Planning a Student-Led Digital Literacies and Media Unit

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As I work with many students (and teachers) in schools, I am more and more struck by the need to have some deep discussions with students that could lead towards a new understanding and agreement on the purposes of education and schools.

Not for the first time, I’m made aware of the disengagement of many students – either actively (and disruptively) or (more often) passively (and hence less visibly). ‘Engagement’ remains a buzz word (as does ‘boring’), but this is too often reduced to either coercive measures about attendance, or to trivial ideas about ‘making learning fun’. (A primary school student told us, many years ago, when reflecting on involvement with a Student Action Team: “It doesn’t have to be fun all the time, just worthwhile.”)

Underlying all these concerns is a worry that we continue to regard education – even perhaps innovative and participatory approaches – as still ‘doing things to’ students, rather than working alongside them towards common and understood purposes. And I’ve argued for many years that we need to get away from only seeing the purpose of education to be something that will deliver outcomes (which may, for some students, be uncertain or unconvincing) and talk about education that enables students to do valuable things now – to make a difference to their world. In turn, that orientation means that we would concentrate on developing the things students can do (seeing them as experts and as having strengths), rather than focusing on what they can’t do.

So perhaps it’s time to start talking with students about these ideas and agreeing on purposes that make sense to us all.

I’m involved in a few school-based initiatives that may lead in that direction:

- two primary schools are continuing the explicit work exploring ideas of engagement – work that began at Preston South and Pender’s Grove Primary Schools (Switched On to Learning);
- one secondary school is challenging a group of marginalised and disengaged students to investigate what the school can do to become more inclusive of their needs;
- another secondary school is considering work with the ‘middle group’ of students – those neither strongly engaged nor highly disengaged, but just ‘drifting’ – to investigate how school can become more purposeful for them.

Behind all these approaches is the idea that we need to forge a new explicit or implicit ‘contract’ with students about purpose – in a way that excites them and in a way that engages them as the ‘purposeful drivers’ of their education.

That’s a challenge for us all – in all our classrooms and organisations. Hopefully, as these approaches develop, we’ll keep you informed through these pages. However, I’d also encourage you to take all opportunities to open up similar conversations.

Roger Holdsworth
Towards A Student-Led Media Unit
A Collaboration Between ClassTV, SYN, Channel 31 and Education

Imagine a Student-Led Digital Literacy and Media Unit that involves students across the state in producing media that is accessible by all Victorian schools. Such a Unit could be based in a coordinating school (Thornbury High School already has some of the established resources and experience) and could partner with media outlets (such as Community Television Channel 31 (C31) and the Student Youth Network (SYN) Media).

The Unit could specialise in the development and application of audio-visual technologies (including online) for the primary and secondary education sector, mainly focusing on the production, recording and broadcasting of TV and radio programs made by students. By forming such a community partnership between Victorian schools, Channel 31 and SYN, all schools could contribute programming for broadcast of both curriculum and extra curricula generated material.

The project would provide a Student Communications/Media Unit that showcases education initiatives, and provides ambassadors for public education. The basis for such a Unit is already there, and current developments in Melbourne make it very possible for a partnership to take the next step.

Current Arrangements
ClassTV is a current program on Channel 31, which is produced by students and teachers at Thornbury High School in Melbourne’s northern suburbs. It has produced 200 programs over five years and recently won a NAB/Foundation for Young Australians Schools First $50,000 impact award that celebrates a community partnership that impacts in a meaningful way on student outcomes. ClassTV currently uses students from many schools as journalists. These student journalists cover various education initiatives: International Student Week, Constitutional Conventions, Cyber Ethics/Responsibility etc. Other education related forums such as The Age VCE Careers Expo at Caulfield Racecourse are also covered for television programs.

Over 40 schools have provided content and various Education Department areas have paid to have initiatives filmed and profiled on Channel 31. This recognises the value of our peer to peer publication platform. ClassTV has also increasingly moved towards producing content commissioned by youth focused groups.

Recently, ClassTV has also developed Classnet (a YouTube styled teacher moderated website) that is currently used by the education community: www.classnet.com.au

In doing this, ClassTV has worked closely with community broadcasters in Melbourne: Channel 31 (C31) in Melbourne is a community-based television broadcaster that has been broadcasting since 1990. It is structured as a consortium of broadcasters with a common ‘community of interest’. C31 can be received throughout the wider Melbourne metropolitan area. It has just started broadcasting on the digital spectrum, as well as on analogue. Student Youth Network Media (SYN) operates a licensed radio station on the FM band in Melbourne. It is operated by young people (under the age of 26 years), and produces programs for both radio and also for C31. They value add to work by schools, but could have a broader impact on the nature of education in those institutions.

Opportunities for Further Development

C31 want to increase the amount of secondary/primary school content during each week. The new digital licence will enable the station to reach both digital and analogue viewers plus increase the broadcast coverage to all of Melbourne as well as a significant rural area surrounding the cities of Melbourne and Geelong.

An opportunity exists to showcase the work of schools...
Students at the Centre

This project is based in a commitment to active student voice, and recognises the importance of this to engagement with learning. Student initiatives are at the centre of this project.

The project will support primary and secondary school students to:

1. **Record conferences, forums, initiatives, events and celebrations** as part of their school work. Finished products from the Unit can then be archived on-line through educational websites such as Classnet and/or broadcast on C31/SYN. Occasionally they could also be fed to the major TV and radio stations for playing on their News Bulletins/Current Affair programs (eg ABC - Behind the News).

2. **Create a number of different ‘edutainment’ community TV/radio shows** made by students across Victoria; these will be aired on C31 and SYN.

3. **Enable student action teams** (primary and secondary) in schools in Victoria to communicate outcomes of their curriculum research to a real audience; the Unit will create a pool of student journalists, researchers, video and audio recorders, directors, editors and producers who are trained and enabled to create audio-visual content under teacher supervision.

The project will support primary and secondary teachers:

1. **By running digital literacy workshops for teacher professional development**. These PD sessions will concentrate on showcasing and highlighting best practice of digital literacy across the curriculum. The PD sessions will

in Victoria through a school/community partnership that is taken to the next level: bringing together digital literacies, teacher professional development and public showcasing of education, students and schools to the general public in an exciting, authentic and innovative approach to 21st century teaching and learning.

**A Model**

The model for the student-led media unit proposes an innovative and world first partnership between Education and providers of Community Television and Radio. This partnership is not only educationally sound but has significant potential for disseminating public information about schools in an edutainment format. The partnership would involve liaison with many Departments and initiatives eg Communication Unit, International Division, Civics and Citizenship, Health and Wellbeing – to showcase and package conferences, workshops, forums and other material for broadcast on TV, radio and online.

Unlike previous models in which professional (and hence expensive) media producers developed such content for a passive student audience, this model places students actively at the centre of the production and broadcast of media. Under teacher supervision, students from schools throughout Victoria will have responsibility for the great majority of the production process. This will happen in various ways, building on existing initiatives. ClassTV and SYN will extend access to their programs through state-wide workshops for teachers and students.

The innovative use of digital literacy in the classroom will be the major focus of the program.

A broadcast culture will be developed in schools by providing both broadcast platforms and skill workshops for schools to develop content that targets an authentic audience. Through such means, students have been and will be empowered and given a real voice, over topics and issues of vital concern to them and the community, via the opportunities opened up by advances in audio and visual communication. Students will be supported in the development of new digital literacies.

The model builds on existing training delivered by both SYN and ClassTV, who already invite school involvement and deliver skills-based workshops to enable teachers and students to make better use of digital technology and to use community media to value add to their classrooms. In particular, students have learnt and will continue to learn to become investigative journalists, to problem solve and explore issues packaged for publication.

Channel 31 recognises the value of a peer to peer publication platform. ClassTV has also increasingly moved towards producing content commissioned by youth focused groups.

This model recognises that digital technology is tailored to enhancing engagement and motivation, as it allows for authentic collaboration in real world settings.
concentrate on audiovisual mediums and be useful for teacher learning about how digital literacies can be incorporated into their teaching practice.

2. Investigate the need and feasibility of running a formal digital literacy conference in conjunction with Education and the subject associations of VITTA and ATOM.

3. Help teachers showcase their students’ digital work to a wider audience.

Proposed Programs (TV, Radio and Online)

Programs made by student journalists would showcase education conferences, forums, workshops and initiatives. TV and radio programs would be created with high input from students; these would range from interview style programs (such as Talkback Classroom and VCE Calling – a program that emphasises important information about different subjects in VCE) to film clips, news and information about school events and student-produced digital resources. All these programs can be archived online subject to copyright issues.

More specifically, the following opportunities for TV and radio broadcast time exist:

- **Civics and Citizenship:** Dedicated airtime allocated to SRCs, youth politics, Constitutional Conventions and leadership initiatives.

- **Regional and Rural:** This includes student digital content about their physical space, whether rural, regional, coastal, etc, incorporating historical, social, cultural, industrial and environmental perspectives. For example students could construct a visual or audio tour of historical buildings in a particular street. They could profile businesses, community and sporting organisations, natural features and habitat for community viewing. The same process could also be used to profile local people.

- **Journalistic issues-based material** developed in schools around topics such as the environment, sustainability, lifestyle – anything of interest to young people and the general public.

- **School music, dance and drama programs.**

- **Multiculturalism** from the schoolyard perspective.

- **Koorie voice:** dedicated airtime for indigenous students.

- Education initiatives presented by young people as ambassadors for their schools and the Department.

- **Interschool competitions.**

- Content created in the format of animation, stop motion, audio, music, film etc. This has been demonstrated to be achievable; a sample of content already created can be viewed online through Classnet.

- **Talkback shows** hosted by students around topical issues and involving high profile guests interviewed by young people.

Format

The Student-led Media Unit would be able to produce material in the following formats:

- **TV:** For C31 we could initially create four weekly TV programs each of a half hour aired after school. They would most likely be broadcast between 4 and 5 pm. They would be based on an edutainment format featuring all of the above programming ideas. This will build on and expand the current ClassTV model, which has had a weekly half hour show on C31 for five years.

- **Radio:** For radio, a good timeslot could be found that allowed students to access the proposed program outside of school hours. Radio is an excellent medium for students to interview leading experts. A few years ago we ran a program called VCE Calling where students interviewd educational experts re VCE English texts. The audience was invited to call in or text questions. This program was a successful model for what we want to achieve in radio.

- **Online:** Our digital content could be used in a number of ways, including on our own website Classnet (www.classnet.com.au) in a creative and collaborative manner.

Rationale for Project Development

This project is committed to not only offering a unique education and training platform but offers the opportunity to provide an unprecedented publication point across the school curriculum.

First, the project addresses current and future publication and technology issues. 21st Century sharing of best practice needs to go beyond the publication in the standard format of magazines and relative static websites. Current best practice embraces the audio/visual mediums of TV, Radio and Web 2.0 technologies.

Secondly, as well as embracing digital publication platforms, the project addresses educational best practice through provision of student-centred and authentic learning contexts. This will develop and extend programs that explore issues of relevance to students (eg lifestyle and obesity) on a peer to peer basis. Whether the media outlet is radio, television or online, students are required...
to plan, research, script, present and work in teams. This already works very well in practice.

Thirdly, the project utilises and builds on current access to the necessary community infrastructure (C31, SYN, Classnet) to become reality. It builds a learning context in which students develop new digital literacies: a set of cultural competencies and social skills that young people need in the new education landscape. The model shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement, application and collaboration. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. These skills build on the foundation of traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom.

Fourthly, the project adds value to classroom practices. Although technology may have changed the tools of learning, it generally hasn’t affected the traditional schooling landscape; this remains essentially teacher-centred and institutionally-bound. The proposed model, already in operation in ClassTV and SYN, enables students and teachers to move beyond the traditional four walls and utilise digital literacy in creative and useful ways that value adds to their curriculum.

Fifthly, the project changes the relation of students to the media. Television exerts a profound influence on young people, shaping their cultural values and political views, yet young people remain largely a targeted and passive marketing demographic. Despite the work of organisations such as the Australian Children’s Television Foundation (ACTF) and ABC3, students still aren’t creators of their own media in any significant way. The American ‘Champions of Change’ study recommended that venues and facilities be set up in order for young people to be ‘creators of media’, concluding that it was essential for them to be part of the creative process in order for them to understand its influence on them.

Students need to be acknowledged as partners in and positive contributors to media production, and this is made possible through the peer to peer model already embodied in SYN and ClassTV.

Finally, the project engages students directly in their areas of strength, competence and knowledge. One of the major benefits of using community television and radio is that, in essence, students already are potentially the most prolific media makers in history as ‘practising digital natives’. The technology is accessible and in use. The broadcast quality of personal cameras and recording devices and their affordability means that schools can produce not only television, but all manner of curriculum driven content for a diverse range of audio-visual broadcast platforms.

For more information, contact: Paul Van Eeden
Producer, ClassTV, Coburg Senior and Thornbury High Schools
paulvaneeden54@gmail.com

Current and Recent ClassTV Initiatives

LOOK!

The current LOOK! (The art of Australian picture books today) exhibition at the State Library of Victoria will tour Australia for two years. The ClassTV students were commissioned to interview ten leading authors including Alison Lester, Shaun Tan and Leigh Hobbs by the Australian Children’s Television Foundation for the State Library. The ten interviews were to supplement the exhibition of paintings, sketches and work in progress material that accompanied various books, eg Shaun Tan’s “The Arrival”. The students filmed and interviewed the artists at their homes (below), then the finalised films were looped to run all day as part of the exhibition. Each segment runs for about four to five minutes.

Save the Whale Day

Merryn (page 3) was part of ClassTV’s crew covering the International Save the Whale Day held on the steps of the Victorian Parliament, where we interviewed various crew members of the Sea Shepherd only weeks before their most recent successful campaign in the Southern Oceans.

Nathan (page 6) was part of the crew and he was vox-popping on Smith Street about people’s understanding of the whaling issue.

ClassTV has become a co-production of Thornbury High School and Coburg Senior High School.
Paul Van Eeden

Paul Van Eeden is now a Leading Teacher at Coburg Senior High School. He has been centrally involved with student-led media initiatives – firstly in radio, and now in television – for many years. Connect talked with Paul about his continuing journey.

Where did it all start for you?

My involvement started when I was a year level coordinator at Thornbury-Darebin Secondary College (now Thornbury HS). The students knew that if they asked me to do something, I was likely to follow it through. So, for example, we had something like 140 boys and 40 girls but they’d been banned from football and soccer for doing all sorts of wicked things... So the students said: ‘Can you please take us to soccer?’ When I started doing these extra-curricular activities, I saw students – even those from my own class – in a different context: someone who was pretty hopeless at English was great at soccer. In the same year I was approached to get involved in debating, and I loved that too ... so much so, that I've now done 18 to 20 years of debating.

The next step was that there was a young student at the school who, in Year 8, set up speakers around the school. Then in Year 10, he went to RRR and realised we could get a temporary broadcast licence. I was at that stage the school's Admin Facilities Coordinator and he approached me and asked if I could help him set up a radio station at the school. With the English aide, he wrote a successful application for a temporary broadcast licence and that was the birth of 3TD: Thornbury-Darebin radio. By the time he was in Year 12, he passed responsibility for it on to me.

So you weren't a Media teacher – you were an English teacher...

It was initially an extra-curricular involvement for me. But another local community radio aspirant station also approached me – as an English teacher – and said they would like students from Thornbury to be bussed up to their studios to read the news on air at, I think, 11 am and then again at 2 pm. I said: ‘Yeah, I can do that.’ Students would come to school in the morning, we'd get the Age or Herald-Sun and figure out some news stories, and then I'd drive them up at recess or I'd get someone else (like a teacher's aide) to drive them. We did that for a while.

My birth into this was then not through the classroom, but through extra-curricular activities.

For the students, was it part of their curriculum?

At the start, it was just getting a good student, say, who wouldn't mind missing their class.

But then I realised that something pretty interesting was happening, and that the students loved it. I thought I could take on doing radio – 24 hours a day for the last four to five weeks of every term ... and we did that for three or four years with a temporary broadcast licence. We ran our own radio station. That meant empowering the students to be the directors and the managers, and getting students on the Board of Management. We had some great students who were very good at organising the program grid: who was on, and who was supervising. The Principal was kind enough to allow me to give really good students the master keys to the school.

So they broadcast seven days a week, basically 24 hours a day. We'd be live on air from 6 am until 10 at night and then we'd switch it over to a computer for pre-taped programs.

How did this integrate with your other teaching at the school?

It worked really well at Thornbury for a while, because many other people were on board. The Music Parents Association had a show; classes might have a play reading; we had debates on air. We made a whole lot of people stakeholders.

It connected well to school work, obviously through the Media classes... but we also had all sorts of shows that were generated from the different classrooms, including some language shows. We had students coming from a whole range of schools in the broader area – from English and Industry classes, and I had various primary schools involved... It was quite vibrant.

That worked quite well, and 3TD was granted a licence in an alliance with University-based Student Radio to become SYN-FM. I was seconded there for a
period of time, but when my secondment was over and I came back to Thornbury, while there were still programs for secondary school students, it lost the curriculum focus without a teacher facilitating what was going on.

**Television**

I realised that there was still a great platform there for teenagers. SYN-TV was developing, initially with SYN and Channel 31 putting film clips on and interviewing bands.

When I came back to school, I thought: ‘I’m going to have a go at putting together a weekly television show that showcases work from high school and primary school students.’ That was my original intention. People were saying that I was crazy: ‘You can’t do television 52 weeks a year!’ But we’ve shown you can: we did that for three years ... but now we run for 39 weeks and take the Christmas season off.

**Class TV** originally started as a quiz between eight local primary schools. We filmed it with RMIT and the Department’s (now-defunct) Schools TV – in their basement. We’d have hundreds of students in at the Department and might tape four shows in a day. And then I was getting high schools to provide little clips and fillers. After totally exhausting the quiz format and not being able to think of another question, we decided to make **Class TV** a platform to showcase students’ work and so ... we’re coming up to our 250th half-hour episode. We’ve made 125 hours of television to date in **Class TV** and about another 50-60 hours for **Next Gen**, which is our evening show. We’ve made a lot of content with perhaps a few dozen schools.

This development still continues. I was just visiting another school this week, which is starting a Television unit and wants to be involved in Channel 31. So I’m still sourcing content. We couldn’t be on air unless schools gave us content – because one place can’t make half an hour of broadcast television a week.

Last year, we were invited to film in so many different places (such as the Privacy Awareness Week by the Privacy Commissioner, the Copyright Copy-wrong Forum, and the United National Youth Association’s refugee forum), so that, out of 39 weeks, 25 episodes were based around set things that we were sent to. Increasingly, we’ve gone from a game show to showing clips from schools to increasingly showing current affairs based around Department and other initiatives.

**How do you work this with your teaching commitments?**

As a Leading Teacher, I have a relatively limited teaching load – about 40%. And one of the reasons that I was employed by Coburg Senior Secondary College was that they want to take the next step – to connect to community. For example, we’ve recently made the latest ad (on-line and hopefully on television) for the Schools First Student Award. The school recognises that what this can offer the school, in terms of connecting to community, is good PR.

And there are direct outcomes for the school. Last year, we got maybe eight to ten little jobs with the Department and other groups like the Alliance for International Education – those are paid jobs. So at Thornbury, I provided perhaps $60,000 worth of equipment in the last couple of years (we have $10,000 cameras whereas most schools only have a $1000 camera). And I’ve already made a few thousand dollars for Coburg from little jobs we’ve done with students.

That gives me flexibility. The school appreciates how **Class TV** and similar work value-adds to the curriculum as well as being great PR when the school is trying to extend itself.

**Does the organisation of **Class TV** take much of your time?**

I’ve had various secondments over the years. Previously at Thornbury, I could do **Class TV** on a full teaching allotment, with a two period a fortnight time allowance. But I would find I’d be at school quite often until 7.30 or 8 pm and I’d go in at weekends and edit – because you’ve always got deadlines for next week’s show. It would chew up a lot of time.

Now I’ve become good at making little fillers, so we have a lot of stock short vox pops that work reasonably well. But it still takes a ton of content to make a short show.

**How does having these resources and opportunities change the nature of what happens in classrooms?**

At Thornbury I was able to set up my own unit – a Media elective called **Class TV**, focused on television production. Different classes would say that they would like to make a video – for example, the Science teacher was on board, so he would do things like a blood-splatter video with his students.

Some other teachers however said: ‘I’d love to do what you do, but I don’t like the chaos of the camera and the students and the running around. I like to have them sitting there and under control.’ I’ve found that these approaches are more successful with younger teachers, who are more willing to take a bit of a risk. My theory of teaching is about ‘organised chaos’: you might have four or five teams of students doing completely different things with cameras, or scripting and storyboarding in the television production.

**How have students responded?**

As the years progressed, students have been clamouring to get in. When they do things like interviewing Ministers – and all these amazing things – it becomes an incredibly authentic learning experience for them. A lot of students want to do it. It’s now the same here at Coburg: students say: ‘Why can’t I be involved? When do I get a go?’

We’ve been asked to field a team for the Model UN, plus we’re getting paid to film the day – and maybe make it into a show on Channel 31. So, within Coburg Senior, there’s a Year 10 unit called Race: ‘Race around the world’ but also Civics and Citizenship – all manner of things. So the three Race teachers are going to shortlist the students who are going to be in the Model UN and I’ll do the same
- the students who do that, plus extras, will be the film crew. It's the students who show an interest in doing it.

**Does this opportunity also change your relationship with students?**

It wouldn't have been successful from the word go if I didn't have a core group of students that I could rely on. In the early days of 3TD the students would tell me how the software worked. I'm not technical. They would show me where the wires would go in, where to plug things in. So I was totally reliant on them. It's been the same with television editing: they've brought the software in, they've said to do it this way. I haven't had any professional development days on the technology – I've just let the students show me. So I've learnt from them.

**Are you training these students to be in the industry?**

No. This work is incredibly empowering for all students. I had four students at the MCG on Monday (to film a project on students going on overseas study trips) and these have been with me for a number of years. The General Managers were saying: ‘Your students are so confident: you're just letting them roam, and they're vox-popping and acting like they're professionals.’ But they have done it for a number of years and are not frightened. They can go and ask for an interview. A lot of the other students were shy, being asked questions like: ‘What do you hope to get out of going to India?’

**Does being interviewed by other students ease that shyness?**

Absolutely. And that's also why students should be centrally involved: they're non-threatening. So if we ask the Minister if our students can interview him, there's no hidden agenda – they are what they are: students asking questions.

**How do other schools want to use you? What is possible?**

A lot of schools realise that the *Class TV* platform is a great way to showcase the products that their students are already making. It's also good PR for the school. Perhaps the Principal hears me talk about *Class TV* and asks the Media teachers to get involved. So I talk with teachers and students about what's possible in the classroom, what they can make.

Some teachers say that their students are in a Media class because they think it's going to be a bludge – Media's viewed that way for a lot of students. So I suggest the kinds of things that I've seen that have worked (after 250 episodes we've got a lot if ideas). It can be anything from vox-popping a simple question like: ‘If it's true you are what you eat, what are you?’ or getting students to string together as many clichés as they can in some sort of mash-up ... I can give 20 or 30 little tidbits that I've seen as successful.

**Practically: what's the process to get material on Class TV?**

I suggest that if schools want to give me some great content, they could 'badge' a day – call it the 'XX High Show'. So, though it's called *Class TV*, it's presented by that school, and showcases their content. They need to give it to me in decent DVD or tape format; it's got to be in 16:9 (widescreen); good sound, good vision. Thornbury then does the editing, because we're well set up and it's easy to piece it together there.

The slots we've got on Channel 31 are PG, so you can't have swearing, pretend suicides, pretend smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol; they can't punch each other. If a school sends 20 films on a DVD, sometimes we can only use one or two.

Community radio and television pays APRA, where a percentage of profits pays for using copyrighted music, so students can put tracks on that they like, so long as they credit the song. They can't put on images that could be held to be copyrighted (eg *Star Wars* style rolling credits), or that could be seen as advertisements for products (eg *iPads*).

It's a tricky thing. Even send-ups of ads can be seen as promoting the goods. As Channel 31 is going digital, the quality control is getting tougher. Things I was getting away with in 2005, they reject now.

These all become learning opportunities, to be fed back to a school...

**Do you think that schools see this is a worthwhile opportunity?**

There are a million little things that teachers do – but that can now be created for an audience. Someone is going to see what you're doing, so you really have to plan this out. And that changes how you teach and why you learn.

We've learnt that it's got to be visually interesting and it's got to sound good. I tell students – and teachers: 'At the bottom line it's edutainment, because if it's not, it's not going to be something that people want to watch. If it's not watchable, we can't show it.'

*Paul Van Eeden was interviewed by Connect, April 2011*
Getting the most from the VISTA Ning Website

VISTA is the Victorian Institute of SRC Teacher Advisors. It is the peak organisation for Victorian teachers who work with Student Councils across Government, Catholic and Private sectors from both primary and secondary schools. We provide access to resources, professional development and the opportunity for SRC teachers to network in their own region and across the state. VISTA manages an online Ning Network (srcteachers.ning.com) to allow SRC teachers to network, share resources and keep members informed of VISTA’s work.

JOINING THE NG:
When you first visit the site, you will be invited to sign up to the site. After you complete your details, you account will be authorised by a member of the VISTA Team. Once your account has been approved, you will receive an e-mail confirming your account is now active.

SETTING UP A PROFILE:
Setting up your profile will allow others on the site to learn a little bit about you and put a face to a name. Once you have registered and logged into the VISTA Ning, you will be presented with a few options.

Click on ADD PROFILE PHOTO. This will allow you to add additional details such as your school and role. You can also upload a photo or avatar of yourself so we can get an idea of who you are.

UPDATING YOUR PAGE:
Each member is given their own personal page to post details and share information. Clicking on the MY PAGE link will allow you to add text boxes, photos or videos. You can also add blog posts about the work you and your students are doing.

JOINING A DISCUSSION:
The VISTA Executive has set up a number of forum discussions for members to share their success stories, seek advice on matters or put forward their opinions. Current discussion topics include students on staff selection panels, details for developing agendas and minutes, assessing and reporting on the work of SRC members and ideas for fundraising. These conversations can be accessed by the DISCUSSIONS tab at the top of the page.

JOINING A GROUP:
VISTA has established a number of interest groups for those wishing to become involved with projects we are undertaking such as the establishing of a state wide Junior School Council for primary students and the development of an SRC Teachers Conference.

ACCESSING RESOURCES:
The RESOURCES FOR VISTA MEMBERS group has been established exclusively for VISTA members to access a range of resources to support them in their role as SRC Teacher Advisors. Resources include templates for minutes and agendas, SRC Constitution Samples, models and structures for creating or updating your SRC and job descriptions for SRC Teacher Advisors.

If you would like to share a resource you have developed, details are available on our site. Otherwise, attach it in an e-mail to vista@srcteachers.org.au – all work published will be credited to its author.

EVENT ARCHIVE:
Recordings of VISTA Wine and Cheese Nights can also be accessed by the EVENTS link at the top of the page.

IN OTHER NEWS....

VISTA TO PRESENT AT DEECD INNOVATION SHOWCASE:
On Friday 13th May at the Melbourne Convention Centre, Scott Duncan from VISTA will be sharing the process in developing an effective Student Council and looking at how the work of Student Councils can extend beyond the school fence boundary. Those attending this session will leave with tools to audit their Student Council, resources to kick-start meetings and plan for action and details of how to connect with teachers and other Student Councils across the state. Victorian teachers wishing to attend the event are encouraged to register at: www.education.vic.gov.au/researchinnovation/showcase

ELECTION UPDATE:
It’s always great to hear from people who have put our advice into practice. Melinda Cashen teaches at Lightning Reef Primary School (Bendigo, Victoria) and has taken on the role of SRC Teacher Advisor for the first time. She contacted us after reading our article in Connect #187 (February 2011) about using the Australian Electoral Commission to assist with the running of her student council elections. She has written about the experience and shared some photos on her class blog at misscashen.global2.vic.edu.au/2011/02/28/701/

VISTA currently receives no additional funding to operate its programs and relies heavily on memberships to support its programs. Visit our website or e-mail us for details on how to join.

vista@srcteachers.org.au
http://srcteachers.ning.com
The Environment Team at Melbourne Girl’s College is well established within the school community. We attract new members every year and it’s the girls who return each year who are responsible for our success. The most effective way to create lasting change is at a grassroots level as it allows us to reach out to more people from a diverse range of social and economic backgrounds. We don’t tell students what to think; we present the facts to them and let them decide where they stand on issues around sustainability and climate change. One of our major challenges has been finding new and interesting ways to inform people about environmental issues.

We held a Zero Carbon Pedal Powered Moonlight Cinema at our school in late February this year. It ran successfully and attracted over 200 guests. The carbon emissions produced from powering our cinema were offset using six stationary bikes attached to generators, which were continuously pedalled during the night to produce the same amount of electricity needed to screen the film. There was also a coffee stall, which was also pedal powered and required a three minute bike ride to make a carbon neutral latte.

The Sustainability Collective is open to students, staff, parents and members of the local community. These meetings have enabled us to run larger events by providing us with a means of communication with local Council and businesses to gain support and sponsorship.

Networking to make connections within the community has had an essential role in the progress we make throughout the year. The Annual MGC Environment Conference is a large event we plan well in advance. Secondary schools across Melbourne are invited to participate in a day of workshops from guest organisations such as Melbourne Water, Greening Australia and The Australian Youth Climate Coalition. It is a day where environment teams can meet and discuss what they have done and aspire to do at their schools in the future.

One of the most impressive things you can do within an environment team is to inspire passion in others. I have been a part of the Environment Team for five years and cannot take credit for the fantastic team I have. Andrew Vance is the staff member at MGC who has supported students in previous years to create the team we have today. We are recognised now as a leading school in sustainability due to our vast improvement in recent years in the areas of water, waste, energy and biodiversity.

I hope this has inspired a few readers to act on their own environmental aspirations – because it is only too often that you are held back by your own inaction.

Kosh Arulsothy
VicSRC Executive

(This is the full text of an article originally for the VicSRC Student Advocate, April 2011)

VicSRC Recognition Awards 2011

The VicSRC is once again offering its SRC Recognition Awards to acknowledge SRCs across Victoria that are making valuable contributions to their schools and communities.

Awards will be given in four categories in 2011:

- The Connect Award for Integration, recognising SRCs that are strongly connected to the school’s decision-making processes;
- The Second Strike Award for Enterprise, recognising SRCs that have completed a highly successful school or community project.
- The VASSP Award for Informed Representation, recognising SRCs that are truly democratic and representative.
- The VISTA Award for Outstanding Teacher Adviser, recognising the support that teachers provide to Student Councils.

Schools may apply for more than one award. Extra credit will be given to applications written by students.

Applications are due on the 10th of June. Finalists will be contacted in mid June and winners will be announced and awarded at the 2011 VicSRC Congress (August 5-7).

Application forms are available from the VicSRC website and on request from the VicSRC coordinator: coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

Do you think your SRC deserves RECOGNITION?

www.vicsrc.org.au/events/recognitionawards
Want to help your SRC members reach their potential, network with students from their local community and learn new leadership skills?

Since 2008 the VicSRC has run a series of sub-regional SRC conferences across Victoria. These were highly successful in enabling students to meet together across schools, learn from each other and work together on common interests. Our experience shows that just creating these spaces for students to meet, express themselves and realise how much they have in common can be a very empowering opportunity for the young people and SRCs involved.

Conferences are one day events and fit within school hours. They are hosted by local schools and invites to attend are sent out to other schools in the local area.

The interactive conference programs are designed for SRC members from years 7 – 12 and will enable students to:

- Identify issues of concern that they share – and develop plans around them;
- Learn how to effectively plan responses to important issues;
- Share information about what their SRC is doing and learn about other SRCs and their work;
- Be challenged about making their SRC more effective;
- Link their interests to on-going action through the VicSRC – through local clusters and the Statewide SRC Congress later in the year.

Cost: $20 per student for VicSRC members and $25 per student for non members

Registration forms can be downloaded from our website: www.vicsrc.org.au/events/conference

Conference dates 2011:

**Inner City Regional Student Conference:**
*Tuesday May 3rd; 9:30am - 2:30pm*
Melbourne Girls’ College
Yarra Boulevard, Richmond

**Frankston Regional Student Conference:**
*Wednesday May 4th; 9:30am - 2:30pm*
Frankston High School (Senior Campus) - Towerhill Road, Frankston

**Greater Geelong Regional Student Conference:**
*Friday May 20th; 9:30am - 2:30pm*
Bellarine Secondary College (Drysdale Campus) - Peninsula Drive, Drysdale

**Grampians Regional Student Conference:**
*Wednesday May 25th; 9:30am - 2:30pm*
Mt Clear College
Olympic Road, Ballarat

**Bendigo Regional Student Conference:**
*Wednesday June 22nd; 9:30am - 2:30pm*
Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Rosalind Park, Bendigo

We hope to see you there!

Are these locations nowhere near you?

Are you interested in hosting a Regional Student Conference in 2011?

If you are interested in hosting a regional student conference at your school in 2011, please contact the VicSRC Coordinator, Kate Walsh on (03) 9267 3744 or email: coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

Whittlesea SRC Cluster

At a recent Whittlesea SRC cluster meeting in Melbourne’s outer northern suburbs, students from the Student Councils of several schools brainstormed together about the purpose of having Student Councils.

**Why do Student Councils exist? What can they do?**

Starting with these basic questions, students created mind-maps about their SRCs, and then started to develop formal ‘mission statements’ about the SRC purpose. They then extended these to say how their SRCs would work to achieve those purposes.

The photographs here show some of the work on the day. For more details, contact the VicSRC.

The VicSRC can also help you to set up a local SRC Cluster in your area. Check the *VicSRC Cluster Kit* on-line on the VicSRC website.
Stand Up ... Speak Up!

6th Annual VicSRC Congress

You’ve been asking for more and now here it is!! Congress will be held over three days and two nights in 2011!

Congress is the primary decision making event for the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC). It provides an opportunity for students from across the state to voice their concerns and ideas, learn from over 80 other SRC representatives and set the VicSRC’s agenda for the next 12 months.

The event involves a mixture of workshops, activities, reports from the VicSRC Student Executive, formal decision-making and different learning opportunities to enhance leadership. And of course, Congress is lots of fun too!

Who: Year 7 – 12 students
When: Friday - Sunday; August 5 - 7, 2011
Where: Oasis Campsite in Mt Evelyn

For more information and registration forms, check out our website: www.vicsrc.org.au/events/congress

VicSRC Competition!

Remember the VicSRC competition for all SRCs across Victoria: create a digital video promoting your SRC and the benefit of having a strong and involved SRC at your school.

Great prizes: a Flip HD video camera and a Lenovo netbook computer donated by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

We want to hear about what you think makes a great SRC and why your school SRC fits this description. Give us your tips for creating strong student representation and participation at your school.

The video must be 3 minutes in length and in digital format to be eligible to win.

What better way to get your SRC motivated for the year ahead than to take part in our competition?

Entries are due on Friday 20th of May. Winners announced in early June.

Further details about the competition are available on the VicSRC website: www.vicsrc.org.au
Enviro Inspiro! 2011

The NSW SRC invites student teams in NSW public schools to create a five-minute media presentation and a two-page report to showcase their successful student-led environmental projects. Schools and student teams can win one of three major prizes valued up to $3,000.

Check out last year’s winners and download the competition poster and instructions from the Enviro Inspiro website.

Digital Citizenship
Check out the new Digital Citizenship website: www.digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au/

Have you ever used the internet to comment on what you see online, share information about yourself or others, communicate with friends, play games, get material for an assignment or buy stuff online? If you answered yes to any of these then you are a digital citizen.

Why is digital citizenship important to you? Do you want to get the best out of using the internet and keep yourself and others safe and healthy in an online world? This website can help you learn what it takes to become a positive digital citizen.

2011 State SRC Conference
2-5 August, Vision Valley Conference Centre, Arcadia

The State SRC Conference Action Team is a group of 20 secondary student leaders who plan and run the annual NSW State SRC conference. This group is busily planning this year’s conference and has just determined the conference theme: Find your vibe.

130 student leaders from Years 9, 10 and 11 representing all regions will participate in this conference later in the year. The conference website will be live soon at: www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studleadsrc/secstateactiv/statesrcconf.php

Meanwhile, please check out last year’s conference on the same site.

The theme, Find your vibe, encourages individuals and SRCs to:

• Reflect on their personal behaviours and actions
• Show integrity in their daily interactions with others
• Show initiative to make school a place where kids want to be
• Create positive connections with the school community.

Noel Grannall
noel.grannall@det.nsw.edu.au

Director-General for a Day
NSW secondary school students can be Director-General for a Day! on Wednesday 3 August 2011. See: www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studleadsrc/studentvoice/whatson/index.php

Director-General for a Day provides opportunities for NSW secondary school students to learn about the challenges and satisfactions of working in senior management in the NSW Department of Education and Training and allows students to find out how educational policy relates to schools.

NSW secondary school students in Year 9, 10 or 11 can apply. Two candidates (one male and one female) will become Director-General for a Day and other students will take on positions such as Deputy Director-General (Schools) for a Day, General Manager for a Day or Director for a Day. In regions, students have the opportunity to work with Regional Directors or School Education Directors for a Day.

NSW public school students can find out more on the department’s Education Week intranet site.
We know we have an agenda for meetings (of SRCs and other groups), but where does this come from, how do we put stuff on it and why?

Here are some ideas to help us use the agenda better.

**Why put stuff on the agenda?**

An item is put on the agenda for some purpose. This can be to tell people what you’ve been doing (no action required except for people listening politely and asking questions), to have an open discussion to get ideas, or to ask for a decision to be made.

Be clear about what the purpose is, and how much time you think it’ll take. Here is what a member of an SRC or other group might think:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>Process at the meeting</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving information about what I’ve been working on</td>
<td>Because I need to keep other people informed and because everyone has to be accountable</td>
<td>I’ll make a report (it can be casual/verbal or a formal presentation with a handout or powerpoint depending on the complexity of the issue)</td>
<td>Other members of the group know about what I’m doing; gives them opportunities to link with their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting ideas about my portfolio or area of responsibility or interest</td>
<td>Because I want to get ideas and other people’s experience to help me</td>
<td>Brainstorming – after an introduction from me</td>
<td>Gives me ideas about my area of responsibility and will help everyone to feel ownership of it too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal or motion for some action or policy</td>
<td>Because I want a decision to be made either to help my work or to approve some action coming from my work</td>
<td>Propose a motion, have a debate, and make a decision; usually I will move a motion and ask someone to second it</td>
<td>A group decision and commitment to an action or direction – authorises me to do something or asks someone else to do something</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How to get stuff on the agenda**

We should all know who in a group is responsible for forming the agenda. An SRC might decide this is the Secretary, or have a specific person with this job (ie an agenda portfolio). It’s not the support teacher: the teacher needs to put her/his stuff on the agenda too. The person who’s responsible needs to accept (or reject) those items and put them in order.

Here’s how it could be done:

The call should go out from the person responsible for the agenda about a week before the meeting, announcing a deadline for agenda items. Then everyone sends to this person the name of the agenda item, the style (report, discussion, decision needed etc) and how long they estimate it will take – so these things can also be put on the agenda.

Then the agenda should be sent round so everyone has notice of what is going to happen. This should be done either by this person or by the support teacher on this student’s behalf – and in liaison with the student.

If there are last minute items for the agenda (or theoretically if people object to the order that the person responsible for the agenda has put them in etc and want to change this), this can be done at the start of the meeting, so there should be an early agenda item about ‘agreeing to the agenda’.

Roger Holdsworth
Understanding ‘Student Voice’

The topic of student voice is complex and substantial - it could warrant a whole unit or course on its own. Through our pre-service studies in education, we have come to realise that student voice is important to learning in schools, but also that, due to its complexity, it is never a ‘black and white’ issue.

As a part of our studies, we looked at some of the different aspects of student voice within schools. In particular we want to focus on the pros and cons of three possible methods:

### Unelected Student Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The most skilled candidate may be chosen by the school due to the experience of the school in knowing who may make the best representative</td>
<td>• Not all students can actively participate in the process: their involvement, membership and social inclusion are not promoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minority groups may have a greater chance of being represented</td>
<td>• The process of representation is not transparent. This may leave students who are not represented or elected feeling negative about themselves and the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A greater diversity of representatives may be chosen</td>
<td>• Some voices may not be heard and some students may not be willing to speak up to the chosen representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Representation and participation does not become a popularity contest</td>
<td>• People who gain an advantage out of maintaining the system (those who elect the representative) may disengage other voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does give some students a chance to develop and grow</td>
<td>• Teachers may have to listen more to students who may not be represented and take a lot of thought in who they choose to represent students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers may have to listen more to students who may not be represented and take a lot of thought in who they choose to represent students</td>
<td>• Students not required to give a specific answer each way on a topic, but rather asked to contribute their overall thoughts and considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The voice of the SRC may lead to unfair representation</td>
<td>• Students given the feeling that their responses are worthwhile and are contributing to the school policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nomination, campaign and election processes are prone to ‘popularity contest’ tendencies</td>
<td>• Students can see results of their participation in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not all year levels have the same number of representatives, which may lead to unfair representation</td>
<td>• Questions are more likely to be based on learning and types of learning within a school, whereas SRC and School Captain roles generally get given fundraiser tasks and other various decisions not necessarily related to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The voice of the SRC may not be as powerful in affecting change as the voice of the executives, meaning that all year levels may not be fairly represented</td>
<td>• Staff given an opportunity to hear about issues they may not have even considered, and would not be alerted to without student input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Executive positions are elected by members of the SRC deeming them less prone to ‘popularity contest’ tendencies</td>
<td>• Students may just see the survey as an opportunity to talk negatively about teachers they don’t like, and not actually use the survey as a tool in crafting their own learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Elected Student Representative Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• All students are able to participate in the SRC, not just the students chosen by other stakeholders in the school community according to social and academic standing, for example</td>
<td>• Nomination, campaign and election processes are prone to ‘popularity contest’ tendencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Representatives from different year levels will more effectively represent the issues specific to that year level</td>
<td>• Not all year levels have the same number of representatives, which may lead to unfair representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many representatives are able to represent a larger portion of the student body</td>
<td>• The voice of the SRC may not be as powerful in affecting change as the voice of the executives, meaning that all year levels may not be fairly represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many representatives are more likely to better represent diverse social groups within the school</td>
<td>• An unsuitable candidate could possibly be elected by the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Executive positions are elected by members of the SRC deeming them less prone to ‘popularity contest’ tendencies</td>
<td>• Nomination, campaign and election processes are prone to ‘popularity contest’ tendencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Student- or Teacher-Run Student Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students are selected at random, so get a broader spectrum of student voice (not just the outspoken students)</td>
<td>• Not a binding decision; ultimately the decisions still come down to the school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mixed year levels at tables so that students don’t feel pressured by their peers</td>
<td>• Still a random sample that is probably just as likely to neglect wider parts of the student body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidentiality of students answers help encourage their honest participation</td>
<td>• When tallying ‘thoughts’, there is the likely chance that students will contradict each other and perhaps a common theme for each issue will not be found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students not required to give a specific answer each way on a topic, but rather asked to contribute their overall thoughts and considerations</td>
<td>• Students may just see the survey as an opportunity to talk negatively about teachers they don’t like, and not actually use the survey as a tool in crafting their own learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peter Anstee, Claire Rollinson, Benn Scully and Hugh Wilson

March 2009

Subsequently:

*This material was developed by the above teachers while in pre-service education at The University of Melbourne. Peter Anstee has subsequently written about the impact of this discussion on his current teaching in a northern suburban secondary college:*

“All I can say about teaching is that I have made the right choice am very happy in my profession and am loving working at the school I am employed at. Every day is a challenge but the rewards far outweigh any negatives. The presentation on Student Voice also assisted me as I worked hard (with many others of course) to establish a student union and student representatives on many school bodies within the school. So the words of the presentation have stayed with me and held me in good stead in applying them to a real context.

“It is maddening sometime and not every day is full of roses but I get up every day excited by the challenge and look forward to a loud, creative, thoughtful, insightful and rewarding classroom.”*
Rights-Based Education

A Review of Recent Research into Children’s Rights-Based Education in State Schools in Hampshire, England

In 2002, one of the county education officials in Hampshire, England learned of research carried out by researchers at Cape Breton University, Nova Scotia, Canada, into the effects of children’s rights education which involved the consistent teaching and modelling, in ‘rights respecting classrooms’, of what are generally referred to as the ‘participation rights’ set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC: www.unicef.org/crc/) (Covell & Howe, 1999, 2001; Covell, O’Leary & Howe, 2002; Howe & Covell, 1998).

These early findings in Canada indicated that, compared with their peers, children who learn about their rights under the Convention, in a rights-consistent classroom, show increased levels of self-esteem, increased perceived peer and teacher support, a more adult-like understanding of rights and responsibilities, more supportive attitudes toward children of minority status, and more rights-respecting behaviours. (Covell and Howe, 2007 and 2008; available from www3.hants.gov.uk/education/childrensrights/)

In 2002 and 2003, administrators and a small group of interested infant, junior and primary head teachers from Hampshire County undertook study-leave in Cape Breton, Canada. Following these visits, the Hampshire Education Authority’s Rights Respect and Responsibility (RRR) initiative was created. This involved a program of whole school reform in some Hampshire schools which began with infant, junior and primary schools and later extended into a small number of secondary schools. The initiative, perhaps surprisingly, received the whole hearted support of key locally elected conservative party politicians and the current policy is that RRR should eventually involve all the county’s schools at all age levels.

The UN agency responsible for monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC by signatory states (which include all the UN member states except for the USA and Somalia) is UNICEF. In 2004 UNICEF UK created a two level national award that proved appropriate for validating the efforts of RRR schools in Hampshire and that encouraged the creation of similar programs in several other cities and counties in England. This is known as the Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA), details of which can be found at www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa

In 2005 the Cape Breton researchers, Covell and Howe, agreed with Hampshire staff that they would carry out a three year longitudinal study from 2005 to 2008 on the effect of the RRR programme in 16 infant, junior and primary schools, some of which they categorised as fully implemented (FI) schools and others as less fully implemented (LFI) schools (later changed to PI or partially implemented). They used a 1 to 8 scale for this school self evaluation, with 1 representing ‘not really started’ and 8 indicating that children’s rights were central to the overall functioning and ethos of the school, operationalised in every classroom and understood and supported by all staff. In 2005, at the start of the study, school ratings ranged from 3.0 to 7.9. By the end of the second year in 2007, three schools had dropped out and, of the survivors, four had reached level 8, four had lower scores than at the start, and the other five had made some improvement, one very considerably (3.00 to 7.67) and one only very marginally (4.40 to 4.50). The researchers attributed the drop-out, the improvements and the declines entirely to the relative commitment, planning, leadership and enthusiasm, or lack of it, of the individual school headteachers for the aims of the RRR project.

In 2006, a second study covering much of the same ground was initiated by UNICEF UK to evaluate the impact that their RRSA (Rights Respecting Schools Award) was having on participating schools. This was carried out by the Universities of Sussex and Brighton and resulted in a preliminary report in 2008 after one year of a three year longitudinal study and a final report in 2010 (Sebba and Robinson, 2008 and 2010: www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Education-Documents/RRSA_Evaluation_Summary.pdf). The study collected data from 12 schools in five local authority areas, including Hampshire, where in one or two schools, data was also being collected at the same time by Covell and Howe – causing some confusion in these schools according to the Cape Breton researchers! Strangely, Sebba and Robinson make no reference to the work of Covell and Howe in their reports though surely they must have known of it.
Covell and Howe’s findings are certainly interesting for those trying to implement more democratic approaches in state (or in the US ‘public’) schools and school systems. There is no space here to detail all the findings or the methodologies of the two Covell and Howe reports so I will quote their summary:

...we can confidently say that where RRR has been fully implemented, teachers and pupils are showing many benefits. Teachers are feeling less stressed and enjoying their classes more, and are able to see the positive effects on their pupils of the work they are doing. Pupils are aware of their rights, they respect the rights of others, they feel respected, and their levels of participation and engagement in school have increased. Schools in which RRR has been fully implemented emanate an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmonious functioning. They are clearly, in the words of the overarching principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in ‘the child’s best interests’. (Covell and Howe, 2010)

Significantly the authors noted a qualitative difference in the understanding of the program between children in the fully implemented or progressing schools and those where the school RRR rating was static or declining. In the former schools, children had an understanding that rights were inalienable but need to be accompanied with growing responsibilities and respect for the rights of others, whereas in the latter schools, children saw the program as mainly to do with rules and obedience to those rules.

One of Covell and Howe’s findings is of particular interest to me and supports one of the guiding hypotheses of the study that I conducted for the UK government in 2001 into ‘more than usually participative schools’; a concept that substantially overlaps with that of a ‘rights respecting school’ (Hannam, 2001: www.csveducation.org.uk/downloads/research-and-reports/Impact-of-Citizenship-Education-Report.pdf). This involves:

... the possibility that the positive effects of RRR are the most pronounced in the schools which are in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In such schools, absences and behavioural incidents have decreased markedly; and test scores, motivation, and self-regulation in learning and behaviour, and parental involvement have increased significantly. Pupils’ behaviour, academic motivation, and achievement test scores have shown remarkable improvement. It would appear that the rights education program has altered the educational experiences, and in turn, the motivations and aspirations of the pupils.

Pupils living in adverse family circumstances, through RRR, are perhaps for the first time experiencing respect, success, and hope for their futures. In the words of one pupil: “It (RRR) gives you self-encouragement knowing that you have rights and someone cares about it.” There is reason to believe that RRR may in fact function as a protective factor in promoting educational resilience among children living in adversity.

Sebba and Robinson’s findings are similarly positive and a selection are set out below under the six headings required by the UNICEF UK commissioning brief which are themselves based on the six headings used for evaluating schools for the RRSA.

1. Knowledge and understanding of the CRC. This developed well in most, though not all, of the studied schools and gradually became a ‘way of being’ in some rather than a list of rights to be learned one by one. Responsibility developed parallel to the growing understanding of rights. Some schools had difficulty in taking along ancillary staff such as playground supervisors. As with Covell and Howe, Sebba and Robinson found the attitude and commitment of head teachers to be crucial to the successful implementation of the project.

2. Relationships and Behaviour. The study schools reported improvements in relationships between students, between staff, and between students and staff. Where conflicts between students did occur, students became more able to resolve these for themselves.

3. Pupils feel empowered to respect the environment and rights of others locally, nationally and globally. Awareness of international issues and campaigns grew, though understanding of national and local issues was less well developed.

4. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards inclusivity and diversity within society. Positive change in attitudes towards ethnic minorities and disabilities of all kinds was reported in all the study schools over the three years of the study.

5. Pupils actively participate in decision-making within the school community. Although there was progress on this issue within all the study schools, there were still examples of adults making decisions for students that they were perfectly capable of making for themselves. Much of the decision-making allowed to many school student representative bodies such as student councils was still restricted to issues such as toilet cleanliness rather than curriculum
design or other core purposes of the schools, though there were examples where this was not the case. On the whole, progress was better than the average for English schools as a whole, reported in a major review of student involvement in school decision making in England carried out in 2007 by Whitty and Wisby (2007). (Whitty and Wisby’s review is available online and makes reference to several studies in which I have been involved. I can provide copies to anyone interested.)

6. Pupils show improved learning and standards. Aside from begging the question of ‘standards of what?’, students and staff in the study schools reported that the rights respecting approach created a classroom climate that was ‘more conducive to learning.’ Scores on standardised tests improved in a majority of the study schools and exclusions and suspensions for anti-social behaviour declined in most during the three years of the study. There are always so many variables at work in educational research that causal connections can rarely be demonstrated, but the associations are nonetheless interesting and match those in my own study. Also consistent with the findings of Covell and Howe and my own work was the finding that the shift to higher test scores and less anti-social behaviour appeared to be greatest in schools in poor socio-economic areas. ’RRSA may mediate the influence of poor socio-economic circumstances on outcomes:’

Both studies presume that there are no ambiguities within the overriding requirement of the UNCRC that the ‘best interests’ of the child should always be the yardstick for its interpretation and implementation. Neither study explores the fundamental contradiction that I would certainly have felt as a child in a ‘rights respecting’ school between on the one hand my ‘...right...to education...compulsory and free to all’ (article 28) if it was experienced as subjection to testing that damaged my self confidence and self-esteem, being grouped by ‘ability’ in a way that labelled me as ‘bright and gifted’ or ‘being a slow learner’, being coerced into lessons where I must ‘attend’ to a compulsory curriculum much of which I find to be uninteresting or irrelevant and on the other hand my participation rights set out in the Convention: namely my ‘...right to express (my) views freely in all matters affecting the child...the views...being given due weight...’ (article 12), my ‘right to freedom of expression...to seek, receive and impart information of all kinds...’ (article 13), my ‘right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion...’ (article 14), my ‘right to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly.’ (article 15), my right not to be ‘...subjected to arbitrary interference with...privacy...’ (article 16), and my right to be protected ‘...from all forms of physical or mental violence...’ (article 19).

There are moves to introduce Matthew Lipmann’s Philosophy for Children (P4C) program into Hampshire schools. Perhaps this will provide the students and the teachers with the analytical and critical tools to make sense, or not, of these contradictions in the UN CRC and the RRR program?

As a teacher in state schools for many years I see the RRR program and the RRSA accreditation as steps towards a more humane school system. Educators in democratic schools might have other views of course.

Derry Hannam, March 2011
derry.hannam@yahoo.com

Originally for the Spring 2011 edition of the EUDEC newsletter,
Leipzig, Germany

References:
Meaningful Student Involvement: USA

Students as Education Planners

Students can learn what, how, how well, why, where, and when they are learning, becoming meaningfully involved in schools.

Meaningful Student Involvement:
Engaging students as partners in educational planning, research, teaching, evaluating, decision-making, advocacy, and more.

Possibilities for Students as Education Planners
- Student co-designing learning plans for every student
- Students co-designing curriculum
- Students planning school day calendars
- Students participating in new school design
- Students planning classroom learning activities
- Students budgeting school activities

Examples of Students as Planners

First Grade Planners
First-grade students in Cheney, Washington, have participated in the Learning-Centred Curriculum-Making Project. This program features students developing a curriculum that they could use as part of their classroom assignments. The teachers assumed that if students helped to create the curriculum, the classroom dialogue about this process would shed light on how to make learning experiences more cohesive and purposeful. All of the activities met state learning standards. The project progressed by teaching students about a subject, and then having students reinvent the lesson plan. They highlighted language and thinking skills related to various subject disciplines. The students used dialogue, coaching, modeling, questioning, and reinforcing techniques. Students helped select target themes, established guiding questions, and designed classroom instructional activities.

Working with Teachers
A program that engaged middle school students as researchers at their school in Orange, California, took the research to the next step by inviting the students to participate in school planning meetings. Students spent time with several teachers planning and constructing learning units based on the research they conducted. They also met with the school principal, pressed her for changes in school rules and militaristic physical education practices. A discipline committee made up of teachers, student researchers and administrators re-examined and reconceptualised the school merit system. The principal also formed a student-teacher task force to visit other schools in the area to begin re-examining the physical education program. As one student wrote: “When I first joined the [student/ teacher planning group], I thought it was a waste of time. I thought a bunch of kids wouldn’t be able to make anything change; obviously I was wrong”

Involved from the Ground Up
High school students in Puyallup, Washington, co-created the mission, guiding principles, and co-wrote the school constitution for a new high school. The result is a student-inclusive decision-making process beginning with every student participating in a leadership class daily. Students also participated in the architectural design process for the school, with much of their input being incorporated into the building. Today, large open spaces and advanced technology courses stand as a testament to the effectiveness of student participation in education planning.

Education Planning as Activism
One student group in the Bronx, New York is taking meaningful student involvement in education planning to the next level. Sistas and Brothers United, or SBU, is working with school district officials to create a small school focused on educating students for social justice. SBU has worked to improve their own schools for several years. They’ve rallied and researched and, as one student said: “[We] got a lot of stuff fixed… that gives me a sense of power.” The students are flexing their power in another direction now. They have begun working with the local school district and a coalition of organisations to start a new high school called the Leadership Institute for Social Justice. As the student-written mission statements says: “A focus on social justice will help students clarify their values, understand their rights, and relate these to the broader world around them.” According to one student: “In the work we do, you can’t be selfish… it’s about us standing up for what we believe in and making change for our sons and daughters”.

Learning through Service
A high school in Spokane, Washington, offers a course called Practicum in Community Involvement that engages students in developing their own year-long learning project. Students must incorporate certain elements into their project, including research, action and reflection, and identify a community mentor to guide them in their learning. Students’ responses to their experiences grow increasingly sophisticated and powerful, with students regularly exclaiming: “This is the only reason I made it through my senior year.”

Successes of Planning
A student in Potomac, Maryland chronicled her own story of becoming involved in education planning in a recent book on the subject. She recounted her elementary education and being shut-out of the Individualised Education Program (IEP) meetings. “They discussed my program for the next year and then told me what to do. I did not like it. I felt like I was not important. I also had no interest in school.” In middle school she attended IEP meetings for the first time. After spending several months in boring meetings packed with unfamiliar language, the adults in the room asked the student if she wanted to go to a school with her peers. She remarked that: “This was the first time I had a say in what was going to happen to me in school.” After this experience she went on to have a highly successful high school career, including several learning experiences from the IEP process. Her transition from high school to college was marked by several independent decisions. However, in reflection, this student explains that this first breakthrough meeting where she decided where to go to school was the point that “changed my whole life” (Pauley, 1996).

Tools for Students as Planners

Research for Students as Planners


Nelson, J. R., Frederick, L. ‘Can Kids Design Curriculum? Yes!’ Education Digest, 59 (8):42-43; April

Olson, L. (ed) (2002). A high school in Spokane, Washington, offers a course called Practicum in Community Involvement that engages students in developing their own year-long learning project. Students must incorporate certain elements into their project, including research, action and reflection, and identify a community mentor to guide them in their learning. Students’ responses to their experiences grow increasingly sophisticated and powerful, with students regularly exclaiming: “This is the only reason I made it through my senior year.”


Soo, H. (1993). ‘Students as Partners in Research and Restructuring Schools’ The Educational Forum, 57: 386-393


From: www.soundout.org/planning.html

Connect 188:
A Call to Action - Strengthening Support for Alternative Learning Programs in Australia

Under the new COAG agreement, many new ‘alternative education’ programs have been established across Australia to meet the needs of the growing number of young people who are disengaging from school/education. However, for young people, parents, schools and youth workers there is currently a lack of information (on a national basis) on where and how these programs operate and the services they provide.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum is seeking the assistance of a range of educational networks to try and gauge the scale and range of these programs so that we can advocate for stronger support, recognition and resourcing. We are conducting a national survey to determine just how many young people are currently involved in some form with these programs across Australia. We are seeking your help in our endeavour to galvanise support for this emerging sector. The more comprehensive this scan is, the more effective it will be as a tool both to support practice and enable advocacy.

Check out the innovative work Dusseldorp Skills Forum have previously done in this area at www.learningchoices.org.au/

We ask that you complete the survey yourself and forward it to others in your networks and encourage them to participate in this important piece of research. The survey asks basic information about your program and should take no longer than 5 to 10 minutes ... so make your program count! Please respond as soon as possible. The sooner we get the information the sooner we can make the case for stronger support.

VISTA Wine and Cheese Nights

The Victorian Institute of SRC Teacher Advisors is continuing its series of Wine and Cheese Nights for SRC Support Teachers in 2011. They will be held on Thursday nights in Kew in Melbourne:

- 5th May • 9th June
- 28th July • 1st September
- 20th October • 24th November

Contact: vista@srcteachers.org.au or check srcteachers.ning.com for all the details.

Second Strike Training Days

Second Strike, the Victorian-based student and teacher training organisation, is presenting a range of training days in 2011.

For Victorian schools:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday-Friday 5-6 May</td>
<td>Class Captains Forums - Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday-Tuesday 9-10 May</td>
<td>School Captains Forums - Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday-Thursday 11-12 May</td>
<td>House Captains Forums - Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday-Wednesday 17-18 May</td>
<td>School Captains Forums - Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday-Friday 19-20 May</td>
<td>House Captains Forums - Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 2 June</td>
<td>JSC Congress - Primary: Box Hill Town Hall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information and venues: info@second-strike.com or check www.second-strike.com for details.

Complete the survey at:
www.surveymonkey.com/s/learningchoicesprograms2011

Many thanks!

You may also be interested in checking out our on-line self-assessment tool (OSAT). This free online tool allows you to easily monitor, measure and manage your program’s strengths and weaknesses. You can use the responses in planning and management, to support proposals for funding or for marketing purposes. Go to: www.learningchoices.org.au/assessmenttool

For any enquiries regarding this survey please contact:
Lesley Tobin: (02) 8007 6302 or 0409 033 161
www.dsf.org.au/
www.learningchoices.org.au/
Dusseldorp Skills Forum
Level 5, 203-233 New South Head Road
Edgecliff NSW 2027
For we are young and ...?

I need to start by declaring my hand: I’m an editor of and contributor to this book and can’t pretend to be objective. But this doesn’t diminish my enthusiasm for the ideas, information and inspiration presented here.

*For we are young and ...?* is a product of the work of researchers and writers associated with the Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne during the past 20+ years. It includes important ideas formed through the longitudinal *Life Patterns* research program, as well as other insights into issues and responses from young people in Australia: around rurality, homelessness, risk and marginality, uncertain futures and so on.

Of particular interest to *Connect* readers might be the chapters on young people as global citizens, on dilemmas associated with listening to the ‘voices’ of young people (including some challenging consideration of the dangers of ‘ventriloquism’), on students as co-investigators and coaches, and on a contrast between the underlying ideas of Student Action Teams and education-based youth development programs.

*For we are young and ...?* is about uncertainty, and how such ideas shape the realities faced by young people in this millennium. It has just been launched (in April 2011) and is available in paperback, PDF and e-book formats through Melbourne University Press.

Let us know

There may be some gaps or improvements necessary. As you use this resource, let us know what you find. (But note that, if an issue of *Connect* seems to be missing, check the issues either side, as double issues show up only as one issue number.) If you have any ideas for improving this resource, please let us know.

Most importantly, please USE it.

Connect Archived!

Most back issues of *Connect* are now on-line for free! Thanks to a great partnership with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER - to whom continued thanks), back issues of *Connect* have been up-loaded or scanned and are now loaded on a newly developed site within ACER’s Research Repository: ACEReSearch.

You can find issues of *Connect* at:

research.acer.edu.au/connect

Look at the left-hand menu; there you’ll find a pull-down menu with which to select the issue number – browse; then when the front cover of that issue is displayed, simply click on the link in the main body of the page to download a PDF of that issue. Recent issues are searchable by key words.

Availability

The last 12 months of *Connect* (ie the last 6 issues) will continue to be available ONLY by subscription. But issues will be progressively added to this site and made freely available after that 12 months.

*Connect* has always been committed to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation.

All back copies of *Connect* to be available on-line for free!

research.acer.edu.au/connect/
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:
For we are young and ...? Young people in a time of uncertainty (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic) ed: S Beadle, R Holdsworth, J Wyn; April 2011
Inspire (DEECD, Melbourne, Vic) Issue 3, April 2011
Parents Voice (Parents Victoria Inc., Brunswick, Vic) Vol 38 Issue 1; February 2011
YAPRap (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) April-May 2011
Yikes! (YACVic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 9 Edition 1; March 2011
Youth Research Centre Annual Report 2010 (YRC, University of Melbourne, Vic)
Youth Studies Australia (ACYS, Hobart, Tas) Vol 30 No 1; March 2011

International:
Education Revolution (AERO, Roslyn Heights, NY, USA) Volume 23 Issue 1 (#64); Spring/Summer 2011
Rethinking Schools (Milwaukee, WI, USA) Volume 25 Numbers 2 and 3; Winter, Spring 2010-11
Voicebox: Primary (School Councils UK, Felixstowe, England) Issue 20; Spring 2011
Voicebox: Secondary (School Councils UK, Felixstowe, England) Issue 20; Spring 2011

ASPRINworld: the Connect website!
www.asprinworld.com/Connect

Connect has a website at ASPRINworld; 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, recent back issue contents and summaries of and order information for Student Councils and Beyond, Student Action Teams, Reaching High and Switched On to Learning.
There are also links from the indexes of recent issues to their archived PDFs (see below).

Connect is now also archived and available electronically: research.acer.edu.au/connect

All issues of Connect are being archived through the ACER Research Repository: ACEReSearch. Connect issues from #1 to #180 are available for free download, and recent issues can be searched by key terms. See the ASPRINworld site for index details of recent issues, then link to and download the whole issue you are interested in.

www.informit.com.au
In addition, current and recent issues of Connect are now available on-line to libraries and others who subscribe to RMIT’s Informit site – a site that contains databases of many Australian publications. You can access whole issues of Connect as well as individual articles. Costs apply, either by a library subscription to Informit’s databases, or through individual payments per view for articles.

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- Reaching High ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) 2006-7 $ ............
- Student Action Teams ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) 2006 $ ............
- Student Councils & Beyond ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) 2005 $ ............
- Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work 1996 $ ............
  Case studies of Primary School SRCs ($6.60 or $11 for two copies)

Foxfire Publications (stories of a US-based student-run oral history publication project):

- Sometimes a Shining Moment and Foxfire: 25 Years ($22 each) (limited copies) $ ............

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