We Are Citizens Too!

- Victorian Junior School Council Congress: Primary School Student Delegates Debating in Parliament
- Promoting Partnerships in Learning
- What I Want to Learn
- Teach the Teachers: Bayside P-12; Mornington SC
- VicSRC: Integrated Assessment Consultation; New Logo
- VISTA: Teachers Talk at JSC Congress
- International: Student Voice in Vermont, USA

Resources:
- Models of Participation, Engagement
- Young People Creating Change Kit
- SoundOut Student Voice Curriculum
- Creative Writing: Freedom, Democracy
- Networking young citizens - report
- Connect ... on Facebook ...
- archived ... available on-line ... access to other resources on-line ...
Welcome to the final issue of Connect for 2014, marking 34 years of publication – and the end of the year in which we successfully became a free on-line publication. Many new people reading this (welcome!); many old friends still with us. I hope this year has been good to you.

In this issue... there are several stories about initiatives involving primary school students: a statewide JSC Congress; partnerships in learning across age levels. As Emily Smith from the VicSRC notes (page 7) there is a tendency to think ‘that junior students are ‘cute’ and don’t take things like this seriously. However, I was surprised that there were so many passionate and confident students willing to speak out and debate.’ Hence:

Beyond Cute

I’ve heard this line a few times recently. When primary school students led a professional development session, teachers congratulated them, saying it was wonderful to see how ‘grown-up’ they now sounded; when primary and secondary school students presented publicly, adults were ’amazed’ at their maturity.

While well meant, such comments can come dangerously close to being patronising. And, as such, the attitudes are almost as great a barrier to students being taken seriously in their partnership and contribution to education (and society) as a refusal to listen. For regarding students as ‘cute’ (and variations thereon) is one way of diminishing their participation. It enables us to avoid listening to what is being said and argued, by focusing on superficialities.

If we are to take students seriously, how should we respond? Foremost, we respond with respect. That means listening seriously, and listening to what is being said. And then, questioning and if appropriate, arguing (respectfully) with evidence and logic – as Art Pearl once said. And asking for and welcoming arguments back to us, with that same use of evidence and logic.

There can be a ‘romanticism’ about ‘student voice’, that arises from that same patronising attitude … that whatever students say must be correct and acted upon. Students can be as misinformed and incorrect as any or all of us; only through respectful challenge – as Art Pearl once said. And asking for and welcoming arguments back to us, with that same use of evidence and logic.

In this issue, there are many examples of these approaches: schools listening to students leading professional development through the ‘Teach the Teacher’ processes; the fascinating account of students’ research on curriculum (The school I’d like; The teachers I’d like; The learner I’d like to be; What I’d like to learn) as part of a longer project and study at a NSW high school; students learning and teaching from each other across ages. We are learning how to do this better and better, stumbling at times, always energised.

But moving beyond ‘cute’. In 2014, please let us know what and how you’re doing that. Best wishes for the holiday season. There’s lots of great reading here to keep you focused and informed. May you relax (if you can) and enter into a new year energised, focused and committed.

Roger Holdsworth

Deadline for material: end of January, 2014
On Monday 18th November, 153 primary school students, from 77 schools across Victoria, took over both chambers of Victoria's Parliament House for the third annual JSC Congress. Under the title of: *We are citizens too! What we do makes a difference*, the Year 5 and 6 students proposed ideas and then discussed, debated and decided on resolutions around issues of importance to their capacity to ‘make a difference’.

The day began with a welcome from Hon. Inga Peulich, Parliamentary Secretary for Education. She introduced students to Parliament House and to the importance of participation in a democracy.

Student delegates from the 80 schools represented at the Congress had been asked to complete a survey in their schools before the Congress, researching the attitudes of their peers on topics such as opportunities to be heard and be involved in schools and community, awareness of national and global issues, and the teaching of languages in primary schools. These research results were compiled and the overall results presented to all delegates (see some examples on page 4).

The student delegates then moved into the Upper and Lower Chambers of Parliament. Some students had prepared statements based on their research or on their passions. They presented these formally as short speeches to the Houses (see an example on page 5), and some questions from other students began the discussions.

Following a morning tea break, the students then formed small workshop groups in rooms throughout Parliament House. The workshop groups were facilitated by members of the VicSRC Student Executive.

The delegates reflected on their own and others’ survey results and the possibilities for action arising from these. Other concerns were raised, linked by the theme that the primary school students were and could be active citizens. Each workshop group was encouraged to formulate one or more proposals (resolutions or motions) that could be put forward for discussions and decision after lunch.

Teachers met separately in a workshop to hear about resources and to share ideas and concerns about their support for Student Councils and other forms of participation in schools.

### Formal Congress Session

After lunch, the student delegates returned to the two Houses of Parliament. Only students (along with the official Clerks) were permitted within the Chambers, with accompanying teachers and others in the public gallery as observers.

The VicSRC Student Executive members (secondary school students) acted as Speaker of each House, outlining the rules and procedures. (These students had earlier been MC of the day, and facilitators of workshops.) The proposals developed by the workshops were put to each Chamber. Students spoke in support of them, asked questions for clarification, and then debated them formally, with speakers for and against. Finally a vote was taken on each proposal and results announced.

The proposals that were agreed to were then listed in each House and prioritised by the delegates.

Because Parliamentary procedures require resolutions to be considered by both Houses, prioritised resolutions from each House were taken by the Clerks to the other House and formally read and proposed there. A second brief debate and vote of that House was then taken to endorse or reject the proposals.

The resolutions passed and those considered by the JSC Congress are shown here (page 6).
Finally, all delegates returned to the central hall of Parliament for closing remarks, thanks and completion of evaluations. All students received certificates of attendance as they left.

 Organisation

The JSC Congress was initiated and supported by the Languages Unit, Learning and Teaching Division of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The day was organised by Second Strike: www.second-strike.com

 Contact

For further information contact Ms Chris Finch, Acting Manager, Languages Unit, Learning and Teaching Division, DEECD: (03) 9637 2318 or email: finch.christine.a@edumail.vic.gov.au or David Mould, Second Strike: 0412 743 951 or David.Mould@second-strike.com
Opening Statements

In the opening session, student delegates were given the opportunity to make some formal statements about their concerns and their research. Here’s one example:

Firstly I would like to thank you all for letting me talk in Parliament House. Today I will be talking to you about transport.

Throughout the world, nearly everybody is using transport in their daily lives, whether it is by car, bus, train or other public transport. Everyone needs transport. If we have no transport how do we get to other places? What happens if you need to go somewhere that is really far away? I believe that we should have more public transport.

My school is in Caroline Springs. We have buses and cars but we don’t have any trains. We need to be able to reach the city and other destinations by public transport. What happens if we need to go to the city? We could go on a bus but it takes an awful long time. Trains are easier to go to places that are pretty far away.

Why is there such a delay? We need it. It may cost a lot of money but there is going to be a lot of people using it so the government is going to get more money. If you are going to go to the city, trains are much easier to travel in because in cars, there is going to be a lot of traffic. In trains there is no traffic. My sister got an admission for Melbourne Uni so that means someone has to drive her there. Instead it would be much easier if she could catch a train.

So in my opinion I believe that the Government should get more public transport for Caroline Springs.

Pari, Creekside College

Preparing Resolutions
Resolutions Passed by Student Delegates

The following resolutions were passed by either the Upper or Lower House:

- That all schools and the Government should take part in a difference day to promote equality and to help express each other’s differences. (Movers: Anjali Mahesh and Luke Dunnart) (carried in both houses) #1
- That the Victorian Government should legalise gay marriage. (Mover: Harriet) (carried in both houses) #2
- That the Minister for Education in Victoria should introduce a Victorian Junior School SRC so younger students around Victoria can have a say and make a difference as well. (Mover: Phoebe) (carried in both houses) #3
- That teachers should take more action to stop bullying, specifically verbal bullying. (Moved: Jethro Ecleo) #4
- That senior students/role models should raise awareness about cyber-bullying and recommend wiser use of technology and social-networking sites. (Moved: Joshua Codey) #5
- That the Federal Government should educate the public on the reasons people seek asylum. (Moved: Rose Weldon) #6
- That all Victorian Schools should reduce the amount of litter, by dedicating 15 minutes after lunch for picking up rubbish. (Mover: Ewan)
- That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should provide funding to schools so they can run kitchen education programs to teach students about healthy eating. (Mover: Jessica Lord)
- That every school should have a welfare coordinator that helps students with any problems at school or at home. (Movers: Riley T, Riley M and Ashleigh W)
- That Victorian Government Schools should get the attention they need to make the toilets useable, comfortable and hygienic. (Mover: Yohef Garlic)
- That the Government should make it compulsory that students participate in the study of a global issue and how they can help. The ways to help which students discover should be put into action. (Mover: Cheyenne)

In addition, the following resolutions were debated by a House, but not carried:

- That student leadership should elect students to run a competition to encourage them to pick up rubbish. (Mover: Gauri Aerry)
- That teachers should encourage students to treat everyone equally and ensure nobody is left out of games and activities. (Mover: Ally Sheppard)
- That all Victorian schools should take a stand against exclusion by having a friendship stop. A friendship stop is an area that students go when they are lonely to find a friend, if someone sees a person at the stop they must include them in their game. (Mover: Amy and Luke)
- That the Government should make more places to graffiti legally. (Mover: not recorded)
- That the Council should place more bins around so we can improve the environment and respect our nature and not litter. (Mover: Lucy Carpenter)
- That the Government should encourage schools to make links between each other and to unite rather than compete. Once the links are made the local Government should provide funding for the networking. (Mover: not recorded)

Finally, the following resolutions were submitted, but time did not permit their discussion:

- That all junior school council groups should regularly walk around their school with the principal, pointing out safety issue so that the principal is aware of maintenance needs. (Mover: Olivia)
- That Victorian primary schools should allocate a period of time after school for optional supervised study. (Mover: Platypus Group)
- That Victorian schools should make it compulsory to learn a foreign language of the student’s choosing. (Mover: Platypus Group)
- That the Department of Education should make a policy for playground safety. This should include shade-sails, height requirements, height restrictions and of four meters, colour-coded equipment for different grade levels, as well as different stages of safety mulch for a safe soft surface to fall on. (Mover: Liam)
- That schools should put up security cameras and higher fences with locks to prevent vandalism and graffiti. (Mover: Kiana)
- The Victorians should take a stand against bullying. All students should feel free to talk to someone when they feel like they are being bullied because it might help someone other than themselves who is also being bullied. (Mover: Sienna McCarthy-Gray)
- That the public should have a day where everyone takes public transport and gives a gold coin donation that goes towards public transport. (Mover: Helaina)
- That the Government should have a tidy schools competition to encourage litter free schools. (Mover: Paul)
- That teachers should select responsible students to perform monitor jobs for litter duty and keeping schools clean. (Mover: Darcy and Milly)
Reflections by VicSRC Students - acting as Speakers

On Monday 18th of November, Emily Smith, Sophie Williams, Samantha Chapman, Kristen Sellings, Bridin Walker and I attended the 5th Annual Junior School Council Congress at Victorian Parliament House. It was a great opportunity to meet Year 5 and 6 students from schools throughout Victoria and experience, once again, the parliamentary style Congress, however this time at Parliament House!

Being one of the speakers was an amazing experience, as it allowed me to experience a bit of politics and I was involved in important decision-making as well as the junior school students. Overall, it was a wonderful opportunity for both the VicSRC and the JSC students and a learning curve for both groups of students.

Qais Sadat, VicSRC Executive

The Junior School Council Congress was a delightful and productive event that created ideas and discussion about schools and how we can change them.

Throughout the day, motions and ideas blossomed and became the start of some decisions that would change schools in Victoria. The session to develop the motions was a long but productive session. Each student was given a group and in that they developed an idea about how they wanted to change their school and schools throughout Victoria.

Motions were then taken to the Congress and debated. Each idea was voted on and then declared carried or defeated. The ones that were carried were taken by the Clerk to the other House.

The delegates made very good decisions and decided on motions that will help mould the schools of Victoria.

Bridin Walker, VicSRC Executive

As a member of the Victorian Student Representative Council, I found that the recent Junior School Council Congress enabled younger students to stand up and speak out about issues that concern young people of their age – who aren’t generally represented at the level we are. It was interesting to see how involved they had become in their topic and the ideas they had to change the way of primary schools around the state. Although being a facilitator and Speaker of Congress on the day in both the Upper and Lower Houses proved challenging at times, it was a rewarding opportunity, which I am grateful to have been offered.

Sophie Williams, VicSRC Executive

On the 18th of November, Parliament House in Melbourne was filled with intelligent students, ready to share their views for the Junior School Council Congress. The day went well and there were a lot of interesting motions put forward.

You are probably thinking that junior students are ‘cute’ and don’t take things like this seriously. However, I was surprised that there were so many passionate and confident students willing to speak out and debate.

During Congress, the motions put forward by students were voted on in both Houses to see what the majority thought. As one of the Speakers of Congress I was able to witness just how strong the students’ views were and how dedicated they were to them.

It was great to see so many students who care about the future and are wanting to make a difference in the world.

Emily Smith, VicSRC Executive

Thanks to Emily Smith for compiling these reflections.
Are you the teacher ‘thrown’ into doing student leadership with no resources? Are you the teacher who has been doing it for many years, a bit bored and in need of ‘motivation’?

As the teachers gathered in the Lower House of Parliament, they came with all different backgrounds and experiences. Roger Holdsworth (editor of Connect) and Krista Seddon (representing the VicSRC) introduced all the great things that their organisations do. It was then time for the teachers to reflect and then ‘talk’ about some of the things that happen at their schools in student leadership. The ‘volume’ of the Lower House of Parliament went up significantly, without the theatre that is currently part of the Lower House of the actual Parliament, and teachers got to share and learn from others.

Thank you to those who shared their stories with the people around them. Thank you to those who shared with the larger group. And more importantly, thank you to those who handed in their sheets so your comments could be collated!

Here are some of the reflections from the day:

What is the structure of your Student School Council?

It was amazing to see the diversity of the structures and the different ways students are selected to participate. There was a clear division between schools who got students to apply for leadership positions and those who were then selected by the students. And the other 50% of the schools got students to apply for leadership positions and then students had to attend an interview. Of course, some schools did a mixture of these two methods. This reminds us all that student leadership is reflective of each individual school rather than promoting only one way to do things.

Most schools incorporated students from Years 3 to 6 in their leadership program. Some schools had dedicated leadership roles eg sports captains or environmental captains, while other schools had School Captains and a leadership group. Again, each system has been developed for a particular school and the important challenge each school faces is to incorporate students into a program where they get to ‘do something’ and gain leadership skills.

When does your Student Council meet and how often?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly at Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly during class</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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Again there was a large variety of times people got to meet with their student leaders. Those more fortunate have the opportunity to meet during class time, while some teachers try and meet during their busy lunchtimes!

What is something great that your Student Council has achieved this year?

Wow – what great things some of the schools in Melbourne have been doing! A lot of schools have organised some fantastic fundraising events. Other schools have focused on giving students the skills to run an assembly – from start to finish. A few schools have been involved in anti-bullying programs and setting up rosters for the playground to help all students in the yard have someone to play with. Many schools have linked in with environmental programs, including a school that encouraged a recycling program by making a movie to explain what needed to be put into each bin and the SRC members went to each class to show the movie and answered any questions so every student understood what was expected of them.

Another key component of many student leadership programs was responding to issues raised by other students. One school identified the storage of skateboards as being an issue. The students, with the support of their SRC teacher, followed through a process where they designed and organised the building of a skateboard storage rack. This storage rack is now used and all the students have a safe place to store their skateboards!

What are some of the issues affecting you and the Student Council at your school?

Time, time, time ... every teacher dreams of more time for doing the things we love and less time needed to do reports! If we’ve had all the money in the world, the teachers would love to have more dedicated time to meet each week, have teacher coverage to allow for more productive Student Councils, to find time to complete the projects that get started and a ‘space’ where the Student Council could meet. At times, the Student Councils become ‘lots of talking – no action’ due to so many other things getting in the way. Other Student Councils want to work on formalising structures and encouraging other staff to be more supportive. One school has a very supportive leadership group and they run a leadership program for all of their Year 6s including regular involvement of the Principal.

What are some of the resources/supports that your Student Council has in place?

One person reflected that their school has ‘no’ resources/supports in place and we hope this changes very soon! Many of the teachers reflected that they did have a budget allocation (very small but it is a start ...) and some schools gave time release for staff. Other schools linked in with the wider school community including the Wellbeing person being responsible for their Student Council. Another school got support from their local Rotary Club and another school got funding from the ‘Bully Buster’ program.

This is always a very difficult challenge as ‘student leadership’ is part of very tight school budgets ... but well done to those who have achieved some resources and support for their Student Councils and good luck to those who are trying to get more!

What would you like help with?

Again people were looking for all different things to help them improve the Student Council at their school. Some people were looking for teacher training; others wanted to establish some protocols and structure to make student opinions really count. Other schools want to link more into the local community. One idea was to create opportunities where teachers could visit other schools and see how their programs ran and operate.

VISTA is an organisation run by a group of teachers who have been involved in student leadership for various amounts of time. (I think Scott – our fearless leader – has been involved the longest!!) We get together, organise resources and produce podcasts to help people ‘get started’. We also organise ‘meet ups’ where teachers can get together and share what they do and encourage each other.

So if you want some help or if you want to share your ideas then we look forward to you making contact with us and becoming a member.

Dianne Parkinson
VISTA Executive

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.
A multi-campus school provides many opportunities for students to take on real roles as educators. Both older and younger students can learn from each other – as co-researchers, they work collaboratively to co-construct knowledge. In so doing they develop their leadership capacity, taking on organised roles as teachers.

Our school, Santa Sabina College in Strathfield, NSW, is a diverse, multicultural community with approximately 1200 students. Our college includes an Early Education Centre (EEC) for children six weeks to pre-school, a Primary School (K to 5), a Middle School (Years 6 and 7), and a Secondary School (Years 8 to 12).

The campuses are positioned on two sites, on opposite sides of 'The Boulevarde'; where a bridge acts as a physical link connecting all four campuses. The campuses generally operate as separate schools, with few opportunities for students to interact.

We have recently developed some cross-campus initiatives to encourage students to learn across all of our campuses.

The question that faced me, as a teacher in the Primary School, has been: How can I embed the principles of Reggio Emilia in a primary context and promote cross-campus projects?

(See the next two pages for an overview of the Reggio Emilia principles.)

Context

In class, the students in Year 5 had been investigating:

- How can we demonstrate joint stewardship of the universe?
- What are the issues for the future and what is my responsibility?

In order to promote the principles of Reggio, I ‘listened’ to the students, to ascertain potential sustainability projects in our school environment and encouraged the link with our younger friends at Mary Bailey House. In so doing, we were building and strengthening ‘relationships’ between students.

The Director of the Childcare Centre shared the sustainability projects, already underway: ‘The Frog Pond’ project and ‘Vegetable Garden’ project. While we had discussed some initial ideas, we decided to observe the interactions between the students, listen to their questions/findings and plan accordingly.

This document describes some of the learning experiences within our Vegetable Garden project. The documentation highlights examples of the principles of Reggio Emilia, which are embedded in the project. It includes teacher and student reflections.

The Vegetable Garden Project Visit 1 and 2

Kathryn (the EEC Teacher) invited us to view the vegetable garden... All I can say, upon our first viewing, is: watch out ‘Better Homes and Gardens’! We were all impressed by the flourishing plants/vegetables.

Instantly the EEC children shared their learning with us:

EEC: Look at the spinach, and the basil.
EEC: Wow, I can see a ladybug.
EEC: No it’s an ant.
Primary Student: Why do they (insects) come here?
(Again, this is a sign that the primary school girls wanted to encourage the EEC students to explain their thinking.)
EEC: It’s food for them.

Teacher Reflection:
Through observing and listening, conscious not to direct the learning experience, I observed:
- the ongoing exchange of knowledge/questioning etc;
- turn taking;
- respect for the learner, listening to one another;
- sharing of personal experiences, and linking prior knowledge to create meaning;
- peer mentoring

The primary school students were again eagerly developing ideas, based on the inquiry/questions of their EEC friends.

continued page 12
Inspired by the Reggio Emilia principles

A collection of beliefs and practices that promote collaboration and inquiry and seeking ways to promote partnerships P-12 (staff, parents and students), we have engaged in a range of cross campus project/s this year. The inquiry projects extend and involve participants on all campuses – including our Early Education Centre (EEC), Primary and Secondary Campuses.

Pedagogy of Relationships

Relationships are integral between children, families and teachers and share equal importance.

When considering relationships, the physical environment is regarded as being the ‘third teacher’ as it supports learning and social relationships.

Pedagogy of Listening

Listening includes paying attention to both the social and physical environment.

Listening aids in the search for meaning and understanding of children’s theories and enhances the possibility of discovering how children think and how they both question and develop a relationship with reality.

Communication and Collaboration

A sense of equity and empowerment underpins relationships with and between children, staff and families. True collaboration allows for differing interests, abilities, experiences and attitudes to enrich perceptions and outcomes for both children and adults.
Projects

Projects involve provoking children to develop theories and strategies and then testing their theories in collaborative small groups.

Projects are usually chosen by teachers when they have identified a common interest within a group of children. The educators typically collaborate together and hypothesise how things may proceed and offer the children opportunities to test their theories.

Image of the Child

Children are viewed as being strong, competent, full of potential and co-constructors of their own learning and understanding.

The Hundred Languages

The term ‘hundred languages of children’ refers to the many ways that children have of expressing themselves. Reggio teachers provide children different avenues for thinking, revising, constructing, negotiating, developing and symbolically expressing their thoughts and feelings. The goal is for the adults and children to better understand one another.

Learners Constructing Meaning

‘Learners constructing meaning’ is at the core of and central to our projects.
Primary Student: The shady area can be used for plants that don’t require sunshine. We will research soil types and plants prone to sunshine and shady conditions.

Primary Student: We will also find plants that all children can maintain.

Primary Student: We can make books about the vegetable patch…non fiction and fiction.

Again, Kathryn and I, as co-researchers, shared further ideas that would strengthen relationships and enhance the project:

- exploring recipes that the students could make using the vegetables;
- sharing morning tea alongside the vegetable patch;
- storytelling using the books the primary students create with EEC children;
- accompanying the EEC children on their mini excursion to the secondary campus next week, to observe their vegetable garden.

Teacher Reflection:
A beautiful reflection, on our return to the Primary School campus captured the essence of the project thus far...

Primary Student: I loved visiting and working with EEC children today.

Mrs McAulay: Why? What was the highlight?

Primary Student: It was great to listen, to talk to the children – even though they’re little and cute, they know what they’re doing!

Mrs McAulay: What do you mean – they know what they’re doing?

Primary Student: Well if you ask questions, you learn, if you’re inquisitive, which they are, everyone learns. I just can’t wait until we work with them next week… I am inspired!

The Primary student had discovered for herself Rinaldi’s view of the child as strong and capable!

Indeed ‘learners constructing meaning’ was evident today!

Visit 3: All three campuses unite

‘…When ripe, it’s round, yellow and orange and quite heavy to carry.’

The EEC teacher gestured, describing the shape of a pumpkin with her hands.

She had all children and students captivated as she described the physical characteristics of pumpkins during our visit linking students from all campuses. We would be on the ‘look out’ for pumpkins as we were off on a first ‘field trip’ together!

Our third visit initiated a ‘triple cross campus venture’, in which children from the EEC and students from the primary campus crossed the Boulevarde bridge to the secondary campus. This broke down the physical barrier that divides all three campuses and further strengthened relationships between students across the College P-12!

The Garden Club on the secondary campus, composed of students from Years 6 to 9, warmly greeted us, and led us down a winding track that led to their flourishing green vegetable garden. It was evident from the array of healthy growing sprouts and well developed stalks of spinach and basil leaves, that much love and care had been invested into this garden. This set a high benchmark for any keen horticulturist and was truly inspiring.

Teacher Reflection
As the students and children enthusiastically paced the pavement to gaze and admire the patch of vegetables, I observed the way the students listened to their younger friends, bending down to hear and truly listen to their comments.

As a few of the EEC children distinguished the various plants by smell, I observed how the older students followed their lead and proceeded to share the description of fragrances with others, including their teachers. Evidence that ‘listening’ takes many different forms; this action of the younger children informed their older counterparts that they would also need to observe their behaviours to develop a true understanding of their thinking.

EEC Child: That’s spinach …

EEC Child: … and they’re strawberries … we’re growing them too.

P Student: I think that’s basil.

S Student: Why do think that? How could you check?

P student: Smell? (she smells)

P student: No, not basil; basil is quite strong.

S Student: Have another go.

Students of all ages were collaborating, constructing meaning, asking questions to prompt and to test theories, and gain deeper knowledge … without teacher intervention! Quite remarkably, the teacher was now the co-researcher, listening with all senses to provide provocations for future investigations.

As the students from all campuses shared their gardening tips and stories, they showed respect and equity for all, as each group listened intently to each other.

I noticed that, throughout the course of the morning visit to the secondary campus, each of the primary students had connected with a younger child from the EEC. They had, in fact, assigned themselves a ‘buddy’. This helped immensely with engaging the younger children in conversation, and developing ‘relational trust’ between both groups.

Prior to the visit, the primary students had shared concerns that initiating and sustaining conversations was a challenge: “I found it challenging to talk to the preschoolers and start a conversation…”

As we walked back across the bridge with relationships strengthened, my colleague and I discussed the need to affirm the ‘buddy connection’ and encourage the primary students to use prompts to engage and extend conversation, fostering authentic interactions between both groups.

We all felt energised by our brisk walk and visit to another part of our College, expanding our network of relationships cross campuses!

As we each parted ways at our meeting point, the ‘plant pots’ that had been given to us as a gift by our secondary gardeners – carefully crafted and packaged to ‘survive’ the trip from one garden to another – became a ‘symbol’ for our ‘Promoting Partnerships Project!’
Student Voice - Reflection ‘snapshots’...

After each visit, I asked the students to share their experiences with the whole class. As you can imagine, the 13 Year 5 girls who were not part of the project this term, eagerly waited to hear the progress from each of our visits. The students were also asked to record their reflections in their journals, and most completed this through our online forum, ‘Edmodo’.

Sometimes, I offered prompts to encourage the conversation and discussion through some guiding questions: What did you enjoy? What did you find out?? What did you find challenging? What are you looking forward to? What are you finding out about yourself as a learner? What questions/wonderings do you have?

In this way, I gained information about how the older children were feeling, their interpretation of the experiences, the memorable moments and also the challenges they encountered.

Here are some of the student reflections to date:

**Student 1:**
Over the last couple of weeks, I have had the privilege to work with some children from the EEC. This opportunity has opened up my eyes to see how a different part of our campus learns. I’m eager to begin this unit of work as I enjoy interacting with the children. Seeing them so engrossed with nature assures me that the children will be engaged in these two projects we are exploring together.

I hope I can teach the EEC children some skills and they can teach me. I will have the opportunity to learn many skills that will enable me to be a great steward of our universe.

**Student 2:**
I really enjoyed going to the EEC because I’ve learnt a lot of things about the preschoolers. I now know what they are growing and how they are going to attract frogs to their frog pond.

**Student 3:**
The EEC has a vegetable garden; they are growing strawberries, chillies and tomatoes. They also constructed a frog pond, and they are testing different theories to attract the frogs to the pond!

**Student 4:**
Today, I found it challenging to talk to the preschoolers and start a conversation.

**Student 5:**
I am looking forward to seeing the EEC children next week, and sharing with them the different resources we have created for them about frogs. I really hope the PPTs help them gain further knowledge about frogs.

**Student 6:**
Over the period of time that we have worked with EEC children I’ve really got to know the EEC children better. I’ve learnt about the plants they’ve been investigating. I’ve learnt how various plants grow and the different stages that happen. In sharing this information with the EEC children, I’ve had to think carefully how to explain this knowledge: how and why this occurs. I’ve also gained some knowledge from my EEC partner about how plants thrive and survive.

I found it challenging to explain things at a level where it wasn’t too complex for the children to understand. I’m eager to have another block of time with the children because I thoroughly enjoy working with other members of our campus.

These reflections represent a ‘snapshot’ of my students’ thinking to date. Interestingly it is the students themselves who are identifying and articulating the principles of Reggio in their own words and reflections:

**Pedagogy of Listening**
“I found it challenging to explain things at a level where it wasn’t too complex for the children to understand. I had to ask and listen to see if they really understood”

**Pedagogy of Relationships**
“I’ve really got to know the EEC children better.”
“I’m eager to have another block of time with the children because I thoroughly enjoy working with other members of our campus”

**Collaboration**
“I hope I can teach [my students] some skills and they can teach me. I will have the opportunity to learn many skills.”

**Projects**
“Seeing them so engrossed with nature assures me that the children will be engaged in these two projects we are exploring together.”

**Image of the Child**
“I’ve learnt a lot of things about the preschoolers.”

“I hope I can teach the EEC children some skills and they can teach me. I will have the opportunity to learn many skills” that will enable me to be a great steward of our universe.”

**Hundred Languages**
“I am looking forward to seeing the EEC children next week, and sharing with them the different resources we have created for them about frogs.”

**Summary**
Cross campus projects have enhanced and enriched our sense of community at Santa Sabina College. The projects have strengthened partnerships between all stakeholders: students, staff and parents. ‘Student voice’ – enabling young people to initiate, direct and share decisions with adults – is pivotal to the projects. Students and children in the Early Education Centre are co-researchers; they are engaged in purposeful, relevant and challenging inquiry projects that promote and provoke responsible action within their community.

We look forward to embedding the principles of Reggio Emilia in a range of cross campus projects in 2014.

**Further Information:**
Emma McAulay, Jackie Baxter and Kathryn Graham
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Students researching curriculum development: Sharing Our Voices on Education

Isaac and Brooke: We are writing this article to inform you about the changes and achievements of our group, the Steering Committee, and what it means to us as researchers. This article is about the journey we have undertaken this year. We are still putting together our research findings, and will report on these in later months.

Student voice

Brooke and Isaac: We believe student voice is important for students, teachers, schools, and the community's growth. Students have their own ways of thinking about things that teachers may not understand. With student voice, teachers will understand us better – what we are thinking about when we are in class. In the Steering Committee, we express how we feel about school in a carefree and fun way, but we also want to give back to the school.

Brooke: Student voice is not only about the teachers understanding students. When talking to teachers, we've also experienced what it's like to be in the teacher's headspace. Without groups like this, students wouldn't understand school as much. Even students that aren't in the Steering Committee benefit: we share our new knowledge with our friends.

Our school

Eve: Our school is a comprehensive, coeducational high school in Sydney. 'Westside High School' is a pseudonym that the students chose. Approximately 586 students are enrolled at the school, and 88.8% of students are from a language background other than English. The school receives funding from the NSW Priority Schools Program (PSP), the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Schools, and the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy.

What the steering committee is

Eve: The Steering Committee was funded from 2010-2013 through National Partnerships for Low Socio-Economic Schools funding. The school wanted to include students in the process of reform, viewing students as the consequential stakeholders in their education. The Steering Committee has been a collaborative endeavour by staff, students, and our academic partner Susan Groundwater-Smith from the University of Sydney. Ms Frazzle has been the facilitator of the group since October 2011. I facilitated the group in 2010 and early 2011.

Writing this Article ...

*Eve: Students chose their own pseudonyms and the pseudonym for the school, and the facilitating teacher chose her own pseudonym, because this project is part of a PhD study and subject to ethics committee requirements. Many of the students did not agree with this requirement, wanting other people to know that it was them who said all these smart things* (Bella).

*Eve: In November 2013, I asked students in the Steering Committee if anyone would like to work on an article for Connect together. Isaac and Brooke volunteered, and we met to discuss how to write it, and how to structure it. Isaac suggested that it would be good to have quotations from other students in the group, as well as the teachers, and other members of the community who had heard about the work of the students, so that they were not speaking in the place of their peers. In this article, quotations are assembled from what students, teachers and others have said in a range of settings: during group meetings/research activities and at formal presentations.

Christian and Mia summarise the work of the group. Their words come from a presentation that they made at the NSW Deputy Principals' Conference in August 2013 with Georgina and Joshua.

This is a multi-vocal text. In putting the name of the speaker before their words, we acknowledge that there are a variety of interpretations of any one issue, situation, or incident. We are all different and see things differently. We may not always agree about an issue, or what happened during an event, and that is a positive thing. At times, things that students have said during group discussions are 'mashed' together, when students were in agreement, or constructed an idea together in a discussion. As Alisha said, in these group situations 'everyone is contributing all together – you feel confident with everyone talking too.'

Isaac, Brooke and Eve worked together to bring the text of the article together. A draft of this article was shown to the whole Steering Committee group before publication.
The history and philosophy of the Steering Committee

Eve: Each year the Steering Committee has had a different broad research focus for investigation:
- 2010 – The school I’d like
- 2011 – The teachers I’d like
- 2012 – The learner I’d like to be
- 2013 – What I’d like to learn

In 2010, 2011 and 2012, the Steering Committee was made up of a representative group of students from Year 9. This year, the Steering Committee is made up of students from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. The rationale for the Students-as-Co-Researchers initiative and the processes of recruitment, training, student-led research, analysis and dissemination have been detailed elsewhere (Mayes, 2013; Mayes & Groundwater-Smith, 2010, 2011, 2013).

The Steering Committee has been based on the following principles:
- Students are resources and producers of knowledge rather than recipients or targets of teaching (Bragg & Fielding, 2005, p. 111);
- Students and teachers can learn from each other. We seek ‘intergenerational reciprocity’ (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 75) and a ‘radical collegiality’ (Bragg & Fielding, 2005; Fielding, 1999);
- We can’t know in advance where our collaborative questioning of the current state of education will take us (Cook-Sather, 2006). Being open to changing directions might lead us to the creation of new knowledge and new ways of relating, speaking, learning, teaching and being (Fielding, 2011, p. 13; Kemmis, 2011, p. 18; Rinaldi, 2006);
- We pursue a ‘person-centred education for democratic fellowship’ over a market-driven high performance model of schooling (Fielding & Moss, 2011).

Christian: We are researchers in the school who conduct research with students and teachers about teaching and learning. We write our own questions, conduct our own research methods, and analyse our own data. We use different research methods, including interviews, focus groups (with postcards and post it notes), observations, and photo and visual methods. Other forms of school governance are based on popularity, but the Steering Committee gives minority students a chance to voice our own opinions.

Cristiano Suarez Ronaldo and John Dixon: We’re going an extra level in thinking about school – from the students’ level to the teachers’ level. We are actually finding out new things about teachers. We’re getting a bigger perspective – like we’re looking from the top of a circus tent at what goes on – a bird’s eye view.

Mia, Jack and Christian: Regular classes, or more traditional forms of student learning and participation levels in classroom activities and how and what they would like to learn/teach. The question was raised: Should students be involved in designing teaching and learning for the new Australian Curriculum? The Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) faculty were open to the possibility of thinking and working with students in planning teaching and learning for the new Australian Curriculum for Stage 4 and 5 History.

Christian and Mia: In order for this research to be conducted, a student task force needed to be created. In 2013 over 100 applicants applied to part take in this year’s Steering Committee’s research, which was a drastic increase from the previous years. Students from last year’s Steering Committee interviewed and selected a representative group for 2013. We decided to investigate with students and teachers how their views about the curriculum may affect their learning and participation levels in classroom activities and how and what they would like to learn/teach. The research topic ‘What I’d like to learn’ is a student investigation of the Australian Curriculum and the hidden curriculum.
1. Having a voice – what we think about what we learn

*Mia and Christian:* In our first Steering Committee meeting we participated in research stations facilitated by Year 10s from the 2012 Steering Committee. At these stations, we expressed what we would like to learn and how we like to learn. There were five research stations, including a graffiti brainstorm, a focus group with postcards to choose from, a silent conversation (writing responses on small slips of paper, placing them on a whiteboard, and then responding to the words of other students with whiteboard markers), a vodcast station and a survey where students gave their responses with marbles in jars (rather than writing their answers or circling a number). These stations gave us an introduction to how research can be run by students and the types of research methods that can be used.

**Our questions about curriculum**

*Christian and Mia:* In the second meeting, we brainstormed in groups:

- How do you think teachers plan?
- How do you think the school plans?
- What do you think happens on staff development days?
- What do you think happens in the staffroom?
- How do you think the government decides what we should learn?

In answering these questions, we wondered what these things look like, sound like, the mood of these settings/situations, and wrote some of our own questions about them.

Later in the meeting, we met with our Principal to have an open discussion about our brainstormed questions and what we students like and dislike about the current curriculum. Then, we each wrote a letter to her in response to the group conversation. We also watched a video of one of our school’s Staff Development Days, observing the History faculty discussing what would be taught in the upcoming term.

Some of us said the following things about speaking to the Principal a few months after it happened:

*Lelia, Rodger, Hussein and James:* People asked the Principal questions, and she explained why we have cameras and some of the rules. We thought these rules were about being strict, but she explained how it was all for our benefit.

*John Dixon:* I really enjoyed talking to the actual Principal because we never got a chance to actually talk to her.

*Mia:* She didn't think that what we do is not important or what she thinks is the most important. She took what we said into consideration. I found when she came to speak to us the most motivating thing. When she came and showed she understood what we were doing, that motivated me to do more.

*Jack:* The Principal put what she had to do aside. That showed me the school actually cares – the Principal actually cares about what’s happening.

2. Understanding the concept of a curriculum

*Mia and Christian:* During the third gathering of the Steering Committee, we further explored the obvious and hidden curriculum, and analysed the differences and effects that both curriculums have on both teachers and students.

*Eve:* After exploring the obvious and hidden curriculums in classrooms in films including *Dead Poet's Society*, Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall*, and others, the students defined these two curriculums as:

- **James:** The obvious curriculum is set by the government and all teachers must follow it.
- **Samantha, Dale, John Dixon and Brooke:** The hidden curriculum is the things that you’re expected to do but aren’t taught to you explicitly. These things are between the lines; they aren’t necessarily the obvious point of the lesson – like raising your hand or not talking when the teacher’s talking. It’s the behind the scenes of the school.

*Christian and Mia:* We had a bit of a debate about which curriculum is more important and has most of an impact on students: what they are taught in class (the obvious curriculum) or how they are taught (the hidden curriculum). Here’s what some people said when asked: Who should make the decisions about what it taught and why?

- **James:** The Principal should make the decisions because they are the head of that school and they have the knowledge and...
statistics and all the pages and documents of what that school needs to improve on.

Cristiano Suarez Ronaldo: Students should have a say as teachers tend to teach things that students are not familiar with, so it’s better to have things students want to know about.

Elizabeth: I don’t think we [students] need a say because teachers have already finished their school; they already know what we need, and so they teach us what we need for the future.

Christian: The whole school community should have a say, because the students don’t necessarily know the learning but might have an idea about how they would like to be taught – which ways they like learning. And teachers need a major say because they’re the ones that are in the classrooms experiencing all our emotions when it comes to learning – how we react to what we’re taught. Also, the principals and the education board, they should also empower us. At the end of the day, they make the choices, but they should take more into consideration what the kids are actually saying – how we want to learn.

Mia and Christian: We then needed to break down the History curriculum to get a better understanding of how the curriculum is applied and followed within the History faculty. We analysed the current HSIE scope and sequence and compared it with a draft HSIE scope and sequence for the upcoming Australian Curriculum in History. We also had a group debate about whether students should be involved in developing the new scope and sequence. It was beneficial hearing other people’s perspectives.

Christian and Mia: The following meeting, we explored the advantages and disadvantages of different research methods: surveys, interviews, focus groups, visual methods and silent conversations. We explored the best ways of giving feedback positively, in a way that understands the needs of the other person. We explored a few scenarios, and role-played using the burger technique (saying something positive, giving some feedback, saying something positive). This gave us a better understanding of how to deliver our feedback in a constructive manner. We thought about how the History teachers might feel about us speaking to them about the curriculum, what their needs might be, and how we might express our ideas to them so that their needs could be met and our perspectives could be heard. We also spent time preparing interview questions in preparation to interview the HSIE teachers.

3. Interviewing the teachers

Mia and Christian: We began interviewing the HSIE staff, asking them questions and getting their feedback on what they thought about the curriculum and where they believe the curriculum is taking students’ education, not only in the immediate future, but also in the long term. This was an interesting experience because we gained insight into what teachers feel and experience each day.

Talking to a teacher face-to-face:

Jack: Normally if we were talking one on one with a teacher, it would be because we were in trouble and sent to the staffroom. So it was kind of weird us asking the questions.

Victoria: It felt kind of weird because in class you don’t say much, but when you sit her down you see how there’s more to say.

Teacher: You’re interacting in this way that isn’t so bound by the teacher-student role, and you can share more about your feelings. I was trying to get them to understand that sometimes we feel just as restricted as they feel bored.

Rodger, Hussein, James, Alisha: In class it’s not as comfortable to talk to the teacher, and there are lots of other people
around. The interview was more personal. The teachers all were a little bit nervous, but it was also much more comfortable – in class they might be more stressed or frustrated with students. A teacher is a different person in class, because there’s a different amount of students. An interview is a good opportunity for them to meet us, for us to understand each other.

**Our expectations:**

**Jack:** I expected most teachers to hate their jobs. But when [the teacher we interviewed] was talking, she actually put me in her place – when she was explaining when she stands up in front of the class, and said it’s a good feeling looking out at all the students, I felt like I could sort of imagine being in her place. She made you feel it.

**Bella, Samantha, John Dixon and Rodger:** We were surprised the teachers sometimes disagree with the curriculum.

**Victoria:** I was surprised that teachers don’t have much say in what topics they do. I didn’t know that they have to leave all that to the government to decide. It makes me respect the teachers more because if the government gives them things that they don’t know, they have to study all over again. It makes me want to learn more.

**Charlie:** Before, I thought teachers would sort of get a survey then they’d hand out to the kids – tick what they’re interested in, and work out something to teach.

**Christian:** [The teacher we interviewed] gave us in depth information and answers. You could tell this wasn’t stuff he thought he just had to answer – we were trying to get it from his point of view and how he sees things. He answered questions about who makes the decisions – who makes the choices, and then elaborated and got in depth with it – he said he would much rather students and leadership parties working together. I thought he was getting his heart into the interview.

**Emotions and observations in the interview:**

**Brooke:** Even the teachers thought that some of the questions were hard.

**Teacher:** It was nerve-wracking, surprisingly, just being in a formal setting – I wasn’t used to it. But I liked it because the kids got to interview us and see us in a different light.

**Cristiano Suarez Ronaldo:** I asked the teacher: ‘how do you feel when you’re planning your work for us?’ [The teacher] told us that sometimes she worries if the work relates to the topic and if the students will like it or not. I was surprised because she said she feels anxious.

**John Dixon:** She doesn’t seem that nervous or anxious when she’s actually teaching.

**Isaac and ‘xPeke’:** We’ve learned how to think about how a student or teacher might feel and how we can get everything out of them: by making them feel comfortable, assured that nothing will be taken to anyone higher than them, all the information will be confidential, allowing them to express how they feel. When we’ve done observations, we’ve seen how they’ve reacted to the questions – facial expressions, getting agitated sometimes – like moving a cup, or their voice changing.

**4. Observing a professional development activity**

**Christian and Mia:** We observed HSIE staff in a meeting where they discussed how to re-design a Year 7 unit of work for the Australian Curriculum. We sat in a semi-circle around the teachers who were sitting in the middle of the room, observing how they communicated their ideas across and what they were planning. Rodger joked that it was like a ‘ring of fire’. We took notes on what we thought was important and interesting from the meeting.

**Hussein:** Maybe they got nervous of us watching them.

**‘xPeke’ and Rodger:** You could tell they really cared about us. The whole meeting was for us – planning for our benefit.

**Hussein:** They talked in the meeting about homework. They care about how much work we get.

**Teacher:** For those brief moments when they were watching us, it created connections between teachers and students. You are still aware of them, conscious of their thoughts as you talk: their own thoughts, your actions and how you think in terms of what we were dealing with that day, planning for the programs. I felt that connection was really positive. You couldn’t really absolutely ignore that they were there, and you didn’t really want to: a connection came in. We were moving away from that student/teacher relationship – there was a collegiality between teacher and student – I’ve never experienced it before. We only touched on it but it was nice.

**Teacher:** They got to see our perspectives on things. And sometimes they still misread us.

**Rodger:** It wasn’t interesting – but it’s not meant to be interesting for us

**Brooke:** I like to know what they teach and how they feel about teaching it – I liked how and then in their meeting there was a little bit of controversy.

**James, Rodger, Hussein and Alisha:** There’s a lot of potential in students observing teachers’ lessons for building teaching and learning partnerships. As students we notice even very small things, like who might be left out of a discussion, or how a student feels when a teacher stands over them. Teachers observing other teachers might notice the whole room or might notice what the teacher does that is similar to them. But we might see what’s right in front of us, and imagine what students in the room might be feeling. It’s the little things that make the big difference.

**5. Focus group with teachers and students**

**Eve:** After collaboratively planning questions for a focus group discussion the week after this observation, Susan Groundwater-Smith ran a focus group with History teachers and some of the students from the Steering Committee. The rest of the Steering Committee observed this meeting, again sitting in a semi-circle around the focus group.

**Teacher:** I really found that quite rewarding – the breaking down of the student/teacher role and just the discussion, the fact we didn’t have to hide how we feel. We said: ‘we hate Monday morning as well’ – and that understanding creates a more harmonious relationship.

**Susan:** Once the focus group discussion was underway, I did not have a sense of whether it was a teacher or a student who was responding. The students were all engaged and eager to contribute. But this can’t be achieved without careful preparation. The students were at ease and confident because they have spent so much time on this project. If anything, the teachers were a little more anxious, not because they were in the mix with the students, but because they were in an interview situation with myself, whom they did not know so well.

**Eve:** Reading these quotations from students and teachers about the interviews, the professional development observation and the focus group, it seems
like these research encounters opened up communicative spaces. Stephen Kemmis describes these as ‘spaces in which people encounter each other reciprocally, as subjects worthy of recognition and respect’ (2011, p. 16).

6. A case study of another school

**Brooke, Isaac and Eve:** We wanted to see how teachers and students thought about, spoke about and taught the curriculum in another setting. Susan Groundwater-Smith helped us organise a visit to an independent Catholic girls school in the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools. We went there for the day, and presented our work to some of the students, observed HSIE faculty lessons, conducted a focus group with students and interviewed teachers in small groups. We also informally spoke to the students and teachers, and were given a tour around the school, including the chapel.

During the day and after, we reflected on the obvious and hidden curriculums of our school and the girls’ school. We thought about how schools and students can be stereotyped, and the different resources and different ways of speaking/teaching/learning between the schools. Some of the girls at the school we visited were intrigued by our project, and interested to hear ideas about how they might do something similar at their school.

**Rodger:** The girls were not like how we expected them to be – we came in with stereotypes.

**Isaac:** As researchers, we found we were more confident with the students we weren’t supposed to be talking with.

**Susan:** We discussed later in the day the tensions between being a participant and an observer in research. Our positions as students/teachers/researchers shifted in different classrooms in this other school, so that at times some of the students fervently joined in on lesson activities or conversations as participants. We did not view this as a problem, but as a research issue.

**Mia:** When the students there heard that we get to talk face-to-face with teachers at our school about teaching and learning, and that teachers are giving students the opportunities to talk, they were very surprised. When we told them about what we do, they loved it. They said: ‘we should do this at our school!’ It was good – people were appreciating our work.

**John Dixon:** Even though different schools have different resources, we all have to learn the same things in the curriculum.

**James:** This was a once in a lifetime experience.

7. Our next steps

**The Steering Committee:** We are trying to figure out what to do next, and how to present the findings from our research to teachers and students. We are trying to imagine possibilities for how teachers might include students in designing and reflecting on the curriculum more.

**Isaac:** But there are a few things stopping us from achieving our goals. With the end of National Partnerships for Low Socio-Economic Schools, funding is an issue. We’re worried that Federal and State politics might interfere with our education.

**Effects of our work**

**On us:**

**Mia:** I never thought I could be that confident in myself to have a voice – to say what I thought to everyone at a Deputy’s Conference. Teachers involved always told us: ‘you can do this; you can have a voice.’ It’s like a moral support. You kind of become open-minded. The Steering Committee didn’t tell us: ‘you have to study for exams,’ but it’s kind of like a hidden curriculum thing. You’re just picking it up.

**Christian:** I used to think I’d just look out for myself. I never used to raise my hand. The Steering Committee’s changed my mindset. Now I contribute in classes and worry about studying for exams. We transfer ideas from the Steering Committee to class, have a different attitude in class. As you progress, you think: ‘if I could transfer this to my classwork, there could be a better outcome for me.’

**Umprikash and Shaza:** In the Steering Committee we learned how to uncover weaknesses – both students and teachers – and we worked on them by trying methods out, doing things multiple times.
Rodger: Getting more knowledge about teachers and students has changed me.

**On our relationships:**

**Umprikash:** We’ve connected with the teachers more.

**Rodger:** We can express ourselves without getting told off – you build stronger relationships with the teachers.

**Dale, Cristiano Suarez Ronaldo, John Dixon:** Teachers aren’t monsters. They don’t slap work on your desk for no reason. Students are important to teachers.

**Hussein and Rodger:** We learned that learning in class is for our benefit.

**Brooke:** The teachers actually do take into account what we want to be taught and how we want to be taught. We see how the teachers think, and how they think as if they’re in our position. I still think they’re perfectly capable of planning the work themselves.

**Shaza and Umprikash:** Teachers are trying to give us choices. Ms Frazzle started to give us options for our learning in Term 2 in our elective ‘Crime Through Time.’ In Term 3 she gave all the power to us. She gave us a topic with sub-topics to choose from: ‘you do what you want to in it – present it in any way you want,’ in groups or individually. Everyone did it in groups. We made our own question, designed our own marking criteria as well, and peer marked it. Everyone did the assignment, and did a good job. Control of learning has been given to students.

**Brooke and Isaac:** We’ve learned to talk more to the teachers. Before we’d always think the teacher is just teaching particular things when they want to, but now we think: ‘they have a set time to do things here. Come on class, stay focused. You’re ruining your own future.’ You feel bad for teachers emotionally now – you know they’re teaching us for our benefit. And if we don’t do the work it’s not going to affect them; it’s going to affect us.

**On our view of the world:**

**Isaac:** Our research has given us an open mind. We’re thinking critically about our education more and why things are the way they are.

**Brooke:** Everything we learned in the Steering Committee I doubt we ever would have learned anywhere else – the behind the scenes of the school and how curriculums work.

‘xPeke’:** We have freedom of speech.

**On the teachers involved:**

**Isaac:** I’m not sure if it’s done anything on the school level or if teachers think it’s beneficial.

**Shaza:** So far the impact we’ve had has been one faculty at a time. Maybe next year we can do another faculty, one at a time.

**Teacher:** It’s nice to do something different, not just the same classroom routine. I do feel the students got to see us in a non-hostile sense, got to see us in a professional sense – our obligations, that we have to do things. I actually did truly enjoy it. It’s nice to spend time with the kids in a different context.

**Teacher:** It makes us realise we have to teach things from their perspective. It’s reciprocal – they sometimes have a different perspective on an issue.

**Teacher:** It’s very rare that we get to relate to them as we are – as people. It was a positive experience for both students and teachers – we got to a level of understanding: ‘we sometimes don’t feel like doing what we’re doing with you. We have to conform just like you do.’

**On the wider community:**

**a. Deputy Principals’ conference:**

**Mia, Christian, Georgina and Joshua:** The Deputy Principals at the NSW Deputy Principals’ Conference asked us many questions about the Steering Committee after we presented to them. Their questions included how to spread these ideas across a school and how our involvement had impacted on us personally. They seemed actually interested in what we had to say and the ideas we gave them for their possible future projects as Deputies.

**Deputy Principals’ emotions about our work (written on post it notes at the end of the presentation):**

- Happy
- Curious
- Interested
- Excited
- Thought-provoking and valuable
- Very authentic
- This is a wonderful idea but confronting
- Student passion is obvious – high levels of passion/engagement. Wow! Very impressive. Great role models.
b. Teachers and students from the school that we visited:

Students from the school that we visited:
- It was good to have a student-to-student discussion.
- We saw different perspectives from a different school, even though we were at our school, so we could change our perspectives.
- We didn’t realise you could have a different perspective on curriculum.
- We were learning from other students not just the teacher.
- I never thought I could have a say.
- I feel that if I say I didn’t enjoy a topic when we do a questionnaire that is bad so I just say I did enjoy it.
- If the others can do it (have a say) then so can we.
- Next time we should go to their school.
- It was good getting to know them.

Teacher: There seemed to be a genuine connection with the students and our students saw huge value in the experience. Interestingly they have seen that it is okay to have a voice and that it can have results that make a difference.

Conclusions:
Should students be involved in designing teaching and learning for the new Australian Curriculum?

No?
Brooke: We’ve seen how the teachers think, and how they think as if they’re in our position. They’re perfectly capable of planning the work themselves.

Dale: If you ask everyone what they want to learn, it might be harder for the teacher to teach and harder for the students to learn. Everyone probably wants to learn something different.

Yes?
John Dixon: It’s good to know what the students want to learn as well to know if your way of teaching is effective as well. Maybe it’s about giving more choices.

‘The Professor’: It’s good if students are involved in planning because they might want to learn more then.

Cristiano Suarez Ronaldo: It’s better if students contribute because the students actually experience what goes on in class – the teacher will have a massive advantage if they listen to them.

Questions we want to ask adults reading this article:
Isaac: When you were at school, how did you feel? Did you have a voice?

Brooke, Isaac and Eve: If teachers and students talked more together about teaching and learning, what emotions might we feel? What changes might happen in our schools?

Eve Mayes, ‘Brooke Davis’ and ‘Isaac Towers’ – on behalf of the Steering Committee, Kadek Arya-Pinatih and Susan Groundwater-Smith
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Reference List:


Our ‘Teach the Teacher’

At the beginning of the year, the SRC Co-ordinator at Bayside Secondary College, Williamstown Campus, heard of a program called *Teach the Teacher* through the VicSRC’s website. She asked the SRC executive members from the school to read through the manual (that was on-line) that explained what the program was about and how it worked. After agreeing that this would be a valuable program to run in our school, we contacted the VicSRC to ask how we could get involved. Within a couple of weeks Krista Seddon from the VicSRC came out to talk to us about what type of issues we would like to address.

Getting the SRC’s thoughts about the school was interesting but we felt like we needed a broader understanding and more opinions of what the student body thought. The way we did this was by using an online survey that students could access on their own computers. We designing questions about the ways in which teachers teach and run the classroom, and sent it out to the whole school to get their thoughts. Over 160 students responded to this. Here are some of the results around these topics:

**Topic 1:** Teaching Strategies  
**Topic 2:** Organisation and Preparation of Teachers for Class  
**Topic 3:** Learning Styles of Students  
**Topic 4:** Discipline  
**Topic 5:** Allocation of Classroom Time and Homework

At the next SRC meeting, we collated these results and examined the opinions of the student body. We picked five broad issues that the students felt needed to be addressed. We then created more specific questions around these issues to ask the teachers. Krista guided us as to how the staff meeting should run so that we made the most use of the time given to us.

The staff meeting started off with a briefing session about what *Teach the Teacher* was about, and what the teachers would be doing in the next hour. Then, to break the ice, we played a couple of games. After these icebreakers, we divided teachers into groups, trying to mix different subject teachers so we had an idea about how their subject/s change the way that they run their classroom. Once they were in groups, two or three SRC members were assigned to each group. (This had been done before the meeting so that everyone knew what they were doing.) In these groups, we asked questions about how and why teachers do certain things, around the issues the students had defined and discussed possible solutions to these issues. Just like the student survey, we then collated and reorganised this information and later displayed it to the SRC members.

This now enabled us to vote on the specific issues that we would now like to focus on. We came up with:
• Updating teaching styles
  - less ‘chalk and talk’
  - change/vary how they are teaching us
• Homework
  - too much at once
  - what happens to students who don’t do it or extensions are given to people who just couldn’t get organised – which isn’t fair
  - reminds us about due date
  - no follow up
• Learning intentions and success criteria
  - student input
  These covered most of the main aspects of information that we had obtained from both students and teachers. We now aim to work collaboratively with the teachers on these issues. We will present the teachers with the three guidelines and then, towards the end of next term, get students to retake the exact same survey they did previously, to see if there are different results and whether or not the students are happier with how the classroom is running and whether their learning has improved.

Jacinta Kenna
Year 9

How do teachers show they care about students’ learning?

- make class enjoyable
- give the students work they are capable of completing
- assist you with what you don’t understand
- give clear explanations in class

Why do students misbehave in class?

- the students think the teachers pick on them too much
- the students get easily distracted by friends
- the students don’t understand the work
- they are bored with the work

How do your teachers allocate their time?

- the teachers are on time to class
- the teachers space out homework
- the teachers use a variety of learning styles
- the teachers are in the class for most of the lesson
Earlier this year, the SRC Coordinator at the Williamstown Campus of Bayside Secondary College in Melbourne’s west, heard about the Teach the Teacher program. Staff and students were interested in undertaking this as a means of increasing the student voice at our campus. The proposal for students to lead discussions with teachers about learning and teaching was met with great enthusiasm from our students who are always looking for ways to lift their profile in the school and undertake meaningful activities – more than just fundraising activities.

From the Principal ....

The first invaluable support came from the VicSRC team, who met with the group to develop their skills and ideas for the program. This was a great learning experience for the students from Year 7 through to Year 9, who worked collaboratively to develop the initiative. In the first session, they gained a good understanding of the purpose of the program, and ideas about where they might go with it. This helped set the direction, clarify ideas and skill students with the concept of processes and presentation. Students saw this as a real leadership building exercise and, I have to say, came away from the sessions with a sense of importance and purpose. The follow up from Krista again was productive and ideas for expanding our program came from this.

Following the introduction, the SRC went on to survey students around issues that they thought were important for the school. After a staff meeting workshop, led by our students, ideas for further work emerged. When students compiled the information that they gathered from this staff meeting, they saw an opportunity to have some input into creating an improved learning environment. They then conducted a further survey with teachers proposing three areas on which they will work collaboratively with staff.

Students have been forthcoming on their views about the ways they are being taught and what they are learning. The formal setting that is suggested within the program, within which students present feedback to staff, has meant that teachers have taken students’ participation more seriously. This has been an incredible empowering experience for students, to have their ‘voice’ listened to and respected. This has also been a very valuable way to enhance the relationship between our students and staff. Students enjoy the idea that they can have some input into their own learning and this has fuelled an ongoing interest from other students, including those not directly connected to the SRC.

The Teach the Teacher program has proved to be an extremely worthwhile vehicle for enhancing student participation. Students will now continue to build on their leadership skills and step up to make this next phase work. They have reported their ideas to the general student body and this has been met with interest. They now need to work on developing some measurable goals around the areas of collaboration with staff. These include: the implementation of homework, lesson intentions and ideas for making learning ‘fun’. The students have set a formidable target to work towards but the consensus was ‘we can do this’.

This is the first time this has been tried at our school but the feedback from staff and students is that this will be a process that we will incorporate into the Student Council every year. It is definitely a worthwhile part of student leadership and I can see potential in the program to develop student skills that will be long lasting and transferable to other settings. It is a program that I would recommend to other schools to introduce and develop to suit their student voice and participation.

Nolene Symons  
Campus Principal  
Bayside P-12 College  
Symons.Nolene.N@educmail.vic.gov.au
Students at Mornington Secondary College in Melbourne’s southern region have taken on a whole new approach to student leadership and, as part of this, have established a student voice group known as Look Who’s Talking. This group of over 30 students has held discussion groups or forums about different areas they want to be actively involved in around their school.

These forums included discussions on transition, developing student leadership and DEECD collected data. One such forum provided a springboard for students to lead discussions with various teacher and parent groups in the school about results of the Attitude to Schools Survey and Parent Opinion Survey. The College has very strong data, with all areas showing above state average results for secondary schools, however the students and staff wanted to work together to unpack the classroom behaviour data – which, although above the State average, was the lowest result across all of the data.

Students adapted aspects of the Teach the Teacher model in doing so, and the school has noted that: “the empowerment of the students has been established using a structured model and this can be further developed into the future.” There have been considerable benefits to being involved with this initiative.

From a student perspective, the number of students wanting to take on active roles within the College has increased significantly. There are now over 200 students actively participating in student leadership across the College and this has contributed to a widespread change of ethos. The level of cross year level activities has increased significantly as older students are running activities for younger students and this is enabling peer mentoring to occur.

Student and teacher conversations are occurring about learning and teaching. Within the classroom, students are talking to teachers about the development of curriculum, and gaining active feedback about the teaching and learning practices that are taking place. Students have been running forums with students about classroom behaviour expectations and what the differences are that can occur between a teacher’s interpretation and a student’s interpretation.

Teachers have really enjoyed a classroom observation process where they have been evaluating and discussing the initiatives that have been developed across the school. The professional development time has enabled robust discussion and reflection to occur to enhance teacher capacity by looking at students as individuals and catering for their needs.

From a school community perspective, there has been an increased awareness of the level of student involvement across the school and the development of student leadership in an increasing number of areas. The School Council has been kept up to date with the Student Voice initiative with presentations being given in a formal manner. The College has also developed a video/DVD presentation that highlights
the work that the Student Voice students have been involved in over the period of the initiative, that has been shown to staff, students and parents.

Throughout the implementation of this initiative we have put in place strategies that will be sustainable into the future. As a College we have looked at the needs and benefits of raising the Student Voice across the College in such a way that it will continue to grow without compromising other programs – but enhancing them. This has involved working with staff and students to look at current practices that exist and identifying priorities for improvement in student engagement and teacher capacity.

Sarah Burns
Principal, Mornington Secondary College
burns.sarah.j@edumail.vic.gov.au

Student Views
... Student Voice

Luke Stahl:
“Student Voice is just a way of involving students into school discussions and decisions that are made in the school.”
“We can get what the students want and combine it with what the teachers want and need to come up with really good discussions to make the school function and work a lot smoother.”

Krystal Lewis-Smith:
“Students have the opportunity to have their say about what goes on in the school. They tell the teachers about suggestions about how teaching can be improved to help students to be more engaged in their learning.”

Cameron Fielding:
“Students get a lot of say and organise a lot of things for teachers. It brings a more connected role with students and teachers – instead of just having teachers say and not having a relationship.”

A resource kit for students and teachers interested to implement a Teach the Teacher program at your school has been developed by the VicSRC. It is part of the Represent! Plus resources on the VicSRC website: www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/representplus
Imagine a world without reports.

This became a short reality for Sammy, Jordyn and I when we attended the Assessment Consultation held by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The meeting was a gathering of about 70 principals and teachers and we three students from the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC).

I was surprised to be hearing many comments made by the teachers and how they hated writing reports. Report writing was not only squashed into a writing period of four weeks but it also was a hassle as certain criteria had to be completed for every student. Teachers found giving feedback from the whole semester to a student in one report was not beneficial, as it caused stress for the teachers and it was also inefficient. We, as students, also felt similarly about reports.

In the twenty-first century in Australia, receiving good reports is a dominant priority for students. We aim to achieve as many As as possible and we tend not to read the comments given by our teachers but instead fret about the letter score first – without the knowledge that the ‘A’ means that you are two semesters ahead of the average standard. This means that you have learnt all the things you need for the next year. This cannot be achieved as you are learning at your current year level, however many students do not know this.

The key point that was displayed to us was the concept of ongoing assessment. This meant that, rather than having reports, teachers instead would give constant feedback to students and parents. I thought this was a great idea and would benefit the majority of students in Victoria. As students, we need someone to guide us through life whether it be in education or other things. Teachers are meant to be there to direct us in becoming intelligent adults and I know that this ongoing assessment concept will assist us greatly.

Although these are fantastic ideas, they will need many years before they are feasible. I cannot wait until this idea becomes real because Australia needs to strive higher in education and aim for the absolute best. I really learned a lot at the Assessment Consultation and really commend the DEECD for seeking students’ views on the education system in Australia.

Margaret Tran
VicSRC Executive
In 2013 – 2014 we are rolling out our new logo! Designed in consultation with the VicSRC Student Executive team, the brief was for a design that looked colourful, fresh, professional and reflected that we are a student-run, student-led organisation.

As part of our plan to roll out the new logo, we are developing a new look for our website, Facebook and Twitter and we are moving our newsletter online to a monthly e-newsletter. You can sign up on our website!

Follow us at:

www.vicsrc.org.au
www.facebook.com/vicsrc
Twitter @vicsrc
#VicSRC
coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

The VicSRC has rebranded! To sign up to the new VicSRC online e-newsletter ... visit: www.vicsrc.org.au/joinin/mailinglist
Invitation for Creative Writing on Freedom and Democracy

The UK-based Phoenix Education Trust is launching a project to compile and publish a book of creative writing from people around the world connected with democratic education!

The project aims to inspire students to develop their English and creative writing skills, will complement teaching curricula and is a chance for students to become published authors and showcase their talents! We plan to advertise, launch and distribute the anthology next year, to celebrate and raise awareness of democratic education.

Please feel free to visit our website: http://phoenixeducation.co.uk/index.php/what-phoenix-trust-does-3/free-anthology, for further details.

We would be very grateful if you could bring this project to the attention of students who might be interested to contribute.

The initiator of this project is Danny Whitehouse. He is checking this email inbox regularly, eager to hear from you! He will offer individual feedback, ideas to stir up enthusiasm in schools, proverbs about freedom, and free-range chicken recipes, should you require sustenance. Please ‘like’ our Facebook page to receive regular bulletins: https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Phoenix-Education-Trust/612344992122718.

On another subject: the Phoenix Education Trust is also setting up a UK Democratic Education Directory. It is an interactive online map on which schools, organisations and individuals that work towards democratic education can place themselves and say a bit about what they are doing. This directory will show what is going on where, so that like-minded people can make connections and support each other.

Anyone who practises or supports democratic education is welcome to appear in the directory. And, it’s free and easy to add yourself - just go to www.democraticeducation.co.uk

Thank you for your time. You are now free to stop reading this, and get writing!

freeanthology@phoenixeducation.co.uk

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition has created a training toolkit: Young People Creating Change. It’s for young people or those working with young people to introduce strategies to create change, promote ideas and input into decisions.


December 2013
Imagine a school where...
- Students are partners in improvement
- Students and adults improve learning, teaching, and leadership throughout education together
- Student voice becomes THE key to successful improvement!

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Some Models of Student Participation and Engagement

“School failed me, and I failed the school. It bored me. The teachers behaved like Feldwebel (sergeants). I wanted to learn what I wanted to know, but they wanted me to learn for the exam. What I hated most was the competitive system there, and especially sports. Because of this, I wasn't worth anything, and several times they suggested I leave. This was a Catholic School in Munich. I felt that my thirst for knowledge was being strangled by my teachers; grades were their only measurement. How can a teacher understand youth with such a system? From the age of twelve I began to suspect authority and distrust teachers.”

— Albert Einstein
Student Voice in Vermont, USA

The third of the seven new 2013-14 Vermont School Board Association priorities for the year is "Promote student voice".

The detail for this priority includes:
1) encourage the Agency of Education to include student involvement on all levels in the development of effective Personalized Learning Plans and Flexible Pathways models;
2) support policy to require student representation on all school boards;
3) work with the VPA/VSBA to support programming for student representatives on school boards; and
4) develop policy to require student feedback mechanisms in grades 7-12 to assess and improve the learning experience.

YATST (Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together) has work underway in all these areas!

We also have a number of Youth Voice/YATST supporters on the board, including Morgan MacIver who is the student representative on the State School Board and active YATST member.

What an amazing year ahead!

Helen Beattie
www.yatst.com
hnbeattie@gmail.com

Networking young citizens: Learning to be citizens in and with the social web

A new report from Suzanne Mellor, ACER and Terri Seddon, Monash University; now available at: research.acer.edu.au/civics/21/

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 on Facebook

Connect has a presence on facebook. Find us at:

www.facebook.com/pages/Connect/360372760717566

We've been posting some news and links there to complement what you see in the on-line version of Connect. It would be great if you could go there and 'like' us, and watch there for news of each Connect's availability on-line - for FREE - since we started in June 2013!

Student Voice Research and Practice Facebook Group

www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

This open facebook group was initially established by Dana Mitra, and is now supported by the work of academics, practitioners and students throughout the world. It provides a valuable community of people working and interested in the area of 'Student Voice' - in Australia, USA, UK, Italy and elsewhere – as well as access to useful resources and examples, and up-to-date information about initiatives. You can easily log on and join the group at the above address.
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 On-Line Subscription (6 issues annually e-mailed to you FREE):
Simply supply your e-mail address (below or by e-mail) and name and phone number (in case of bounces). There is no cost; however donations to support Connect’s work are appreciated and acknowledged.

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Connect now has no income except donations and sales of literature (opposite). By supporting Connect with donations, you keep us going. To make a donation to the work of Connect, use the form in this issue or contact us for bank account details in order to make an electronic transfer of funds. We gratefully acknowledge all contributions in Connect.

ASPRINworld: the Connect website!

www.asprinworld.com/connect

Connect has a website at ASPRINworld: ASPRIN is the Australian Student Participation Resource and Information Network (“a cure for your student participation headaches”) – a still-emerging concept. The Connect section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, recent back issue contents and summaries of and order information for Student Councils and Beyond, Student Action Teams, Reaching High and Switched On to Learning. There are also links from the indexes of recent issues to their archived PDFs (see below).

Connect is now also archived and available electronically:

research.acer.edu.au/connect

All issues of Connect are being archived through the ACER Research Repository: ACEReSearch. Connect issues from #1 to #194 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 International 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:

Annual Report (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne Vic) 2013

The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families: Literature Review (Professor John Polesel, Ms Nicky Dufet, Dr Malcolm Turnbull; Whittam Institute, UWS, Sydney, NSW) January 2012

GRIP Newsletter (GRIP Leadership, NSW) Summer 2013

Parents Voice (Parents Victoria, Wandong, Vic) Vol 40 Issues 4 & 5; October 2013

Research Developments (ACER, Camberwell, Vic) December 2013

TLN Journal (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 20 No 3; Spring 2013

Yikes (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 13 Edition 3; November 2013

International:

ReThinking Schools (Milwaukee, WI, USA) Vol 28 No 1; Fall 2013

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

www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams

Articles from Connect are now discoverable through EBSCOhost research databases.

www.asprinworld.com/connect & research.acer.edu.au/connect

December 2013
Connect On-Line!

All back issues of Connect from 1979 to the present (that's 34 years!) are freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), all back issues of Connect have been scanned or up-loaded and are 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.

Connect has a commitment to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation. We are totally supported by donations!

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.

All back copies of Connect are available on-line ... for free!

research.acer.edu.au/connect