing their groups.)

As one teacher wrote later: ‘I found it really interesting (and insightful) to see how they see themselves and their role!’

Aldercourt Primary School, Frankston North

We have a Student Leadership Council (SLC) because, with us around, other kids will feel comfortable to speak up. Our SLC encourages more things to happen in our school. It also gives kids a chance to have a say about what they would like to happen at school.

There are 10 members of the SLC. To get on the SLC we go through all type of speeches, trials and interviews and have elections. Our school captains run our meetings and our assemblies. At the start of the year, we had a training day with Skye Primary School to learn how to be a good leader and what leaders do around the school.

We have achieved many of our plans for the year. We are doing a survey for all of the students to see what books they would like to buy for our library. We are also running an outside office at lunchtimes so other children can have a say on what they would like for our school. Later this year, we are having ‘Aldercourt Idol’. This is being run by some of the SLC students. We are also holding an SLC Week. During this week there will be activities every day. We’re also having a disco later on this year.

Tanisha and Kiara
**Camberwell Primary School**

If we had to sum up the reasons for having a JSC in a few words, we would say that it was to help make the school environment a better place. Of course we also make it way much more fun for the students.

We each represent our class and submit their ideas, along with our own. We are more like ‘idea distributors’ – not just the makers. We all help make the school a better place – every time we do something, it's for the benefit of everybody.

We have a lot of achievements. One of them has to do with the government. Because of the stimulus package, we can build in scooter racks, which will make the school a safer place.

About every two weeks, the JSC members (two from each class from Grade 1 up) get together for one lunchtime and discuss matters relevant to the school, such as walk to school days and fundraisers. Our meetings can go for 30 to 60 minutes. We talk about how the school community is getting on and good ways to raise money for the school and for people in need. We have two groups of JSC leadership and fundraising.

Afterwards, we talk about our meetings at assembly, in the newsletter, on the school intranet through posters and we also go to all the classes and tell students directly. The teachers allow us about five minutes to give a quick summary of topics discussed previously. The school community can read about what we do on the intranet or hear about it as assembly. We also send out notification of fundraising dates through students, as well as putting up posters around the school.

When we need to give opinions or receive feedback on certain topics, we alert the school via the newsletter. A couple of students from the JSC are assigned the task of writing these advertisements.

*Jessica, Dani, Lucy and Tayla*

**Charles Latrobe Primary School, Bellfield Campus**

We have an SRC to represent the school on some occasions. We raise money and sometimes help the Principal to improve our school. We are currently doing a project on the history of our school so that people can remember Bellfield as a school.

There are 18 students on our SRC. You get to be on it by teacher choice and children’s vote. Students help to run the meetings and write the minutes.

*Anas and Jordan*

**Comet Hill Primary School, Bendigo**

Our SRC meets once a week for one hour. We let students know what we are doing by being good – we help others and wear our badges.

*Mitchell*

**Harcourt Valley Primary School, Harcourt**

We have a JSC at our school to improve the school for all of the children. We make things easier for teachers and the Principal.

At JSC meetings we discuss how to improve the school. We figure out things like, for example, how to help someone who didn’t cooperate with anybody. We have also helped a girl in our school who is undergoing chemotherapy for leukaemia, and we have got new football goalposts.

There are 16 students on JSC; they are our grade 6 students. All grade 5 students also attend JSC meetings. Some grade 6 students represent the younger students in our school. We don’t have any special positions in the JSC: we are all equal and all have the right to say something.

The JSC meets whenever necessary and for as long as is needed. Afterwards we have an assembly and a Parent Information Paper that tells what we have been doing.

We are working on ways to make our JSC much better.

*Joshua, Nic and Maxx*

**Laburnum Primary School, Blackburn**

It’s great to have a JSC because teachers have lots on already. It’s a great leadership opportunity for students.

Laburnum’s JSC raises money for the school through fundraisers, fetes, dress-up days etc. We achieved $1240 for the Glenn McGrath Foundation through a dress-up day.

Our members start at Prep and go all the way to Grade 6. The Grade 4, 5 and 6 kids help the Prep, 1, 2 and 3 kids. Every class has two representatives. In each class, kids present a speech and their classmates vote for them.

The School Captains run the meetings, and we also have three or four teachers helping. The School Captains make slide shows about our work.
The JSC meets every second Thursday for about 20 minutes. After every meeting we all talk to our classes about what we have discussed. We also make posters and speak at assembly to tell others about what we are doing.

Finley, Eliza and David

Lalor Primary School

We should have an SRC in our schools because it can help to change schools and make them better. Students can suggest ideas.

Our SRC helps and changes things. We make our school better and everyone is welcome to help. Everyone suggests an idea and this has really helped. It has also helped us to achieve much more confidence.

Chelsea

Quarry Hill Primary School, Bendigo

We have an SRC at our school to get students’ ideas and opinions. We look at the students’ points of view and sort out problems. We have also organised fundraisers for the school and for charities.

Sophie

Moonee Ponds Central School

If we didn’t have an SRC at our school then we, the students, would not have a voice and school would not be as much fun. We have an SRC so that we have more leadership skills and can put in our ideas. We take people’s suggestions and figure out if they are possible. If they are and it is a good idea, then we will try to make it happen.

We have organised fundraisers (for outside and inside the school), set up suggestion boxes, bought new sports equipment, made teachers wear brightly coloured vests so they are easier to find in the yard, fixed things such as leaking taps, got SRC badges, and many other things.

Kids from Year 1 to 8 are on the SRC, so everyone in a class gets a chance to be a good leader and to make our school a better place. We get nominated and then have to do a speech. The people who get the most votes get to be on the SRC.

Within the SRC we have minute takers who write down what we say at SRC meetings and leaders who become the SRC leader for the day of the meeting. The SRC meets every two weeks, but when we are close to a fundraiser, we meet each week or a few times a week.

After each meeting, two students stay behind to write a report about the meeting. The report we write goes in the newsletter and we talk about the meeting at assembly and to our classes. We also have an SRC noticeboard.

Alec, Alexandra, Jaydan and Georgia
Mulgrave Primary School

Mulgrave Primary School has a JSC because it is a responsibility that helps take care of the school. It also means that kids can experience what it’s like to be part of an important group that helps make big decisions. So the JSC comes up with ideas to make our school better and tries to give the school as much benefit as possible. It looks after the school grounds and helps with activities – and helps teachers who need help. It has raised the confidence of students and developed many leadership qualities in grade representatives. It has also achieved getting the school two discos that raised lots of money for families in need.

There are 14 members on our JSC. To get on the JSC first you write a speech on why you want to be on it, then your classmates and teachers vote for the person they think will match and be good for the job.

In the JSC we have two School Captains and two teachers who help run the meetings.

(From left to right, above) Joshua, Jacqui, Edeen and Yathavan

Orchard Grove Primary School, Blackburn South

Orchard Grove Primary School has 16 student representatives in our JSC. At the start of the year we held elections and each class from Grade 2 to Grade 6 voted for a representative and a deputy.

Our JSC is very busy! The JSC has two leaders who also talk at assembly and organise rubbish-free and healthy lunches.

Our JSC came up with the idea of the Playground Monitors. Playground Monitors are Grade 5 and 6 students who help children in the yard who are having trouble finding someone to play with. They wear a lanyard so you can see them and the lanyard has lots of cool ideas of games to play, like hide and seek and charades. They also carry a bag with lots of things in it like pencils, cars, chess, skipping ropes and footballs.

I think Playground Monitors are a great idea because they help people feel happier in the yard and they also teach them ways that they can make friends.

Amy

Trinity Grammar School, Kew

On our SRC there are 16 members from Prep to Grade 6. Each class has an SRC representative. The people interested in the SRC are elected by their class. We love it when truly passionate people apply. The Chair of the SRC is the Captain of Community and Service, who leads the SRC. A teacher coordinates the SRC and supervises and runs meetings.

Ethan
Spring Gully Primary School, Bendigo

We have an SRC so we can help out charities as well as helping our school to be a better place. We come up with fantastic ideas to raise money as well as having fun eg casual dress days with a gold coin donation to the Red Cross. We made a fun run to raise money for someone who was in an accident.

On our SRC we have 22 members and two teachers to help us run meetings and get ideas. To get on the SRC, in the different grades people volunteer and then the class votes for one girl and one boy. We have an SRC President who runs the meetings and helps with ideas, and a person who counts the money we raise for fundraisers. We also have other roles.

Brooke and Kianna

Warragul North Primary School

A JSC is really good because people can come you with an idea to improve the school. You then say your ideas to others and see if it is realistic and a good idea. So our JSC comes up with ideas to benefit the school. It also fixes things and raises money. Recently our HSC organised a disco that cost a gold coin donation – this raised money while also being fun and enjoyable.

On our Council we have 13 people, each representing their grade from Grade 3 to Grade 6. So we are aged between 8 and 12 years. Each year, every one of these grades elects a person to represent them. That person then joins the Council.

The Council has a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary and a Spokesperson. The President’s role is to run the meetings. If that person is absent, the Vice-President takes over. Our Secretary writes down the important ideas that are discussed in the meetings. If we are going to put one of these ideas into action, our Spokesperson speaks at assembly to inform the school of our decision.

We meet from 1.40 to 2.10 pm once a month on a Thursday. In our 30 minutes, we talk about things from helping the school to helping the environment. Our group works very well in the time we have and we discuss all our ideas from the previous month.

We then report to our students at our school assemblies occasionally on a Friday, about what we are doing to help the school. The Spokesperson, with another member, talks about what we are doing. We also report to parents who may be at assembly, or by putting our thoughts in the school newsletter that most parents read. We also report to a group of parents called the Parents Club who will discuss our ideas and they will decide whether to put them into use.

Sophie, Claire and Joel
Questions that Connect

Since 1979, Roger Holdsworth has published a bimonthly magazine in Victoria, Australia, called Connect. Connect aims to support active student participation in school leadership and throughout classes in primary and secondary schools throughout Australia. The stories throughout the magazine are excellent, and regularly provide me inspiration for continuing on in this hard journey we are traveling on this side of the Pacific. Roger has even been so kind to include an article I wrote and to promote several of the publications I’ve written.

Today I received my February 2010 edition, and as usual, my imagination is alighted with all the great stories throughout it. (I usually read each issue twice, devouring it when it first arrives and then picking through it until the next one arrives.) However, of all the articles, it was the cover this month that caught my eye. The following questions that can help educators connect with students, from Connect:

- How would you do things differently?
- What do you think engages and disengages students?
- What level of choice do students have in classes?
- How can students be more involved in planning learning experiences?
- Who are the experts on disengagement where you are?
- How would you measure the engagement of students?
- How could you encourage others to learn more about engagement?
- What other ways could you change engagement?
- How would you run a research project looking at engagement in your school?
- Are there engagement patterns in your school and classes?
- Do students have a voice in the structure of the school?

These are all questions answered by Connect’s booklet called Switched On to Learning: Student Initiatives in School Engagement. Written by students in primary schools in Australia, the book uses cartoons to teach readers about what engagement is, how it can be measured, and why it is important.

All this is to say that these efforts are truly global. In my own research I’ve found work focused on student voice and student engagement from more than two dozens countries. Want to learn more? Send an email to adam@soundout.org - and watch my blog: commonaction.blogspot.com - more coming soon!

Adam Fletcher
Saturday, February 20, 2010
www.soundout.org

And Gladly Teach: A Classroom Handbook

Engagement is a word frequently encountered in education journals and policies at the moment. This perhaps reflects a concern that many students do not see that what they learn and how they learn is relevant to their needs, interests and perceived futures.

Connect has argued that, at core, issues of engagement are about shared purposes of education – purposes that make sense to students. If they do not see what they are doing as purposeful (which is more than relevant) to their current roles in society, they are less likely to be engaged.

However, we can also lapse into the error of believing that learning (however purposeful we think it is) should be intrinsically engaging – without worrying about how we teach and the impact that that can have on students’ engagement. And this can lead us to blame students for not being engaged with their learning.

This small book by Victorian English teacher Glen Pearsall goes straight to the heart of that matter. Glen practically sets out classroom strategies and approaches designed to engage. He argues for the need to create engaged learners, who work cooperatively (in classrooms designed to promote that), who stay on task, because they are managing their own learning.

This book contains ideas on every page, each based on years of experience in diverse classrooms. Each idea and strategy is firmly based in respect for students as intelligent, committed and potentially engaged learners. These ideas and strategies challenge students, encourage ‘collective efficacy’ and ask students to be reflective and productive. They recognise students as having an active role in the collegial support of the classroom and school.

The Teacher Learning Network in Victoria has produced a handsome and valuable small book, wisely illustrated by a young artist (Seb Haquin - previously a student of Glen) in ways they provide a sharp and student-centred slant on the text.

I think there’s more work to be done building on this book. The authenticity of learning that is required for learning to be truly engaging needs to complement the effective and engaging teaching that this book supports. But this goes a long way to inspire, advise and support classroom practices that can provoke excitement and thoughtfulness – and learners who are engaged with their learning.

And Gladly Teach is available from the Teacher Learning Network (TLN) for $14.95 plus $3 postage and handling: contact them on (03) 9418 4992 or www.tln.org.au
VicSRC Cluster Kit

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) has recently published a Kit for SRCs and supporters who want to establish an SRC Cluster or network in their local area.

This Kit contains information about what a Cluster is, what it can do, and why it is important. It then suggests advice on practical issues such as how often and where clusters should meet, and what their agendas could be. There are also sections in the Kit for support organisations about the roles that they, schools and students should play, as well as job descriptions for Cluster support personnel.

Finally, the Kit contains information about the steps that could be taken to set up an SRC Cluster, and provides some resources: meeting agendas, a Cluster questionnaire, and some case studies and stories about existing and recent Clusters.

The Kit is available from the VicSRC: contact them on (03) 9267 3744; or it can be downloaded from the VicSRC website: www.vicsrc.org.au

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:

And Gladly Teach: A Classroom Handbook (Glen Pearsall, TLN Press, Abbotsford, Vic) March 2010

Parents Voice (Parents Victoria Inc., Brunswick, Vic) Vol 37 Issue 2; April 2010

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

TLN Journal: Building the Foundations (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 17 No 1; Autumn, 2010

YAPRap (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) June-July 2010

Yikes (YAC Vic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 8 Edition 3; June 2010

International:

Personalised Education Now (Nottingham, UK) Issue No 12; Spring/Summer 2010

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.

Code Description/Pages/Cost

633 Child-led Disaster Risk Reduction: A Practical Guide
(Lynne Benson and Jon Bugge; Save the Children)
(50 pp)

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