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This Issue:

I admit! This issue got out of hand a little! It was going to be a normal sized issue focusing on the learnings from the whole cohort Student Action Teams in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, but all these other fascinating articles came along.

So what you have here is a bonus 36-page issue of Connect - and it’s not even Christmas or holiday reading time yet! I hope that you have time to digest it all – because there are many fascinating articles here.

The issue starts with some great advice and images from primary school students, their teacher and a University colleague. Here the students are involved in ‘Student Voice’ conferences – and three of these are reported on here.

The peak student bodies in NSW and Victoria report on recent events: the outcomes of the 2011 NSW State SRC Conference (and the resolutions ranked within its Big Ideas session), its press coverage in regional papers, the NSW Award of Excellence for Learning for Sustainability to the NSW State SRC, and the VicSRC’s consultations with and submissions to Inquiries on Science and Mathematics Participation and The Schooling Workforce. Rural Youth Ambassadors have also been appointed in Victorian rural schools and are working closely with the VicSRC.

The long article that forms the ‘centre’ of this issue summarises reflections from a large ‘whole cohort’ Student Action Team project around Environmental Sustainability, conducted in three primary schools and a secondary college. Here students and teachers talk about what was important about this approach, what was learnt about the processes and what the continuing outcomes have been for their schools. There are some fascinating insights here – together with descriptions of innovative ‘learning walks’ and family involvement.

Student Action Teams aren’t occurring just in Australia: an article from Lebanon reports on a similar ‘students as researchers’ approach within a school there, and SoundOut’s Adam Fletcher continues the series around Meaningful Student Involvement by summarising examples of students as education evaluators.

Enjoy! But also plan to share your initiatives in another big issue in early December.

Roger Holdsworth

Deadline for material: end of November, 2011

Next Issue: #192: December 2011
This year we continued our exciting project with Melbourne University’s pre-service teachers. This involved us attending some of the Masters of Education tutorials and explaining to the adults what experiences we want at school and also how we learn best. During these tutorials, the pre-service teachers got to experience our views of school, education and the way we relate to our friends.

The main objective of this project was to provide the student teachers with our perspectives on teaching, as we are experts on our own learning. We think these workshops have helped the pre-service teachers in their preparation to make kids’ classrooms enjoyable places to be.

We’re really happy that children in the future will be able to experience the benefits of the workshops we participated in.

In conclusion ...

• We loved going on the tram to the Uni
• We loved hanging out at the café at the Uni
• We loved working in a different environment outside our school

BUT MOST OF ALL WE LOVED BEING IN CHARGE OF THE ADULTS!!!

Written by Tania Rivett’s students from St Margaret Mary’s Primary School as part of the Learning Partnerships Program 2011
Be Available for Kids who need Help

Don't be too mean to your kids because they will think my teacher is mean and she hates me.

Take your lessons outside because learning in a FUN way makes children work effectively.

Give us a choice about the work we do.

Give students time to think and work.

If a child does not understand the question, try to teach him in a different way. Do not just shout the same instruction at him.
The Learning Partnerships Program has acted as a catalyst for my students to reflect on their optimal learning environment and express their opinions in relation to effective pedagogy. As the children act as mentors to the pre-service teachers during these workshops, this program has also provided an opportunity for the children to have a voice that is both heard and valued within a powerful context.

As a member of our school leadership team, this project has given me a valuable insight into the expectations primary students have of school staff and the different styles of curriculum children feel they best engage with. As a classroom teacher, this experience has continued to connect me with individual learning styles of my students and it has been exciting to see their confidence grow as a result of their experiences at Melbourne University.

What makes an effective teacher?

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The Learning Partnerships Program

This program is comprised of drama based activities, which together act as a discussion forum. Strategies such as ‘freeze frames’ and ‘think, pair, share’ are used to stimulate conversations. The Learning Partnerships Program can be used with students or adults of any age and this program does not require specialist drama training for either the facilitator or the participants. Similarly to programs such as ‘Circle Time’, in preparing for these workshops students must understand and value the following statement of protocol, which in itself has formed part of our Values Education Program. For example:

- There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers to questions asked during the workshops; our aim is to explore, discuss and reflect on our personal feelings.
- If a question makes you feel uncomfortable you don’t have to answer it.
- Everyone has equal right to share their thoughts and feelings.

The activities used in the Learning Partnerships Program act as framework for contemporary learning and teaching. The students learn ‘by’ doing the activities but also learn the selected content ‘through’ the activities.

On the opening page of this article, two of my students reflect on their visits to the classes at Melbourne University, and on the next page (p 6), Bern Murphy outlines how this program operates there. The cartoons that surround our reflections show some of the lessons that our students want to convey to beginning teachers. These are the experts providing valuable advice – and also thinking about how they, themselves, learn.

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Learning Partnerships

The partnership between The University of Melbourne and St Margaret Mary’s has continued in 2011. In this ‘learning partnership’, students from the school undertake training to facilitate workshops for students in the Masters of Teaching in both primary and early years pre-service training.

In the subject Social and Professional Contexts, student participation is explored both in lectures and tutorials. Roger Holdsworth provides an inspiring lecture on Student Voice and this is followed up with Year 3, 4, 5 or 6 students from St Margaret Mary’s providing the action. In one of the tutorials, the school students come to the university to lead a workshop. In this class, the ratio of primary school to University student is usually about one to one. This year the school students ran five workshops – for all the groups – and in some cases a follow-up workshop was held back at the school where the Year 5 and 6 students hosted the program. In these workshops, the students explored aspects of student voice including the important advice that young people have to offer to beginning teachers about what makes a ‘good one’. Interestingly, their definition of a good teacher is first and foremost that of a person who cares about their students and who is fair in their approach.

The partnership has now seen St Margaret Mary’s students who started when they were in either Year 3 or 4 continue their participation in Year 5 or 6 where they have become the ‘experts’ who help in the peer training of any new recruits. Some of the students have gone on to secondary schools where they hopefully have experiences to continue these skills! While the University students don’t get to see this aspect of watching young people grow and develop in confidence, it is something that is discussed in follow-up classes.

The messages that beginning teachers receive from the students about how to work with young people, or about behaviour management strategies that they find effective, are important. However, from our point of view, the modeling of the program as an authentic way to ‘do’ student participation is even more important. The beginning teachers see a model that is inclusive of all students and where all students are the leaders, not just a chosen few. They also get to explore strategies about how to do this in a school setting.

As the coordinator of the subject, I am constantly surprised at how much the University students say they gain from participating in the process. These students are in their second year of the course and spend quite a bit of time in schools, so the concept of being in an environment with young school children is not new. However seeing young people in charge of a group of unknown adults is, seemingly, a new experience. In feedback to the University, the students often say they get more out of the session with the school students than the rest of the course! Digging deeper than this, they say that the powerful component is seeing how quite timid young people can participate in the program when they feel well supported by their own peers and teachers, and in a setting where they know that what they are doing is valued by the adults who they are working with.

Bern Murphy
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JSC Congresses 2011
Preliminary Report

The Eastern, Western and Northern Metropolitan regions of Melbourne have now all hosted a JSC Congress in 2011. The Congress is a collaboration between Second Strike and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to offer Junior School Councils in Victoria’s primary schools an opportunity to debate the pressing issues facing students, and to vote on proposals that address those issues. In order to participate at Congress, the students must first conduct a research survey amongst their students at school so that, when they stand up in the parliamentary style Congress, they can truly claim to be representatives.

The Eastern Region and Western Region both focused their research questions on the topic of 21st Century Learning: what should it look like, what technology will do and should do for education. Northern Region considered issues of the Environment and how to reduce the negative impact of humans.

The formal session of Congress is a Parliamentary style debate where only current primary school students may speak, move motions and vote. The seriousness of the occasion was matched in each Congress by the seriousness with which the students considered their comments and valued their vote. The resolutions of Congress showed a well considered call from students in primary schools for change and a commitment to being part of that decision-making process.

Student Comment:

“During the Formal Congress, some of us got up to put forward our motions. Other students had the chance to ask questions about the motions and to support or oppose the motion. At the end of each motion, the members of the congress voted for or against the motions.

“Some of the motions put forward included ‘providing bigger lockers’, ‘providing surveillance cameras in schools’, ‘unbanning rugby during lunchtime’, ‘not having composite grades for 5s and 6s’.

“Participating in the Junior School Congress gave us the confidence to speak in front of different people, meet new people. It gave us a chance to have our say about how we can improve our school and learning in the 21st Century.

Where to from here:

“We would like to take the skills we learnt during the Congress and share them with other students. We plan to run workshops similar to those run at the Congress and ‘Peer Teach’ other students. We would like to survey the students and get their ideas on how we can improve our school and then use our skills to organise events throughout the year.”

Lucy 5A, Naomi 5B, Abbey 6A, Gabby 6B, Priyanka 6C, Sam 7A, Cedy 7B, Briannan 7C, Michael 7D, Billie 7E

More information will be available in the official Congress Report that will be out soon. The next Congress is on October 25th in Wangaratta, before we take over the State Parliament House on November 14th for a State-wide JSC Congress to bring it all together.

For more information, contact David Mould, Director of Second Strike on: 03 9853 0600 or info@second-strike.com
A team is a group of people who work together and include everyone.

Team work is a group of people who let everyone join in.

Team work is when you have a goal to complete.

To make a good team you need to follow the 4Bs and have a goal. It is also when your group have at least one of the 4Es and who include everyone with their ideas.

Team work is when all group members work together.
How do Student Action Team approaches differ from Inquiry Learning approaches that exist in many schools? How do students and teachers regard these approaches: what works and what challenges them? What do we learn from the process?

These are some of the questions that were considered at the end of a one-term Student Action Team project on the topic of Environmental Sustainability, was undertaken by all the Grade 5 classes in three primary schools in Melbourne’s northern suburbs in Term 2, 2011 (see Connect 189, June 2011: pages 9-12). This further account is of students’ and teachers’ reflections and evaluation at the start of Term 3.

Funding for the approach was received from the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program (AGQTP) through the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, and hence there was an expectation that the approach would explore the implications of Student Action Teams for quality learning and teaching. The funding enabled the employment of two consultants to work with the teachers and students and covered expenses involved in professional development and inter-school student forums.

The project lasted throughout Term 2, 2011, with preparation for teachers in Term 1. The final Student Forum occurred early in Term 3.

Students formed into 12 Student Action Teams within their classes in each school. There were usually three teams in each of four classes. The student leaders - one from each team – met at three inter-school Student Forums to prepare, share, plan and celebrate. Students undertook research, planning and action initiatives as part of their Inquiry Units within the curriculum.

A teacher at one school summarised the processes:

“At our school, the students looked at waste: wasting water, wasting paper and wasting electricity. They were able to survey parents, students, teachers, auxiliary staff, maintenance staff and cleaners. From their research, they identified the main areas of concern. From this stage, they had to decide how to go about making an improvement to the waste situation. They chose a variety of ways: from presentations to staff, students, colouring competitions, monitoring of particular areas, short movies, songs to send a message.”

The following evaluation comments were made by the student leaders at the final Student Forum (30 responses received), and also by two whole classes of students following this (36 responses from one group; a combined set of discussed responses from another group). In addition, approximately ten teachers responded to a different set of evaluation questions at the end of the project.

Students:
Overall Responses
Both student leaders and students in classes were very positive about the project, rating it as ‘brilliant’ or ‘very good’. The main reasons given were in terms of the public achievement of project outcomes and the feedback received:

“My group got a lot done and we got really good reports on it.”
“We were successful in getting to our goal.”
“All the teachers said that our work was fantastic and we are noticing a difference!”
“Working towards achieving a goal.”
“We made a difference.”

Many students also referred to the relationships within groups:

“We got to know each other well and worked as a team.”
Group leaders tended to be positive about such relations, while students within the classes were more mixed in their responses:

“We still needed to fight less.”

“Too much arguing.”

Students generally said that the project had made a large impact on them in terms of their awareness of and learning about environmental issues:

“I learnt lots of things about sustainability. It made me aware!”

“A huge impact on my learning and my work!”

“I think it really made me realise that I need to try and help the environment.”

on their environmental behaviour:

“I’m telling everyone to look after the environment and I’m doing it.”

“This project has made a huge impact on me. I am starting to use less water and energy, and I am even walking to school every day.”

and more generally on their exercise of responsibility for their learning:

“It let me be able to work by myself”

“I now try my hardest at home and at school.”

and their realisation that they could make a difference:

“It made a pretty good impact because we really made a difference.”

It is interesting to note that the students in the grades were, overall, more positive about the impact on their environmental behaviours than were the student leaders.

Students in both groups were also positive about the impact that they felt they had made on environmental issues, many citing specific examples (less water and energy wastage, recycling, rubbish reduction, vegetable gardens etc), while others made more general statements:

“This is great because we are all aware of the problem.”

Some thoughtfully noted that they had made little difference in the short-term, but were positive about the longer-term impact of their work, through raised consciousness of the issues

“It probably made people think differently.”

“Lots of students trying to make a difference – something.”

A very small minority said they had had no impact.

**Difficulties**

Students generally identified the teamwork involved in the project as its most difficult aspect. Team leaders were more aware and critical of this than were class members:

“Cooperating as a team.”

“Sharing work out in group: being frustrated over all work being piled on you.”

“Trying to get them to listen to my ideas because they kept on yelling out ideas.”

“At times we weren’t working together.”

Class members tended to emphasise the difficulties involved with the team tasks (making plans, deciding on an issue, carrying out research and so on):

“The play – because we all had different ideas.”

“Getting our goal and figuring how to do and what we are going to do.”

“Choosing a goal and task allocation.”

“Trying to find everyone a job.”

Other areas of concern included reporting, presenting and public speaking (for both leaders and team members):

“Getting ready to perform at assembly.”

“Presenting on the night because I get stage fright.”

the technical issues:

“Technical difficulties with our movie.”

and getting responses from others:

“Getting replies back from our challenge.”

At the final Student Forum, students were asked to nominate school actions and approaches under six headings. These were some of their responses:

1. **An action that had a quick impact:**
   - The Prep challenge and the parent role play at St Martins; getting the whole school to have nude food containers, as this involved parents, students and the whole community
   - St Mary’s got the teachers to turn off lights
   - There was improvement in the use of toilet paper at St Damian’s

2. **An action that could easily be done elsewhere**
   - The walking to school program at St Mary’s: everyone understood it and you could see other people walking. They used humour and true facts to get their message through
   - St Damian’s showed that it’s really easy to get students involved, especially if you have prizes; stopping people wasting paper can be done at any school
   - Reducing waste of electricity in classrooms (leaving computers, lights and heaters on) can be tackled anywhere by keeping watch on teacher and student behaviour

3. **An action with the biggest long-term impact**
   - The vegetable patch at St Mary’s is going to be there forever
   - Nude Food at St Damian’s will become a habit and everyone will start doing it – especially if students buy Nude Food boxes: they will end up using them every day
   - One group at St Martin’s made bins for every classroom with sections for paper, waste etc

4. **An action that involves most people**
   - Water waste at St Mary’s was for the whole school
   - The Nude Food at St Martin’s and St Damian’s involved parents, students and teachers

5. **An action that clearly came from the research**
   - All the movies and lessons at St Damian’s came from their research.
   - The energy group at St Martin’s did truckloads of research and the action was based on that; they showed and explained all their information clearly and it looked like they spent a lot of time researching.
   - At St Mary’s, the news reports had a lot of facts from research

6. **An action that taught people about the environment**
   - At St Damian’s, the Nude Food and Wasting Toilet Paper groups educated children in Prep to 3 and Grades 4 to 6 by movies and class lessons.
   - St Mary’s have lots of posters hung up around the school
   - At St Martin’s there was a forum for all Year 5 parents and students
   - All schools: we are sure that everyone educated their school in some way!
Enjoyment
On the other hand, when teams worked well, this was an identified area of enjoyment with the project for both leaders:

“Working as a team.”
“Having a great team.”
“Working well together.”
“Sharing with others.”
and students generally:

“Working with people I don’t usually work with.”
“Working together and making new friends.”
“Meeting new people – it was so fun.”
However, the main enjoyment came from achieving the hands-on tasks of the project and presenting these to others:

“Doing our action as it was better than doing worksheets.”
“Doing the lesson and puppet show – educating.”
“Definitely the play: it ended up awesome.”
“On Tuesday night, getting a lot of good feedback from the parents.”
Some students also particularly enjoyed the sense of making a difference:

“The fact that we’ve helped the environment.”

Students were also asked to rank project enjoyment on a scale from 1 to 10; leaders’ responses ranged from 5 to 10, with an average of 8.9 (modes at 9 and 10); class responses ranged from 8 to 10, also with an average of 8.9 (but modes at 8 and 10).

Learning
Not surprisingly, both student leaders and class members identified knowledge about environmental sustainability as the main things learnt:

“I learnt loads about the environment and how to look after it.”
“Ways to recycle grey water; the bigger you are, the bigger your carbon footprint.”
“We learnt what the word ‘sustainability’ means and why we should protect the environment.”
A lot of that learning was very practical: about appropriate behaviour:

“Not to take our world for granted; how to save energy, water, paper and so on; the three Rs: reduce, reuse, recycle.”
“If you compost, you stop a lot of rubbish going to landfill.”
Other learnings were identified: about teamwork:

“How to work in a team well.”
“Working as a team; working with others that I don’t work with.”
about capacity to make a difference (agency):

“Even though we are school kids, we can still make a difference.”
“Even 6 people can make a little difference to the world.”
and the development of personal attributes:

“I learnt that you have to work out another plan.”
“Self-confidence.”

As was done for enjoyment, students were asked to rank the amount of learning on a scale from 1 to 10. Student leaders again provided responses from 5 to 10, with average of 9.0 (and mode of 10), while class students also ranked learning between 5 and 10 with an average of 8.2 (modes at 7, 8 and 9).

At St Martin of Tours PS, Rosanna, a parent forum run by the students provided a great opportunity for the grade 5s to celebrate all the hard work they did in their Student Action Teams on Sustainability. The support from the teaching staff was reflected in the quality of the students’ displays. The night was a great success, with many parents and families attending to share the great work achieved throughout our Term 2 Project.

The evening began with a presentation by Andrew Hinchliffe from Yarra Valley Water, which was organised by one of the Action Teams called ‘The Green Machine’. He spoke about the Metropolitan Water Industry, Next Generation Water Services and Grey Water and Water Efficiency, which not only gave our students further insight into addressing water wastage, but also provided parents with information relevant to saving water in their homes.

Kate Wilde from The Workshop also shared many valuable insights on Student Action Teams through her entertaining and engaging manner.

As a result of our project, we feel that we have inspired our school to look more seriously at Sustainability Issues within the curriculum. The Grade 2 students are helping to design a pond within the new section of the school and the Grade 6 students are investigating ways of Protecting Our Planet and creating a future that we want.

Another achievement we can be really proud of is the action of one of the teams which, with the support of the Parents and Friends Association, is raising money to purchase water saving time flow taps and have enlisted the voluntary services of a plumber to install these in the school. Two other groups won an Energy Savers award from Origin Energy for the DVD they produced on Energy Saving Ideas. Also one of the fathers at the school is making a set of recycling bins for every grade in the school, and we are taking part in a Nude Food Day and a Walk to School Day in October.

One action group produced a role play for junior grades on ways of dealing with rubbish in the school, while another made DVDs about saving water, others produced Web Pages with relevant information on water wastage issues, surveyed families and students on Energy and Water usage or provided information on how to start up Compost Bins. Lessons were produced for other grades in the school and times were negotiated with teachers so that class time wasn’t interrupted.

When we plan our inquiry units now, we think about the changes or the differences we can make, as a result of the unit of work.

It is now almost an expectation on the students’ behalf that we use this approach to make our learning more meaningful so that what they are doing is worthwhile and has an impact on their community.
To conclude and clearly demonstrate the richness of learning that occurred during the Student Action Teams, and collate students understanding of the process, St Mary’s teachers and students prepared a Learning Walk for the community.

Our goal was to empower students in leading others through their learning journey from beginning to end. In doing this, students verbalised their learning and reinforced their own understandings in preparing to share their knowledge and experiences with a live audience. This all took place in our MacKillop Learning Centre - a magnificent open area, which was utilised to implement the Learning Walks. In this learning space the students organised a cyclic exhibition with different entry points and diverse activities, which explicitly simulated the steps taken in the Action Research. The process clearly showed personalised learning as students explained movement throughout the SAT, with some stages requiring assistance and scaffolding in order to achieve set goals, whereas others were quickly completed and the teams moved on to the action and evaluation stages.

In preparing for this activity, students brainstormed the stages involved in the SAT and then chose which area they wanted to explicitly present on the Learning Walk. Students were extremely creative and chose to work on various items such as a live game show, taped interviews, and multi-modal presentations using Photostory and Smile Box. Some students created structures and models, flow charts, surveys and pamphlets. One group even produced their own documentary using Movie Maker and Pivot Animation. The groups were challenged to work together to present relevant and entertaining information, which in turn reflected the learning that had occurred during the SAT.

As the students had already been working together in the research and action stages, they were familiar with expectations, and this assisted the reflective task being compiled quickly and with renewed enthusiasm as all the ground work had been previously covered. At this stage the students understood the value of teamwork, voicing their opinions respectfully and organising themselves to complete tasks in the allocated time. All these extremely important skills were discussed and developed during the SAT. The valuable sessions with Kate Wilde were documented by the students and they have translated these skills into their learning this term while working on a Health and Well-Being Unit.

The Learning Walk was an engaging celebration that clearly demonstrated the value of Student Action Teams. The parents, teachers and community members were impressed and made positive comments about the students’ knowledge, their ability to answer questions and refer to resources in the community. Students and teachers in other levels have been motivated in trialing SAT and this process is now being adapted to facilitate and further develop student directed learning in action teams at St Mary’s.

The students glowed with pride as they presented their viewpoints and knowledge. The depth in understanding of Sustainability was recognised as solid and one that permeated into family life. Parents have commented on the discussions at home and the fact that students can make a difference if they are given the opportunity and support!

Gabriella Leone

Students reflecting on the processes of Student Action Teams

Differences

Students were asked how working in Student Action Teams differed from other ways of working with their schools.

The student leaders mainly identified responses around the applied or action-based approaches. Some of these comments were very specific and insightful:

“We got to take action.”
“We normally sit in our classroom to learn, but now we can teach the other kids about what we know.”
“It was very different, because instead of going on excursions and writing facts about the environment, we did something for the environment.”
“It’s a matter of saving the environment, not failing a test. I like the idea of this project.”
“Because we actually got to do it and make a difference, instead of learning about it.”

There were similar responses from the other students, though perhaps less specific:

“The more hands-on approach was better and more enjoyable.”
“We had to make an action in our team.”
“We actually make a difference to what we’re learning about.”
“When we were learning, we were teaching.”

Associated with this was the idea of responsibility:

“It gave you the chance to do it by yourself.”
“You had to research but then you did things, not teachers.”
“Instead of the teachers telling us to do, we got to decide what to do.”
“We had more freedom.”
“All up to us.”
“Taking a challenge”

the size and scope of the project:

“Usually we don’t work this long on something.”
“We used WOW factors.”
“This is pretty bigger than normal work.”

and the chance to work with others outside the classroom or school:

“You would meet other people and you would want to do it.”
“We got a lot out of it and learnt a lot of things and worked with other classes.”

The other main response about difference was that this approach involved working in groups. Classroom students in particular identified this as a difference:
“It was different because we don’t work in teams all the time.”
"Usually you work by yourself, but in SAT we worked as a group.”
“We were with our friends – it was a better way of learning.”

Not surprisingly, some student leaders identified the inter-school forums as a difference:
“You got to work with students from different schools.”
but this was not mentioned as often as one might expect.

Many students identified generally that this was a ‘fun’ way to learn.

**Improvements**

Finally, the students were asked about what they would suggest should be done differently next time. Many simply said ‘nothing’:
“I think we could do nothing differently because I think it all went great – everything was perfect.”

Most, however, criticised their own effort and focused on improvements in their personal responsibility:
“I’d make sure we put more effort in and do extra things and have more ideas.”
“i would think our actions through more thoroughly.”
“Not get annoyed when we practice something over and over.”

Many suggested improvements in what they actually did:
“I wouldn’t have done the home challenge because it didn’t really work out.”

Where they did critique project organisation and operation, they suggested having more time:
“Maybe have more time to do action.”

choosing a different topic (either overall, or within each small group):
“Choose a different topic to work with.”

choosing groups in different ways:
“Maybe we could pick our groups because I had some people who I found it hard to work with.”
“I would make it a whole class as a team.”
“Choose different team members.”
“Larger teams – we only had three members.”
or being more organised:
“Not changing the date, time and place all the time.”
“Not do everything at the last minute.”

**Teachers:**

**Overall Responses**

Staff generally responded that the Student Action Team process had been a positive experience. They particularly noted positive outcomes in student engagement:
“The camaraderie developed in Student Action Teams.”
“Involvement and interest shown by students.”
“Many students became passionate about their SAT, being engaged and enthusiastic.”
“Everyone was involved and we all learnt more about the environment.”
“The excitement on the students’ faces when they presented.”
“Seeing the enjoyment students and parents got from their actions.”

One teacher wrote:
“As a teaching and Learning Coordinator, I found the project to be successful in terms of the engagement of the children. It was so engaging because the learning was real for them. It was truly authentic.”

This engagement was generally associated with an approach that provided an authentic task and active learning:
“Students bringing about change.”
“The students have been able to research on sustainability areas that are relevant to themselves and the school.”

They also noted the responsibility involved with working independently, either individually or in teams:
“Independent learning of students.”
“Collaborating in teams by setting individual tasks.”

and in making decisions:
“The projects encouraged the students to take responsibility and be accountable for their own learning. This forced reluctant students to become more engaged with their learning.”

Teachers also pointed positively to the Interschool links involved in the project, both for students and for themselves:
“Working with staff and students from other schools.”
“Improved students’ learning outcomes and professional learning of the teacher.”

One highlighted how the project had broadened to encourage home-school links:
“When I attended the Expo Night at our school, it was very affirming to hear the parents’ comments as they were watching their children present their learning. They all said how they wished they had had the same opportunities when they were at school.”

The topic itself was regarded positively:
“They learnt about ways in which they can be more sustainable and the potential positive impact they can have on the world.”
“Reduction in the use of gladwrap, wrappers; reduction in use and wastage of electricity – leaving lights, computers on.”
“Aware of the money that the school spends on paper, other waste, energy and what could be done to improve this.”

However, there were some negative aspects to this approach that were highlighted by the teachers. Primarily, these involved unfamiliarity with the Student Action Team approach by students:
“Students worked through the SAT process, which was a challenge, as they just wanted to get stuck into the action. However, the process was great: questions, goals, research, surveys, steps, action.”
“Students at the school needed to be directed with Student Action Teams as it was their very first time participating in such a program.”

The same uncertainty was experienced by teachers:
For teachers who had not experienced action teams or had little information about them, they struggled to initially know what was happening.”

“Even though 12 students reported back to the grades, there needs be a person to guide teachers along the process of action teams and keep everyone on the same track if teachers have not worked in action teams before.”

“Teachers need to plan and work together so that everyone is aware of what the expectations are at each part of the process of Student Action Teams.”

especially with regard to pre-planning of student outcomes:

“Without specific outcomes some teachers struggle.”

It was also seen that students entered the project without specific knowledge in the topic:

“Sustainability’ was a topic that our students were unfamiliar with, so it required familiarisation before the students had sufficient understanding to become engaged in action teams.”

In addition, teachers pointed to some of the organisational issues involved, including internal protocols:

“Teachers need to aware and make students aware of protocols they require when approaching other teachers, and other business providers.”

“Groups were too big.”

“Kids lost interest when they weren’t responded to with emails etc.”

“Some students had greater success than others depending on the challenge or project selected.”

Student learning and development

The teachers reported on the learning and development that they had observed in their classes through the project. They highlighted skills and capacities:

“They asked insightful questions.”

“They developed a strong sense of responsibility.”

“They developed confidence.”

“They developed effective communication skills and public speaking.”

teamwork:

“They worked collaboratively.”

“They worked and learnt with and from other students to explore ideas and solutions.”

“They all had responsibilities to act on especially working within a team.”

making public presentations:

“They communicated their knowledge.”

“They clearly articulated their ideas and had their views and suggestions heard.”

and making a difference (agency):

“They became change makers in the school and community.”

“They ‘made a difference’ as decision makers.”

“I was totally delighted with the students feeling that they had made a difference by presenting to children and teachers.”

In some cases, they reported directly on what students had said to them, that:

“I feel like I have made a difference”

and

“I enjoyed taking action.”

They noted that students liked the challenge where teachers only ‘guided’ the process and students got to make the decisions:

“The students enjoyed their challenge; they wanted more lessons and looked forward to working on their actions; they loved working with Kate.”

However the teachers also reported some of the frustrations experienced by students on hitting barriers in the project:

“Students said: ‘it was annoying when we had to wait for replies to our questions’.”

Year 5 students of St Damian’s School, Bundoora were very excited to be involved in Student Action Teams. The word ‘action’ made them feel excited and keen to start. Parents and others in the school were invited to Walk Through Student Actions on Sustainability.

The Open Area of the school and three classrooms were set up by students to present their work. Classes booked half hour time slots to walk through the twelve stages of the projects, starting with a 12 minute DVD with glimpses of the 15 mini teams and their actions. Next, parents and grades followed the trail of the consecutive stages of the students’ work.

The twelve stations, managed by students, displayed posters, Powerpoints, movies with a direct message to teachers and students, interviews with key people within the school, colouring competitions, prizes for students (bookmarks and stickers) and other forms of encouragement and enforcement.

The project has inspired students in our school to take a more serious approach to sustainability issues within and around our school. By analysing and comparing data collected at the beginning of the project with data from the end of the project, students have discovered that there have been improvements in the following areas:

• A vegetable garden is being considered for development in 2012.

Kate Wilde is a terrific speaker and motivator who provided an appetising introduction for the students when she took the school based sessions. The students were totally engaged by her skills, especially in involving students.

Diane Foley

They are being thrown around the walls and ceiling of the toilets (little if any mess has been reported by students or cleaners) since the students were presented with a persuasive movie made by students to show that it is not cool to spread toilet paper/water bombs;

• Students are keeping a watch on use of taps so that less water is being wasted;

• Containers for the collection of waste water from the taps are being set up for the recycling of the water on plants;

• Teachers and students are turning off unnecessary power to lights, interactive whiteboards, computers and heaters/airconditioners;

• The school is purchasing more compost bins and considering the installation of more water tanks;

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“Students said: ‘it was annoying when we had to wait for replies to our questions’.”
Students from the nearby secondary school, Loyola College, worked with the primary schools on the topic, developing drama pieces based on their observations of student concerns and research. Their teacher summed up the experience:

“Students from Loyola College’s Year 9 Drama Class gained much out of working in Student Action Teams. Our final action was to perform a short piece of theatre on the topic of Sustainability. This was a huge success, with the class performing five shows in two weeks. This included performances to the other schools in the cluster.

“Projects like this help give secondary drama a purpose, with a performance in front of a real audience at the end of the semester, rather than just an in-class assessment. Many students are still talking about the project and are hoping we can do something similar in Year 10 Drama.”

Michael O’Keeffe

Project structure

Duration and timing

Teacher responses varied, with some saying that the project length was ‘just right’, while others said: ‘Longer would have been better’ or ‘Probably a bit too long, one term would have been better’. It was suggested that it might have been better either doing the project in Term 2 and 3 or just in Term 3 as reports and other demands such as NAPLAN interrupted the timing.

Some suggestions were made about timing and what this would imply for the projects:

“Projects needed to be scaffolded a bit better earlier on in term, as the last stages of project tended to be a little bit rushed.”

“More time would have been needed for a ‘trial and error’ week – for students to send out letters and get feedback … what they left out/information not covered.”

Time per week

Classes had allocated specific amounts of time per week to their Inquiry learning topic. Some teachers found this adequate, while in other classes, more time was needed:

“About 40 minutes every day – enough time.”

“Usually there were only three inquiry lessons a week but in this project, at times we were pushing a lesson a day. So, time was taken from other subjects.”

“Tried to stick to our three inquiry lessons per week, but it blew out with workloads.”

Some teachers recognised that there was skill development happening in many areas, and that this meant that the Student Action Teams were developing many curriculum areas:

“At first it took as much time as a normal inquiry unit however as the action developed it took a large part of the week, but at this stage the SAT work involved literacy, maths, social skills, art so it wasn’t as if other areas were suffering.”

Student Action Teams as Inquiry Learning

The teachers were asked to reflect on the degree to which this approach was similar to or different from Inquiry approaches that they were already using within the classes. They responded in various ways, depending perhaps on the specific approaches they were already using, highlighting:

Taking action:

“It is similar in that the students can research their own topics, however the action that they take to make a difference in SATs is not included in the Inquiry Approach and students are given the opportunities to engage with their community. Also students develop social and emotional learning skills through their role as team members.”

“I believe that this approach to teaching and learning allows students to have an active interest in the topic, to have a meaningful approach to their learning and for them to make a small yet significant difference to their community.”

“Students felt empowered by researching, collating information and then developing a strategy – DVD for teachers, students doing a ‘rap’ at school assembly.”

Student self-direction:

“Very similar. Students work more in the area they are interested in in SAT. Normal Inquiry – we have to direct them through the ‘broader understandings.’”

“This project has been a little different to our Inquiry planning in that, apart from the initial planning, the children were doing a lot more leading.”

“More ‘contemporary’; more student directed; all students involved; technologies involved.”

A specific process:

“The students have worked on many Inquiry units. This was different because we followed an explicit process for students to work step by step before actually taking any action.”

“It was more detailed and time consuming. However, rewarding for all.”
**Inter-school links**

Twelve student leaders and some teachers met three times during the project. This was seen by teachers as both positive:

“Good to know our colleagues from neighbouring schools are involved in similar projects.”

but also to have some limitations, particularly for those who were not able to attend these forums:

“A bit difficult for kids to understand because they couldn’t communicate or see what the other schools were working on. Better for teachers because we could use the wiki and take advantage of the interschool meetings.”

“The interschool aspect was well organised and the meetings allowed for good preparation and discussion of issues that arose. It was a shame that not all staff could attend the forums, but don’t know how you can get around that.”

“Fantastic for the leaders; perhaps more interschool relations would have been better for the rest of the level.”

One teacher suggested:

“It was great the fact that the 12 students and teachers could interact with each other; however the rest of the students didn’t benefit a huge deal. Perhaps if each school showcased what they did to each other it would have had a greater impact on the rest of the students.”

**Sustainability … of this approach**

This project was supported under the general heading of ‘quality teaching’ and hence there is an implication that it should enable teachers to reflect on and improve their own classroom practices. Teachers were asked what they would take from this project into their ‘everyday teaching’.

They highlighted issues of:

- Including action component in authentic projects
  - “Use authentic and purposeful teaching projects.”
  - “The action component: ‘how can we make a difference to the real world?’”
  - “As a coordinator, I have been working on getting teams across the school to use this type of approach for our Inquiry units where our rich task is based on an action. The Year 5 teachers have been very open to this process and I see that in future this approach would have a place at this school. It does require the Curriculum leader and the team of teachers to have passion and lead and help drive the planning and implementation.”

- Student independence in learning
  - “Allowing students more independence in their learning through Student Voice.”
  - “Independent learning and personalised learning develops student responsibility and learning outcomes.”
  - “Student independence with the projects: letting the kids take almost complete control of their entire projects.”
  - “Benefits of differentiated learning.”

- “Made me more aware of learning styles of students and resources available.”

- **Student skills in teamwork**
  - “Great opportunities for students and the different way students learn; great teamwork.”
  - “Skills: students had to work hard on interpersonal skills in order for their teams to work.”

- **Building student confidence**
  - “Student confidence and self-esteem are vital components of student wellbeing.”

The teachers also reflected on how such approaches might be incorporated into schools’ normal operation. They pointed to the need for teachers to understand the process:

“Teachers need to be aware of the process of SATs and how students could present their findings and to support students in this way of learning.”

decide how and where it would fit into the curriculum (eg in Inquiry Approaches), and be willing to let students lead on curriculum matters:

“The school students’ needs to identify what are important community or school issues.”

“Use student voice to design project and evaluate it.”

One teacher pointed out that such approaches “must be part of the framework of the school” and another indicated that such reflection and development is underway:

“As we are having a Learning walk for parents, we have revisited the SAT process and both teachers and students are very clear with the steps required. For this reason I believe we could individually go through the process.”

Some adjustments were suggested:

“Have a mini project – on a much smaller scale.”

“Need to have only a couple of SATs working in a classroom at any one time, or need another assistant. Too difficult to manage with one teacher. Technician is needed to assist in DVD making.”
Quality Teaching and Learning

Finally, the teachers reflected directly on what had been learnt about quality teaching through this project. Two wrote:

“Quality teaching is about rich learning experiences for students and for students learning to be relevant, personalised, rigorous and engaging. The SAT was all of this and more. The students were able to take complete ownership of their own learning and were motivated to ‘make a difference’.”

“In terms of quality teaching, this project has allowed the team to see the importance of the skill in scaffolding the task for the children. It also assisted the teachers to see that, when planning, there needs to be a good degree of flexibility and at other times there will be times when we need to take a more direct approach. Having Kate also work with the children assisted the teachers with the relationship and team building required.”

Others described elements of such quality teaching that they will remember and take into their practice:

- “Students become independent learners.”
- “When students are independent learners they are focused, goal orientated and gain life skills.”
- “Students are engaged because they are in control over their learning.”
- “Students become more responsible.”
- “There is less classroom management for teachers.”
- “Differentiated learning occurs.”
- “Student activities are purposeful, authentic.”
- “Students use higher-order thinking and learning.”
- “Student Wellbeing is a key issue.”
- “A rich meaningful context.”

Putting Education back into School through Student Action Researchers

When I first encountered the term ‘Students as Researchers’ (SAR), I initially thought that it could be interesting to try to teach students how to become researchers ... and that this skill would be extremely useful for them at university.

However it went far beyond that. The Students as Researchers project at this school has a different and more important objective: to expose students to a different way of learning, to think outside the box, and find solutions to their problems when and if they face any.

I discovered this when a friend of mine, Lena Bahou (who is doing her MPhil at Cambridge University), called to tell me that she was working on Students as Researchers as her action research study. She went on to explain that the project would teach students research skills that they could use to make desired changes in their schools. She was looking for a school in Lebanon to launch this pilot study, and her aim was to find a school outside Greater Beirut. I quickly grabbed the opportunity and invited her to do this study at the Ibn Batouta School (IBS).

I thought that the Students as Researchers project was exactly what we needed in order to enhance thinking skills and to educate our students in how to go about owning their education, by being actively involved instead of merely being on the receiving end, as is traditionally the case.

To my pleasure, she agreed and came to spend a month at IBS, where she worked closely with the Grade 7 and 8 students. Of course this meant that we had to make some adjustments to our daily schedule, and some teachers were gladly willing to help and accommodate to these changes, even though it meant that the students would be missing some of their lessons.

On the first day of Lena’s arrival, I arranged for a staff meeting at which she described the Students as Researchers project and explained the rationale behind it. She invited teachers to participate in planning and/or running the sessions and in supporting the students. Many teachers expressed interest in joining in some of the sessions and some became more actively involved.

Lena and I set about planning the general picture and the overall procedure. Every evening we shared our thoughts, evaluated our work, and planned accordingly. As we did this, we ended up changing some of our initial plans to accommodate the needs of the students. For example, it took a while to get the students used to working alone with little help from us.

When we wanted them to identify what they felt strongly enough about to change, it was difficult for them to come up with their own ideas. This was mainly because they had become used to being spoon fed and had never been asked to think about and share what mattered to them, what they wanted to make a difference to and the ways in which they thought they could with others go about it. For example, when we were doing the evaluation session at the end of the project, the students said that the most difficult part of the project was that they had to think! This of course gave the project even more credibility, for one of its aims was to encourage the students to think independently.
Project Stages

The project was divided into several parts. The first step was to introduce the Students as Researchers idea to our Year 7/8 students and explain why Lena was doing it with them. Together, she and the students deliberated on what research is and how Students as Researchers differed from journalism and ordinary school projects. Lena showed the class several examples of children's research from around the world.

The following day, Lena asked to meet with the students for a group interview. The group interview centred around questions about 'student voice' and their learning. The students were asked to think about whether they had a voice in the school, to what extent they were listened to, and if their voice translated into changes. What we realised was that students had a 'voice of complaint' when they experienced individual injustice that sometimes turned into a collective 'voice of protest'. However, school had not supported the students to cultivate and exercise a 'voice of initiative' or suggestion.

At the end of the interview, Lena and I had invited the students to write a question they had for me. When Lena showed me the students' questions, my first impression was that they were spot on, and I wondered why I had not already explained why we make certain decisions at school. In addition, I realised that the students were pointing to some aspects of school life that were missing because too much emphasis had been given to academics. (Students as Researchers is also very academic but it connects classroom learning to life).

As a result, I decided that the students needed a forum through which to express and act on their voices and so I suggested a student committee. They were very excited and came to see me at the end of the project to remind me of a ‘Student Council’. The following year the students came up with some by-laws and decided whether they wanted to interview their other parent. More. Some even expressed an interest in wanting to interview their other parent.

Researching

Then came the most challenging section: students had to choose their own topic and develop research questions after a brainstorming session. The students had the option of either doing the research alone or in groups of twos or threes. Here are the topics they chose in order to make a difference in their lives:

1. Girls and their weight
2. Activities during break time
3. Books in the school library
4. Teacher-student relationships
5. Favourite subjects and teacher qualities
6. How orphaned children live
7. Garbage in the school playground

Each group of student researchers decided whether they wanted to interview, write questionnaires or use photos for their research – or maybe even combine some of these methods. They designed an action plan, wrote their questions, piloted their questionnaires with Grade 9 students and then made appropriate amendments. Each group collected the data, analysed it, and wrote their research titles and what they said about why they chose these topics:

**Students' research titles and what they said about why they chose these topics:**

**Favourite subjects and teachers' qualities:** “To let teachers know what students think about their subjects and to make lessons more enjoyable.”

**Playground activities:** “We chose this topic because we feel that we need to have more fun during break.”

**Girls and their weight:** “I chose this topic because I want to know how girls take care of their weight and health and see how we can help.”

**Our trip to the orphanage:** “We chose this topic because we wanted to know more about orphaned children and how they are treated.”

**Improving our library:** “I chose the topic because I thought that the library at IB needed more interesting books.”

**Relationships between teachers and students:** “We chose this topic because we noticed some teachers were getting angry in class and in the playground whereas students responded badly to their teachers.”

**Throwing garbage:** “We chose this topic because we know that we have too much garbage in our school and in our country and we want to help keep our environment clean.”
their conclusions and recommendations using PowerPoint.

After much practice, the students presented their Students as Researchers projects to students and teachers alike. The listening students were impressed with their classmates’ work and with their enthusiasm; some were envious of the Grade 7/8 because they felt they were important with their cameras and clipboards. Teachers were proud of the students’ courage to vocally and respectfully say exactly what students thought about the school, their teachers and subjects.

After the presentations, some teachers spoke openly about the need to change their instructional techniques and relationship with their students. Teacher Michelle shared that: “It has given me a chance to revisit what we’re doing. Are we ignoring students? Are we shouting? Why did they like my subject or not like? The teacher must start with herself and then, when she changes, the students will change.” Teacher Salma said: “I am proud of them! ... I can use the points they raised to think about my methods. I am one of the teachers who shouts and so I know I need to control myself more and find other ways to deal with my students.” While some teachers said that they loved the transformation in the student body, other reluctant teachers did not really appreciate what was happening and thought that students were given too much freedom. Teacher Marie wondered: “To what extent should teachers listen to students?”

In the final interview with Lena, students shared their reflections on being student researchers:

Hala: “If you fail at something, redo it until you get what you want.”

Nada: “Don’t wait for someone to tell you what to do and not do.”

Karim: “I really liked changing people’s minds ... showing them another way.”

Angelo: “Before I was shy and didn’t like to talk in front of anyone but now I want to try to and never give up.”

Fouad: “The most important thing I learned was how to ask questions.”

The work has just begun and more will be done in the following months and next year. It is important to have follow-up steps, to work with the students on making the changes happen, and using Students as Researchers as a tool to make other changes not only in school, but in their communities as well.

**Outcomes**

Since we wrote the initial part of this article, IBS students have worked hard on reducing garbage in the school. Grades 7 and 8 embarked on a project to creatively design barrels that would become trash bins in the playground. These have been placed all around the school, and the difference can be seen. Some boys have started organising activities during breaks, while the girls will be having a bake sale to buy more books for the library.

Teachers have decided to spend more time with their students to make learning more engaging and fun. Many of them have started working with students in groups and challenging them with problems that they have to solve.

Souad said: “I can’t believe that we actually did all that work!”

Rana admitted to her Teacher of English that: “the project gave me a lot of self confidence. I can speak to students during assembly without any fear.” Bushra ended up being our MC at the end of the year show.

Kamal got so excited he decided to run for Student Council Presidency. “I want to have more changes at school,” he commented. Kamal did make it to Student Council!

Students from younger classes came up to me asking if they could do what the ‘older’ students were doing.

Finally, I can confidently say that we are on the right track to really making student voices mean constructive change, but the challenge is to keep up the momentum for the next group of students. And more importantly is sustaining the enthusiasm of the teachers for embracing change and having SAR become part of the school ethos so that student voice really makes a difference.

Samia
Director, IBS

Many thanks go to Miss Lena Bahou (lenabahou@hotmail.com) whose input and help are invaluable.

Note: Student, teacher and school names have been changed.

More about Student Action Teams, including some linked mini-case studies, at: www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams
Being a member of a Student Representative Council (SRC) is not always about wearing a badge and missing out on classes. For some, the initial appeal wears off when they realise the volume of time and level of commitment required to fulfil the role effectively. This can lead to SRC members backing away from their responsibilities, dragging down the SRC’s reputation or choosing to opt out of the SRC all together. So, what can be done to prevent these situations from occurring? How do you respond to situations where the ‘bad apples’ are starting to spoil the rest of the bunch?

Prevention

Having students aware of the accountability involved prior to taking on a role can be one way of preventing burn out or issues during the year. Developing clear job descriptions that state the tasks involved and the time required each week could be one way of informing students about the commitment required. Having past SRC members who have filled those positions speak to potential candidates can also help to communicate the degree of involvement and work required.

During the year, it is useful to complete an audit of your SRC. The VicSRC resource kit, Represent! (see www.vicsrc.org.au) features an audit tool (1.7 ‘An effective SRC’) to enable you and the SRC members to obtain feedback about how the SRC is operating. Being aware of how others perceive the organisation is a useful exercise that will provide you with data to help discuss the operations of the SRC with its members and school administration.

After a mid-year review of our SRC*, our data showed that SRC members were frustrated with giving up large amounts of their lunchtime for meetings and other commitments. As the teacher advisor, I raised this with the school administration and we agreed to rotate meetings fortnightly between lunchtime and class time. The SRC also agreed that they would allocate a portion of their budget to provide catering at some of the lunchtime SRC meetings.

Is it an SRC issue or a school issue?

As the SRC Teacher Advisor, you will no doubt encounter an experience with a member of staff who will tell you about the inappropriate behaviour of a student who is a member of the SRC.

The Year 9 Co-ordinator* approached me about Damien’s behaviour in a class that was covered by a CRT. The Co-ordinator was called to the class after rude and disruptive behaviour by Damien and other students. The other students were reprimanded by way of after-school detention however, as Damien was an SRC member, he was told the matter would need to be taken further. The Co-ordinator was calling for Damien to be removed from his position on the SRC.

Does inappropriate school behaviour warrant sanctions imposed by the SRC? Should this be in addition to any consequence imposed by the school? Having a clear policy or SRC constitution that is understood by year level co-ordinators and school leadership that states how such situations are to be managed, can assist greatly. I have heard of SRCs threatening to withdraw support from wider school events or stage class walkouts by the student body when such processes have not been followed. Whilst the school may choose to impose sanctions based on the student code of conduct, if the sanctions were to impact on the student’s involvement in the SRC, at a minimum the SRC Teacher Advisor – as an advocate for the SRC – should be present at all discussions.

Do you involve the SRC when dealing with the actions of an individual member?

Depending on the matter, it can be useful to involve SRC members in managing disciplinary matters. By doing so, you are demonstrating that their involvement in decision making isn’t tokenistic and limited to fundraising and where the new bins should be placed in the yard.

 Carl* was a Grade 3 member of the SRC. He always arrived late to meetings, failed to complete tasks he agreed to undertake and disrupted meetings by making inappropriate noises and offering comments unrelated to what was being discussed. The school captains who chaired the meetings raised their concerns with me. We discussed strategies they could use during the meeting to manage Carl’s behaviour. The school captains also met with Carl to discuss his behaviour. The conversation between the school captains and Carl was far more powerful, as it was coming from an equal level rather than a top-down approach.

The Meetings Resource Kit developed by Second Strike contains further information and advice about responding to certain behaviours during meetings.

On the other hand, having SRC members deal with disciplinary matters against students may impact negatively on their relationships with other students and school staff, so you may wish to remove them from the processes.

We have recently uploaded some new resources to the MEMBERS ONLY resources section of the VISTA website. Resources on offer include:

- Sample Job Descriptions
- Sample Constitutions and Policies containing Codes of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures
- Formal Warning Letters
- Sample SRC Reports for students

To access these resources or to become a VISTA member, visit us at srcteachers.ning.com

* Whilst the stories are based on real experiences, the names contained within the article have been changed.

Scott Duncan

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

vista@srcteachers.org.au
http://srcteachers.ning.com
Apology:
Full VicSRC Student Executive 2011-2012

In the last issue of Connect, the list of new Executive members of the VicSRC was incomplete. One name fell off the bottom of the list! Apologies to Sufi Salieh. The full list of students who were elected to the VicSRC Executive for 2011-2012 is:

- Denara Amat (Year 11, Melbourne Girls College)
- Rachel Cerar (Year 9, Braybrook College)
- Sammy Chapman (Year 8, Casey Grammar)
- Tiffany Chapman (Year 10, Toorak College)
- Tim Eric (Year 11, Frankston High School)
- Marlee-Alice Gorman (Year 9, Princes Hill Secondary)
- Lachlan Hugo (Year 9, Princes Hill Secondary)
- Justine Jaramillo (Year 11, Narre Warren South P-12)
- Jake Kearns (Year 7, Maffra Secondary College)
- Sean Law (Year 10, Sunbury College)
- Alexis Leonhardt (Year 8, Bundoora Secondary College)
- Samantha McClelland (Year 11, Balwyn High School)
- Ellis Patterson (Year 10, Melbourne Girls College)
- Olivia Pearce (Year 8, Maffra Secondary College)
- Edison Ponari (Year 10, Bundoora Secondary College)
- Sufi Salieh (Year 9, Melbourne Girls College)

VicSRC Congress 2011: Fun times and serious consultations

Speaking Out About Maths & Science
Consultation with the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office

The VicSRC has been involved in several consultations and audits in the education sector during 2011. It’s great that the opinions of students are being sought on a range of educational issues that especially affect young people throughout their schooling.

So often the opinions of students are not considered in policy and program formation – which is surprising considering that students are the people who are often most affected by new policies and changes in schools. The VicSRC applauds the organisations and policy makers who make an effort to speak with students and continue to encourage a mutual sharing of ideas.

Recently, the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) consulted with six members of the VicSRC Student Executive around Science and Mathematics participation rates and initiatives in Victorian schools. Students discussed issues from the quality of Mathematics and Science curriculum in schools, to the image of Mathematics and Science among students. The consultation was very informative and we were pleased to receive this positive feedback from VAGO:

“I have often consulted with students through the VicSRC and am always very impressed with their input to a wide range of policy issues. The students always come well prepared to discuss the topic, and demonstrate knowledge of the issues at the standard expected of more experienced stakeholders. They can offer insights that are often missed when the young person’s voice is not heard.

“The discussion on Mathematics and Science education was both enjoyable and illuminating. I was impressed with the range of issues the students identified, as well as their depth of understanding on the different variables which can affect student participation rates and the quality of learning. The group presented the views of their wider student body in an engaging, professional and inclusive way.

“I wish to thank the students for their participation and look forward to working with you in the future.

“It’s so great to see the voice of students being valued in this way!”

We would like to thank the VAGO and look forward to seeing the ideas that we presented come into future policy.

Kate Walsh
Samantha McClelland

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
The Schooling Workforce

Submission by the Victorian Student Representative Council to the Productivity Commission

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is a democratic network of Student Representative Councils (SRCs) working to represent the views of secondary students throughout Victoria. It aims to make students’ voices heard across the school system and beyond. The VicSRC holds a range of forums and events each year to hear student views, enable students to share ideas across schools and network together to take action on issues of concern to them. While an independent and student run body, the VicSRC is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.

The VicSRC would like to thank Commissioner Alison McClelland for meeting with the VicSRC Executive to discuss the issues raised in this inquiry directly. Since that time, the VicSRC has also held its annual Congress with over 100 students from 40 schools participating. Students themselves initiated discussion on several issues within the terms of reference and passed some resolutions relevant to the inquiry. This submission includes these resolutions as well as other ideas and input from across the three day Congress and from the discussions held with Commissioner McClelland. The submission addresses three areas: student expectations of teachers and the student teacher relationship; relationships between parents and teachers; and student relationships with school principals.

Student experiences and expectations of teachers

Students report a broad range of experiences of their teachers. These range from teachers who are inspiring and fun to learn with, to teachers who don’t inspire anything more than frustration and dissatisfaction. Different students experience the same teachers differently as factors relating to personality and styles of learning and teaching come into play. Students acknowledge that teachers have a difficult job to not only cater to the diverse needs of students but also to the broader needs of the education system and other stakeholders such as principals, parents and wider society. Overall students agree that there is a mixture of both good and bad teachers within the workforce. They believe that good teachers are under-valued while at the same time bad teachers remain working in school settings. The VicSRC is not in a position to assess the numeric balance of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ teachers.

Qualities of a good teacher

After consulting with students the VicSRC offers the following elements that contribute to a high quality teacher:

- They have a friendly and personal relationship with students based on mutual respect.
- They have a passion for and good knowledge of their subject.
- They are well organised and set about plans for the term enabling students to be partners in the learning process by planning ahead or catching up on things they’ve missed.
- They provide students with the freedom and responsibility to explore a range of learning options to cater to a range of learning styles.
- They have expectations of both students and themselves that spring from their passion to see students succeed in life, not just in school.
- They hear and respond to feedback from both students and other teachers.

When the VicSRC asked students what they want from their teachers, the strongest theme is in regards to how teachers and students relate to each other. This is an aspect of school life that the current generation of students is more passionate about than any preceding generation. Students desire and expect to be respected as individuals who have their own unique personal approach to learning and life and who can take responsibility for much of their own learning, if given the chance. Students want teachers who will treat them as partners in the learning process, based on relationships of mutual respect. Students are increasingly aware of their own learning styles and want teachers who understand and accommodate them as individual learners.

Students are increasingly approaching learning within the context of their whole life journey and they want teachers to understand, support and relate to them in a way that is not bounded by the school fence. They want teachers who relate to students as a person, not just as a ‘teacher’ and to draw on their own life experience within their teaching practice.

Students report that some teachers do relate to them in this way and are able to respond to the changing way in which students are seeking to relate to their teachers. Other teachers have not demonstrated an interest or ability to relate to students in this way. In developing policy regarding the schooling workforce, the VicSRC encourages the government to find ways to support teachers to adapt to these changing cultural expectations.

The VicSRC notes that some schools have begun to include student input within teacher selection and performance appraisal. It is particularly important to students that teachers are able to take on board student feedback, and that students get some response to this feedback in the form of changes or discussion about the students’ concerns. Some students are also keen to participate in teacher selection. They acknowledge that this is an important role and needs to be undertaken with a sense of responsibility. This responsibility makes some other students wary of taking on this role but many feel they would have something to contribute if they were offered the opportunity and supported appropriately. The VicSRC recommends that mechanisms for effectively implementing these forms of student participation be promoted among schools.
Relevant VicSRC Congress 2011

Resolutions:
“That the VicSRC create a resource to strengthen interaction and relationships between students and teachers.”
“That the VicSRC establish a ‘teach the teacher’ training course for individual SRCs to enact at their schools around the way students learn.”
“That the VicSRC encourage schools to include student opinion and voice on teacher selection panels.”

VicSRC Recommendations
1. That teachers are encouraged and resourced to relate to students in a way that respects the authentic individuality of both student and teacher.
2. That students are given the opportunity to contribute to teacher performance appraisal and that teachers are supported to receive and respond to student feedback.
3. That willing students are included in teacher selection processes and that schools are provided with a framework and the resources to support students participating in this process.

Relationships between teachers and parents

The relationship between teachers and parents is an area about which the VicSRC is receiving a growing amount of feedback. While some students are quite happy to maintain the status quo of minimal interaction between parents and school, much of the feedback the VicSRC receives is from students who would like their parents to be more engaged in their school life. This is consistent with students seeing their school life as being embedded within their wider life journey. These students would like more outreach towards parents from their schools and teachers. Many students want to be able to access support from both teachers and parents who understand what is going on for the student both at school and at home. In most cases this requires an improved relationship between teachers and parents with more regular communication. Students are critical of current reporting and communication arrangements that are either superficial or that exclude an active role for students. They are also critical of relationships that are solely concerned with responses to negative behaviour.

Some specific student comments and policy implications are as follows:

Student comments:
‘Why do teachers only contact our parents when we’ve done something wrong?’

Policy implications:
The teacher-parent relationship should be about more than just managing bad behaviour. It should focus on supporting student learning.

Student comments:
‘My parents don’t understand how the VCE system works.’

Policy implications:
Students, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, need more help from schools and teachers in explaining to parents the different options and pathways available to students, and the details of how the system works. This will help parents to feel informed and confident to help their children navigate the system.

Relationships with principals

Student feedback about school principals also varies greatly, and emphasises the importance of the principal’s style, personality and ways of interacting with students. The way that the principal exercises leadership within the school directly influences the behaviours and responses of students and teachers, and can establish a school climate that welcomes and values the participation of students as partners. Students report that some principals are great at interacting with students, take an active interest in student views, attend SRC meetings and discuss with students their ideas and concerns. Other principals are almost invisible to students, conducting their work beyond closed doors without including student representatives and appearing occasionally at school assemblies.

Students want to relate to their principals in the same way that they relate to their teachers: as individual people with different roles, opinions and experiences but able to converse as mutually respecting equals. They want principals who are easy to approach, open to student ideas and input and treat them as partners in school governance and decision making. SRC representatives want principals and leading teachers to attend SRC meetings when invited and to take their ideas seriously. They want principals to be proactive in inviting input from students about the core issues within the school: teaching and learning, relationships, resources and so on. Students who are given a voice in these realms of school life feel a sense of ownership and belonging that has benefits not just for students and their learning outcomes but for other stakeholders in the school as well.

Relevant VicSRC Congress 2011

Resolutions:
“That the government provide some sort of resource for schools to help better educate parents about the Victorian schooling system. This resource could include funding, professional facilitators and/or kits.”

VicSRC Recommendations
4. That teachers are equipped and supported to maintain active relationships with parents and to include students in this process.
5. That schools provide opportunities and structures in which students, teachers and parents can come together for meaningful conversations.
6. That governments increase outreach and education for parents to equip and encourage them to take a greater interest in their children’s school experience.
As a college captain at Brighton Secondary College in Melbourne’s south, I have found it extremely tough to overcome different challenges that we as a leadership body are facing, be it house spirit, communication or litter. The problem has been that there isn’t even nearly a large enough community of leaders to spring ideas off in our community, which causes year after year of hard work to be lost when successive years take over captaincy.

As Term 2 quickly approached, I knew it wouldn't be long before Year 12 was over. I saw myself walking in and out of being a captain, having made no real impact or difference. Therefore I established the concept of bringing school leaders together from a variety of schools in the area to create an open forum and discussion to discuss the challenges we are all facing. A revolution of student leaders – and from there it was born: the Student Leaders Revolution!

Along with my co-captains, we developed the idea to include over 20 different schools ranging from government and private to Jewish and Catholic schools. It doesn't make any sense to me that, as a cohort of students in the state, we choose to tackle obstacles as individual schools rather than as a unit – after all, we are all humans attempting to solve the exact same problems. We decided to run the Revolution in a workshop style setting, where students would gather bi-annually to discuss and solve issues that we are all facing and to support and guide one another in transforming ideas into action!

The Student Leaders Revolution took place on the 23rd July 2011, hosted by Brighton Secondary College, where over 70 students attended from over a dozen schools. Present on the day was the Minister of Education, Martin Dixon who said, “It is wonderful to see a program that has been initiated by students, and that focuses on issues of real significance to young Victorians. It is especially pleasing to see students from government, Catholic, Jewish and independent schools coming together to share ideas, develop solutions and motivate each other to take action.” Also at hand at the workshop was the ABC network, who managed to capture the heart of the Revolution on the 7pm news that night.

The event was a true success, in that schools were able to collaborate on many diverse issues and problems they were facing and produce countless solutions in which to take action on! The Student Leaders Revolution is set to continue early next year, growing and developing to enable students from all over the state to participate. The revolution could not have commenced without the assistance of all the sponsors involved as well as each participating college and their students and supervisors.

For further event details, see: www.studentleadersrevolution.com or email: info@studentleadersrevolution.com

Jaime Levin

Minister of Education, Hon Martin Dixon poses with Revolting students (L to R) Hayden Broadbent, Jaime Levin, Jordie Crawford and Lauren McNei, accompanied by Brighton Secondary College Principal, Julie Podbury

Inspirational speakers and facilitators, Alice and Abe of Live Large Project conduct a group discussion.
As a Student Leadership Coordinator, I have revelled in chances to involve our students in as many extra curricular activities as possible. Recently I thought: “Why don’t I organise one myself?!” and so I did!

I initiated the ‘Whitehorse Student Leadership Conference’ for all the Whitehorse Network secondary schools: Koonung Secondary College, Forest Hill College, Box Hill Senior Secondary College, Box Hill High School and Mullauna College. The rationale behind the conference was that, as teachers, we have many chances to network, but often School Captains, and more to the point, School Captains of like and surrounding schools, rarely get this chance.

With the support of my school and Whitehorse Youth ConneXions, I was able to hold the conference on August 4th at Youth ConneXions. It ran for around three hours and was opened by the Regional Network Leader Mr Rod Williamson. Over the course of the day, there was much discussion between the student leaders about their achievements for the year, as well as common challenges they faced. They also came up with advice that they would provide to the school captains of 2012, with the main piece being: “Manage your time well!”

Students were also involved in listening to some past leaders discuss how they have gone from strength to strength with their leadership potential. To end with, the students had a superb lunch and were also able to find out information from organisations that tap into their leadership skills such as the Foundation for Young Australians and Create2Change.

The conference was a beaming success and hopefully next year they can occur each term so that the students can interact on a more consistent basis and track each others’ progress.

Could I take this opportunity to thank Whitehorse Youth ConneXions and all the participating schools for their support and participation. It was a wonderful morning and everyone involved seemed to benefit!

I would be more than happy to discuss the organisation of such an event with any school SRC or teacher who is interested.

Laura Grinzi
Student Leadership Coordinator,
Koonung Secondary College
grinzi.laura.l@edumail.vic.gov.au

Local Student Conferences

Whitehorse Student Leadership Conference!

Captains from the attending schools having a group discussion

Regional Network Leader Rod Williamson addressing the group at the start of the day
The Student Voice Education Conference started with a question that a teacher at our school asked himself, after going to many professional development sessions. His question was simple. Why is it that the teachers and education experts get together to give their personal opinions on what the ideal 21st century education is and not the students – when the students are the ones most directly involved and affected by education?

From this question, an idea was born. The idea was also simple: get together a group of students from some schools across Victoria, so that they can talk about education, and what the ideal 21st century education is.

David Cobb, the teacher who formed the idea, came to the students and pitched the idea, hoping to gather together a group to run the event. This he certainly did, as a large number of students were interested to organise the conference. David Cobb believed that the conference should be student run so, with the support of our school (Preshil: www.preshil.vic.edu.au), it was our role as the organising committee to get the conference to happen. We decided on a list of questions related to 21st century education, and from there, the Student Voice Education Conference was born!

After months of planning and organising, the conference was held on the 6th August at the Hawthorn Town Hall in Melbourne's east. The conference lasted four and a half hours, with breaks for lunch. Students from 17 schools across Victoria attended; they sat at tables with students from other schools, listened to student speakers and then discussed the questions we were asking between those on their tables.

The conference couldn’t possibly have gone better, with lots of interesting and enlightening answers to the questions we asked! We hope to pass the information we received from students on to educational experts, so they can see what students want in 21st century education.

I’d like to take a moment to thank all the people who made the conference possible. Firstly, our sponsors: Boroondara City Council and Youth Services, Dicksons National Distribution (Vic), Cold Rock Ice Creamery, OfficeWorks, Franchised Food Company and Taxwise Professionals. I’d also like to thank Brendan O’Keefe for all his help with the technological side of the event and planning, including setting up the website. And of course, thank you to all those who participated on the day, without whom the event could not have run, and all the teachers who brought their students to the event.

For more information about the event visit:
www.studentvoiceaustralia.org
or our Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/pages/Student-Voice-The-Student-Education-Conference/101834233239391?sk=wall
or contact David Cobb at:
davidc@preshil.vic.edu.au

Suzanne Bouillet
Year 10, Preshil
The BIG IDEA Session
at the 2011 NSW State SRC Conference, 2-5 August 2011

The BIG IDEA Session was held at the 2011 NSW State SRC Conference. It provided an opportunity for SRC students in NSW secondary schools to have their say about ways to improve the quality of school life.

At the BIG IDEA Session, each regional SRC team from the 10 educational regions put forward their BIG IDEA about ways to enhance school life.

The 10 BIG IDEAS were considered by the 130 student participants at the conference and students voted for their TOP 3 BIG IDEAS.

The TOP BIG IDEAS are for the 2012 NSW Student Representative Council to consider during its term of office.

10 BIG IDEAS were put forward at the 2011 State SRC Conference. The 2012 NSW SRC will consider ways to support the TOP 4 BIG IDEAS during its term of office. (NB: In 2011, the 3rd and 4th favourite BIG IDEAS had the same number of votes.)

The TOP BIG IDEAS for the 2012 NSW SRC to consider are:

1. The promotion of the VicSRC handbook, Represent!, to help with the effective operation of SRCs in NSW public schools - Riverina Region
2. The creation of a shared SRC database with key contacts and useful resources on an approved social networking website to help improve communication between SRCs in regions - Northern Sydney Region
3. The development of an SRC Awareness Day package to promote the operation, benefits and actions of SRCs - Illawarra South East Region
4. A H.U.G. ‘How U Going?’ initiative to encourage SRCs to promote balanced student lifestyles and encourage students to access school counsellors if individual support is needed - Sydney Region
5. Ways for SRCs to engage in school programs to increase student participation and engagement - North Coast Region
6. The concept of SRCs running an Acceptance Week with themed days in individual schools - Western NSW Region
7. SRC participation in Harmony Day to help promote respect, tolerance and acceptance and positive relationships between students, teachers and the community - New England Region
8. Ways for SRCs to promote the importance and educational benefits of healthy relationships between teachers and students to enhance learning - Western Sydney Region
9. SRC participation in an IN-TOLERANCE Day (or similar event) to promote the benefits of diversity in schools - Hunter/Central Coast Region
10. The development of an online SRC forum for regional SRCs to improve communication and help share resources - South Western Sydney Region

The remaining BIG IDEAS are for consideration by regions as possible regional SRC projects in 2011/2012. SRCs may consider:

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Samantha hones skills

Samantha Jezewski from Balmain High School was one of the inspiring presenters at the NSW State SRC Conference last year. She gathered in Sydney for the NSW State SRC Conference to share her journey in education and to promote her own success story. Samantha is a great example of what can be achieved through dedication and hard work.

Jack leads by example at conference

By Jack Macon

Jack leads by example at the NSW State SRC Conference.

Jack leads by example at conference

By Jack Macon

Jack leads by example at conference

By Jack Macon

Helping students to make the grade

Central Western Daily

More to success than good grades

Julian joins future leaders at conference

Narellan Westfield

NSW State SRC Conference 2011
“Find Your Vibe”

Student helps organise leadership conference in Sydney

Union Central School student Sashi Khachatrian has been selected to organise the Victorian division of an Australia-wide youth leadership conference.

Sashi, 14, is one of just 13 students across Australia who will be responsible for the Day 3 of the conference, which involves developing, coordinating and running workshops at the conference.

Union Central principal Michael Armstrong said the conference had given the school an opportunity to be involved in and organise a much larger conference three years ago.

"Sashi has been involved with the OShock (organised by the Victorian Department of Education and Training) and has been a key player in the program," Mr Armstrong said.

"He has won the respect of other students and staff and it is fitting that he has been chosen as a key contributor to this year’s conference."

Sashi said he was excited about the opportunity.

"I’m very excited. It’s going to be great," he said.

Student leaders help others speak out

A school leader from a Sydney high school has been chosen to help others speak out at a national conference for young leaders.

The student leader, who was one of just 12 selected from around the country, will be part of a group of young people who will share their experiences with others at the conference.

The conference, which is held annually, aims to provide an opportunity for young people to share their stories and learn from each other.

Oxley, Narrabri students chosen

Two Oxley students have been chosen to participate in an upcoming conference for young journalists.

The conference, which is being held in Melbourne, will be attended by 12 students from across the country.

The students were chosen after a rigorous selection process, which involved writing a essay and two interviews.

"It was a great opportunity to be selected and I’m really excited to meet other students and learn from them," one of the students said.

"I’m looking forward to hearing about their experiences and getting a chance to share my own," the other student said.

Mindful instruction

A new approach to teaching, which focuses on mindfulness and meditation, is being introduced in NSW schools.

The program, which is being piloted in some schools, aims to help students develop better focus and concentration.

"I think this is a great way to help students manage their emotions and stay calm," one teacher said.

"It’s also a great way to help students develop self-awareness and self-regulation, which are important skills for their future, whether they go on to university or enter the workforce."

"Find Your Vibe"

By Daily Liberal

“Find Your Vibe” is a new feature that will appear in the Daily Liberal each week. It will highlight the achievements of young people in our community and encourage others to follow their dreams.

“Find Your Vibe” is a celebration of youth and the promise of the future. It’s about seeing the world through the eyes of young people and understanding their perspective.

“Find Your Vibe” will feature stories, interviews, and photos of young people who are making a difference in their communities. It will be a platform for young people to share their experiences and inspire others to take action.

“Find Your Vibe” is a reminder that every young person has the potential to make a positive impact on the world. It’s about giving young people a voice and encouraging them to be the change they want to see.

“Find Your Vibe” is a call to action. It’s a call for young people to get involved and make a difference. It’s a call to support and empower young people to achieve their goals.

“Find Your Vibe” is a celebration of young people and their potential. It’s a reminder that every young person has the power to change the world. It’s a celebration of the future and the possibilities that lie ahead.

“Find Your Vibe” is about looking to the future and seeing what’s possible. It’s about being bold and taking risks. It’s about being true to oneself and pursuing one’s dreams.

“Find Your Vibe” is about finding one’s place in the world and making a positive impact. It’s about being a part of something bigger than oneself.

“Find Your Vibe” is about finding one’s voice and being heard. It’s about being true to oneself and not compromising one’s values.

“Find Your Vibe” is a reminder that young people have the power to shape the world. It’s about being bold, taking risks, and being true to oneself.

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Learning for Sustainability Award of Excellence

The NSW State SRC recently won an award within the Corporate Division of the State’s Learning for Sustainability Awards of Excellence for its green initiatives: Enviro Inspiro! and Green Day.

The NSW SRC invites student teams in NSW public schools to create a 5 minute media presentation and a 2 page report to showcase their successful student-led environmental projects. Schools and student teams can win one of three major ‘prizes’ valued up to $3,000.

Enviro Inspiro! has been successfully run by the NSW SRC since 2006.

Enviro Inspiro! projects demonstrate how students:
- research the need for improvements to the school or local area environment
- successfully implement an environmental project
- enhance the environment

The NSW Student Welfare Directorate provides a statewide SRC program for student leaders who are encouraged to put great ideas into action on a wider scale. Together with some outside funding, young leaders from the NSW Student Representative Council develop initiatives that are important to young people in schools. Enviro Inspiro! and Green Day are two such student-led initiatives.

Green Day started as a simple idea from one student in one school in the Illawarra. Secondary school students are invited to go green for one day in September to help improve the environment. Schools are encouraged to participate in Green Day to maintain awareness of environmental issues in a fun way.

Green Day

Green Day: a simple idea from one student in one school; proposed by Illawarra/South East Region; endorsed by 130 secondary students at the Student Forum held at the 2009 State SRC Conference:

The idea: that the NSW SRC promote a simultaneous Green Day in which students participate in environmentally friendly projects.

From a simple idea ... to ACTION!!!
- 2009 NSW SRC plans a draft website, poster and guidelines for students
- 2010 NSW SRC finalises Green Day resources
- First Green Days promoted and held in 2010
- 2011 NSW currently encouraging more schools to participate in Green Day
- NSWSRCs participate in the Learning for Sustainability Video Conference Festivals - June 2010 and June 2011.

Outcomes
- Increased student participation rates as students engage in fun and purposeful learning
- Student-led initiatives help increase the environmental sustainability of school communities.
- Students help schools improve connections with the local community
- Students develop higher order thinking as they explore, question, problem-solve and discuss issues that are important to them.
Moving from doing research to defining action

Our **Research** shows...

So...  
**Because**...

Our **Vision** is...

So...  
**Because**...

The **Changes that are needed** are...

So...  
**Because**...

The **Action that we will take** is...

---

Action planning tool

October 2011
Students as Education Evaluators

Schools can develop purposeful, impacting, and authentic assessments of classes, schools, and teachers, encouraging accountability and ownership for all participants in the learning process.

Evaluating MY Effectiveness

Several middle and high school students participated in a student evaluator program for the Teens as School Volunteer Tutors Project in New York City. Together with an adult evaluation facilitator, they decided to interview two groups of subjects: an adult group made up of school professionals and the tutor’s own parents and a student group made up of both tutors and their tutees. The student evaluators devised interview forms, agreed on interview assignments, and drew up a time line for completion. The students completed 57 interviews, and analysed them with the adult facilitator. During the analysis period, the students reflected on their experiences and what they learned, and assessed their data. The student evaluators then made several recommendations that have since been integrated into the program. In reflection, the adult facilitator wrote that the use of student evaluators was ideal, resulting in usable data, stronger leadership skills, and greater school awareness of the tutoring program itself.

Voice & Purpose

A range of students participated in a recent Bay Area (California) School Reform Collaborative project. One school invited students to share their views on what needed to be changed, and how to accomplish those changes. The students then joined teachers to analyse the data gathered. They found that there were five main concerns students raised, including stronger leadership skills, and greater school awareness of the tutoring program itself.

Assessing School Effectiveness

A group of self-selected student leaders at Secondary Academy for Success (SAS), a public alternative high school in Bothell, Washington, were trained in school change and student voice. Afterward they facilitated a schoolwide forum for students and teachers, addressing such areas as teacher quality, building design, and curriculum. The students compiled their findings into a report for their peers, also presenting it to the school staff and the district school board. The school principal created positions for students on the school re-design committee and now regards their input as essential to school improvement.

Possibilities of Students as Education Evaluators

- Students evaluating classes and schools
- Students evaluating teacher performance and efficacy
- Students evaluating self-performance and learning
- Students leading parent-teacher conferences

Examples of Students as Planners

Its REALLY Time to Listen

In 2003, students in REAL HARD (Representing Educated Active Leaders - Having A Righteous Dream), a community youth leadership organisation, designed and collected 1,000 report card surveys evaluating teaching, counseling, school safety and facilities at three Oakland high schools. The students compiled their findings, analysed the results, and made concrete recommendations to improve the schools in this exciting, comprehensive report. The introduction to the report states: “There are 48,000 youth in Oakland’s schools that are experts – who are in class every day and who have a lot to say about how the schools are run and how to improve our education. Whenever something happens in the schools, everyone wants to hear from the teachers and parents - but what about the students? Who asks our opinion? Why do we feel shut out, like no one cares what we think?”

Assessing School Effectiveness

(www.soundout.org/features/SAS.html)

A group of self-selected student leaders at Secondary Academy for Success (SAS), a public alternative high school in Bothell, Washington, were trained in school change and student voice. Afterward they facilitated a schoolwide forum for students and teachers, addressing such areas as teacher quality, building design, and curriculum. The students compiled their findings into a report for their peers, also presenting it to the school staff and the district school board. The school principal created positions for students on the school re-design committee and now regards their input as essential to school improvement.

Best Practices Club

(bestpracticeslex.org/)

The purpose of Best Practices is to involve students in the process of improving teaching and learning at the high school. Teachers volunteer to invite student observers into their classrooms to observe and document teaching and learning. The results (the information and examples of best teaching practices that students glean from these classrooms) are analysed, discussed, and shared with the school community.

Dream)

In 2003, students in REAL HARD (Representing Educated Active Leaders - Having A Righteous Dream), a community youth leadership organisation, designed and collected 1,000 report card surveys evaluating teaching, counseling, school safety and facilities at three Oakland high schools. The students compiled their findings, analysed the results, and made concrete recommendations to improve the schools in this exciting, comprehensive report. The introduction to the report states: “There are 48,000 youth in Oakland’s schools that are experts – who are in class every day and who have a lot to say about how the schools are run and how to improve our education. Whenever something happens in the schools, everyone wants to hear from the teachers and parents - but what about the students? Who asks our opinion? Why do we feel shut out, like no one cares what we think?”

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Student-led Conferences Project

(www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/)

Growing a Trend: Student-Led Conferencing

(www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin112.shtml)

Building Better Students - LA High School

Students Assess their School

(innercitystruggle.org/story.php?story=91)

Tools for Students as Evaluators


Purdue Teacher Evaluation Scale

(eric.ed.gov/tr/TC006979.htm)

Student-Led Research on Schools Example Page: 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.whatkidscando.org/studentallies/pdfs/engagingstudentsinnactionresearch/researchforaction_guide.pdf)
From all of us at VISTA we would like to wish all SRC Teachers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We hope you enjoy your (well deserved) break and return fresh and ready in 2011 to provide a youth voice on rural education.

Plans already in development include:

- The Victorian Institute of SRC Teacher Advisors is continuing its series of Wine and Cheese Nights for SRC Support Teachers in November. They will be held on Thursday nights in Kew Melbourne:
  - 20th October
  - 24th November

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

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 November. They will be held on Thursday nights in Kew Melbourne:

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Rural Youth Ambassadors

The Victorian Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall was joined by Members of Parliament Paul Weller and David Southwick in announcing the inaugural Rural Youth Ambassador program at the recent CEP Rural Learning Summit.

Mr Hall said the 13 Rural Youth Ambassadors representing both Catholic and Government schools would workshop and discuss ideas and issues around engaging and retaining young people in rural learning over the next nine months.

The Rural Youth Ambassador program is an initiative developed by the Country Education Project and VicSRC to provide a youth voice on rural education. This year ambassadors are supported through scholarships provided by each of the DEECD country regions and the CEO Diocese offices.

Over the next nine months they will focus their discussion on the key factors affecting the engagement and retention of young people in rural Victoria and explore ways in which this can be addressed in the future.

The youth ambassadors were involved in a two day workshop recently, presented their initial thoughts to the CEP Rural Learning Summit, will be involved in ongoing web-based discussion and forums, be involved in further face to face workshops, and present their findings to Minister Hall and Minister Dixon early in 2012.

In addition, the youth ambassadors have already been asked to provide input into the work of two parliamentary committees: Education and Training, and Rural and Regional Development.

Two representatives have been invited to join other key stakeholders in the Rural Education Reference group, established by Minister Dixon recently to provide advice to the state government on the future of rural education within Victoria.

To express your interest in becoming a Rural Youth Ambassador, please contact the Country Education Project (PO Box 1255, Wangaratta 3676), by phone: 03 5723 0000 (mobile: 0428171145), email: admin@cep.org.au or by completing the form on the CEP website cep.org.au/2011/09/08/rural-youth-ambassadors-announced/

The Youth Ambassadors for 2011 are: Ryley Afford (Hopetoun), Sinead Allen (Mirboo North), Brittney Anderson (Mooropna), Lauren Cain (Mirboo North), Emma Inglis (Timboon), Alexander Kerr (Timboon), Daniel Longdon (Korumbura), Rachel Mariner (Lovers Hill), Rebecca McKenzie (Cahuna), Blaise Mortimer (Nathalia), Reece Rowe (Mooropna), Ashley Schultz (Warracknabeal), and Anna Tinkler (Nathalia).

Phil Brown
from Bush Voices, September 8 2011
**Connect Publications: Order Form**

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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:
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www.informit.com.au
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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:
Connecting lives and learning: renewing pedagogy in the middle years (ed. Brenton Prosser, Bill Lucas, Alan Reid; ACSA/UniSA/Hawke Research Institute) Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA: 2010
Inspire (DEECD, Melbourne, Vic) Issue 8; September 2011
Research eLert (DEECD, Melbourne, Vic) September 2011
Rewriting the Rules for Youth Participation: Inclusion and diversity in government and community decision making (Joanna Bell, Ariadne Vromen, Phillipa Collin) National Youth Affairs Research Scheme: 2008
Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 5 No 4; October 2011
YAPRap (YAPA, Surry Hills, NSW) Aug-Sept, Oct-Nov 2011
Yikes (YACVic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 9 Edition 4; September 2011
Young People and Service Provision Under Job Services Australia (Jen Rose, Lisa Morstyn, Alice Tudhope; YACVic, Vic) August 2011
Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, TAS) Volume 30, Number 3; September 2011

International:
Adam Fletcher from SoundOut has created the ‘Student Voice is Changing Schools’ page on Facebook, where he is posting student voice information beyond SoundOut’s collection. It’s at: www.facebook.com/pages/Student-Voice-is-Changing-Schools/118596624818676
Democracy & Education (Lewis and Clark, Portland OR, USA) Fall issue (Vol 19 Issue 2, 2011) online at: www.democracyeducationjournal.org/home

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

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Most importantly, please USE it.