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Developing confidence and leadership skills: Primary School SRC

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Why does Connect exist?

Connect has been published bi-monthly since 1979.

It aims to:

• document student participation approaches and initiatives;
• support reflective practices;
• develop and share resources.

Cover:

From the bus: Murputja Anangu School (page 3)
Photos on pages 1, 3, 4, 5 by Clare Ellis

Student Voice is clearly a buzz phrase of the moment. So this issue of Connect includes several practical and theoretical perspectives, as well as reporting on an international series of Student Voice seminars at Cambridge (UK) and a Student Voice panel held recently in Brisbane.

Like all such education terms (participation ... engagement ... involvement ...) ‘student voice’ can have many meanings, and can be understood and enacted in different ways. I must admit to initially having had some scepticism about the term, fearing its limitations - particularly in comparison to well-explored uses of ideas around ‘participation’. However, I can see that it may be possible to explore and support practices under the ‘student voice’ heading and, in fact, to use the tensions and contradictions in the area to illuminate fruitful directions, discussions and understanding.

Michael Fielding has researched, worked and written in this area for a long time. Earlier this year, he presented an address that explored six meanings of ‘student voice’ under the heading of ‘patterns of partnership’. This address is reproduced here with Michael’s permission. The schema that he presents can have direct practical use; I have already started using a variation of it with some schools to explore both a description of their current practice, and also a framework for setting goals for improving learning and teaching.

Other perspectives are provided here from a beginning teacher (Emma Waheed), and also from Adam Fletcher from the US-based SoundOut group. Adam challenges ‘romanticism’ around student voice – the uncritical applause that any form of ‘voice’ is ‘good’, by pointing out that students exercise ‘voice’ in many ways and about many issues ... all the time. Yet we bring our own values to bear on how we respond to those voices, necessarily applauding some and criticising others, so seeing some as ‘convenient’ and some as ‘inconvenient’. I’m reminded of an article from Reddy and Patra (2002) about ‘youth participation’, where they commented on Roger Hart’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ by observing that young people are participating all the time – in many ways. And, they said, the ladder is therefore not a scale of participation, but a scale of adult control and influence over (or even containment of) that participation (see: www.workingchild.org/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20A%20%20journey%20in%20children%20participation-revised.pdf). These ideas brought much of the ‘participation’ field up with a jolt and made us rethink how we looked on these concepts.

Similarly, Dana Mitra, at the recent Brisbane Student Voice panel, referred to ‘student voice work’, locating the area of discussion with institutional and other responses to ‘voice’: not about ‘voice’ itself (for that occurs all the time), but how others (students, teachers, schools etc) respond to students’ voices, and work with students in partnerships that both challenge and support students’ multiple and varied voices.

And, as Michael Fielding notes in his article, student voice work cannot be ‘value-neutral’. There are strong concerns about its co-option for inauthentic uses. He asks: “What is all this activity for? Whose interests does it serve? Is student voice a neutral technology or an inevitable expression of a set of values and assumptions, not just about teaching and learning, but about the kind of society we wish to live in?” What do you think?

Roger Holdsworth

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Connect 197:
“This is our rock, okay!”

Digital Literacy and Student Voice in Remote Indigenous Education

“Welcome to Murputja Anangu School, Greta Valley Primary ...

We are going to show you around our school.”

It is in these clear and simple terms that the students from Murputja Anangu School’s Ngintaka (Goanna) class introduced the film they made about their school day for the students at Greta Valley Primary School, in Victoria's northeast.

I am still struck by the significance of these opening words. Here are six Anangu students, living on their traditional lands in the central Australian desert, inviting a here-to-unknown class of students in Victoria's rural northeast to a virtual tour of their school. It is in this moment, through the exchange of information between two cultures by their children, that I think the significance of digital literacy to remote Indigenous education, and mainstream classrooms and curriculum, is evident.

In June 2012, I completed a two-week teaching placement at the Murputja Anangu School in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the far northwest desert country of South Australia (SA), culminating in a week working with this upper-primary class to make the film. The APY Lands are home to approximately 2,440 Anangu people (ABS, 2011), a highly transient population, especially during periods of cultural or sorry business. In 1981, the SA Parliament gave Anangu people title to more than 103,000 square kilometres of land, and all Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra people who are traditional owners of any part of the Lands are members of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara. Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are the key languages spoken across the APY Lands, along with Luritja, Arrente, and Ngaanyatjarra. Just 4.1 per cent speak only English at home, compared to 82.8 per cent across Australia (ABS Census Quick Stats, 2011).

Situated near the Mann Ranges, students attending Murputja Anangu School tend to live in family groups within the Nyapari and Kanpi homelands, each community comprised of around 50-100 Anangu. The school teaches kids from CPC (pre school) through to middle secondary, with enrolment hovering around 30 students.

Anangu culture and language is an essentially oral system, which makes digital modes of communication such as films or radio a logical way for remote students to tell their stories and connect with students across the country or world. Over the course of a week, I worked with a small group of upper-primary Anangu students to storyboard, film and edit a video about their school day. They made this video to share directly with the students at my next placement school, Greta Valley Primary, in Victoria's King Valley. As I write this, I am now working with the Greta Valley students to prepare a video to share with the Murputja class in return.
All the Anangu students took turns at directing, filming, and appearing in the film they had planned together. I was struck by how quickly this group took on the concept of an audience, with frequent consideration given to what they might like to show the students at Greta Valley. Given the way people's daily lives in remote Indigenous communities are represented in an increasingly reductionist and negative fashion (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Sweet, 2009; Dickson, 2012), the importance of ensuring Indigenous students are given a voice within the national discourse was plain to see.

So too was its potential. The resulting film is a joyful, often bouncy glimpse into school and community life for these Anangu kids. With extensive footage of the school bus trips between the two homeland communities of Kanpi and Nyapari, anyone who has travelled on the corrugated sand roads of central Australia will know what I mean by ‘bouncy’. The film is an equally proud and humble narrative of an average day at school, peppered with a natural mix of Pitjantjatjara and English (Dickson, 2012), and featuring the school bus trip, homeland communities, camels, camp dogs, school breakfast, hygiene routines, lunchtime football, and time in the classroom. Yet for all the file footage in the various media and government organisations across Australia, these are scenes we don't usually get to see.

For, aside from the breath-taking beauty of the APY Lands and the dynamism of the film's subjects, what is unique about this footage is that it is filmed through the eyes of the Anangu students themselves. The whole film is set to the sound of local Ngaanyatjarra men, the Irrunytju Band, singing Kalkanya Puli Ilaringu in Pitjantjatjara, which is a song about the powerful draw of returning home to country. These sentiments are captured in the film's gently commanding and unscripted coda, in which the camera is trained on the rolling hills that surround Murputja, accompanied by a deceptively simple explanation from an Anangu boy: "This is our rock, okay."

One of the many highlights of this digital literacy project has been the process of exchange between Murputja and Greta Valley schools. To facilitate this, and promote greater understanding of the rich diversity of Indigenous culture in Australia, the Greta Valley students have been introduced to the striking map of Australia's 200 plus Indigenous nations, and begun to learn some basic Pitjantjatjara. Given my own very limited understanding of the language, the only challenge has been to keep up with their demands for more words and phrases. When watching the film, the interest and affection students developed towards the Anangu has been evident in their responses, which ranged from: "They are pretty awesome!" and "The school is cool!" to "Is it hot?", "Do they have shops? What do they eat?!", and contrasting sentiments: "Why do they live in the middle of nowhere?" to "It would be awesome to live there."

This demonstrated to me the potential for teachers to facilitate cultural dialogue between students, as opposed to adults delivering and mediating narrow lessons or units of work on the ‘other’.

I had been initially sceptical about the level of interest the students at Greta Valley might show towards making a film about their school and community for the Murputja students. This was informed by recent, unsurprising PISA research that has shown that Indigenous students have lower levels of digital literacy to non-Indigenous peers, across indicators of proficiency, access, and confidence (Thomson, De Bortoli & ACER, 2012). My fear had been that the novelty
of a digital exchange might wear off quickly for the Greta Valley students. However, just as with the Anangu students, they embraced the demands of their audience and demonstrated a willingness and ability to think deeply about what they would like to share with their digital friends in the APY Lands.

The resulting film looks set to become a challenge for the editing team, such is the rich array of footage students are eager to share with the Anangu. It is my hope that both schools will continue this digital exchange across the curriculum and years.

Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is a process that depends on the power and depth of communication that occurs. This digital exchange between Murputja Anangu School and Greta Valley Primary is just one small example of the importance of valuing and promoting student voice in our classrooms and cultures more generally. More particularly and urgently, as former Australian of the Year, Professor Fiona Stanley has argued: “The more that the dominant culture reports negative stories about Aboriginal people, the more Aboriginal children feel bad about being Aboriginal” (Dickson, 2012; Sweet, 2009). Who better to correct that record than the children themselves?

Want to know more?

The Murputja Anangu School’s website is: www.murputja.sa.edu.au/

The Australian Broadcasting Commission has an interactive Indigenous Australia map: www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/

There is a series of films produced by and about Northern Territory’s Ntaria School students, and exchanged with Tasmania’s Wynyard High School, as a result of filmmaking workshops with Big hART’s Namatjira project in 2012. See: http://vimeo.com/channels/namatjira/43585437

For a powerful example of a formal Indigenous language and cultural education in a mainstream school, see the Wiradjuri language program that has been established in three primary schools in the NSW town of Parkes: www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/07/04/3538590.htm

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References


We developed an SRC at St Joseph’s Primary School, Springvale last year (see Connect 190: August 2011) through the process of a Student Action Team of Year 5 students investigating what Student Voice meant and could (and should) be like at our school. We have continued to develop the approach where students investigate what other students at the school want and then work towards implementing these ideas.

The SRC at our school now consists of 20 Year 5/6 students. Sixteen students were elected by the eight Year 5/6 classes at the beginning of the year. (There is an even mix of Year 5 and 6 students, boys and girls.) The SRC also includes the two school captains and vice captains.

A lot of time has been spent developing the confidence and leadership skills of the students. They are excellent at taking minutes for meetings and organising but they struggle to believe they have the ability to create and develop their ideas.

During the first six months of the year, the Deputy Principals worked together with all 20 students. The SRC worked to develop the MonsterChef Cupcake Competition for the 700 students at the school. They designed the entry form, certificates, and posters for the competition. They worked out the instructions for the competition and rehearsed so that they ran the entire event. It was extremely successful.

In Term 3 the students broke into two groups: Publicity and Rewards and Recognition being one group, and Environment and Social Justice being the other. Eventually we hope to work in four groups.

Recently the students rang Bunnings Warehouse to get assistance for organising a vegetable garden for the school. I was impressed with the manner in which they spoke to the events coordinator. They have written a letter asking for assistance. The students also created signs to promote the better use of our toilet blocks and discussed this by visiting and speaking to all classes about the issue.

We are also promoting Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) through our school. The students are currently organising how our school can give rewards and certificates to students associated with this. They have created posters and are designing the processes for proving rewards and recognition related to these concepts.

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In 2010, ISIS Primary Care identified a high level of unhealthy behaviour involving alcohol and other drugs (AOD), and sexual and reproductive health (S&RH) within Melbourne’s western suburbs. The Department of Health (2010) reported higher than average rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), while a number of local government areas in the West displayed greater than average alcohol-related harm and illicit drug-related hospitalisations (HealthWest Partnership 2010).

We know that strong, healthy relationships can protect against poor behaviour in both areas, particularly during adolescence. Adolescents with healthy relationships and strong connections to family and community (including their school) tend to have fewer problems with AOD and S&RH later in life (Herrman, Saxena & Moodie 2005; AIHW 2003; Loxley, Toumbourou & Stockwell 2004).

With this in mind, staff from ISIS decided to conduct a project with a local secondary school. It was envisaged the project would develop students’ communication skills and ability to relate to others, hopefully enabling them to make better decisions around AOD and S&RH now and in the future. The School Nurse at Bayside College Williamstown was also eager to conduct a health promotion project seeking to improve communication and relationships among students.

Bayside Williamstown is a secondary school for Years 7 – 9 students, located in Hobsons Bay in Melbourne’s western suburbs, with around 320 students from diverse cultural backgrounds. It was decided to take a collaborative approach, conducting a project throughout the 2011 school year to help students develop skills to build stronger relationships.

A number of Australian schools have successfully used a Student Action Team approach to address issues surrounding AOD and S&RH now and in the future. This idea, a Student Wellbeing Action Team (SWAT) was set up.

Our first lessons...
Initially it was intended that students representing all year levels and classes join the SWAT, with a particular focus on students at high risk of poor social connectedness. However, restrictions on timetabling meant that this was not possible. Finally, the SWAT consisted of one Year 9 class (about 20 students) with the classroom teacher, school nurse and three ISIS staff allocated time for the project.

Sessions were run every two weeks while the health issue and possible...
Instead of the survey, the SWAT began brainstorming ideas for possible projects. At first students wanted to look at the school canteen but, for a number of reasons, this was outside the scope and influence of the SWAT project. Now and throughout the project, the highly-regulated school environment would prove challenging and occasionally discouraging to students. Which leads us to…

**Lesson #2:** When working within a regulated school environment, expect some blocks and detours along the way. Anticipate them where possible, but encourage students to think laterally and work around these.

The students decided to focus on school pride, as they expressed concerns that the school was not seen as favourably by the community as it could be, and were eager to improve its profile. By increasing feelings of school pride, it was thought that students would feel a stronger sense of connection with their school, thereby decreasing the likelihood of experiencing symptoms of poor mental health (Herrman, Saxena & Moodie 2005). In addition, school connectedness was identified by the World Health Organization (Herrman, Saxena & Moodie 2005) as a protective factor against adolescents engaging in unsafe health practices and risky behavior, enabling the specific project to tie in nicely with the overall aim of the SWAT.

Lesson #3: More time should be dedicated to a SWAT early in the school year, as unforeseen school activities throughout the year can impact on the SWAT. Insufficient time can lead to students feeling disempowered and dissatisfied with the project outcome.

Deciding on a project…

The SWAT aimed to survey all students and staff at the school, and so target an issue affecting the whole school community. But other school commitments slowly began eating up class time that should have been dedicated to the SWAT, consequently this worthwhile but time consuming activity could not go ahead. This pattern continued through the school year, leaving less and less class time for the SWAT.

Lesson #1: However you decide to run your Student Action Team, it’s important that everyone has a clear understanding of the roles of all involved. Roles and expectations should be set out and agreed to by all involved, before the project begins!

Lesson #2: When working within a regulated school environment, expect some blocks and detours along the way. Anticipate them where possible, but encourage students to think laterally and work around these.

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The Year 9 class decided to create a mural to improve the look and feel of the school, and so foster a sense of pride in the school among the entire school community. Students wanted the school to be seen as a valuable and active part of their community, and chose a quote they felt represented that idea:

‘Be the change you wish to see in the world’
Due to worries that a mural would be too easily defaced by graffiti, it was replaced with a mosaic. The inspirational quote by Gandhi was incorporated into a mosaic design depicting a map of the world. ISIS staff encouraged the SWAT to take ownership of the project as much as possible. Students were broken into groups with different tasks to perform, including marketing, school engagement and seeking donations of materials for the mosaic from local businesses. During these sessions, students were easily distracted and difficult to engage. It was soon realised this was, in part, because they were lacking some of the skills, knowledge or confidence necessary to perform these tasks. Unfortunately, time constraints had meant that planned training was unable to go ahead…

Lesson #4: When planning a SWAT, allow sufficient time for training and skill development in the early stages. Encourage input from teachers, as they are qualified educators and can make suggestions based on the class’s abilities and preferred learning styles.

Being the change…

Two full days were required to produce the colourful mosaic, with all students participating. Materials (mosaic tiles etc) were donated by local businesses, which were sent thank you letters written by the students. The artist involved was enthusiastic and passionate, which was felt and appreciated by the students. They enjoyed the practical nature of the task more than the planning phases. Students brought in music to listen to and enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of working together. Even students who had been less enthusiastic about the project initially, contributed well in these final stages…

Lesson #5: Hands-on activities help to maintain student interest, while expecting students to perform unfamiliar tasks with insufficient preparation or training will lose it.

The Year 9 students were pleased with how the mosaic turned out, and were understandably very proud of it. Being part of the SWAT promoted the development of good collaborative working relationships between the students, teachers and ISIS workers. The students adapted well to the program and developed cohesiveness as a group.

The results from the wellbeing survey (which was completed pre- and post-project) indicated an increase in feelings of school connectedness among the participating students. Comments from the class teacher indicated that, following the SWAT project, students were happy to work with anyone in the class and were very accepting of each other. The deputy principal noted that participating in the SWAT created a cohesive group, leading to a ‘better fit’ in the school community.

The mosaic has since been mounted on the outside wall near the school car park with a plaque naming participating students, and the then-Year 9 students have moved on to Year 10 at the senior campus. The students remain proud of the mosaic, and are pleased to have left a ‘legacy’ at the Williamstown campus.

Lessons aren’t just for students…

While the SWAT ultimately achieved its aim of helping Bayside students learn to build better relationships, the road was not a smooth one, nor was the project an unqualified success. The whole-of-school approach initially envisioned did not function as intended and many on-the-go changes had to be made. Meanwhile, the future of the SWAT program at Bayside is uncertain. While acknowledging the success of the program, Bayside were hesitant to run another SWAT without the support of ISIS. Before embarking on a similar project in the future, ISIS needs to look at ways to make this project more sustainable and less difficult for schools to run on their own.

As demonstrated by the content of this report, many valuable lessons were learned throughout the process and project that are applicable not just to the implementation of Student Action Teams but also to anyone conducting school-based projects. It is hoped that the lessons of this project will be valuable to others and will enable them to conduct successful school-based projects in the future.

Thanks go to all staff and students involved at Bayside College Williamstown for your help and enthusiasm while working with us on this great project.

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Because in large part my lecture is a celebration of student voice, it is important to begin by acknowledging that the range of work that has developed in many countries across the world in the last two decades has been quite remarkable. Thus we have:

- **Peer support** – ie activities that suggest that young people benefit, both socially and academically, from listening to each other’s voices whether individually – eg buddy, coaching, mentoring and peer teaching; or, more collectively – eg prefects, student leaders and class and school councils and circle time.

- **Student/teacher learning partnerships** - in which students are given responsibility for working alongside teachers and other adults in a developmental capacity eg student-led learning walks, students as co-researchers and lead researchers, Students as Learning Partners (where teachers invite students to observe their teaching), student ambassadors, and student led learners. Not only does much of this flourish at institutional level, it is also possible for individual teachers to undertake a wide range of student voice work within their own classrooms through an increasingly imaginative range of practices supplementing the more familiar observation, video-recording, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and diary with such things as collage, drawings, learning logs and scrap-books, drama and role play, and suggestion boxes. Indeed, for writers like Jean Rudduck and Donald McIntyre, the classroom is the most important arena for student voice work since, in their view, it is the classroom that constitutes the dominant daily context and most important site of the realisation of the school’s core purpose, namely teaching and learning.

- **Student evaluation of staff/the school** - activities in which students express their views on a range of matters, sometimes after collecting and interpreting data, either on individual members of staff, school teams or departments, or the school as a learning community eg students as observers, students as informants in teacher consultation about effective teaching and learning, students on staff appointment panels, students as associate governors, student focus groups and surveys, students as key informants in the processes of external inspection and accountability, and junior leadership teams.

- **Student engagement with the community** – often through student-led initiatives like student action teams addressing issues such as environmental health, road safety or the development of mutual understanding and support between generations; likewise youth councils and fledging attempts to involve whole towns in student-oriented initiatives such as the UNICEF RRR (Rights Respect Responsibility) program.

Listening to the voices of young people is now actively advocated by government departments in the context of formal education and also within the framework of childhood services. There has also been very substantial grass-roots interest in student voice from teachers, from young people themselves and from university researchers. That said, there are, of course, very different readings of what student voice is, why it has flourished as it has, what its strengths and weakness are, and what its future prospects might be. In this article based on the lecture Professor Fielding highlights four clusters of issues that seem particularly significant.

**Emerging Issues**

In the course of this lecture I will highlight four clusters of issues that seem to me particularly significant at this time. One of
the most important points to absences, such as the voices of those deemed less successful or less important in school and society. We need to ask ourselves whose voices are heard and why, and reflect on the nature and extent of the silences that so often go unnoticed and unrecorded.

Secondly, a very important strand of the literature argues for the entitlement of rights-based approaches rather than the condescending uncertainties of patronage and circumstantial good will.

Thirdly, a number of writers are concerned to expose exuberant claims of participation as little more than glossy enticement into the Scylla of performativity and the Charybdis of perpetual consumption. Here the concern is that student voice becomes a tool of management, aping the practices of quality assurance, sometimes (though thankfully rarely) through covert observation and rating of teachers. Even in less pernicious variants there are real dangers of an unwitting descent to superficial responses to poorly constructed questionnaires and the predictable reproduction of standard notions of good teaching and learning that migrate too readily into various forms of box-ticking and professional dereliction.

Lastly, even when these dangers are overtly avoided, there remain significant tensions for many teachers, in particular, lack of institutional support, and unremitting pressures of curriculum coverage and exam performance. There are also deeper issues that remain largely unaddressed eg whether the driving force is an expression of consumerist ideology or democratic agency and the companion challenge of clarifying the appropriate relationship between professional expertise of teachers and the integrity and validity of learner-oriented approaches to education in both its more restricted and more expansive senses.

What these emerging concerns point to is a series of underlying questions, not just about the successes and difficulties of student voice in the second decade of the 21st century, but also about fundamental purposes eg What is all this activity for? Whose interests does it serve? Is student voice a neutral technology or an inevitable expression of a set of values and assumptions, not just about teaching and learning, but about the kind of society we wish to live in? My own view is that student voice is inevitably and properly saturated by values: it cannot be neutral and to suggest otherwise is either a profound mistake or a convenient subterfuge.

**Patterns of partnership: how adults listen to and learn with students in schools**

**Purpose, power and relationships**

In a moment I will illustrate the inevitable partiality of student voice, both in action and conception, but before I do I want to touch on the key issue of power which will enable us to move beyond the excitement of multiple examples and establish a clearer view of the nature of student voice work being undertaken. Perhaps the best known of the typologies that help us to differentiate in a searching and discriminating way are from the field of youth participation eg Roger Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ (Hart, 1992) and the equally interesting and useful, but less well-known ‘pathways to participation’ developed by Harry Shier (Shier, 2001). My own typology – ‘patterns of partnership’ – owes a considerable debt to both of these leading pioneers. However, it differs in a number of important respects. Firstly, whilst it offers a framework that has generic significance across contexts and professions, it is also one which draws distinctions about different ways in which young people and adults work together that pay particular attention to the complexities and specificities of school-based environments.

Secondly, I have become increasingly convinced of the need to name and explore participatory democracy as a legitimate and increasingly urgent aspiration, not only in society at large, but in schools themselves. Of course, many will disagree with this, but my hope is that some at least will not only warm to the naming of democracy as a legitimate aspiration to be overtly addressed on a day-to-day basis in the processes and culture of the school, but also welcome the incremental possibilities that my typology supports and encourages.

Thirdly, and as a consequence of the particular view of democracy for which I am arguing, I wish to go beyond Hart’s and Shier’s quite proper insistence that we take seriously the power relations that inevitably circumscribe or enable different kinds of engagement. Power is not the only characteristic of human relations that prohibits or facilitates different kinds of outcome. Equally important, and especially so when taken into account with the calibrations of power, are relationships, ie the way we regard each other, the way in which our dispositions are directed and shaped by our willingness to treat each other as persons in our own right, as beings with all the distinctiveness and possibility our uniqueness proclaims and the rich commonalities our humanity presumes and requires.

**Patterns of partnership**

Leaving a fuller exploration of this relational dimension of my proposals until later, I set out below my typology: Patterns of partnership: how adults listen to and learn with students in schools – which suggests six forms of interaction between adults and young people within schools and other educational contexts. These are:

- **Students as data source** – in which staff utilise information about student progress and well-being
- **Students as active respondents** – in which staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/professional decisions
- **Students as co-enquirers** – in which staff take a lead role with high-profile, active student support
- **Students as knowledge creators** – in which students take lead roles with active staff support
- **Students as joint authors** – in which students take lead roles in which students and staff decide on a joint course of action together
- **Intergenerational learning as lived democracy** – in which there is a shared commitment to responsibility for the common good

In each of these ways of working, the power relations are different, thus not only enabling or prohibiting the contributions of one side of the partnership, but also influencing the potential synergy of the joint work and thereby affecting the possibility of both adults and young...
people being able to listen to and learn with and from each other. In order to explore their possible resonance with the current and future realities of work in schools, I illustrate each of the six forms of interaction at the classroom level, the unit/team/department level, and at the level of the whole school.

In the **Students as data source** mode (see Table 1) staff work hard to utilise information about student progress and well-being. There is a real teacher commitment to paying attention to student voices speaking through the practical realities of work done and targets agreed. It acknowledges that for teaching and learning to improve, there is a need to take more explicit account of relevant data about individual students and group or class achievement. At unit/team/department level, this way of working might express itself through, say, samples of student work being shared across a staff group, either as a form of moderation, or, less formally, as part of a celebration of the range of work going on. At whole school level, an example would be the now much more common practice of conducting an annual survey of student opinion on matters the school deems important.

In the **Students as active respondents** mode (see Table 2) staff invite student dialogue and discussion in order to deepen their approach to student learning and enhance the professional decisions they make. Here staff move beyond the accumulation of passive data and, in order to deepen the learning of young people and enrich staff professional decisions, they feel a need to hear what students have to say about their own experience in lessons or their active engagement in contributing to its development via, for example, assessment-for-learning approaches. Students are discussants rather than recipients of current approaches and thereby contribute to the development of teaching and learning in their school. At unit/team/department level, this active respondent role might express itself through, say, every fourth meeting having a significant agenda item based on pupil views/evaluations of the work they have been doing. At whole school level, an example would be the inclusion of pupils in the appointment process for new staff.

In the **Students as co-enquirers** partnership (see Table 3) we see an increase in both student and teacher involvement and a greater degree of partnership than in the previous two modes. Whilst student and teacher roles are not equal, they are shifting strongly, if not in an egalitarian, then in a more strenuously interdependent direction. Students move from being discussants to being co-enquirers into matters of agreed significance and importance. While the focus and the boundaries of exploration are fixed by the teacher, the commitment and agreement of students are essential. At a classroom level this might involve, for example, a shared enquiry into and development of more independent/interdependent ways of student working. At unit/team/department level, this kind of approach might express itself through student evaluation of a unit of work, as, for example, undertaken by a group in a girls’ secondary school calling themselves the ‘History Dudettes’. At whole school level, an example would be a joint student-student evaluation of the Reports to Parents system.

**Students as knowledge creators** (see Table 4) deepens and extends the egalitarian thrust of the co-enquiry approach. Partnership and dialogue remain the dominant ways of working, but here it is the voice of the student that comes to the fore in a leadership or initiating, not just a responsive, role. It is students who identify the issues to be pursued and students who subsequently undertake the enquiry/development with the support of staff. At classroom level, this has sometimes expressed itself through annual Student-Led Reviews which replace traditional Parents’ Evenings (where parents come to the school to hear the teacher’s views about the progress of their child). At unit/team/department level, a good example comes from a Student Year Council who were concerned that their playground buddying system was not working in the ways they had hoped. At whole school level, students in an innovative secondary school used photo-elicitation as part of their enquiry into the causes of low-level bullying that went largely undetected by staff.

### Table 1: Students as data source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Lesson planning takes account of student test scores and other data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit/team/department</td>
<td>Samples of student work shared across staff group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Student attitude survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Students as active respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Engaging with and adapting explicit assessment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit/team/department</td>
<td>Team agenda based on students views/evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Students on staff appointment panels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Students as co-enquirers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>How can we develop more independence in learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit/team/department</td>
<td>Student evaluation of eg a History unit of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Joint evaluation of current system of Reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Students as knowledge creators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Development of Student-Led Reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit/team/department</td>
<td>Is the playground buddying system working?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>What is the cause of low level bullying in class?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Joint authors model (see Table 5) involves a genuinely shared, fully collaborative partnership between students and staff. Leadership, planning and conduct of research and the subsequent commitment to responsive action are embraced as both a mutual responsibility and energising adventure. At classroom level, this might express itself through the co-construction of, for example, a Maths lesson. At unit/team/department level, this might take the form of a Research Lesson in which, say, three staff and three students co-plan a lesson, observe it, meet to discuss the observation data, plan version two in the light of it and repeat the process. And all of this endeavour is undertaken on behalf of the team/department and their students. At whole school level, this kind of approach might express itself in a jointly led Learning Walk. Here a focus or centre of interest is agreed and the school (and any other participating institution) becomes the site of enquiry within which the focused Walk is undertaken.

Finally, the Intergenerational learning as lived democracy approach (see Table 6) extends the shared and collaborative partnership between students and staff in ways that (a) emphasise a joint commitment to the common good, and (b) include occasions and opportunities for an equal sharing of power and responsibility. At its best it is an instantiation and explicit acknowledgement of the creativity and promise of intergenerational learning.

At classroom level, it might involve staff, students and museum staff planning a visit to a museum for younger students. At unit/team/department level, this might take the form of classes acting as critical friends to each other in the wider context of a thematic or interdisciplinary project within and/or between years. At whole school level, this might express itself through the development of Whole School Meetings that are such an important iconic practice within the radical traditions of both private and publicly funded education.

Democratic fellowship and the demands of deep democracy

Deep democracy

Whilst deliberately naming democracy as a form of partnership that is pre-eminently desirable and incrementally achievable in schools through something like the patterns of partnership between adults and young people, it is important to say a little more about the view of democracy on which such advocacy rests. In so doing it is also important to relate it to earlier arguments about relationships as a key component in the nexus of power and purposes that define and enable the intergenerational work that schools and the wider practices of society intend and develop. Relationships as an integral component of the nexus of power and purpose in reconfiguring our aspirations and practices is fundamentally tied to, though not exhausted by, a view of democracy that insists on the link between the personal and the political, between democracy’s purposes and the means by which it seeks to realise its intentions.

Democracy is much more than a collaborative mechanism by which we agree our aspirations, take action, hold each other to account and revise or renew our commitments in the light of public deliberation. It is primarily a way of living and learning together at the heart of which lie the three mutually conditioning commitments to freedom, equality and community. Certainly, it transcends the now ubiquitous intrusions of the market in much contemporary theory and practice of democracy. As Michael Sandel has so eloquently reminded us,

Democratic governance is radically devalued if reduced to the role of handmaiden to the market economy.

Democracy is about more than fixing and tweaking and nudging incentives to make markets work better... (it) is about much more than maximising GDP, or satisfying consumer preferences. It’s also about seeking distributive justice; promoting the health of democratic institutions; and cultivating the solidarity, and sense of community that democracy requires. Market-mimicking governance – at its best – can satisfy us as consumers. But it can do nothing to make us democratic citizens. (Sandel, 2009: 4)

Of course, many will disagree with Sandel and with me: but that is as it should be. Democracy is an essentially contested concept and part of its health and legitimacy depends on the disagreements which make up its ideal aspirations and its daily enactment. As I suggested earlier, the same is true of student voice: it cannot be a neutral technology. The machinery of democracy, and student voice as one of its many instantiations, must articulate and enable the kinds of human encounter, the kinds of living and learning which democracy intends.

The practical realisation of deep democracy will ultimately and immediately depend on the lived dispositions and values, on what writers within this tradition have often called fellowship, or what I, for reasons sketched out below, call democratic fellowship. Democracy needs fellowship to forestall, for example, the tyranny of a populist or racist injustice: fellowship needs democracy in order to forestall, for example, the wistful reaffirmation of hierarchical communities in which all come, once again, to know and love their place. For me, as for writers like the great Scottish philosopher John

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Students as joint authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students and staff decide on a joint course of action together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Co-construct eg a Maths lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit/team/department</td>
<td>Develop a ‘Research Lesson’ for the department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Joint student and staff Learning Walk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 Intergenerational learning as lived democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Students and staff plan lesson for younger students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit/team/department</td>
<td>Classes as critical friends in thematic conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Whole School Meeting to decide a key issue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Macmurray, fellowship is the point of politics. Indeed, politics 'has significance only through the human fellowship which it makes possible; and by this its validity and its success must be judged' (Macmurray, 1950: 69–70). Democratic fellowship is not just the point of politics, but the precondition of democracy's daily development and future flourishing: 'the extent and quality of such political freedom as we can achieve depends in the last resort upon the extent and quality of the fellowship which is available to sustain it' (Macmurray 1950: 69). Human fellowship is at once the precursor to and hope of democratic politics which is both its agent and an important site of its prefigurative enactment. 'The democratic slogan - liberty, equality, fraternity - embodies correctly the principles of human fellowship. To achieve freedom and equality is to create friendship, to constitute community between men' (Macmurray, 1950: 74–75).

If we supplement this relational view of democracy which presumes, nurtures and anticipates more inclusive and more generously conceived forms of human sociality with a number of other allied considerations, a fully fledged democratic fellowship perspective will interpret and act on the patterns of partnership with very different understandings, intentions and results to those who approach them from market-led, neo-liberal standpoints.

Three such considerations seem to me particularly apt here. Firstly, there will be an optimistic, enabling view of what young people are capable of that was at one time much more widely held by, amongst others, the now much maligned progressive education movement. Secondly, there will be an acknowledgement, tacit or otherwise, that those more open views of young people are partnered with both a respect and a regard for what the children's rights movement has done so much to develop in the last two decades. Thirdly, and this is the point it is important to press most insistently here, attention will be paid to relationships, to care as well as to rights, justice and power. When teachers and students begin to work in these new ways they are not just redrawing the boundaries of what is permissible and thereby jointly extending a sense of what is possible: they are also giving each other the desire and the strength to do so through their regard and care for each other. In sum, a democratic fellowship perspective not only insists on the necessity of emancipatory values guiding its development, it also requires a similarly open and creative set of dispositions and understandings that provide the motivational energy and responsive engagement at the heart of its aspirations.

**Democratic fellowship in action**

How, then, might democratic fellowship engage with the lived realities towards which I have gestured in my six-fold 'patterns of partnership'? Space permits only one or two examples:

A democratic fellowship reading of the classroom example of Partnership 1 - Students as data source in which staff utilise information about student progress and well-being might draw attention to and encourage a teacher to go beyond test data and draw on her emerging knowledge and understanding of the student's range of involvement in many areas of the curriculum, and on her developing knowledge and appreciation of the young person in both formal and informal and school and non-school situations, including those in which she is developing her agency as a public actor in communal and interpersonal contexts.

A democratic fellowship reading of the classroom example of Partnership 4 - Students as knowledge creators in which students take a lead role with active staff support would bring out the fact that students themselves have responsibility for organising the Annual Review meeting by liaising between themselves, their teachers and their parents, about mundane but important practicalities. These would include, for example, the student attending to the physical details of the meeting such as seating arrangements that reflect who and what are the central focus of the imminent dialogue. It would also bring out the student's leading role in the moral and existential conduct of the encounter as well as the establishment of clarity about outcomes and the resulting responsibilities of each of the partners involved. Furthermore, in some of the best examples I know of, the fellowship dimensions of the Review Meeting involve not just the teachers and parents, but a group of the young person's peers who act as critical friends to the student in the preparation of the presentation of the achievements and aspirations which lie at the heart of the Review process. They also transcend an exclusive preoccupation with reductive measurement and the myopia of performance: here young people are asking profound, practical questions about what it means to lead a good life, not merely map a partial picture of some of its narrower components.

**Reaffirming and renewing radical democratic traditions of education**

My hope is that my patterns of partnership typology and the democratic fellowship perspective for which I have argued will not only challenge the domination of neo-liberal perspectives, but also provide a practical means towards the realisation of democracy as a way of living and learning together and of schools as themselves examples of democracy in action. However, practical steps of the kind I am suggesting will not be enough to support and sustain the development of schools as democratic learning communities. We also need at least two other enabling commitments.

These are, firstly, an analytic tool that helps us to identify key factors that not only name what we are committed to, but also points to the core elements that are necessary to sustain and develop our work over time. Secondly, we must actively and extensively draw on radical democratic traditions of public education: we must, in other words reclaim our histories, for without them we are prisoners of a contextless present and an impoverished future.

The first of these imperatives, which I have explored in some of my recent work, will not detain us here (see Fielding and Moss, 2011). I do however, wish to draw this lecture to a close by saying just a little about the second imperative, about the necessity of countering what E.P. Thomson once tellingly called 'the enormous condescension of posteriority' (Thompson, 1968: 13). My strongly held view is that there is a necessary link between our pasts and our capacity to understand the present and shape the future in ways that our values demand and our hopes suggest. Russell Jacoby is entirely right in his judgement that any society that has lost its memory has also lost its mind. 'The inability or refusal to think back takes its toll in the inability to
Just as there is no one history, so there is a plurality of alternative traditions reflecting particular standpoints, preoccupations and aspirations. Following the advice of Roberto Unger, we must find our genealogies, not merely inherit them (Unger, 1998: 235). For me that genealogy would include, for example, the pioneering work of Alex Bloom in the East End of London from 1945-1955 (Bloom, 1953, Fielding, 2005), Howard Case’s work in a residential special school in Hertfordshire, England from 1958-1972 (Case, 1966, Fielding, 2010), and Lawrence Kohlberg’s work in the USA during the 1970s and 80s (Kohlberg, 1980, Fielding, 2010). For readers of this paper and for recipients of College of Teachers awards the genealogies will be different. The key point, however, is the necessity of commitment: you must choose a kind of future to which you aspire. There is no neutral ground to occupy.

Student voice is not a technique devoid of aims or purpose: those purposes exist, either explicitly or, more frequently, implicitly in the policy context or wider zeitgeist that gives energy and resonance to its contemporary appeal.

References

Professor Michael Fielding
Emeritus Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. Well known for his work in the fields of radical education, student voice, school leadership and professional learning, Michael brings a perspective strongly influenced by person-centred, radical democratic traditions of publicly funded education. If we forget history or marginalise purposes we may get somewhere faster - but not where we need to go.

Student Voice Panel in Brisbane

The 17th Annual Values and Leadership Conference, held in Brisbane at the start of October, featured a panel of Australian and US speakers around ‘Student Voice and Participation in Australian Schools’. The panel was convened by Professor Dana Mitra, Director, Willower Center for Ethics and Leadership, Penn State University, USA.

This innovative session brought together Australian researchers, practitioners and policy makers to examine how issues of student voice and participation are conceptualised and implemented in schools. Panelists were:

- Dr Kaye Johnson, Department for Education and Child Development, SA;
- Lynne Searle, Principal, Gosford High School, NSW;
- Eve Mayes, former teacher at Condell Park High School and graduate student at University of Sydney, NSW;
- Samantha McClelland, Year 12 student, Balwyn High School and (ex) executive member, VicSRC, Vic;
- Roger Holdsworth, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, Victoria and editor of Connect;
- Dr David Znyier, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Vic.

Panelist presented brief outlines of their work and involvement in the area of ‘student voice’ and then took part in a conversation about current dilemmas and successes related to voice and participation. Questions to the group focused on key issues in the field including how to mobilise support for voice projects, issues of sustainability of long term work, and positive and negative outcomes of previous efforts.

For further information and summary of the panel, contact Dana Mitra: dmitra@psu.edu
Perspectives on Student Voice

Why it matters to me...

To speak and to be heard: it’s a plea at the heart of every human being. It is especially important to acknowledge this desire within educational dimensions, specifically in acknowledgement of the voice of the child. Student Voice is an important social issue and, as a beginning teacher, I wish to explore the ways in which I can respond to it in my classroom.

Although schools are designed for young people, they are rarely designed in co-operation with young people (Osler 2010). School, it seems, is something that happens to students: they are recipients of an educational process. This ‘banking’ concept of education (Freire 1996), in which students are seen as empty minds that are to be filled by the knowledge of the teacher, locates students as inferior to adults and hence devalues their opinions. On the contrary, their perspectives, and consequently their needs, are matters of importance to them and to their education. Valuing students is about ways in which we, as teachers, respect their human rights and, compatible with our ethical standards, which we apply to adult citizens.

Student Voice highlights the ways in which education, democracy and social justice are tightly linked, in responding to the strong desire for a reciprocal relationship between teachers and students. Osler (2010: 80) illustrates this through the following student quotes:

“I would feel better at school if teachers treated me the way they like to be treated.”

“I think by being respected for who I am and what I am will make me a better student.”

“If you complain about the teachers no action is usually taken. If a teacher complains about you, you always get a report, warning and a very big investigation. I have always wondered what has happened to equal rights?”

“It would help if they [teachers] listened once in a while to our views instead of thinking they’re always right. If teachers want respect they should give students respect too and they should also respect our ideas and our views.”

The idea that a positive relationship based upon understanding, respect and fairness can be the pivotal point for democratic and educational engagement is incredibly important to me and vital to the way I see myself as a teacher.

Such a focus on the relationships between students and those around them (for example fellow students, teachers, parents, administrators, the community) helps to open up the notion of Student Voice as a holistic approach, rather than treating it as an issue that is only relevant in specific circumstances with select individuals for example:

... asking for student opinions and, listening to student voices, reminds teachers that students possess unique knowledge and perspective about their schools and their learning, which adults cannot replicate. (Mitra, 2007: 728)

and to be understood, both in terms of placing themselves within the classroom but also as individuals and human beings within the world. This kind of holistic approach attempts to facilitate students as participants (as opposed to recipients) within their learning environment.

To develop such an approach is a complex task but I think it can be more effective in offering avenues that enable real Student Voice than offering limited opportunities where they may be able to express themselves or see others speak on their behalf.

“Recognising and building on the knowledge and competence of students, enabling them to make decisions about their own investigations, and ensuring that they can experience positive outcomes that make a difference to their environments – these seem to be principles of effective and engaging learning in any classroom.” (Holdsworth 2012: 12)

As teachers, there are many ways of helping to enable or disable student voice. Many of these are foundational but often overlooked; the ways in which a teacher talks to or shouts at their students, punishes, restricts rewards and generally exercises authority can all be seen as ways that hinder positive relationships. Alternatively (and referring back to the idea of reciprocal respect and the ways we can treat and value another human being), actions such as active listening, valuing opinions, engaging students as partners in educational planning, in research, teaching, evaluating, and decision making are positive steps toward opening avenues for effective communication and creating a dialogue with students. These indicate the moral and ethical (as well as pragmatic) reasons
why students should be consulted about their schooling.

“...it is argued that there is an increasing need for engagement of students more directly with the immediate purposes for their learning. The curriculum must include the capacity and willingness of students to act upon their learning - to produce something of value, to be valued and to value one’s self as someone who can ‘make a difference’ - that goes beyond the teacher and beyond the classroom.” (Holdsworth 1998:4)

Currently, and as a result of my research on this issue, I am developing a unit plan that seeks to address and incorporate a real Student Voice through curriculum negotiation. The underlying requirement is to teach drawing techniques to a class of approximately 29 Year 9 girls at a Catholic Girls College in the inner city suburbs. Within the framework of this learning outcome, I would like to facilitate the students in designing their own task and end result. I hope that, through understanding and designing their own task and end result, they learn and what they learn. The most important aspects of teaching us to consider. In the end, students are the most important stakeholders – what they say should matter and should effect change.

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Convenient or Inconvenient Student Voice?

Student Voice is being thrown around these days as something special, unique, and never wrong. The simple fact is that while all children and youth in schools are powerful beyond measure and important beyond words, ‘Student Voice’ is nothing that should be romanticised or put on a pedestal. It should be integrated, normalised, and mainstreamed, but not worshiped or seen as infallible, because that’s simply not true.

Student Voice is any expression by any learner anywhere in any school about anything, for any purpose. Many well-meaning adults in school who advocate for Student Voice are often talking about what is convenient for us as adults.

Convenient Student Voice ...

... happens whenever adults know who is going to speak, what is going to be said, where its going to be shared, when its going to happen, and what the outcomes are going to be. Adults might not have written the script, but what is said is no surprise to us. This can include the young person speaking to the school board, the student advisory council, and the student researcher program. It can also include the traditional student leaders in your school or education program, the debate club, or the action learning program in class.

Inconvenient Student Voice ...

... is when young people express themselves at school in ways that aren’t predictable. They share ideas, shout out thoughts, take action, reflect harshly, or critique severely. They write, draw, graffiti, paint, play, sing, protest, research, build, deconstruct, rebuild, examine, and do things that adults don’t know, understand, approve of, or otherwise predict. Inconvenient Student Voice can be students graffitiing on lockers at school, bullying, texting test answers back and forth, joining gangs, or protesting teacher firings and bad cafeteria food.

The difference between these two approaches depends on location, position, and circumstance. As UK researcher Michael Fielding showed, there are numerous considerations that determine whether Student Voice is deliberately embraced within schools. Race, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, educational attainment, or other identities frequently determines whether or not Student Voice is heard, engaged, interacted with, approved of, or denied, ignored, or penalised.

My work with SoundOut has taught me that there is much more Student Voice happening than adults ever approve of: Inconvenient Student Voice is all over. It’s a matter of whether adults actually want to hear it. I built the SoundOut website after conducting an international scan of Student Voice in the early 2000s. My booklet Stories of Meaningful Student Involvement shares some of what I found.

What do you think? Where does Student Voice have a role in your school, convenient or otherwise? Is there anything you can do to embrace Inconvenient Student Voice? Are there times when Student Voice might be inconvenient for you, but convenient for other adults?

Bullying: Student Voice?

In a lot of educators’ minds, ‘student voice’ only happens when adults direct learners to share their thoughts in ways that are acceptable in schools. Whether embedded in the curriculum, listened to through adult-led student forums, or guided in carefully moderated websites, student voice is often painted as the cuddly, friendly, and convenient precursor to ‘student engagement’.

However, after more than a decade of working with schools across the US and Canada to promote Meaningful Student Involvement throughout the education system, I have discovered that student voice is a multifaceted reality that occurs throughout schools, all the time. Today I define ‘student voice’ as any expression of any learner about any facet of education. It is shared by the kid who runs out in the hallway after class and scribbles “Mrs Jones Sux!”, as well as the student government president who writes a letter to the editor of the local newspaper. It’s the girls texting answers to the test under the desk, as well as the debate team captain speaking at the mock government event.

This shows us how bullying is clearly an expression of student voice. While inconvenient and disconcerting, approaching bullying from this understanding can allow educators to discern the genuine source of why bullying happens. Repressed actions, ideas, knowledge, and beliefs need an appropriate outlet, and schools are positioned to engage both young people and adults in learning through Meaningful Student Involvement.

Learn more about this from the new SoundOut Focus Paper: Student Voice and Bullying. It’s available online at http://tinyurl.com/9ox0hjc

Adam Fletcher
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www.SoundOut.org
Second Annual Student Voice Seminar Draws Wide Range of International Participants and Inspires New Projects

While there are many definitions of ‘student voice’, there are also people doing work focused on students as active participants and partners in educational practice, research, and reform who do not use the term at all. What are the similarities and differences across these efforts? What might theorists, practitioners, policy makers, and students themselves, who work in various contexts on different kinds of projects, have to learn from one another?

Exploring these questions was the impetus behind the first student voice seminar, called Student Voice: Past Efforts, Current Trends, Future Possibilities, held on July 1, 2011. As part of a month-long residence as The Jean Rudduck Visiting Scholar in June and July of 2011, Alison Cook-Sather, Professor of Education and Coordinator of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr College, worked with Julia Flutter and Helen Demetriou to bring into dialogue differently positioned participants in education (teachers, students, policy makers, researchers) from across levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) and contexts (Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, Italy, The Netherlands, Scotland, Spain, the United States and Wales).

The 2011 event was the first cross-level, cross-context gathering of its kind. Rather than present a series of papers, this seminar afforded participants the opportunity to explore different notions and practices of student voice through a series of conversations that cut across differences of role, context, and practice. In addition, several contributors offered more in-depth discussions of their work:

Michael Fielding, of the Institute of Education, University of London, UK, spoke on ‘patterns of partnership’: partnerships between young people and adults as a form of ‘radical collegiality’, as a form of ‘inter-generational learning.’

Jean Courtney and Andrew Pawluch, of the Ontario Student Voice initiative, instigated by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, Canada, spoke about their work on the SpeakUp program, demonstrating how an entire province can gather a wide range of student voices and present their experiences of teaching and learning to the Ministry of Education.

Alison Peacock, Head of The Wroxham School and National Leader of the Cambridge Primary Review Network, presented a video of her primary students and let them speak for themselves about the ways in which Alison and her colleagues have created a ‘listening school’.

While last year’s gathering facilitated learning about similarities and differences across levels and contexts, 2012’s seminar focused on supporting the development or extension of cross-context or cross-level projects. During the two days of ‘Strengthening Links Across the Lines’, participants were invited to consider overlapping realms of theory and practice — student voice in assessment and research in primary and secondary educational contexts; students as change agents at the tertiary level; and teacher research and students as researchers at the primary and secondary levels, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at the tertiary level. They clarified their own commitments in one or more of these realms and sought to connect up with others in different contexts to pursue programmatic, research, and/or writing projects.

Like last year, this year’s seminar also included opportunities to hear briefly from people doing especially innovative and exciting work that would provoke discussion and extend our thinking about student voice:

Mike Neary, Dean of Teaching and Learning at the University of Lincoln, UK, talked about his work on the student as producer, through which he argues that students are the subjects of the intellectual process of teaching and learning, and a progressive pedagogy involves reinventing the politics of production from within, against and beyond the current social relations of capitalist production.

Peter Felten, Elon University, USA, offered some thoughts on productive disruptions, a theme he has addressed in various contexts, including the editorial he wrote for an issue of Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education called ‘Monet Moments and the Necessity of Productive Disruption’.

Sara Bragg, Open University, UK, challenged participants to judge by what is done rather than what is claimed in student voice work, and she worked through some of the possibilities and pitfalls both of student voice and of the ways we conceptualise it.

Drawing on these provocative arguments, as well as the rich set of insights and approaches each participant brought to the seminar, teams formed to pursue particular ideas or practices. Taking advantage of the rare opportunity to talk and plan together, one group of teachers from several different schools in the UK planned how they might assess, map, and coordinate student voice efforts in their schools. Another group, composed of participants from multiple contexts, focused on how to create networks across different countries through which theories and practices of student voice work could be documented and further developed. A third cross-context group plans to explore ‘transitions’ as a particularly critical time for students and will be continuing their exploration through generating material on students’ experiences of transitions to be disseminated through an e-book. And a fourth group has taken up the notion of ‘dissonance’ as a generative framework for conducting research within tertiary educational contexts in several different countries.

Next June (2013) will be the third of the student voice seminars. Participants are looking toward presenting their works in progress, inviting scholars, practitioners, and students from around the world to participate, and mapping new ways forward. For further information about the seminar and its outputs, or to register interest for attending the Student Voice Seminar 2013, please contact: Julia Flutter: jaed100@cam.ac.uk
Let’s hear your voice!

THE STUDENT VOICE

The Student Voice is a regular segment within each episode of The VISTA Podcast.

Thanks to a new addition on our podcast website, we have made it even easier and quicker for teachers and students to provide audio feedback that can be included in future episodes of The VISTA Podcast. All you need is a device with an internet connection and a microphone.

Simply head on over to our podcast website at:


where the following pop-up will appear on the side of the page.

Click on the SEND VOICEMAIL button and hit START RECORDING.

Once you have completed your recording, you have the option of hearing it back, re-recording your work or sending it through.

THE TEACHER VOICE

VISTA’s aim is to support all Victorian teachers working in schools who are undertaking the role of SRC Teacher Adviser.

To ensure our organisation is best catering for your needs, we are currently undertaking a survey to collect data about the working conditions for SRC Teacher Advisers, the work being undertaken by Student Councils and ideas about how VISTA can best help and support you in your role.

The link to access the survey is available from the VISTA website at:

http://srcteachers.ning.com

The survey will remain open for the duration of Term 4 and all participants will receive a final copy of the report.

EPISODE #5 OF THE VISTA PODCAST

Keep your eyes (and ears) out for the next episode of The VISTA Podcast! Our next episode features an interview with the winner of the VISTA SRC Teacher Adviser Award, Jessica Bambridge from Frankston High School. In her interview, Jessica shares details of the projects undertaken by SRC students, details of other leadership programs on offer and strategies for running Student Councils.

Episodes of The VISTA Podcast can be downloaded from the podcast website or through iTunes.

VISTA currently receives no additional funding to operate its programs and relies heavily on memberships to support its programs. Visit us at http://srcteachers.ning.com or e-mail us at vista@srcteachers.org.au for details on how to join.
What does it mean to ‘take action’?

A group of students may be asked or challenged to take action around an issue or topic. For example, the VicSRC Executive has been directed by students at the VicSRC Congress to ‘lobby’, ‘look into’, ‘support’, ‘advocate’ or ‘develop’ in several areas. What sort of practical action outcomes are possible? What should Executive members aim to achieve?

Also, if students start to think about appropriate actions at a state level, these ideas might also be useful for students in similar situations in schools when they think about their practical action outcomes.

Previously, students in Student Action Teams had defined their actions under headings of the ‘four Es’:

- Engineering
- Enforcement
- Encouragement
- Education

Brainstorming around an issue under these headings (eg setting them up as column headings in a little chart) led students to think of many examples of actions they could take.

At a recent VicSRC Executive Training Camp, students extended on this model by thinking of the practical actions they could take to achieve outcomes within their various issue/topic/portfolio areas. They came up with ten ideas:

1. Write up examples of current practices as case studies;
2. Develop a resource for SRCs, schools or individual students to use;
3. Write a letter or a proposal to a decision-maker;
4. Organise an event: a conference, forum, professional development etc;
5. Write an advocacy article for publication in a journal;
6. Make a press release for print, radio or TV;
7. Show the issue visually eg through a video or animation - and share this;
8. Create a website;
9. Lobby decision-makers personally (1:1 meeting) or by phone: go and see them and ask for their support;
10. Develop a campaign: petition, twitter, facebook group - and get it to go viral.

Students recognised that the first step was to do some serious research about their issue: finding out about its meaning and details; investigating what others thought; checking what was already happening.

They would then think about what outcomes they wanted, and what would be the most effective actions to achieve these. The nature of the issue will determine which of the above practical actions are most appropriate.

Maybe there are more possibilities.

If you have examples of actions you have taken, or ideas about other things you could do, please share them.

What does it mean to you to: ‘take action’?

Roger Holdsworth & VicSRC Executive

VicSRC Executive Training

If you’ve been elected for the first time to the State Executive of a student organisation, what do you need to know? What would prepare you for that responsibility?

This year I was elected to the Executive of the VicSRC. Along with 12 other members of the 15-student Executive (many of who are new to their positions), I recently attended a VicSRC training and planning camp in Malmsbury. To get us ready for our roles in 2012-13, we had guest speakers talk to us, we organised what we would be working on for the year and, most importantly, we completed many team building activities so that we would work effectively as a group.

After an initial briefing about the camp, some team building exercises and games enabled us to get to know each other a little better. There was training on a low ropes course (focusing on supporting each other) and the highlight of this part of the camp: the giant swing – 14 m high! Each of us participated – even those who were afraid of heights - and had a great time.

We also started work on the resolutions that were passed at Congress. These are the topics that, as a group, we will be working on for the next 12 months. We talked about how to do an effective job in these and began our plans. We also learnt more about the history of the VicSRC: what we, the new Exec members, are inheriting. There was training and discussions about meeting procedures, how to take effective minutes, how we can better represent secondary school students and what we can do to get them involved.

After the camp, I’m feeling much more confident in my ability to represent Victorian secondary students in the organisation.

Michael Swift
VicSRC Executive 2012-2013

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: cooordinator@vicsrc.org.au

www.vicsrc.org.au
The New England Region held its NER SRC Conference: **Represent 2012** at Lake Keepit Sport and Recreation Centre from Wednesday 5th to Friday 7th September 2012. Seventy students from across the region attended the Conference.

The Conference was organised and facilitated by the ten students who attended the State SRC Conference known as the **NERCATs!!**

Students took part in a variety of workshops created by the NERCATs, and based on similar themes from the workshops at the State Conference. The workshops included:

- **Strategames**: Using games to highlight the need to work together (equity through games);
- **Mind Matters - Fantastic Five**: Focusing on the 5 key elements of wellbeing;
- **We’re All In This Together**: Focusing on tolerance and respect of differences in our schools; and
- **SRC Ethics 101**: The ‘real SRC’: election processes, constitutions, SRC structure, the aim of SRCs in our schools.

The groups also took part in rock climbing and initiative activities run by the Sport and Recreation Staff. The whole group took part in leadership activities focusing on what it means to be a leader.

The Term 3 Regional SRC meeting was also held at the conference with the final reports from our NSW SRC and SCAT representatives and the usual school reports. The NER SRC Executive Team launched a competition to design a regional SRC logo.

The night activities included a very competitive trivia contest and a dance party with the theme Beauty and the Geek – with some very interesting outfits!!

**The NERCATs**

Contact: c/o Rebecca Maybury, Student Welfare Consultant - South, New England Region
rebecca.maybury@det.nsw.edu.au
Students learn the power of representation

A conference for students, organised by students, has highlighted the power of Student Councils to advocate and ensure that their voice is heard.

The annual NSW State Student Representative Council Conference was organised by 20 students selected onto the SRC Conference Action Team (SCAT). As part of the action team, decision making and time management were important factors that were learnt in order to create this conference.

"Being a part of the 2012 SCAT team has allowed me to be confident, calm and collected throughout the leadership role because I had a great support network behind me," Gillian Rae from South Grafton High School said.

This network included SRC advisers Jake Henzler of Killara High School and Jacqueline Ellis from Northern Beaches Secondary College in Manly, and student coordinator, Noel Grannall.

Gillian said she was honoured to be part of the organising team.

"I have had the chance to participate in the fantastic initiatives and been able to have an insight into SRCs - to be able to acknowledge that we have the capable power to make real decisions and have a voice," she said.

A range of activities and workshops were included in the conference program. "The workshops were incredible; being able to captivate a room full of teenagers at once was really awesome," said Barakah Raashed from Sefton High School in Sydney's south-west. "It was insightful to help encourage our young leaders to think outside the box and bring something new to life."

This year’s conference theme, Represent! encouraged SRCs to consider their core business.

The questions focused on during the conference included:

• What do SRCs spend their time doing?
• Who do SRCs represent?
• How do SRCs connect to school decision-making?
• How are SRCs recognised within the school? and
• How efficient and effective are SRCs?

Keynote speaker, Roger Holdsworth, Senior Research Associate at the Australian Youth Research Centre (University of Melbourne), maintains a strong commitment to the roles of value for young people in school and during his talk concentrated on effective SRCs and possibilities for Student Action Teams.

Central School in the New England region, said he left everyone in the room with "fabulous new ideas, feeling very enthusiastic and motivated to work in our SRC."

The memorable nights were filled with drum beats, trivia and a disco themed All That Glitters in which everyone came together and participated with full enthusiasm.

Muirfield High School representative Euan Moyle said he learned valuable leadership and SRC skills that he could bring to his school.

"It was one of the most intense and enjoyable weeks of my life," he said.

Erika Vass
Year 11, Campbelltown High School
In April 2013, Connect will produce its final print publication - with issue 200. However, this does not mean that Connect will cease, but simply that it will only be available electronically after that date. You will be able to regularly download your own copy of Connect from the Connect/ACER website (where back copies are currently archived): research.acer.edu.au/connect/

The good news is that Connect will then become FREE at that point: no more subscription costs. Since current subscriptions barely cover printing and postage, without those costs we will be able to meet our commitment to providing information, stories, case studies and resources to the widest audience at no cost.

How It Will Work
If you have the address of the Connect/ACER site, you will be able to simply check it for any new material. However we know that this seldom happens. So we will develop an e-mail ‘subscriber’ list (free) to notify you when a new issue is posted on the website. This e-mail will contain links to take you to an index of that issue’s contents (on the asprinworld site) and also directly to a downloadable PDF of that issue (on the Connect/ACER site). This e-mail subscription list will open at the start of 2013. A priority invitation to join that list will be sent to all current subscribers.

Current Subscribers
If your subscription expires before issue 200 (see your mailing label for this information), we’d ask you to renew your subscription as normal. If your subscription expires after issue 200 (and you therefore will have ‘credit’ with Connect), we’ll contact you individually to see what you want to do. Options could be to leave the credit as a donation to the work of Connect, or receive an earlier issue of Connect to discharge paid subscription obligations, or to receive a Connect publication in lieu of those issues. We’ll send this letter out early in 2013.

2012-2013 Issues
At the moment, all issues prior to the last six (ie all but the last 12 months’ issues) are already freely available on the Connect/ACER website. The process of adding back issues (from 2011 and 2012) will continue, with one issue added every two months until April. Starting in May 2013, we’ll then progressively add the remaining issues – approximately one a week – until all issues are on the website in June 2013.

Content
Connect will continue to carry practical stories and resources - from and for primary and secondary schools – about student participatory practices in classrooms and school ... in curriculum, governance, networking, community and so on.

Those stories and resources will continue to be your stories. You are encouraged to contribute your experiences and learnings for others to read.

Connect free, on-line ... starting June 2013

All about Student Action Teams, including some hyper-linked mini-case studies, at:

www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams
Student Voice Research and Practice Facebook Group

www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

This is a recent and open facebook group established by Dana Mitra. It provides a valuable community of people working and interested in this area - in Australia, USA, UK and elsewhere – as well as access to useful resources and examples. For example, here is information about an entire issue of the UK-based Management in Education journal about Student Voice that is freely available, and an extract from Resources for Students as Researchers provided by the US-based What Kids Can Do.

You can easily log on and join the group at the above address.

Repositioning trust: a challenge to inauthentic neoliberal uses of pupil voice

Gerry Czerniawski, University of East London, Cass School of Education and Communities, Stratford Campus, Water Lane, London, E15 4LZ, United Kingdom Email: g.czerniawski@uel.ac.uk

At a time when ‘trust’ is argued by many to be on the wane within post-industrial societies this article examines a case study of pupil voice brought about through collaboration between a secondary school (for pupils aged 11−16) and a university located in a large conurbation in southern England. Building on data from focus groups and individual interviews with pupils and teachers, the author suggests that for pupil voice to be truly effective and transformative, policy-makers, academics and practitioners need to move away from the ‘synthetic trust’ that typifies many pupil voice initiatives to one where authentic trust forms the cornerstone of all professional relationships in schools.

Management in Education:
http://mie.sagepub.com/content/26/3/130. abstract

Students as Researchers Resources

The research process

- Find a focus/develop questions (that are manageable and interesting)
- Think about your own experience and that of others in that area
- Decide what is the best way to investigate the topic
- Design the research tool e.g. interview, photographs, written responses
- Run a pilot to test your ideas for data collection
- Gather evidence (data)
- Sift and analyse the data
- Make conclusions
- Report of findings
- Follow up the findings

Tips from Students Researching Students

- You only get answers to the questions you ask. Be sure to ask the same question in different ways.
- Be careful how you word your questions. Poor questions get poor answers. Questions that lead people can only give you answers you want to hear.
- Survey teachers and students, especially on the same issues. There are big differences in each group’s experience of school - and those differences matter.
- Explain what your research involves and why it’s important. Talk to both students and teachers in advance of administering the survey. Remind students that it’s not a test - or a joke. Tell them how you’ll use the results.
- Use a free online survey website. Students and teachers can answer surveys online and get organized data back immediately. Try SurveyMonkey.com

From:
www.whatkidscando.org/specialcollections/student_as_allies/pdfs/saa_samplesurveys_final.pdf

‘Student Councils and Beyond’ On-Line!

We’ve almost run out of print copies of the first Connect publication: Student Councils and Beyond (from 2005). And many of the ideas have subsequently been reflected in the Represent! kit from the VicSRC (www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent).

So we have made all of Student Councils and Beyond (a compilation of articles and resources from many earlier issues of Connect) available on-line for FREE. It can be downloaded (as one document or in sections) as PDFs from the Connect website. Find it at:

www.asprinworld.com/connect
Connect Publications: Order Form

Tax Invoice: ABN: 98 174 663 341

To: Connect, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote VIC 3070 Australia
e-mail: r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au

Connect Annual Subscription (for last 3 print issues - to #200):

(circle amount and indicate if ☐ new or ☐ renewal) half year

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☐ individual (paid privately, not by organisation) $11
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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:
research.acer.edu.au/connect

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

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

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

Australian:
Australian Teacher Magazine (North Richmond, Vic) Vol 8 Nos 7, 8; August, September 2012
Inspire (DEECD, Melbourne, Vic) Issues 8, 9; September, October 2012
School Journal (Lighthouse Christian College, Springvale, Vic) 2011
Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 6 No 4; October 2012
TLN Journal (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 19, No 2; October 2012
Youth Research Centre Annual Report (Youth Research Centre, Carlton, Vic) 2011
Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tas) Vol 31 No 3; September 2012

International:
Management in Education (British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society/Sage, UK) Vol 26 No 3; July 2012: The Space Between - Positioning Student Voice at the Heart of Leadership in Education; available at: http://mie.sagepub.com/content/current
Northwest Education (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, USA) Vol 13 No 3; Spring-Summer 2008: ‘Student Engagement Takes Center Stage’

Friends of Connect
By subscribing at a higher rate, the following have helped keep Connect going. We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following contribution since the last issue of Connect: Supporting Subscribers:
Kim Stadtmiller (Whittlesea Youth Commitment) Bundoora (Vic)

Is Your Connect Subscription Up-to-date?
The number on your Connect label tells you the issue with which your subscription expires. Please renew promptly - renewal notices cost us time and money!
Back issues of *Connect* from 1979 to late 2011 (that’s almost 32 years! – from #1 to #191) are now all freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), back issues of *Connect* have been scanned or up-loaded and are now on the ACER’s Research Repository: ACEReSearch.

You can find these issues of *Connect* at:

research.acer.edu.au/connect

The left-hand menu provides a pull-down menu for you to select the issue number > browse; the front cover of the issue is displayed, and you can simply click on the link in the main body of the page to download a PDF of the issue. Recent issues are also searchable by key words.

**Availability**

The last 12 months of *Connect* (ie the last 6 issues) will continue to be available ONLY by subscription until April 2013. Issues will then be progressively added to this site and new issues made freely available there from June 2013.

This ensures that *Connect* maintains its commitment to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation.

**Let us know**

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

**Most importantly, please USE this resource.**

Back copies of *Connect* are available on-line for free!

research.acer.edu.au/connect/