Whole Cohort Student Action Teams in Primary & Secondary Schools

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Transformation: I think that’s what we’re basically on about. Transforming what happens in schools – the purpose of learning, the processes of learning, the relationships between students and teachers.

And this transformation must be for all students, not just those who are already excited and committed. In some ways, the engaged students (and teachers) are least in need of transformed educational approaches. It’s those students who are typified as disengaged or simply drifting along, and those teachers who are typified as bored and unchallenged – and boring their students, who have most to gain from changes. (But, I argue, all students are learning powerful and life-long lessons – negative lessons – from educational approaches that fail to challenge and excite them!)

So in this issue, several schools report some steps they are taking with what we are referring to as ‘whole cohorts’ of students, to transform the way that learning and teaching happens within everyday classes. Their Student Action Team approaches are ways of making changes to ideas of purpose, processes and relationships.

First, purpose. These approaches establish purposes for students, teachers and schools that talk of the value of the learning in what it can achieve now – not only in some deferred (and perhaps uncertain) future. They also address shared purposes between students and teachers, as classes deal with issues of concern to all.

Secondly, processes. These approaches place practical, hands-on learning at the centre of pedagogy. (This can include, but not be restricted to, building things, though such examples of Hands-On Learning have been shown to be highly effective in re-engaging students.) Processes of learning are applied, build on students’ strengths (not deficits) and passions, and place students in roles of value, as they become researchers, teachers, producers of information, community developers and so on.

Thirdly, relationships. These approaches change both the relationship of students to learning, and also the relationship between students and teachers. As we stress the uncertain nature of outcomes, teachers become learners along with their students, just as students become teachers within their communities. Both become more respectful of each other.

If such student participatory approaches (and Student Action Teams are only one such manifestation – alongside other curriculum and governance examples) are to become widespread, then we must be learning how they can operate for all students, transforming what happens within schools. If they are important, they will need to transform our everyday classrooms. And that way, life and learning becomes so much more exciting, challenging and worthwhile for us all.

Roger Holdsworth
How do we implement Student Action Teams in whole classes, across whole year levels or as whole-school approaches?

Many of the Student Action Teams that have been implemented in primary and secondary schools during the last decade have involved small numbers of students working on an issue of concern to themselves, to other students, or to their communities.

However, as we noted in a small article in Connect 187 (page 4) Student Action Teams can develop from various opportunities within a school. In summary, we have seen that they can start with a commitment by a school to the idea of a SAT – and then students discuss, research and define an issue of concern; they can start with a specific existing issue of concern and a team of students can form and be ‘commissioned’ to investigate and act on it; or a particular class (or group of classes) – or subject – can adopt a SAT approach to its learning and teaching.

The first and second of these openings are particularly suited to work by a small group of students for whom that issue is most relevant. The SAT may involve other students in the research and action, either passively as sources of information, or actively as co-actors. However, the SAT itself consists of a small group of students with a specific role and challenge – and may be specifically targeted at these students.

However, the third opening implies that larger groups of students – all those in the class or year level or even all students in the school – will be actively engaged within the curriculum-focused SAT.

How might that work?

Immediately, of course, this structure raises different issues about student choice and decision-making. If all students within a cohort are to be involved as part of their everyday studies, they don’t have the same opportunities to opt in or opt out that students who choose to form a SAT do. Yet these students also have strong opportunities to determine how the research and action might proceed.

From the school’s viewpoint, how do these Student Action Team approaches map against subject requirements and mandated outcomes?

It is important that we address these issues. If approaches such as Student Action Teams, that provide real and important roles for all students, as part of their learning and teaching, are to develop within schools, then we must learn how they can be implemented with whole cohorts of students. And we must learn how they can be implemented with the range of student interests and engagements that exist within any class or year level.

The schools that are profiled in this issue of Connect are exploring these very questions. They have decided to implement Student Action Team approaches with whole cohorts.

These schools are also just beginning that journey. Their stories here are ‘first stories’, dominated by descriptions and explanations of what is happening. But here is also the start of some reflections from teachers and students, and this will continue and develop. These schools are committed to learning how to implement Student Action Team approaches within their curriculum contexts.

This journey will continue – and information and reflections will be reported in future issues of Connect.

But for the moment, read on ...
School Engagement: St Charles Borromeo Primary School

Students at St Charles Borromeo Primary School in Melbourne's north-east suburbs have been involved in Student Action Teams for several years – principally around Values Education. However, these teams have usually involved a small group of students who were passionate about the issue – and who then investigated and acted on their topic of interest.

What would it mean for a Student Action Team approach to be used more centrally within the school's curriculum?

In 2011, the school decided to challenge all the Year 5 and 6 students to tackle an important issue as part of their core studies. Looking at data from School Improvement Surveys, staff had expressed concern about the 'Student Attitudes to School' scores, in particular in the area of engagement. All staff felt that this was an accurate reflection of what they were experiencing daily in their classrooms: that most students were 'switched off' and it was difficult to elicit a sense of enthusiasm and excitement for learning in the children. This was especially true for the students in middle and senior school; as the senior students took part in the survey, this accurately reflected how they felt.

Therefore, it was decided by the school that an explicit focus on school engagement would be valuable. The previous experience (where students investigated the nature of values that were explicit or implicit within the school and community – and how well they were enacted – and then developed actions to build more effective Values Education) had shown that such an approach was engaging in itself for the students involved. Would this extend to all students if they had similar opportunities?

The Grade 5 and 6 students at St Charles Borromeo (from two classes) began the process by talking about what described and formed good and bad days at the school. (This initial approach built on the work at Preston South and Pender's Grove Primary Schools in 2007-9 – see earlier issues of Connect for background, which was also documented by students in the book Switched On To Learning.)

Then, working in eight teams, the students began to brainstorm about their understanding of concepts of engagement. How could they show this? What would be seen, heard, felt, thought about engagement within the school? What was their experience of being engaged or disengaged?

In mid-year, they were reaching agreement about definitions of 'engagement,' coming up with models of ways to 'measure it' – and then thinking about whether these make sense to other grades in the school.

Both classes have allocated time for the groups to meet together to prepare a presentation about engagement. Each group has selected a class/staff group to work with for the length of the project. Whilst preparing for their presentation, the students needed to be aware of the age of their audience, and how best to engage them. They are planning a variety of activities that includes cooperative group activities, games, Circle Time and role plays. One group has composed and performed a song on engagement. The classroom teachers have been asked to provide feedback to the students regarding their presentation.

From here, it is anticipated that they will start forming questions that they want to investigate. Some time early in Term 3 they will report back on their investigations and start planning action they might take to have an impact on engagement.

Classroom implications

The process of working with all students in the classes has raised some interesting questions about the Student Action Team process. Most obviously, with all students involved in a core curriculum approach, the focus of student decision-making shifts from 'whether we will do this investigation' to 'how we will do this investigation.'

This now becomes a method of achieving mandated curriculum outcomes. The teachers have mapped what they are doing and outcomes within this approach against their curriculum requirements.

To make sure all the students have been active members of the teams, the classes spent some time before the initial whole group session investigating and deciding on roles that operate within groups. The students came up with the following six group roles: team leader, speaker, writer/recorder, materials monitor, publisher, and researcher. As they then work within classes on their 'engagement research,' each and every student is accountable through this designated role to ensure that they are meeting their responsibilities to the group. As the process proceeds, the plan is to ask the students to reflect and evaluate how their team is working together, and how these team roles are contributing to the overall task. This reflection will be completed following the presentation of their research in the classrooms.

It is also important that teachers have time to meet regularly to plan directions and to reflect on outcomes – and to fine-tune the process. The timeline that has been adopted for this project allows the school the flexibility to meet the needs of the students. It has been useful here to have an external consultant meet with the teachers on an ongoing basis to see how the project is progressing. This has meant that activities have been adjusted and refined as necessary – part of the uncertain process of implementing Student Action Teams, particularly when new territory is being explored: working with the whole grades in this way.

Follow-up

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Investigating Engagement: St Michael’s Primary School

How do all senior students in a primary school understand ideas of engagement with school? Is it important to them? If so, why? And what can they do to improve engagement – either by changing their own views, or the ways in which the school encourages their engagement?

From 2010, the school data showed that student were motivated and confident as learners and that parents perceived that their child was well connected to peers and motivated to go to school. However students' responses indicated they felt disconnected from school and needed greater experience of stimulating learning.

These variations in responses laid the grounds for further discussion and investigation and, in turn, became the underpinning for the inquiry by students in Years 4 to 6 on the explicit topic of Engagement. Students would be leading the school community to understand why students who see themselves as motivated and confident learners, connected to peers and motivated to go to school, also feel disconnected from the school and learning. Their big inquiry question was to be: What is it that engages and disengages us from and at school?

The school therefore decided to run an action research inquiry throughout Term 2 with the entire Year 4-6 cohort of students through formation of Student Action Teams.

Forming teams
The whole cohort of Grade 4, 5 and 6 students at the school are involved in this Student Action Team approach. The two grades have divided into eight teams of about six students each.

Students started with an activity about building ‘straw skyscrapers’ in teams and then thinking about how well their teams operated, and what members did – and what helped and hindered achievements. This led students to discuss what makes a good team member, and what leadership roles are involved in a team. Continuing teams were then formed to ensure a mix of roles and interests.

The students discovered important things about their group roles, says Jenny Nour, one of the two classroom teachers involved. “They needed to be accountable for their role within the group; they could also assist other group members as they are all working towards a common goal; but it can be challenging to work in such large groups where there are differing views and ideas about where the project should be heading.”

Hannah Marino, the other teacher, reflects on the value of this initial activity: “This was a good basis to begin discussion as to what roles the children thought were essential to work effectively in a group. After much discussion, and over three sessions, the children from the two classes finally agreed on a set of six roles. They then went back into their groups to come up with descriptors for these roles. We then agreed again on the definitions. This was a lengthy process, with some children showing little interest at this stage.

“The children then had to individually select one role for themselves, based on what they viewed their strength as. This was an effective process and children gave constructive feedback to each other, stating reasons why or why not they thought particular children were suited to some roles over others. This process was done with care and all children were finally allocated group roles after two sessions.”
Initial investigations

The teams began working together in class, as part of their inquiry learning. The next session, says Hannah, was a formal introduction to the topic in a Student Forum that involved all students in one large session. “The children worked in their ‘new’ groups, discussing and completing activities about what a good and bad day at school looks, feels and sounds like.

“One observation we made of this activity was about the comments made by some children – that their particular role did not, for example, require them to brainstorm or give ideas – and so they wouldn’t. We needed to do further work on how to work as a team, particularly around the need to be flexible within roles.

“This session finished with the children being introduced to the term ‘Engagement’. After some discussion, they were left with the questions, ‘What is Engagement – how could we define it?’”

In mid year, the students have been brainstorming, discussing as a whole cohort and finally reaching agreement about their definitions, and are coming up with models of ways to ‘measure’ it. They are then thinking about whether these make sense to other grades in the school. Some teams are already getting ready to consult with staff and parents about these issues.

“Thinking about what we’ve completed so far,” says Hannah, “the children who we typically recognise as being ‘engaged’, remained focused throughout the initial sessions. However, the children who we view as ‘disengaged’ appeared to operate ‘true to form’, giving little input in the process. But when it came to the designing and building of models, these children showed interest and were keen to work in the group!”

Students have had a great time actually constructing various models of ‘engagement indicators’. They then developed and practised ‘lesson plans’ to take these models to other grades and members of the school community. This included work on open-ended questions they could ask in order to collect data about engagement. They will then reflect on how well the sessions go, and perhaps return to grades with modified approaches.

The Deputy Principal, Barbara Gomez, has also worked with the students. She notes: “The inquiry has been lifted to a whole new level. The students are running with it. The design and construction work got their enthusiasm and excitement up, and the groups are firing! We are starting to see the richness in this inquiry and are making connections between student engagement and their learning.”

The students’ reflections also showed their increased engagement:

“On the first day of making the designs, I felt that I was a bad leader because half of the group didn’t help us with the design; they just did what they weren’t supposed to do – like they were being lazy.”

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Engagement Scales:

**Completely Engaged:** You are completely focused and paying attention to the task, while giving full effort. When someone speaks to you, you listen with all eyes and ears.

**Mostly Engaged:** You are almost concentrating, almost completely focused, but still seem to feel a little bit bored.

**Average:** You are very uninterested in the topic and only giving the amount of effort that is required. You can’t seem to find any fun in the activity, and so you are not focused.

**Barely Engaged:** You are trying very hard to be focused, but feel bored all the time. You are really not interested, and do not want to do the task at all.

**Not Even Interested:** You are so bored with the task that you do not even bother to give any effort. You are not interested.

**Not Engaged At All:** Not engaged at all means that you don’t want to give any effort or help. You are not having any fun.
Classroom implications

The process of working with all students in the classes has raised some interesting reflections about the Student Action Team process. Most obviously, with all students involved in a core curriculum approach, the nature of the student decision-making that is involved shifts from students decisions about whether they will do the investigation to decisions about how they will do it.

The Student Action Team approach now becomes a method of achieving the curriculum outcomes mandated by the school or system. The teachers have begun to map what they are doing and the projected outcomes within this approach against their curriculum requirements. They have developed a rubric that enables them to observe and report on outcomes in areas such as Design and Technology (investigating and designing; producing; analysing and evaluating) and Interpersonal Skills (building social relationships; working in teams).

Within their classes, the teachers regularly allowed time for all students to reflect on the process and on what they have achieved. This also specifically asks students to think about the ways in which they have been active members of the teams, and have developed their role (see next page).

The teachers are also meeting regularly to plan project directions and to reflect on the process, the overall design and directions and the outcomes.

Lesson Plan

Focus: To investigate what the Year 1/2s think engagement is and how they interpret it.

Sequence:
1. Introduce ourselves and inform them why we are here.
2. Discuss with them what a good/bad day is like to them in their life.
3. Do an exciting activity for them that they will enjoy and have an opportunity to get involved and have the ability to do something.
4. We will then talk to them about their reactions and ask them which activity they thought was the most engaging and why.

Exciting Activity

Focus: To find out what engages the Year 1/2s and how to put it in a lesson.

Sequence:
1. Read a story chosen by the Year 1/2s or chosen by a vote.
2. Then clear tables and cover tables completely with newspaper.
3. Allow children to start painting their favourite part of the story.

Equipment:
1. Newspaper
2. Paint
3. Blank Paper
Students' responses and reflections:

“I don’t think our group was doing well, however we are slowly getting much more organised. Some people need to stay on task and focus. Other than that, I think our group will do very well. On Wednesday, we are going to find out what the senior parents think about what ‘engagement’ means. We are going to do a fun activity and a boring activity. Last of all, we are going to let the parents thinks about how their children feel after school. Why do they feel this way? My role is to organise the Y-chart. My partner is doing ‘a bad day at school’ and I am doing ‘a good day at school’. Before that day comes, I am to design and work on our model – we’ve decided to do a lift.”

“We are going to do a fun sport activity and then measure their engagement levels, and then a boring activity and measure their engagement levels. I’ll take down notes and information of their engagement and help do the preparation. We are going well because we got everything done.”

“My group is going to go into the Year 3s on Wednesday. We are going to say our introduction and then ask them what a good day and a bad day is for them, and then tell them to draw a picture of it. After that, we are going to get them into little groups, then get them to act out a good day or bad day – then judge them and then give them a piece of paper to answer the questions. My role is to lead and explain some of the activities that we organised for the Year 3s: I am the coordinator. I think my group is going very good and are on track – most of us are going very well.”

“Today in Inquiry, we started to make our design to show the different levels of engagement. Our group made an engagement wheel. We drew a thumb and stuck it on the wheel, and on the wheel we wrote the levels of engagement. If you put the thumb on a certain colour or word, it shows if you were engaged, not engaged etc in the previous activity.

“Today I thought that our group worked well because in the previous days of Inquiry, I have to admit that we had not much of an idea of what we were doing. But today, we made a model of the design. We got a lot of feedback that we should make it bigger and have more levels of engagement, so we are now working on one that will be a lot bigger and we might put some more levels of engagement. When we were making our design, all our group members were helping each other.”

“What my group did was: we had to finish the lesson plan first and then we had to start painting. We made an arrow with a ladder. We made it really colourful and bright, but we still have to stick it on.”

“I think today’s Inquiry session was very fun and interesting. The fact that we got to work and associate with other different people really engaged me a lot. I guess our group members all had something to do and were contributing really well, which helped our session be very productive. Everything we got through in that session went well and positively, and the feedback we got to improve our designs also was one of the aspects which extended my engagement also. Our lesson plan is printed and we just need to complete our design.”

“Our group kind of did not go well because at the start we had a meltdown and at the end we worked well. At the start we started arguing and then we got an idea of a body that went well. The thing that went well was that we made it and we put a smiley face on the head and on the other side we drew a sad face.”

“I think my group went well when making the design of how the grade 3s would understand the levels of engagement. Our model was an ice-cream cone, with six levels of engagement. My favourite part of doing this activity was when we placed the crêpe paper on the foam balls, but it was difficult making the foam balls get into place inside the cones.”

“We worked on our design to show different levels of engagement. Our captain decided to make our traffic light based on ‘Wonder Woman’. He also decided to make our traffic lights called wonderlights. I think that our design or construction went well. We got most of our design work done and I think we worked well together as a group. Next time, I think we should improve on the labels for our design. I really enjoyed the day because we got to do some work.”

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All Grade 5s ... Across Four Schools

All the Grade 5 students at three primary schools in Melbourne's north-east have been examining local issues about environmental sustainability in Term 2 this year. As a core part of their curriculum, they have been investigating what the important – even critical – issues are, and what is causing them.

But these students aren't just seeking to understand what sustainability means; based on what they find from their research, they are also planning to take action to improve their school and community responses. They are committed to building a sustainable world in which they will live. They have formed large-scale Student Action Teams as part of their curriculum to carry out their inquiries and lead the action.

Background
These schools have recently worked together on related matters. Four years ago, the Principals of Loyola College (Watsonia) and three of its local primary schools were offered the chance to be involved, through the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program (AGQTP), in approaches to support student transition and engagement. The three Catholic primary schools involved were St Damian's in Bundoora, St Mary's in Greensborough and St Martin of Tours in Rosanna. The work undertaken during this project led to workshops to support student transitions to secondary college, and invitations were extended to parents from feeder primary schools to attend parent information evenings covering a range of issues. The evaluation of the project showed that the initial goals had been achieved, and also suggested that the next obvious step was to create opportunities for enhanced opportunities for student voice within the schools.

The schools were approached again to see if they were interested to continue their cluster involvement in a project based around 'student voice' – that would also build engagement. They were, and so the team regrouped to tackle a new project.

Leadership members from each of the primary schools met regularly in 2010 to determine how this intention to enhance students' voice and engagement would be realised. Again, prior experience informed their decisions. As teachers from St Martin's had worked with Kate Wilde from The Workshop and had also previously met with Roger Holdsworth to hear about the Student Action Teams approach, they were keen for the group to work with these professionals in the project.

Core Curriculum
Discussions were held with staff about ways in which such Student Action Team approaches could be incorporated into the schools' core curricula. The Inquiry Units were an obvious structural location, where a shared focus for these units could be explored using ideas from Student Action Teams. The criteria for selection was a topic that would be appropriate across all schools and that would also enable students to take action to make a difference – both to their learning, and to the school (and even community) culture.

Other criteria were that the project should involve all students in the process and encourage interaction across the three primary schools. Other nearby schools had previously involved senior primary school students in a unit on Sustainability, and the inclusion of sustainability as a focus in the new Australian Curriculum provided further argument. So it was decided to pursue this as the curriculum focus and develop Research and Action Teams around it within all Grade 5 classes at each school.
Student teams
Within each of the three primary schools, students started by discussing and practising different roles and responsibilities within a team. This included exploring ways of negotiating and resolving conflicts within groups. From these teams, students voted for peers who they believed would represent them in a leadership role: within three teams of students in each of the four Grade 5 classes in each school. Interestingly the students who nominated were identical to those whom the teachers had envisaged as the most appropriate candidates.

These Student Action Team leaders from each of the grades were particularly proud of their role and were eager – but also a little apprehensive – about attending the first forum to bring the representatives from all schools together. Parents of these students were very supportive, teachers encouraged the involvement of the Student Action Team leaders and the Principals endorsed their selection.

The students from one of the grades talked of the responsibility of attending the Student Forums to share information – and also to take that information back to their classes through discussions and assemblies:

Warren: I am really proud to be a leader at the forum. Will: I am proud of the way I have reacted. Lachlan: I am really proud to be involved and feel that I can help other students.

St Mary’s students

Student Forums
The inter-school aspect of this approach is driven by regular Student Forums involving 12 students from each school. These enable students to report to and learn from each other, and also to experience activities and approaches that they can take back to their classes.

At the first Forum, for example, ideas about ‘sustainability’ were introduced through a mapping exercise, in which student knowledge about their local environments – and the positive and negative aspects of local practices and issues – were drawn upon. Students started to identify the key concerns and issues in their area, but were then challenged to produce evidence that these were the issues that other members of the school communities would also identify. So research tasks started to emerge, and research methods were proposed.

We were very excited and curious about what we were going to do during our first Student Action Team Forum. We discovered that we had a lot of environmental issues at St Damian’s, for example: noise pollution, waste etc. We were talking about our main issues including waste of water, electricity and littering. Surprisingly we thought of a lot of environmental issues. All of us greatly enjoyed all the fun activities that we had at the first forum. Overall it was a wonderful experience and we enjoyed and learnt many things.

Jordan, Deni, Laura and Nikolina
St Damian’s students

The forums are so much fun and it is good to compare information with the other schools … Interacting with children from other schools lets me learn more … They have helped us in our basic learning because it teaches us teamwork … They have been really useful in helping to understand more about the environment and knowing what to do as a Student Leader … It has made it much easier to understand how we can help the environment having Kate and Roger there to help us … They have been very useful in helping us set up our Student Action Teams … It’s great to think we can help other students with work on Sustainability … They have made it so much easier for us when we get back to school so we can help other students and be confident in what we are doing … When we come back to our groups we are one step ahead.

Emma, Oriana, David, Steph, Matt, Julian, Alice, Mikayla and Adrian
St Martin’s students
After the Forum, the students took these questions and challenges back to their grades. They fed back information from the Forum to all their classes. Within their classroom groups they have been able to provide added support to their own team members and encourage and motivate other students. While having the responsibility as a leader, they, like other students, have a particular function in their group, but at the same time are aware of the outcomes to be achieved and can therefore keep their fellow students focused on the tasks undertaken.

They recognised that this involvement had helped their learning, through...

Warren: ... thinking deeply and not getting distracted. Will: ... making me think deeper when I need to ask questions and answer them. Lachlan: ... thinking differently about the project.

St Mary’s students

The inter-school involvement has also built a strong sense of shared commitment across the three schools. For example, after attending the first Forum and experiencing various mixing games and activities, the leaders seemed very comfortable about being with students from other schools.

There was a blending of school uniforms visible throughout the venue during the second Forum, where students reported on their research, identified their main topics, and started to invent desirable futures.

Representatives of St Damian’s attended the second Student Action Team Forum of the term. We shared the results of our research of the school’s main environmental issues using posters to show what we had discovered. We then looked at the other schools’ posters and found them to be interesting and informative.

Roger then led us in meditation, where we were asked to think of how our school and our world would look in the future. We found that the activity was calming. We learnt about the 4 Es – Engineering, Enforcement, Encouragement and Education – which helps us decide on an action for our school. We really enjoyed the Forum and we are really looking forward to going to the next Forum in Term 3.

Naomi, Dimitrios, Andrew, Claudia and Joshua
St Damian’s students

Classroom focus

For the teachers involved in this program, the approach has allowed more effective learning in cooperative environments. It has provided unique opportunities for greater connection between students and teachers – which in turn assists with classroom behaviour.

It is a great means of engaging students in higher-order thinking and allowing for differentiated learning.

The other important benefit observed so far (for this initiative continues towards the end of Term 2), is increased knowledge about the topic of Sustainability compared with before the program. Students have told teachers that they have begun to talk to their families about sustainability issues in their own homes and how they have started making a difference. “To know that students have used the knowledge gained as a motivation for behaviour change is significant,” noted one teacher. “We also know that many parents are involved in ongoing discussions about the ‘Sustainability’ issues throughout the term, as children sought help with their ‘Sustainability’ homework.”

One teacher described some of the ways in which this approach was integrated into classroom work:

Students made observations about their schools’ current areas of sustainable development (eg green areas), compared with the overall use of other areas within the school. Students used trundle wheels to record areas and perimeters of suitable places for play and suitable sustainable areas. So this lesson also solved a mathematical problem as students recorded the perimeters using their metre trundle wheels.

As a result of these investigations, students found that areas for play far outweighed sustainable areas and that there is a real need for more areas of sustainable development. So, they said, we need to plan such areas in the future.

Support with classroom approaches

Kate Wilde from The Workshop has worked with each of the classes to reinforce Forum activities, and to introduce and drive sessions on teamwork, research, planning and action. Kate’s sessions have provided enormous enjoyment for students as they see these sessions as ‘fun’ activities, and they are eager to participate in ongoing tasks.

Students have identified particular strengths within a group; they have been taught basic strategies of communication, resilience and assertiveness and developed a shared language for talking about problems in the class and schoolyard.

Students were able to recognise and name various behaviours and then develop their own problem-solving strategies for the day-to-day interpersonal issues common to their age group.

They played the ‘Mentos’ game where they learnt to include all members in their group when discussing a particular issue. They experienced, through hands on
activities, what it is like to work as a team and prioritise needs. They have identified their passions—passions they will be pursuing in the area of sustainability.

The combination of clear instruction, student-directed goals, technology, teamwork and activities has had students excited about being in 'Sustainability Teams' from the start.

Kate Wilde (a youth worker) has been visiting our school every second Thursday to help us with our Student Action Teams. She helped us by giving us ideas and encouraged us to work co-operatively. Kate has given us ideas to think about and asked us to work out what we thought would be a good way to work better in groups and during Student Action Team activities. We played games linked to Sustainability and we had lots of fun!

Damian, Thomas, Ethan, Vincent and Nikola
St Damian’s students

She is so much fun and so is Roger. They both are so helpful because they have done this before ... Kate makes the work fun and she explains things so well ... Kate motivates us and gets us excited about the topic ... The classroom lights up when Kate comes in.

Emma, Lauren, Alice and Mikayla
St Martin’s students

Vibrant and engaging. Children listened, children learnt.

Anne (teacher)

Further support came from Judy Jack, a Student Wellbeing Education Officer with the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (CEOM), who has particular responsibility for Community Arts. She remained involved in meetings and was keen to include the Loyola College Performing Arts Department and liaised with that school. The Drama Coordinator excitedly accepted the proposal, and arranged for the Year 9 Drama class to compose and perform plays based on the concepts being pursued in the project. These students participated in the first Student Forum, listened to the primary school students as they explored issues, and transformed these into scenarios that, using Playback/Forum Theatre approaches, raised dilemmas and solutions for consideration by the schools.

The play helped me understand more about Sustainability because I learn better through seeing things rather than hearing or reading about them ... The play made the topic more interesting and made me pay more attention to the topic ... It was really interesting to see what they showed us about what might happen in the future if we are not sustainable ... There was a difference between their understanding of Sustainability and ours which was good because we learnt more.

Steph, Julian, Marcus and Matt
St Martin’s students

The anticipation was great. The children were intrigued. They weren’t sure what was going to happen. The Loyola Drama Group did not disappoint. They were very clever and entertaining.

Anne (teacher)

Whole cohort Student Action Teams

The Student Action Team approach encourages engagement in all students by offering them a sense of control over their learning, providing them with opportunities to bond with their peers, giving ‘real life’ meaning to learning by engaging them in decision-making and action on issues they value, and giving them opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking and learning.

At St Damian’s we have been looking at being sustainable. The Year 5s have been split into three groups; they are ‘wasting water’, ‘wasting electricity’ and ‘littering’. In the littering groups we have discovered in St Damian’s there is at least five kilos a day and that littering occurs throughout the school. Our action is to slowly make St Damian’s a nude food school.

Isaac, Jarrod and Connor
St Damian’s students

It has challenged teachers to include all students in these activities—in different ways, but also identifying their strengths and passions. It has enabled different voices to be heard and is transforming students into active and informed citizens.

The SAT model has helped students take more ownership over their work. It’s been great to see the students engaged and excited about addressing an issue that has an impact on them. Student Action Teams have been flexible enough to be incorporated into most curriculum areas, which helps to make student learning relevant.

Felicity (teacher)

The Student Action Teams approach to sustainability has given our students the chance to use mixed digital media to investigate the problem at hand. Our students were able to use the school’s digital cameras to document and gather evidence for their cause. After being placed into personalised teams, groups wanted to take their own initiative during lunchtimes to commence their plan of action.

Students have a great interest in Sustainability. This has allowed us to strengthen our speaking and listening programs. We have been able to conduct debates on Sustainability issues and practise listening by using talking circles and other feedback.

Gareth (teacher)

Contact

For more information, contact:
• St Martin of Tours Primary School, Rosanna
• St Damian’s Primary School, Bundooora
• St Mary’s Parish Primary School, Greensborough
• Drama Department, Loyola College, Watsonia

The whole cohort SAT theme continues on page 17
Connect is a bi-monthly practice journal that documents and supports examples of active student participation in primary and secondary schools. It provides practical examples of and resources for student participation in school governance, classroom/curriculum decision-making and implementation, and community initiatives and action.

Connect is available on subscription. All back copies are available in print format. Published since 1979 ISSN 0158-4995

Student Action Teams:
Implementing Productive Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms
Student Action Teams, as part of their school curriculum, adopt a community issue that they care passionately about, research it, decide what needs to be changed or improved and take action to achieve that.

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

ISBN 978-0-9803133-2-1; 90 pp

Reaching High:
A Program Promoting Positive Approaches to Learning Differences

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

This inspiring and exciting 120-page book documents the development and operation of the Reaching High Program. It outlines the theory and community links behind the program, and how it is built on the active and strength-based participation of students. The book includes a DVD of practical ideas. (Available at reduced price without DVD.)

First published by Connect in December 2006; 120 pp
ISBN 978-0-9803133-0-7
Switched On to Learning
Student Initiatives in School Engagement

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

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

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

ISBN 978-0-9803133-3-8; 52 pp (Limited copies available until sold out.)

Democracy Starts Here!
Junior School Councils at Work

How do we learn about citizenship and democracy?

In this 1996 book, students and teachers write about their experiences with Junior School Councils in ten Melbourne primary schools.

These are not citizens-in-waiting. They are already active and involved citizens, asserting their ability to take part in decisions about the operation of their own schools. Their experiences provide practical examples of learning how to be active and informed citizens, committed to the ideas and operation of democracy.

From these schools in Preston and Reservoir, you can learn: what Junior School Councils do, how to set up and structure a JSC, about reporting to students and others, about valuable resources and networks, and how to support Student Councils. 48 pp

Support publications available on-line

You can download PDFs of all issues except for those issues published in the last 12 months - these remain only available by subscription.

Check: research.acer.edu.au/connect or: www.asprinworld.com/Connect

Student Action Teams ‘How To’ Manual
The original Student Action Teams Manual from 2003:

‘Learning in the community’ is online and available free through the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:


Represent! Represent! is a Resource Kit for Student Representative Councils and their support teachers.

It was written and published in 2010 for the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) and is available on-line from their website.

Check: www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent
Publications available from Connect

**Foxfire**

...is a public school-based program in north Georgia, USA, in which students have documented and published oral histories of their communities since 1966. In 1972, *Foxfire* published the first book of collected articles. In visits to Australia in the early 1990s, *Foxfire* made available some copies of their publications.

**Foxfire: 25 Years**

What was it like to be fourteen and help create these Foxfire books? And what happened to the students?

In this anniversary book (published in 1991), *Foxfire*’s ninth and tenth grade students interviewed former students, who were in professions as varied as mayor, school principal, cab driver, airline pilot, editor and more.


*(Limited copies available until sold out.)*

**Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience**

This book from 1985 recounts the early story of the *Foxfire* program in northern Georgia, USA. It outlines how it came about, the principles involved (overarching truths), and the practical details of the grammar/composition course within which it was located.


*(Only 2 copies - available until sold.)*

**A Foxfire Christmas**

As an example of the processes involved in *Foxfire*, students interviewed their own grandparents, family members or community members to record and share Christmas memories and traditions of Appalachia: preparations and decorations; food and menus; gifts and Santa; serenading and other traditions.


*(Only 2 copies - available until sold.)*

**The Foxfire Book; Foxfire 9**

*Connect* has one copy each of these collections (1972 - 384 pp; 1986 - 493 pp respectively), with some cover damage. These are each available from *Connect* for postage costs.

**Students and Work**

Participants at a conference on ‘Mixes of school and work’, held in September 1985, identified a need for more examples of school/work programs already operating in schools: how they were developed and how they are administered. This publication was largely a response to those views. It was an attempt to provide a theoretical overview of mixes of school and work, identify the issues relating to such approaches and provide examples of programs that have operated in schools and been reported on in *Connect* between the years 1979 to 1985.

Peter Blunden, who edited this collection, wrote in the introduction: “There is a wide range of possibilities, many models of school and work programs that can be drawn from by schools. Hopefully this publication will be useful by presenting some of these possibilities and raising some of the issues for discussion and debate.”

The issues remain as relevant today. It is fascinating to get a glimpse of initiatives from 30 years ago.

ISBN 0-7241-3995-8; 80pp

*(Limited copies available until sold out.)*

**SRC Pamphlets**

A series of six 4-page pamphlets about Student Representative Councils was published by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria in 1988. The contents of these pamphlets have later been reproduced in issues of *Connect*, and were also used in writing of *Represent!* (see opposite).

*(Very limited number of copies of the set available until sold out.)*
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16 Connect 189:
Grade 6 Student Action Teams

St Peter’s Primary School

The experience of St Peter’s Primary School in East Bentleigh in using Student Action Team approaches to Transition (see Connect 180 and 185-6) has encouraged them to develop a range of Student Action Teams that include all their Year 6 students.

All students are regarded as student leaders. They have brainstormed possible areas for action and narrowed these down to eight topics/teams. Students then chose a team to join, applied for membership in writing (giving reasons) while in Year 5, and committed to remaining in that team for all their Year 6.

At the end of 2010, a planning and training day introduced Student Action Team ideas firstly to staff who would work with these students, and then to the Year 5 students. That day included team-building activities, as well as an introduction to both research (“what will we need to find out about our area?”) and action planning (“how will we make changes/improvements based on what we find out?”).

All teams took a Student Action Team approach – ie they included investigations and action. While all were focused on changing and improving the school, not just on students taking responsibility for areas of school operation, this was more apparent for some than others and led to a reflection on the difference between ‘Student Action Teams’ and ‘Student Responsibility Groups’ (see article in Connect 185-186, page 18 – also on the www.asprinworld.com website).

Now, midway through 2011, the teams are taking some time to reflect on what they have been doing, what they have found out, how they have been working – and what improvements will be needed in the process.

This is what the groups intended to do. There will be more information on what they are actually doing in future issues of Connect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1: Cross Arts (10 students)</th>
<th>Group 4: House Leaders (16 students - 2 boys and 2 girls from each House)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outline:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For those who plan on being involved in our school productions and/or choir;</td>
<td>• Promote team spirit and unity, run House meetings, prepare team songs and banners etc in lead up to school sports;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote event, work behind the scenes, help with props, costumes and advertising;</td>
<td>• Organise and run a Team event each term;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assist with ‘Red and Green Faces’, art displays, the fete and graduation;</td>
<td>• Foster an understanding of the history of your House;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Organise art and drama activities for Shared Play days.</td>
<td>• Prior to sporting events, set up fun skill drills, during Shared Play;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Group 2: School Assemblies (8 students)</th>
<th>Group 5: Library (8 students)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Plan for fortnightly assemblies;</td>
<td>• Book Club Co-ordination;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prepare prayer, overheads, sound system, flag raising and National Anthem;</td>
<td>• Shelving and general library housekeeping;</td>
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<td>• Introduce guest speakers etc;</td>
<td>• Laminating;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Liaise with teachers about inclusions in assemblies eg PE, sustainability, Peer Support etc;</td>
<td>• Labelling and stamping books to be catalogued;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Announce reminders;</td>
<td>• Training resources and books that interest students;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Training in use of microphone, data projector etc.</td>
<td>• Scanning;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Group 3: Peer Support (10 students)</th>
<th>Group 4: House Leaders (16 students - 2 boys and 2 girls from each House)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help younger students to:</td>
<td>• Promote team spirit and unity, run House meetings, prepare team songs and banners etc in lead up to school sports;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop new ideas for play and getting along;</td>
<td>• Organise and run a Team event each term;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Support children at shared play through active listening;</td>
<td>• Foster an understanding of the history of your House;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote the ethos and values of St Peter’s;</td>
<td>• Prior to sporting events, set up fun skill drills, during Shared Play;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote and model the principles of Restorative Justice;</td>
<td>• Promote a variety of alternate playtime games for students eg Marbles, hopscotch, skipping, elastics;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet regularly with teachers to discuss the role; plan and evaluate activities and develop ideas.</td>
<td>• Promote indoor activities such as chess or board games to be held in library on a regular basis;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assist in the running of the 20K Club.</td>
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For further information, contact Joan Carrazzo at St Peter's Primary School, East Bentleigh: JCarrazzo@spbentleigheast.catholic.edu.au

Minister Dixon to Attend VicSRC Congress

It has been confirmed that on Friday, 5th August 2011, the Minister for Education, Hon Martin Dixon, will be attending the Victorian Student Representative Council’s 6th Annual Congress from 2 - 3 pm.

This year’s theme of ‘Stand up, Speak up!’ is an exciting way to get school students involved. It is the first year that we have extended to a 3-day 2-night Congress, which gives students even more opportunity to have their voices heard! Congress runs over 5th to 7th August and is held at Oasis Campsite, Mt Evelyn. It is open to student representatives from all Victorian secondary schools. If you are interested in coming along, please have a look at our website at: www.vicsrc.org.au/events/congress

Tiffany Chapman

Frankston Environmental and Sustainability Conference

On the 25th May 2011, around 70 students from 10 local schools gathered at the Frankston High School hall to discuss and share initiatives about combating climate change. This was the student-led Frankston Environmental and Sustainability Conference.

Because of the apparent hazards and risks facing our environment, taking action is becoming a crucial issue to young people in today’s modern society. It is therefore critical that we support students and the wider community to build a sense of optimism and hope for the future, based on sound information, learning and action to address sustainability at school, in the community and at home.

The key goal of this exciting conference was to promote awareness of local environmental issues and the ways in which students can improve and develop key goals for their school’s sustainability programs.

Greg Hunt (Executive Officer of the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance), Cr Christine Richards (Frankston South West Ward Councillor), and Aidan Jago (Australian Youth Climate Coalition representative), spoke at the event. Various groups, including the Frankston City Council and Community Gardens, Australian Youth Climate Coalition, Earthwatch and Swinburne University had stalls present. Representatives from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Sustainability Victoria, and the Victorian Association for Environmental Education were also present at the Frankston Environmental and Sustainability Conference.

Kimi Pellosis
The Power of Student Participation

I want to tell you about the power of having students participate in decision making, and the potential of students to influence whole communities of learners.

Student participation is a major way to build opportunities for all students to become successful learners: confident and creative individuals who actively participate and indeed care.

If you are not listening to student voices, you are missing out. But it’s not just me who thinks so. In fact, did you know that students actually have the right to be heard?

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child 1990 states:

State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

What that means is that, as students, we have the right to express our opinions on matters that directly affect us. This is our right – but we need your support to exercise it.

And there are many good reasons why you should support us to be involved in decision making and to be heard.

Firstly, inviting students to participate in decisions benefits students.

According to the VicSRC’s Represent! Kit (a resource for students and teachers):

Student learning and school results improved in schools where students are actively represented in decision making, in particular students learning about being an active and informed citizen is improved where there are opportunities for students to experience active citizenship within the school.

But more importantly, involving young people in decision making and listening to student voice also has benefits for schools and communities.

Integrating students to assist in the decision making offers a superior outcome, which has a higher probability of being effective.

A respectful student teacher partnership encourages students, it improves the level of wellbeing, and provides a sense of safety and belonging. What’s more, it reflects well on the school. It creates a sense of pride and accomplishment and results in a shared ownership of the outcomes.

In schools, change comes from the bottom up – it’s a transformation demanded by the majority of people … and this means students. When students assist in decision making, decisions have a higher probability of being effective.

Better decisions are made if everyone who is affected by these decisions is involved in making them. That is simply logic. Both the school and student benefit.

So you may be sitting here asking: ‘Why are students’ inputs so important for the development of education?’

Let me give you an example.

Over the past decade, technology has rapidly evolved and has become a part of our everyday life. Schools have seen the potential for learning and have adapted technology into the curriculum – which is fantastic. Technology should be present and utilised in every school because it’s a great tool for stimulating and enhancing learning.
But there's a problem. Not all staff and teachers feel confident about using technology. You might be sitting here thinking that it's all good and well to incorporate technology into the classroom but what if I don't know how to use it?

**Why can't students teach teachers?**

After all we are the next generation and it's as if every instructional manual for technology is programmed into us. Together we can embrace the change and use it to the advantage of students and teachers alike.

However the technology itself is not the whole focus. It's a tool that unlocks the door to the online world and this is where the student-teacher partnership becomes really important. Students want to make use of the online world. Teachers and parents want to make sure we are safe online. We know we must behave respectfully and ethically online and we can work together in each and every school to come up with the actions that ensure this happens.

Involving us however erases the stereotypical image that it's the learners who always have to listen to the educators and that roles can't be reversed. There is also that elevated sense of status, where students are able to feel as though they are not being controlled, but rather are in control of themselves and their own learning.

**We want to have our say in a whole range of things that affect us.**

Now I am not stating that all ideas presented by students should be implemented; however they should be heard. There should be ways for students to express their ideas and, when they do take the initiative to speak up, they need to at least know that you'll be there listening.

Yes, applaud the idea, but more importantly recognise the attempt at participation. We should be recognised for our efforts, no matter the outcome.

Now there are many examples of schools that take great strides forward and are doing some amazing things – having students changing canteen menus, or campaigning to pick up rubbish, taking part in fundraisers. That certainly isn't being overlooked.

However, with that said, everyone can further improve their Student Representation and structure.

I understand that sometimes it is simply easier and necessary to make decisions, however it is essential that you communicate it to us as we have different life experiences, and – who knows – your ideas may gain support from students, with un-asked questions raised and different perspectives presented.

So **challenge us**, challenge all of us, and hear voices – but not the same voices, because we shouldn't be involved when we are needed but rather when we have something to say.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful students can change the school, because we can change the world. If we want to create a workplace and learning environment that values idealism, human connection, and real in-depth learning.

We will have to create it together. The student-teacher relationship is fundamentally important in this. **Why can't we work together?**

We can strengthen our partnership, gain and maintain respect, develop our education, and take responsibility together for making things better.

Jim Stynes is the founder of the REACH Foundation and an inspiring man. He once said some words that have resonated strongly with me:

> I truly believe that every person, especially young people, have unlimited potential and that we all have a unique voice which needs to be heard.

*Deep down under everything, we just want to be ourselves. When young people are given the opportunity to express their real selves, they can achieve whatever they want. They can have all the love, happiness and success they require.*

**Very often the process starts simply by someone believing in them.**

I ask you to believe that students can be valuable members of your learning community. I know that when I am acknowledged for meeting a high expectation, it reinforces my belief in myself; it proves that I can last through a challenge.

My confidence boosts and I feel immense satisfaction because my thoughts and opinions are being validated and considered. All students feel that way. It makes us want to try even harder in order to improve the things around us.

When you increase our sense of agency, you increase our sense of belonging. We are willing and enthusiastically wanting to create a partnership with teachers and school staff.

By giving us the opportunity, by allowing us to have a voice, and by allowing it to be truthfully heard, together we simply cannot fail.

With that said, find opportunities where students can shine and show their talents. Next time you make a decision, ask us what we think about it. We may just have an idea to improve it.

Better yet, approach that one student who never has the chance or is afraid to speak – because their voice matters too.

If we always do what we've always done, we will get what we've always got. For some of us, that is simply not enough.

Before I end, I just want to leave you with one last thought: *What would happen if we were viewed as part of the solution, rather than part of the problem?*

Elizabeth Kalas  
VicSRC Executive  
Year 12, Taylors Lakes Secondary College

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

The 6th Annual VicSRC Congress
Victoria’s Peak Representational Forum for Secondary School Students

your school your voice

CONGRESS

WHEN:
Friday 5th - Sunday 7th August, 2011

WHERE:
Oasis Camp, Mt. Evelyn
Melway Reference: 120 D3

WHO:
Year 7-12 Students

COST:
$110 for VicSRC members
$140 for non-members
(Price includes accommodation, all meals, registration & materials)
Full supervision provided

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Kate Walsh
VicSRC Coordinator
(03) 9267 3744 or 0411 679 050
coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

Tiffany Chapman
Congress Coordinator
congress@vicsrc.org.au

Further information about Congress and registration forms can be found on our website: www.vicsrc.org.au

REGISTER BY FRIDAY, 1 JULY 2011

The VicSRC is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.

June 2011 21
Students as Researchers

Using scientific methods, students actively examine schools, educational practices, and school systems that they participate in.

Possibilities for Students as Education Researchers

- Examining curricular effectiveness
- Identifying important issues among their peers
- Analysing student-adult relationships
- Co-designing school improvement research

Examples of Students as Education Researchers

These are summaries of real stories from schools across the US where students have been engaged as researchers, exploring the schools they participate in everyday.

Financial Futures

(www.datacenter.org/research/Who Runs Schools?
item: $25,000 for ‘student initiatives’.

Board of Education passed its budget for the want to be involved!” When the Poughkeepsie and gathered periodically so that students approval: “Student input should be solicited waiting: student-created data from that survey hand-tabulated and analysed data from 596 question survey that solicited opinions from Students in Poughkeepsie, New York conducted research on their district’s budget crisis as part. These are summaries of real stories from schools across the US where students have been engaged as researchers, exploring the schools they participate in.

Examples of Students as Education Researchers

Examples of Students as Education Researchers

Meaningful Student Involvement: USA

Students as Researchers

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

Education and Advocacy Project

(www.incommunityresearch.org/research/educationadvocacy.htm)

Several school districts in Connecticut are participating in a student action research program coordinated by the Youth ActionResearchInstitute. This program is a model program that engages students in identifying and researching issues that affect the quality of education in their schools and elsewhere in the state. The program, for fifth and sixth graders, has nine teachers participating who are: integrating student driven action research into their classrooms using cooperative learning methods into core curricular activities. The project’s methods and goals indicate assessing the effects of PAR on students, educators, and the overall school communities involved.

Students as Research Allies

(www.whatkidsandco.org/studentallies/pdfs/saa_finalreport.pdf)

What Kids Can Do, a nonprofit youth advocacy organisation in Providence, Rhode Island, began a program in 2003 looking to engage students as allies in schools across the United States. ‘Students as Allies’ has consequently involved hundreds of students in dozens of schools in California, Indiana, New York, and other states. More than one of their projects focuses on students engaged as researchers, and its reports are valuable for its other examples as well.

Students Searching for Success

A high school principal in Bear Valley, California wanted to explore students’ views of learning, so she started a student-research program. The group focused on the questions: “Do our school restructuring activities really make fundamental changes in the learning process? Does all of our work have an impact in the classroom?” As part of the year-long study, the student researchers participated in a twice-weekly course that focused on their work, and consequently, the students became the driving force in the data collection and analyses. Students conceived the methods used and led the data collection work. In their study, the student researchers collected data from 200 of the school’s 1,600 students. They also explored learning outside of school, how students learn best, and the school’s impacts on students learning. The story is taken from Kushman, J., Shanessey, J. (ed.) (1997). Look Who’s Talking Now: Student Views of Restructuring Schools. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory.

Separate But Unequal

(www.asby.com/2006/07/0706research.html)

For many kids, summer camp means pitching tents and listening to spooky stories around a campfire. But for 100 city students who signed on as co-researchers on a university project, summer camp was serious business. The kids – white, African American, Latino, Asian, and Afro-Caribbean, with a range of achievement levels – examined race, ethnicity, and class in their New York area high schools. At the first camp session, City University of New York researchers Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre unveiled their plan for an achievement gap study. But the students proposed a broader opportunity gap study that included student achievement as one of several ‘separate but unequal’ issues. They suggested topics the adult researchers hadn’t thought of, such as immigrant students’ school experiences and school counselors’ interactions with students of different races.

During the following school year, reports Susan Black, the kids administered nearly 10,000 surveys and analysed them by race, ethnicity, curriculum track, school location, and school size. Then they compared the survey results with additional information collected from focus groups, observations, and interviews. The student researchers didn’t set out to change the world, but they hoped their research would “inspire action and some new and creative ideas for improving schools.”

Programs for Students as Researchers

This section features organisations and programs focused on engaging students as educational researchers in schools across the US.

Students as Allies in Improving Their Schools

(www.whatkidsandco.org/studentallies/studentalliesintro.html)

What Kids Can Do worked with youth organisations in five cities across the US to engage students as they asked powerful questions about schools. Their site includes stories, resources, essays, and summaries of student researchers’ findings about student voice, relationships, school effectiveness, and more.

Youth Action Research Institute

(www.incommunityresearch.org/research/yari.htm)

YARI (formerly the National Teen Action Research Center) is a program of the Institute for Community Research, located in Hartford, Connecticut. YARI promotes the use of action research for personal, group, and community development.
Youth Action Research Group
(socialjustice.georgetown.edu/research/yarg/)

YARG, a program at Georgetown University, involves community residents in defining, researching and critically analysing the challenges facing their neighborhoods. The young people in YARG learn participatory action research methods and ethnographic techniques to better understand their surrounding community for the purpose of addressing pressing social issues.

Youth Strategy Project
(http://www.datacenter.org/programs/youth.htm)

Data Center’s youth program, located in Oakland, California, provides strategic research, consultation, and training for social, economic and environmental justice organizations. It is tailored to build the research and analytical skills of the next generation of movement leaders.

CIRCLE Youth-Led Research
(www.civicyouth.org/practitioners/guide_YLR.htm)

CIRCLE, a youth civic engagement research program at the University of Maryland, annually supports a number of student-led research projects across the nation that focus on education. Past projects have examined school culture, teaching efficacy, racism, and more.

Tools for Students as Researchers

These are actual curricula, discussion frameworks, research tools, and other activity-oriented publications focused on engaging students as researchers.

Student-Led Research on Schools: A collection of student-written research studies focusing on school. (www.soundout.org/studentresearch.html)

How to research issues at your school: [PDF] A guide to action research written for youth. (www.whatkidsascend.org/studentallies/pdfs/engagingstudentsinactionresearch/researchforaction_guide.pdf)

Sample surveys for students: [PDF] Designed by students working with What Kids Can Do: Students as Allies Project. These surveys will help you listen to student voice. (www.whatkidsascend.org/studentallies/pdfs/saa_samplesurveys_final.pdf)

A sample survey written by students: [PDF] A survey written by students with Youth in Focus in California that asks students how successful they think their schools are. (www.youthinfocus.net/pdf/andenonsurveys.pdf)

Guide to Getting Started: A short how-to from CIRCLE on creating a student-led research project. (www.civicyouth.org/practitioners/guide_YLR.html#guide)

Criteria to Assess Youth Involvement in Decision-Making: This is a powerfully comprehensive measurement of youth involvement in schools by the Canadian Association on School Health. It includes the relationship of youth involvement to the sponsoring organisation, the nature of youth involvement, the processes of youth involvement, applications of youth involvement, and evidence of youth involvement. (www.schoololife.com/cash/investigativeframework.htm)


Ladder of Student Involvement: Adam Fletcher adapted this tool from the work of Roger Hart in order to identify potential location of students throughout school decision-making. (www.soundout.org/ladder.html)

Framework for Assessing Student Voice: Prof. Michael Fielding first established this framework in 2001 for Forum. Since then, dozens of projects have used it to evaluate their efforts. (www.soundout.org/framework.html)

Student-Designed & Delivered Classroom Observation Tool: Students at Lexington High School in Massachusetts use this tool to evaluate their teachers’ classroom performance. (bestpractices.org/node/11)

Guide to Consulting Students about Schools: [PDF] From a UK-based project that studies ‘pupil’ voice in schools for students under-18 years old. (www.consultingpupils.co.uk/Consulting%20pupils.pdf)


Empowered Voices: A Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Girls: This curriculum is a project designed to reduce or prevent substance abuse and risky sexual behavior and increase school attachment through participatory action research. Published by the Institute for Community Research. (www.incommunityresearch.org/publications/empoweredvoices.html)

Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Empowering Youth: Published by the Institute for Community Research. (www.incommunityresearch.org/publications/empoweringyouth.html)

Youth Engaged in Leadership & Learning: YELL is a free curriculum provided by the J. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University. It is designed for anyone involved in youth development and leadership, particularly working in schools. (gardnercenter.stanford.edu)


Articles About Students as Researchers

These are articles from newsletters, magazines, websites, and organisations focused on engaging students as researchers in schools.

Regional Education Labs & Student Voice: SoundOut compilation of different government-funded educational research organisations’ work on student voice and involvement. (www.soundout.org/rel2.html)

Critical Voices: Researchers are beginning to turn to high schools to help design and carry out studies that examine the issues affecting students and their schools. In this study, students are both the subjects of research and the researchers themselves. (www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=02fine.h22)


Creating Community Change: Challenges and Tensions in Community Youth Research: An issue brief from the Gardner Center at Stanford University. (gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/CFY_7_02.pdf)

Youth Engaged in Leadership & Learning (Youth Mapping) annotated bibliography: An issue brief from the Gardner Center at Stanford University. (gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/CFY_7_02.pdf)

Going the Distance: Supporting Community Youth Development: Power Point presentation at the Coalition of Community Foundation for Youth 2002 Annual Conference by the Gardner Center. (gardnercenter.stanford.edu/resources/CFY_7_02.pdf)

Establishing the Importance of Youth Participation in Community Evaluation and Research: An article from the Journal of Community Youth Development. (www.cdjournal.org/2003spring/ednote_note.html)


Students as Researchers: Susan Black explores a groundbreaking project in New York City where dozens of students examine the experiences, opinions, and ideas of student about dozens of issues in their educational experiences today. (www.uoby.com/2006/07/07/research/)


Books/Chapters about Students as Researchers

This section features books or chapters in books that specifically address engaging students as researchers in schools.

Silenced Voices and Extraordinary Conversations: Re-Imagining Schools, Wiles, L. & Fine, M. (2003). This book is a collection of papers that examines many social justice issues in public education. The first section is a collection of papers mostly from the 1980s that explores the active ‘silencing’ that plagues students of color and low-income students in American schools. The second section is co-written with students, exploring their perspectives and the research these student researchers have conducted to provide powerful lessons for pre-service and experienced teachers.


Students Teaching, Teachers Learning. Branscombe, A., Giovannini, D., Schwartz, J. (1992). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/ Cook. This book focuses on shared inquiry. The research projects detailed in these chapters show how classroom dynamics change and more active learning takes place for both teacher and student when collaboration is involved. The projects here range from elementary through graduate school in both rural and urban, public and private settings.
What does it mean to be an 'Outward Facing School'? And what possibilities exist for students leading in enabling a school to be more ‘outward facing’?

Discussions have been continuing amongst some educators – from systems, schools and universities – about the concept of an ‘outward facing school’ (see the editorial, Connect 176, April 2009). The difference has been noted between a school that ‘looks out the window’ and one that ‘takes steps out the door’.

In the first case, a school can be a location for ‘community studies’ and for using community facilities. It can form links with community groups that support the work of the school – though these links are often on the school’s terms. That’s one image of the ‘outward facing school’.

Another more challenging image is of a school that moves from its positions of control and ‘safety’ to take on difficult and often (though not always) contentious issues within and as part of its community. And this is a form of ‘outward facing’ in which students can take a leading role, as part of their studies.

What might that look like in practice? What are the ‘hooks’ that might enable a school to take those steps beyond its ‘fortress walls’?

It seems that when we think about students leading in this process, we can recognise and report on and imagine the same practical approaches that we have been documenting under the title of ‘student participation’ for some time eg years ago (#116, April 1999), Connect carried an article on ‘Curriculum Approaches Enhancing Effective Student Participation’.

(The original article included many practical examples here. They are available in the on-line version: see page 28 for access information.)

Moving Outwards
As well as the examples mentioned here (and look through back issues of Connect for more detail on their documentation), there have been many other student participatory approaches developed internally within schools. For example, there are many stories about Students as Researchers, students tutoring, students developing curriculum resources, student responsibility groups and so on. And then there are the representative examples of student participation: Student Councils and various other forms of student organisations. These are all valuable.

However, they can all be seen as being ‘inward looking’. Conceptually, we can see the overlap of ideas:

Moving activities from being ‘inward looking’ to ‘outward facing’: what do we need?

Firstly, we need to commit to consciously seeking opportunities to establish such links and extensions. As we are involved, within schools, in initiatives that enable students to be active learners and which create real and important roles for them, we need to be thinking all the time about how we can take this initiative further. We need to be looking outside. This is a very similar first step to the step required to move from ‘student-centred learning’ to ‘active student participation’. So, for example, if we are studying about healthy foods, the opportunistic step is to ask ourselves (and the students):

“What can we do with this knowledge? How will we use it now?”

Secondly, we need to be aware of, involved in, and actively seeking to build various forms of community alliances. We should be seeking to link our work within schools, with our community’s concerns. So, for example, if we are aware that the local Council is developing a ‘sustainability policy’ or strategy, then we can approach the appropriate Council officers and ask how we (the school or class) can be involved. When, for example, the Council was seeking submissions for the development of a local park, teachers approached the consultant and suggested participation of students in the local research study.

Thirdly, we can build such linkages and contacts into active challenges and commissions for the students: about the development of resources, about the conduct of research, about peer education, about the creation of media. The use of such a ‘commission’ can easily move the school to be ‘outward facing’, but can also provide strong motivation for learning and for engagement of students with real and important tasks within their community.

Finally, we need to be ask ourselves all the time: instead of doing this myself, how can I support students to do it? That includes involving students from the start, in visioning what an ‘outward facing school’ might look like. It is, after all, their communities.

There may be many other examples and strategies that we could use. We would be most interested to hear of your ideas and experiences.

Roger Holdsworth

A full version of this article was first published in Connect 177, June 2009. It contained many concrete examples, which can be found on-line in the original version. It is reprinted here in association with the international Look Out! - Partnerships for Learning: Outward Facing Schools in the 21st Century Conference in Melbourne, 20-21 June 2011.
Imagine a group of primary school students spread throughout Victoria, working together to implement major projects, to provide feedback to organisations about policy and other new initiatives being implemented, whilst learning about citizenship and decision making.

Sounds impressive. At present though, all we can do is imagine, because such an opportunity for primary school students does not exist.

Since 2001, secondary students have had the VicSRC to speak and act on behalf of secondary students in schools throughout Victoria. Each year, the VicSRC holds a Congress where students are able to put forward motions that are voted upon and then implemented by a Student Executive throughout the following year.

The primary equivalent to the VicSRC Congress would be Frenzy, which Second Strike has facilitated since 2008. Like the VicSRC Congress, a key feature of Frenzy is a Congress sitting. Students who attend are placed into discussion groups where they form motions to be tabled before the Congress. Motions are then moved in the Congress, debated and put to a formal vote. At each Congress, primary school students have moved and passed a motion for the creation of a state student representative group. However, without a student executive or organisation to lobby for action, many of these motions have failed to come to fruition.

VISTA has a number of primary school SRC teachers as members and they too have been asking about an equivalent organisation for primary students.

The VISTA executive is therefore leading the charge in establishing a VicJSC (Victorian Junior School Council).

Whilst these ideas are still very much under development, the initial proposal would see membership open to Government, Independent and Catholic primary schools across Victoria. Students would utilise on-line tools such as web 2.0 sites and on-line conferencing to connect with other students and implement the recommendations put forward at Frenzy. The use of on-line tools would eliminate the need for travel and would enable students in regional and remote locations the opportunity to participate.

The creation of a VicJSC would provide primary school students with a united voice. It would harness the collective power and enthusiasm of primary school students and provide them with an opportunity to focus on specific issues and activities.

A VicJSC network would also allow other students from across the state to learn about the workings of other Student Councils and improve the operations and workings of their own Student Council at their school. It would provide the education system and other organisations with a reference group to consult with when making major decisions and, in turn, provide primary school students with the opportunity to understand, practise and experience democracy in a real-life context.

It’s time that the voice of our young people was heard, but more importantly, it’s time for them to be given an opportunity to turn their ideas into action.

If you would like to receive further correspondence about becoming involved with the VicJSC, please e-mail us at vista@srcteachers.org.au with your contact details.

MEETING MINUTES MADE EASY:

I was made aware of a great free online resource the other day called minutes.io (http://minutes.io) The site allows you to generate minutes from a meeting using an on-line template.

After entering the heading, you then need to enter the details of those present. Minute.io allows for sub-headings/topics down the side and breaks these into categories of TO DO, OKAY, INFO, and IDEA. After the meeting, the program allows you to print off your minutes, e-mail your minutes to those who attended or publish the link for the minutes to a website for SRC members or others to access.

The major drawback was that the website didn’t load with Internet Explorer, the main web browser used in schools. Those wanting to use it would need to access the site through an alternative browser such as Google Chrome, Firefox or Safari. However, for those looking for a template or easy way for students to take minutes, this site would be a great starting point.

Scott Duncan, VISTA President; Cranbourne East Primary School
News and Reviews

Democracy & Education

Democracy & Education is a long-standing education journal moving in a new direction. For the last two years, we have been in hiatus, working to refocus the journal on scholarly issues, engage a new corps of scholars in this conversation, and rework our format to accommodate the deeply engaged dialog we believe is critical to any democracy and to all forms of education.

Our first issue in the new format is available now, and we invite you to explore at:
http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home

Our Focus
The mission of Democracy & Education is to provoke rigorous, open, and inclusive engagement with the challenges of educating youth in the pre-K-12 age span for active participation in a democratic society. The journal seeks to support and sustain conversations that take as their focus the conceptual foundations, social policies, institutional structures, and teaching/learning practices associated with democratic education.

The Value of Ideas
Because we value the open exchange of ideas, Democracy & Education is a fully open access journal: our content is available free to everyone. We hope you will explore our first open-access issue online.

Engagement at Our Core
Each issue contains five to six 'conversations', each of which include a Feature Article and Responses. Feature articles present issues and arguments related to democratic education; responses extend the conversation about the feature article's core concerns, and can consist of critiques, elaborations, examples, alternate perspectives, or other forms of engagement. We see this kind of sustained, public engagement as crucial to knowledge formation and dialogue in a democracy.

Inaugural Issue
We are pleased to present work by leading scholars including: Nel Noddings on schooling for democracy (responses from Diane Reay and Ron Glass/Kysa Nygreen), Carrie Nolan and Sarah Stitzlein on defining hope (response by Kathy Hyttten), and Jason Irizarry with an ethnographic study of Latino youth engaged in participatory action research (response by Anjale Welton), among many others.

Submit an Article
We welcome conventional scholarly essays (8,000 words) as well as responses in essay (4,000 words) or alternate forms, such as edited videos or artwork. All submissions are peer reviewed. You can submit articles at:
http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home

The Editors of Democracy & Education
Scott Fletcher, Executive Editor, Lewis & Clark (Portland, OR)
Liza Finkel, Editor, Portland State University (Portland, OR)
PJ Nelsen, Editor, Appalachian State University (Boone, NC)

Democracy & Education is a journal for people who can't imagine two more important things

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:
• 28th July • 1st September
• 20th October • 24th November

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

Anyone may submit an original article to be considered for publication in Connect provided he or she owns the copyright to the work being submitted or is authorised by the copyright owner or owners to submit the article. Authors are the initial owners of the copyrights to their works, but by successfully submitting the article to Connect, transfer such ownership of the published article to Connect on the understanding that any royalties or other income from that article will be used to maintain publication of Connect.

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.

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:

Inspire (DEECD, Melbourne, Vic) Issues 4, 5; May, June 2011
NAB Schools First 2010 Public Report (NAB Schools First, Melbourne, Vic) 2011
Parents Voice (Parents Victoria Inc., Brunswick, Vic) Vol 38 Issue 2; April 2011
Restorative Practices in Catholic School Communities (CEOM, East Melbourne, Vic) kit; 2011
Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 5 No 2; April 2011
TLN Journal (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 18 No 1; Autumn 2011
YAPRap (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) June-July 2011
Youth Studies Australia (ACYs, Hobart, Tas) Vol 30 No 2; June 2011

International:

Education Alliance Magazine: Multicultural Education issue (International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes, Copenhagen, Denmark) #5; January 2011

Urgent: Renewal Puzzle and Query

Connect can accept EFT payment of subscriptions – e-mail and ask us for bank account details. However if paying this way, please make sure you notify us of your renewal! We recently received EFT payment tagged as ‘Custom House ULC 4747’, but have no record of whose renewal payment this is. So we’re probably sending you an erroneous renewal notice with this issue! Please let us know - preferably by e-mail and identifying the amount - so we can credit your renewal.

Friends of Connect

By subscribing at a higher rate, the following have helped keep Connect going. We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following contribution since the last issue of Connect:

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Helen Butler

Smiths Gully (Vic)

Is Your Connect Subscription Up-to-date?

The number on your Connect label tells you the issue with which your subscription expires. Please renew promptly - renewal notices cost us time and money!
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/