Thinking and writing about our work

- *Rethinking Student Voice in Health Education*
- *The exclusion of the excluders by the excluded: Music Production & Student Voice*
- *Students teaching their teachers & classmates*
- *PALs: A student-owned program for primary aged students*
- *You Can Talk To Me*
- *VicSRC: Students Transforming Education - Regional Conferences 2016; 2016 Dates; Teach the Teacher; Small Steps*

Resources:

- *Connect PUBLICATIONS CATALOGUE - updated*
- *Ideas and action resources for the Education State*
- *Harris Student Commission on Learning*
- *Student-Led Conferences*
- *Review: Student Voice and School Governance*
- *International: Journal of Student Voice; Student Voice Seminar: 2016, USA; Student Voice Research & Practice facebook group; New SoundOut website*
- *Connect ... available on-line ... on facebook ... archived ... access to other on-line resources*
Why does Connect exist?

Connect has been published bi-monthly since 1979!

It aims to:
- document student participation approaches and initiatives;
- support reflective practices;
- develop and share resources.

This Issue:

Connect now enters its 37th year, reminding us all about the value of reflecting on and documenting what we do: learning and sharing. That reflection can be very personal, in journals and in quiet moments; but it can also be organised and public. Then the sharing adds value to your work, both for yourself and for others. As you write about your work for others, you are ‘forced’ to think in more structured ways about what you’ve been doing (in order to clearly communicate), what outcomes there have been, what you are learning (to help others avoid your valuable mistakes), and what you might now move on to.

So in this first issue for 2016, there are some examples of powerful reflection ... and some of these tackle head-on questions about the participation and voice of those often excluded from access and success. Both Hannah McDermott and Andy Brader ask whether traditional ways of encouraging student voices actually are counter-productive. Do they simply reinforce the views we are comfortable to hear? Do they enable the different and dissonant voices to matter? They suggest very different approaches ... and both are reflective ‘works in progress’.

And we know that, on an individual level, expectations matter. The same thing applies to Student Councils: ask students to raise money, and they’ll expect that that is all their Student Councils do; ask them about curriculum, learning and teaching organisation ... and provide the time and resources for them to research and explore this ... and the Student Council will meet your expectations that they’re vital partners in the school’s distributed leadership.

Money matters ...

With the move from print to on-line production, the cost of producing Connect has greatly decreased (though it’s never paid for the work involved ... so that hasn’t changed). It’s decreased but not vanished! If you enjoy reading Connect and would like to make a donation to meet these costs, that’d be great. You can send a cheque or money order made out to Connect; you can send an order form and I’ll invoice (eg the school); but unfortunately I don’t have capacity to process cards.

You’ll also notice that I’ve updated and reprinted the Connect Catalogue in this issue. I have many publications on the shelves - some produced by Connect, others distributed by us. In some cases, the cost of purchase only covers the postage. It would be great to get some of these to you, so we have a look. They are great resources and fascinating reading. (Note that some are in very short supply - so ask first on these items.) And there are links to free items in the catalogue.

You might also notice that, as a consequence of its decreased income, Connect has been able to drop out of the GST regime. While others argue about increasing the GST, you now pay no added GST for Connect publications - they are 10% cheaper. (Though, unlike others allegedly, we do continue to pay tax)

Next Issue ...

We’re hoping to hear from Ontario, Canada in the next issue of Connect (in April) about their work with students as school and district trustees. And from Australia, providing a way for ‘voices’ to be heard through in-school TV narrowcasts. Plus more.

Roger Holdsworth

Next Issue: #218: April 2016
Deadline for material: end of March, 2016
Rethinking student voice in Health Education

While education policy makes increasing demands on schools to foster student voice, many educational facilities struggle to provide adequate opportunity for this to occur beyond tokenism. There is a mounting tension between policy and practice that is particularly true for schools in low socio-economic environments, and those with a large proportion of disadvantaged and at-risk students.

McClelland College is a government secondary school situated in a low socio-economic area in the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It has high numbers of students who experience generational poverty. Its current enrolment stands at 875 students, with about 90 full time equivalent staff. Although students are predominantly from an English speaking background, the College has witnessed a higher intake of Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) students in recent years.

When compared to other schools in the local area, McClelland College has historically experienced lower academic results. In a bid to challenge this trend, the College embarked about a decade ago on a revision of policy, practice, facilities and even uniform, in the hope of improving both results, and its perception in the community. While the College's vision of a personalised curriculum was realised, improved academic results did not follow.

Whilst the school purports to fulfil their mantra that 'one size does not fit all', itself a tacit testament to student voice efforts, data from the Student Attitudes to School survey reveals a contrasting perspective across a variety of areas, from high student distress and student morale, to low school connectedness and connectedness to peers. This trend has perplexed many members of the school community: why are the results so poor? This confronting issue of student data, particularly in the area of school connectedness, became a stimulus for the student voice element of this project, and a motivator to ensure McClelland College truly embodies the values it espouses.

In a bid to provide students with greater personalised learning and respond to their needs, a College-wide Academy Program was established in 2014, and students spend two periods each week in a cross-age environment studying an elective subject in their area of passion: from sports to arts, and from academic to community-based learning areas. To make room for this, it was decided that the theory component of Health curriculum be sacrificed for junior students. In part, the project proposed to bridge this curriculum gap.

In seeking to develop the junior Health curriculum at the College, we began by using the Achievement Program, and this also emerged as a vehicle to engage student voice. Two committees (one student and one adult) were established to plan, prepare and implement a range of whole-school health promotion activities. However, I also wanted to examine how effective this was, so I collected qualitative data from the student Health Promoting Schools committee during focus groups sessions. As we shall see, this revealed that the
Achievement Program did not provide a structure within which to adequately develop student voice, but contributed to a damaging trend of creating further marginalisation for already disadvantaged groups. Ultimately, the findings of this project support the multitude of student voice research that suggests that many current efforts are ineffective and, more worryingly still, detrimental to the wellbeing of students who are already at-risk.

Background

The Achievement Program is a jointly funded initiative of the State Government of Victoria and the Australian Government, and was developed by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education and Training (State of Victoria, 2015). It is based on the World Health Organisation’s Health Promoting Schools model, which itself is a widely-recognised and evidence-based approach to health promotion in schools. The Achievement Program requires that a school audit its current Health Education practices and, based on the most prominent areas of need within the eight HPS strands (see diagram), that student and adult committees plan and implement activities that meet targeted criterion more effectively. The program is tailored to suit the individual needs of the client school, and planned activities are encouraged to be whole-school events where possible. Whilst these events have a basis in curriculum, they are not classroom-based, and activities are designed to have an element of fun as well as an opportunity to learn – for example, a competition, craft activity or mural.

The Achievement Program’s requirement for a student committee appeared to have great potential to utilise the student voice requirements so prominent on the educational landscape at present. Recognising this, my main focus shifted from its initial intent to improve Health Education at McClelland College, towards leveraging this opportunity to improve student voice efforts. The focus became about giving students’ genuine agency in the direction of Health Education at McClelland College, with the Achievement Program as a vehicle to achieve this.

As student voice becomes more prevalent in the education agenda, schools face the challenge of how to balance this requirement, as systems targets and accountability measures for schools also increase. Whilst Australian policy directives are clear in their expectation that student voice be fostered in schools (Department of Education and Training, 2010; MCEETYA, 2008), it is apparent that current legislative direction is not enough to ensure it is enacted appropriately in schools; this is the case at McClelland College, despite its efforts. In response, this project intended to establish a mechanism for authentic student voice at McClelland College, using the student collaboration requirement of the Achievement Program to make lasting changes in line with emergent student perspectives and policy demands.

‘Student Attitudes to School’ Data

Current school data around school connectedness suggest that students’ needs are not being adequately met within the College despite its strategic intent to ‘improve outcomes for all students through increasing student engagement and connectedness with their schooling’. A goal of increasing school connectedness by 3.66% in 2014 (based on Attitudes to School data) was achieved in 2014, but the trajectory has not been sustained in 2015. There was instead a rapid decrease: school connectedness data in 2013 were 11.9% and in 2014 were 18.2%; then there was a dramatic nosedive to 5.8% in 2015. This descent coincides with the decision to forego the theory component of Health education in the junior years, and while correlation between these two factors cannot definitively be determined, neglecting to address this potential association in the future would be remiss. In the interim, this project aimed to improve school connectedness indicators by giving students a platform from which to effect change in the way McClelland approaches the junior Health curriculum, with the concurrent aim being that this new approach would also support student voice efforts at the College.

Socio-economic Status

Current research into student voice efforts suggests that students from low socio-economic environments are not being considered and, worse still, are being further marginalised by many current practices (Black, 2010; Smyth, 2006). Educational researchers (Black 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Rodriguez and Brown, 2009) are critical of current efforts, asserting that they are homogenised and singular, and without consideration of the diverse nature of the modern student body. Rodriguez and Brown (2009) in
particular argue that many students are rendered unable to contribute in any real sense, because they do not conform to the middle-class discourses that characterise educational facilities.

Herein lies the rationale for the rethinking of current approaches that drove the project. If this project was to truly represent a shift in the way McClelland approaches student voice, it must consider and respond to the needs of its student population. This would require an overhaul of current practices, procedure and attitudes; McClelland must meet the broader needs of a community that experiences generational poverty, explicitly unlocking the coded messages educators routinely send students. This project aimed to commence the trajectory towards this shift, using Health Education as the vehicle towards student voice at McClelland College.

My Role

I was new to McClelland College in 2015, and the Year 8 Educational Leader. I am responsible for leadership of the Literacy and Humanities curriculum, programs, and behaviour management at Year 8. Furthermore, as a Leading Teacher, I am expected to take on roles and responsibilities outside of Year 8 management, and lead whole-school improvement initiatives.

I met with McClelland’s Principal in March about the proposed project. He suggested that I address the curriculum deficit created by the Academy Program, whilst simultaneously maintaining the strong tradition of responding to students’ needs at McClelland College. With a teaching background in English and Humanities, I felt ill prepared to meet the curriculum requirement. Furthermore, with a basic, but limited, understanding of current student voice efforts and a greater understanding of what does not work than what does, I did not feel fully equipped to meet this criterion either. However, I recognised the importance of aligning my project with the vision of the College.

I began a process of informal and more formalised research, including looking into health promotion in schools. The government-funded Achievement Program appeared to provide an ideal framework to accommodate the requirements of the project. The program itself is designed to improve student wellbeing and engagement outcomes, and schools are supported by a health professional to:

- work collaboratively and cross-sectorally;
- collect and analyse data on current practices;
- plan and implement activities which meet emergent areas of need; and
- reflect and improve on both new and established activities.

As this structure encourages a student collaboration element, it appeared to provide a fitting framework to accommodate this project’s two major aims: to meet a Health curriculum deficit, and to enact genuine student voice.

I liaised with a member of Peninsula Health’s Health Promotion team who outlined the benefits of the program and our obligations as a school, as well as explaining the broad process of auditing current practices and implementing activities to bridge emergent gaps. In consultation with McClelland’s Principal, the intention of the project became to secure recognition as a Health Promoting School through the Achievement Program, and leverage the framework to support student voice efforts at the College.

The Process

To do this, two Health Promoting Schools (HPS) committees were set up – one adult and one student – to plan, prepare and implement relevant activities. The adult committee comprised myself, a Peninsula Health representative, a McClelland College parent, the School Nurse, two Leading Teachers, a Graduate Teacher, an Expert Teacher, the College’s staff wellbeing representative, and four Pre-Service Teachers. The student committee comprised two student representatives from each junior Year level (7-9), and a representative each from Years 10 and 11. Each committee met on a fortnightly basis, and engaged in planning and preparation for proposed activities to meet state-wide benchmarks in support of our application to become recognised as a Health Promoting School by the Achievement Program.

The Achievement Program provides an Audit Tool proforma that allows schools to assess their current level of proficiency across the eight HPS strands in the areas of environment, policy, learning and skills, and community engagement, with a view to selecting the most pressing areas of need in one’s educational context. In our first adult HPS committee meeting in April, we decided to utilise this tool to assess what our priorities should be for the coming year, in light of collected data.

We decided that the four pre-service teachers (PSTs) would complete the Audit Tool; this would give them the opportunity to network with members of the school community and begin familiarising themselves with policy documentation in schools. The timeframe of two weeks was decided upon, and the PSTs were introduced to key members of the school community who would support them in this data collection exercise.

Although the adult committee had agreed that we would conduct an audit for data collection, we talked about which areas were likely to emerge as priorities. ‘Alcohol and Other Drugs’ and ‘Sexual Health and Wellbeing’ were considered to be of greatest need at McClelland, based on the habits of the student body at large. However, when the adult committee met again to discuss and analyse the findings of the audit and decide upon three areas of priority (with the intention being to focus on one per term for the remainder of the school year) these did not emerge as the most pressing priorities. Instead ‘Healthy Eating and Oral Health’ and ‘Sun Protection’ did. A heated debate took place but, ultimately, it was decided that the originally identified areas were already being adequately addressed by the College and it was agreed that ‘Alcohol and Other Drugs’ and ‘Sexual Health and Wellbeing’ could be either addressed separately from the HPS committee’s work, or as priority areas over two terms next year, regardless of the results of the 2016 Audit Tool.

In consultation with both committees, it was therefore decided to tackle the ‘Oral Health’ component in Term 2, address ‘Healthy Eating’ in Term 3 and ‘Sun Protection’ would be covered in Term 4.

During the initial planning phase, the student committee was asked a series of four questions to answer in pairs, having agreed to the key focus areas for the remainder of the school year:

- What do we do at McClelland College regarding health and wellbeing education and support?

February 2016
• What could we do differently?
• If time and money were no object, what would we do at McClelland College (health and wellbeing related)?
• Considering that time and money do have an impact, what might be some very achievable ways to meet your health and wellbeing needs at McClelland College?

Answers varied of course, but the highest frequency answer that fitted with our first priority of ‘Oral Health’ was dental screenings. A discussion around how this might occur ensued, and we ruminated on questions such as: Would the screenings be at school or off-site? Would there be a cost attached? How much would we be prepared to charge? Would we make it available to both College staff and students? How would we promote this? Whose permission must we seek?

The student meeting minutes were taken to the adult committee the following week, and it was suggested that a dental team could be available through Peninsula Health and that screenings would be free for students and take place at McClelland College. Discussion turned to how else we might meet key benchmarks for this HPS strand, and the PSTs indicated that they would like to plan and prepare an oral health quiz for junior students.

The dental screenings were largely organised by myself and the Peninsula Health representative. Students contributed to the process in a Public Relations capacity by creating posters, flyers, and other advertising for both the dental screenings and the oral health quiz. Input from the PSTs was invaluable; they were instrumental in researching oral health, creating a presentation for the quiz, and delivering the competition across six different periods, awarding dental paraphernalia provided by Peninsula Health as prizes. The remainder of the adult committee began planning for the Term 3 focus on ‘Healthy Eating’ during this phase.

This action felt quite fragmented, with each committee, and a sub-section of the adult committee, working on different projects. Student voice efforts began to fall away in terms of students’ genuine input into the organisational and administrative requirements such events necessitate. While students had requested that “more advertising” of our health promotion efforts occur, these actions felt quite tokenistic in terms of the overarching action that took place to achieve the dental screenings’ success. I noted in July: “I get the sinking feeling that I am doing this all ‘wrong’. This really does not feel like student voice to me. It feels like I’m telling the ‘good’ students what to do, and they already know the answer before I’ve finished the sentence. We all know the answer, because it has been done before.” This was a clear indication that I did not feel the change element so crucial to this project’s success was being achieved. I had diagnosed the culture, chosen a new direction, but was faltering at the most challenging hurdle: managing the change.

I was also forced to reassess the adult committee’s readiness for change. I jotted questions in my reflective journal such as: “Are they satisfied with our progress as a committee? To what degree? Is this what they signed up for? Do their passions lie primarily with the health and wellbeing of students as attached to the Health curriculum, or would they be willing to explore student voice using an, as yet, undefined vehicle? Have I created an environment of trust to the degree that I could elicit the answers to these questions during a round table discussion?”

These questions became the impetus and inspiration for informal discussion around the adult committee’s levels of satisfaction with the
process, and the direction in which we were heading. The ensuing conversation revealed that the adult committee was more interested in the health promotion aspect of our work than with the underlying approaches to student voice – that had come to engage my interest.

During Term 4, we continued with the Health Promoting Schools focus on ‘Sun Protection’. The student committee had already identified an interest in planting trees as a health-related activity. I knew that there was similar interest elsewhere in the school – through existing work by a student Environment Team, and by the Year 11-12 VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) group. I consulted with, and convened a team of students and teachers from these areas of the school. These identified an area of the school that hadn’t been used for about 10 years - the ‘Bear Pit’. With the planting of indigenous trees to shade this area, this could become a pleasant, shady and environmentally friendly area for student use.

The process of developing this area began before the end of the school year and will continue into 2016. However the focus in this work had again shifted from explicit processes to support student voice, to dealing with the specific health promotion areas. I accepted that the Achievement Program model dealt well with health promotion, though not so well with promotion of student voice.

I recognised that this process had uncovered a need to take further initiatives to explore and develop student voice in the College. Hence, as the school year ended, I began planning with others in the school to do more to address this area - and these initiatives will become a major core of my work in 2016.

**Discussion and Reflection**

**Student Voice**

I had recognised from the beginning that the project’s timeframe would not allow for student involvement beyond consultation, and that this represented a barrier in climbing the ladder towards ‘shared decision making’ (Hart, 1992). It was not expected, however, that we would face challenges in enacting genuine ‘student consultation’. However it would appear that the student consultation evident in this project has occurred only within adult-sanctioned parameters, rendering the process somewhat unsuccessful from a student voice perspective.

It is important to note that the selection of a project framework occurred prior to in-depth research into student voice being undertaken. As the original aims and goals began to shift and become moulded by new understandings, Health Education emerged as the vehicle for a student voice-based project, rather than the main driver in itself. Although in retrospect the Achievement Program is not a framework to achieve student voice, at the time it was selected it was not yet known what a prominent role student voice was to play in the project. Therefore, while the project failed to embody the notion of student voice, it is important to note that such shortcomings must be viewed through the lens of a developing context, and as new priorities emerged.

Perhaps the most enlightening moment of my learning during this process occurred during research into current student voice efforts. I realised that the Achievement Program represents for student voice what ‘add-on’ programming represents for whole-school approaches: a tokenistic and ineffective methodology existing only within adult-sanctioned parameters.

When the student committee was asked: “what could we do differently/better (regarding Health Education at McClelland College)?” references to fruit platters to classes. When I queried the origin of this idea, they explained that it was something that had been part of their primary school experience. For me, this is evidence of highly institutionalised individuals who are able to give answers within a preconceived notion of a school’s capacity to realistically effect change. With prior knowledge of this particular student group’s propensity to give intelligent but somewhat rigid answers, I then pre-empted this and asked them the question: “If time and money were no object what would you do (regarding health and wellbeing)?”, hoping for a more innovative and creative response. However, the most common answer noted was to plant more native trees on the school grounds, revealing a sub-section of the school population much more in-tune with their civic responsibility than I had anticipated, but who still remained within the confines of ‘safe’ and achievable options.

In another example, the student committee began to plan activities aligned with the ‘Healthy Eating’ strand. One of their ideas was to create a ‘Rags to Riches’ style competition, where different competitors were to submit their own individualised healthy recipes, based on the television program of the same name. When I presented this idea, it was suggested that it would take a lot of organisation, that no other schools
were going to this extent to achieve recognition, and that I needed to ‘rein in’ the students’ ideas. At this stage, I had begun to recognise just how limiting, and potentially damaging, attitudes such as this can be in a school environment.

**Student Committee: Future Recommendations**

Two further considerations for future planning around the student committee emerged when I re-read my reflective journal: questioning techniques, and the structure and content of meetings.

**Questioning**

Based on the similarity of responses given, and clarifying questions asked in relation to questions 2 and 3, it became apparent that the parallels students had drawn between the two questions were the source of confusion for them, and that further consideration needed to be given to refining questions. At a 2012 Catholic Education Conference: *Innovate, Create, Relate*, a speaker proposed the sentence stem: “It is unacceptable that...” This could provide a non-restrictive starting point and springboard from which students can ruminate, elaborate and give creative responses. Alternatively, OMNI’s *Toolkit for Conducting Focus Groups* provides a variety of probes that aim to both clarify responses, and help to elicit more detailed information from respondents:

- “Please tell me more about that...”
- “Could you explain what you mean by...”
- “Can you tell me something else about...”

A more measured and well thought-out approach to questioning techniques is likely to yield more detailed and accurate qualitative data from student respondents; removing the ambiguity in questioning will also allow for a more interactive process.

**Meetings**

Student meetings were fundamentally traditional in both structure and content: agendas were emailed prior to meetings, discussion points were raised during the meeting as outlined, and notes were taken and then disseminated post-meeting. The meetings were largely discussion-based, and I chaired each and every meeting. If we accept that the current face of student voice must be rethought, it naturally follows that traditional methods employed to elicit student response must also be revisited.

Colucci (2007) provides a vast array of different techniques and approaches that could be adopted during student focus groups in order to inject the element of ‘fun’ into the process that appears to be missing in HPS committee meetings. The activities outlined give scope for students to express themselves, drawing on a wider skill set than does the SRC’s selection criteria: role-playing, rating and ranking, and storytelling.

Providing students with opportunities to engage with activities and exercises should break up the monotony of the current formula whilst supporting discussion of sensitive topics by encouraging participant attention (Colucci, 2007). Furthermore, if methods to elicit response are more varied, they provide broader opportunities to support student voice. Considerations such as these must be observed if McClelland College is to be successful in becoming an educational facility that embodies the true notion of student voice.

The initial intention of the project was to plan and implement health promotion activities in order to secure recognition through the *Achievement Program*, as well as supporting student voice at McClelland College. However, consultation with the student committee a few months into the project revealed that the framework within which we are required to work to secure this recognition provided only limited scope for students to enact change and be heard. I was confronted with evidence that, as with the educational landscape in Australia as a whole, the journey towards changing the face of student voice at McClelland had only just begun.

**Tokenism and Marginalisation**

In Rodriguez and Brown’s (2009) scathing indictment of the current culture of systems targets in western schools, they present an educational landscape that creates further marginalisation for disadvantaged students in a student voice context, and this reminds us that McClelland’s student body is more susceptible to this risk than students attending schools in higher socio-economic areas.

As part of their student voice efforts, McClelland has adopted the resounding mechanism for student voice in Australia, the Student Representative Council (SRC). The concept of the SRC has received much criticism for its tokenism, based on the small percentage of students it consults and the fact that this consultation occurs only within adult-sanctioned parameters (Holdsworth, 2014; Walsh and Black, 2009). Students are often chosen by adults, and are already required to possess effective public and private communication, and organisation skills (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010). With median literacy levels ‘below average’ during the junior year levels at McClelland, two of the required skills (effective public and private communication) appear unlikely to be achievable for the majority of the junior student body. Whilst Rodriguez and Brown (2009) acknowledge the argument that low literacy levels have a role to play in this marginalisation, in tempered relief, they also state that institutionalised biases disallow students from entering the forum and that this factor is more accurately to blame. Whatever the cause of this marginalisation, it would appear that the student HPS committee has done little to buck this trend.

As my research into tokenism progressed and, through reflecting on the actions we were taking, I began to understand fully the implications of the most prominent student voice typologies (Hart, 1992; Fielding, 2004; Mitra, 2006). I reached the concerning conclusion that the student committee represented no opportunity for student voice beyond the entry point of ‘listening’. Furthermore, I recogniised that, even before meeting the students on the first occasion, I had naively added to this concerning trend of creating further marginalisation for students: I had ‘cherry-picked’ students based on recommendations from their year level leaders and, unwittingly, formed a group that was not representative of the average student at McClelland. More worryingly still, I had reinforced the message sent to the majority of students that they were not invited to be part of this adult-sanctioned and middle-class discourse.

I had, unwittingly, contributed to the cycle of marginalisation alluded to by Black (2010) and Rodriguez and Brown (2009), disallowing disadvantaged students from entering the debate by selecting students based on adult recommendation and providing only adult-sanctioned parameters within which to enact change. After detailed
Having said also has a was established with institutionalised thinking and as close to elicit student responses as unimpeded by of how questions are worded in order to process for next year, and also a revision will mean a different student selection framework will allow us to work. This is proposed that the HPS committee’s action continues, but a new understanding that it is not the most appropriate forum for student voice efforts be recognised.

Recommendations
How then might the College better provide opportunity for the development of student voice in future? One possibility is through the ruMAD? Program (see Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning, 2014). Developed and piloted by Dr David Zynijer and Claire Brunner, ruMAD? was established with disadvantaged and at-risk students in mind, and might just provide a framework that bridges the gap between the values espoused in policy documentation and the reality of student empowerment in the classroom at McClelland College.

Whilst ruMAD? (Are You Making a Difference?) does not necessarily possess a Health Education element, it may provide a framework within which to develop student voice at McClelland College, where the Achievement Program was less successful. The program comprises student action projects and student-led foundations, positioning students as change agents and providing them with rich learning opportunities that take their thinking and action beyond the classroom. Furthermore, levels of commitment required of the school are flexible – from one-day events to the lengthier long-term projects.

The ruMAD? Program also has a considerable evidence-base: external evaluations of the program have been largely positive (Bell, Shrimpton, Hurworth & St Leger, 2004; Stokes & Turnbull, 2008). In one, surveys were conducted at three schools, two of which were situated in low socio-economic areas, and found improvements in three major areas: engagement, an increase in students making a difference, and community connections. Based on these studies, ruMAD? appears to provide a program well suited to one of the intentions of this project, as well as the socio-economic status of the environment. However, I have also seen during this project that that which initially appears to be the ‘right fit’ can eventuate as limiting or altogether inappropriate and have heeded this warning. Further investigation is required before ruMAD? becomes part of student voice efforts at McClelland College.

A Closing Thought
In a closing thought, if I were to add an enquiry question in collaboration with the newly formed HPS committee, my suggestion would be: “How do we reimagine McClelland College’s capacity to achieve authentic student voice, without limitation?” This project has, without doubt, changed my thinking about the importance, relevance and priority of student voice in schools. Furthermore, what once appeared to be an insurmountable challenge to achieve in disadvantaged areas, I now recognise as a non-negotiable element of student experience, with endless possibilities and manifestations. I consider it is not only my duty, but also my passion, to make students a genuine part of the change process, without exception.

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When students are given the opportunity to lead their learning, they both feel in control of it, and a valued member of the whole class’s teaching and learning. The following is an example of an initiative taken by Grade 3 students at St Charles Borromeo Primary School in Templestowe (in Melbourne’s north east) to increase both student and teacher awareness of the importance of language and attitude in approaching learning - the concept of mindset.

Four Grade 3 students (Sabina, Sarah, Greta and Oscar) at the school worked with Leah (a Learning Support Officer) to create a taskboard to show staff and students how they can change their mindset by changing their words.

It had been observed that some students had great difficulty in seeing past what they believed they couldn’t do and didn’t have the strategies to ‘have a go’. This was particularly evident with students with special needs, many of whom weren’t willing to make a mistake.

As Student Wellbeing Leader, I suggested that the students be commissioned to develop a visual resource in their own words, which could be referred to by them as a support for their learning. But I also suggested that this be done in a public way that produced a resource that would be useful for all students. In developing this way of thinking, this would also recognise these students as leaders in thinking about ways of learning for all.
Starting from the existing ‘Change Your Words - Change Your Mindset’ concept, the students worked together as a group to discuss why we sometimes rely on negative thoughts instead of working on changing our thinking and taking responsibility for taking a risk. They listed statements that are often heard in classrooms by students and looked at how to change them to have a positive and meaningful outcome that would help them be resilient learners.

They brainstormed 14 statements and changed the words so they would have a positive meaning for them.

But these students then went beyond just reminding themselves of the importance of this language in their own learning. They decided to become teachers of others - students and teachers - about the concept.

They created their own taskboard, typing up the statements and overlaying them to show the changes that could occur. They decided on a prominent place in the school corridor where it could be used as a teaching tool. They then invited their teacher and classmates to join them and hear what their aim was and why it is important to sometimes change your words and thinking when you are faced with a challenge. They spoke to the group about being a responsible learner; they said that the students must try to problem solve themselves before they look for help.

The group ran the process. With staff support, they adapted existing ideas, decided on the particular messages they wanted to convey, and worked out how to teach this to others.

The group has now been asked to showcase their taskboard to other class groups when school resumes.

Rosa Siriani (their classroom teacher and Teaching and Learning Leader at St Charles) said: “The pride shown to these students by their classmates and the discussion following the teaching lesson by them was amazing.”

Grade 3 students have so much insight to what works for them. This example reminds us, as teachers, that we must hear student voice when creating their learning environment. It is hoped that this is a catalyst for further opportunities for student voice to lead the teaching and learning at St Charles.

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<tr>
<th>Original Statement</th>
<th>Change Your Words; Change Your Mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't understand</td>
<td>What different way can I look at this to understand it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give up</td>
<td>I'll try to figure it out by looking at it from a different angle and by using the methods I have learnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made a mistake</td>
<td>Mistakes lead to success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is too hard</td>
<td>This will be a challenge so I'll try, try again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's good enough</td>
<td>I know I can do better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll never be as smart as her</td>
<td>I am smart and always willing to learn from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can't read</td>
<td>Yes I can with practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can't make this any better</td>
<td>If I keep trying I can improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm not good at this</td>
<td>I may not be good at this but I am able</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need help</td>
<td>So I will ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel frustrated</td>
<td>I will take deep breaths or count back from 10 and rethink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am distracted</td>
<td>I will stop and refocus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-one listens to me</td>
<td>I have a right to express my feelings because my opinion matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel left out</td>
<td>Everyone is equal and belongs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sue Cahill
Student Wellbeing Leader
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A student-owned leadership program for primary aged students

The Play At Lunchtimes program has been running now in South Australian schools for over three years. It has been set up in over 200 school sites, with over 4000 students having had the opportunity to access the onsite training. It provides schools and students with support for student-led and student-run activities.

The program was devised in the UK where a need for student-led lunchtime activity was identified back in 2005. Principals in UK schools highlighted the lunchtime period as the most fraught in the school day. They tasked a number of educators with researching what was already out there, refining it and re-writing a program that offered genuine student-driven leadership opportunities.

I was one of these educators. It soon became apparent that what was out there were imposed teacher-driven activities and not authentic student voice and student leadership. In consultation with a number of students, we set about writing a program after assessing what they wanted to happen at lunchtimes. Students wanted some professional development where they were given a day out of lesson time to attend training that was specifically aimed at developing their skills to organise and run activities at lunchtimes. They wanted to write activity cards in age appropriate, student friendly language, to work in friendship groups to organise activities for students who were lost, lonely or had not yet developed the skills to engage with others in play.

In the summer of 2005 the program was written, trialled in schools and eventually published in the latter part of 2006. The program was set up in areas of the UK with much success, so much so that, throughout the coming years, many other education authorities bought into the program and it was rolled out far and wide within the UK.

In 2009 I relocated to South Australia, where I soon realised that there was nothing similar in primary schools. With support from the DECD Partnership for Learning team, the program was re-written for South Australian schools. To date over 250 primary sites including Catholic, Independent and State schools have accessed the program, with over 4000 students taking part in professional development leadership training prior to implementing the program.

Process
Students usually apply for roles as PALs leaders through a member of the school staff who is keen to get the program off the ground. The application form that many schools like to use to formalise the process is attached to this article; many schools advertise a position and interview students for this role. Schools then choose students who express an interest in working with younger students and feel that they have got something to offer.

The training includes a full day at a school site. At the start of the day the trainer, usually myself, organises and demonstrates leading games – which usually lasts until recess time. After recess, the students begin to run the activities
and, in small groups, plan an activity session for the afternoon. In the afternoon, a reception/Year 1-2 class is invited into the training space to take part in a session run by the PALs leaders.

It is in this afternoon session that the PALs step up, realise that they are the true role models at their site and begin to think about the potential of authentic student-driven programs such as PALs. For most students, the training is the first time that they have accessed professional development particularly focused on realising their leadership potential. The training is very much a strengths-based approach; I am always keen to point out what they have to offer, their fantastic natural ability to work with younger children and the fact that they have a kind heart and are more than willing to give at least one lunchtime a week for the benefit of others.

Many of the school staff who observe this session realise that they are onto something really exciting and become very enthused about the next step of implementing the program. Many schools have embraced PALs to meet their particular needs. This was expected to be the case as schools are very adept at tailoring initiatives to respond to their school issues. Many schools use the program to give students at Years 5-6-7 an authentic leadership opportunity, and giving students who have nobody to play with a buddy at lunchtimes. Other schools use the program to set up authentic and well thought out transition programs in which students who will be attending the primary school in the coming year can not only to visit the site throughout the year, but be able to participate in student-driven activities and build friendships prior to starting at that site in Term 1.

The program was recently featured on local and national news. An article was featured on the ABC News in which a primary school is implementing the program to engage students who come to South Australia as refugees, with little or no language skills and feeling at a low ebb. The PALs leaders at this particular site were in the same position a number of years ago, some from the same country. After an initial PALs training day the students then feel empowered, with some teacher support, to engage the younger students in activities at lunchtimes. See: http://ow.ly/WcycN

Feedback
Teacher feedback and responses from schools has been very encouraging. Each year schools that have participated in the program are required to complete a SurveyMozi questionnaire and results then indicate whether the program is meeting the needs of the staff and students. Some responses from staff, PALs leaders and students over the past couple of years have been:

“It is a brilliant program, which the children who run it absolutely love. They feel empowered and important. The small children it is aimed at adore playing with older children and it means they have something fun to do now in the school just about every day of the week.” (Nuriootpa PS)

“Students really enjoy participating and it has been wonderful to see the confidence and leadership skills develop in our mentors.” (Lake Windemere B-7 School)

“We have enjoyed watching the kids go from training to leading, thankyou!” (Wallaroo PS)

“Even when PALs is not being organised, some students are still seen organising activities for younger students.” (Peterborough PS)

“Some PALs students have really blossomed in their leadership skills and confidence, which has been fantastic. One student has even led an initiative with the rest of the leaders to write down all students that attend each day and to award certificates to them at the end of the year for their participation.” (Craigmore South PS)

“Our student leaders have stepped up and also run sessions for transitioning kindy students (up to 40 children).” (Salisbury North R-7 School)

Feedback from PALs leaders is gained in terms of video evidence of them running the sessions, and also from their reflections. The students who participate in the program are also questioned as to their reflections and thoughts and observations made of their levels of participation.

Contact
I am keen to explore and develop opportunities for PALs to be offered to other states who feel that they would benefit from the program. If you need further details please contact me.

Andrew Delaney
andrew.delaney636@schools.sa.edu.au
pals application form

Application Form PALs leader

Surname ___________________________  First Name ___________________________

School ___________________________  Class ___________________________

Please answer the questions below in the space provided. (If you need help, please ask an adult).

Why do you want to become a PALs leader?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What experience have you had in being a leader?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What qualities/skills would be important as a PALs leader?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What interests/hobbies do you have?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

If you are successful in this application how will you improve recess and lunchtimes?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Explain why you think you will be good as PALs leader and what you will do to make sure you succeed?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your application; you will be hearing from us shortly.
You Can Talk To Me: A CCSVA Initiative

Students at Wyong High School have developed a project to maximise opportunities for students to talk about wellbeing concerns. Staff who are willing to be identified as a support network for students clearly display a sticker in their classroom. The sticker instantly identifies staff as a You Can Talk To Me participant and students can discuss matters of wellbeing with these staff members.

To establish this, the Central Coast Student Voice Alliance (CCSVA) 2014 team (Kaleigh Croser, Mohammad Nathani, Courtney McDermott and Adam Fiene) conducted action research including silent conversations, mapping, anonymous surveys and interviews and photographs. These methods were used to investigate how safe and supported students at the school felt. Other data sources included the Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey.

The analysis of all data sources led the CCSVA team to conclude that students wanted greater access to support, a support mechanism in place for when counsellors were busy or unavailable, to empower others to talk more about mental health concerns and to build effective relationships with staff.

It was hoped that, by successful implementation of this project, students will feel better supported and safer at school, there will be increased inclusivity and belonging for all students, and improved attendance for students suffering from mental health. This will promote positive mental health and effective learning for all.

More staff will be trained in supporting student mental health and it is hoped that stickers will be displayed in most classrooms. By initiating this, a culture of talking about mental health will be initiated and developed, with staff and students working together to improve mental health outcomes for students. Comprehensive wellbeing data will be used to initiate a change in practice.

In 2015, a new team representing Darian Comber, Tom Bailey, Aidan Olmos, Zoe McAndrew and Sam Forrest developed the You Can Talk To Me project. While this service doesn’t replace the School Counselling, it gives students more access to support.

The project has been discussed and placed on agendas at Student Voice Student Action Team meetings, Executive and Staff Meetings, and Year meetings and whole school assemblies. It will also be added to newsletter items, the WHS SkoolBag app and WHS Facebook alert system.

Achieving ‘buy in’ from staff was the greatest challenge and this was met by ensuring the team could produce data to support the project. Providing information and support for students to ensure they are engaging in the process was vital to the projects’ success. And it was important to maintain authenticity and allow students to lead the project that they have designed. Staff have had great ideas about how to add to this project but these need to be viewed as a staff response to Student Voice not Student Voice itself.

The project has needed the following resources: time to collate and analyse findings and student time to prepare executive and staff meeting presentations. In addition there has been the cost of stickers.

We now need to promote the project to students, offer ‘buy-in’ to staff who were absent from the initial meeting, run an item in the school newsletter and explore expansion of the project into other school settings through the CCSVA conferences.

Results of the project will be evaluated in 2016. A second round of action research will be conducted as well as the 2016 TTFM survey to ascertain if there are improvements in student wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

Jan Penni
HT Teaching and Learning
jan.pennisi@det.nsw.edu.au
The exclusion of the excluders by the excluded

Music Production as a framework for inclusive practice

Young people in Australian schools have important opinions and views, but are increasingly distrustful of traditional ways to support and ‘hear’ their voices. The argument for Arts-based education holds that young people are often disengaged from education because it makes little connection with their real world: it does not deliver what they perceive as valuable and important. Like the majority of everyday conversations in English, Arts-based informal education allows young people an authentic voice that is not overly scrutinized for its adherence to formal English structure, its rules and grammar. Through music-based arts projects, young people can learn to assert their voice in their own accent, express anger and frustrations and experiment with new personal identities.

I will document here the delivery of an engaging type of artistic activity, which has enjoyed long-term success in countries such as the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. It uses Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs: hardware and software combinations for PCs or Macs) to produce music recordings, as an informal education engagement pathway. This synthesis results in a framework for practice with huge benefits for young people who have not conformed to, or been rejected by, mainstream education services.

Sociologist Manuel Castells (1997: 9) classifies young people who resist formal education as part of a broader collective resistant response: the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded. They “build trenches of resistance and survival based on principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating societies’ dominant institutions” (1997: 8).

The evidence supporting the framework outlined here is drawn from my 20 years of teaching digital music production in the UK and Australia. I’ll introduce specific educational issues with reference to the literature on youthwork as informal education, and on social and cultural theory about digital arts, as well as documenting the aims, activities, cohorts, facilities and impact of this work since I started in 1995. Peer-reviewed research of this important work with marginalised young people documents how digital music production can re-engage and extend participation through a range of non-traditional access points, including online social networks.

In doing so, I also question the efficacy of narrow employment-based approaches to evaluating and accounting for the learning and engagement activities of young people in flexible education contexts. According to the evidence presented here, this Music Production framework for practice allows educators to view popular music production as a curriculum field, where training, aesthetic and skill-based valuations and distinctions are exchanged between performers, performances and audiences. In this way, young people document and publish their voice and invite feedback, in a context that is real and makes sense to them.

Background

Due to the rise of more affordable recording technologies, the field of music production has expanded rapidly over the last quarter of a century. This lowering of the threshold to participation in music production happened alongside the growth in what has recently been named ‘Electronic Dance Music (EDM)’. The primary tools of this remix, loop-based culture are personal computers, installed...
with software that sequences new and old musical segments/clips/samples in original compositions. Typical populist examples include the use of four-bar loops from 1960s popular music (see Fatboy Slim: “Come along way”, HillTop Hoods: “Nosebleed Section”, Junkie XL Vs Elvis Presley: “A little less conversation” for commercially successful examples).

There is a steep learning curve associated with the sequencing software we use to remix and produce ‘EDM’. Once a new student acquires the basic looping, sampling, recording, arranging and synthesis techniques, s/he will usually progress quickly to enjoy the final stage of all digital music production activity: the mixdown. This stage renders all the sequenced elements of the project into one stereo music file (.wav, .mp3, .aiff, .flac are some of the common file formats). It is a similar process to modern film and photograph editing, as a user must first use digital hardware to make a series of detailed edits with software, which are finally rendered into a generic file that can be opened by any digital media player.

The education and training sector has slowly accommodated this rise in music production activities through certification, ranging from level I vocational skills through to PhDs in creative music composition and performance. I have taught and supervised students of music production across these levels in the UK (since 1995) and in Australia (since 2003). It is important to note that digital, and especially mobile, technologies allow these artistic activities to occur in and outside the usual time/space confines of a typical school day. It is more appropriately regarded as informal education because of its focus on process. It is an activity performed voluntarily, and the participant is most productive when not working toward a predefined learning outcome.

Relationships

Trusting relationships between practitioners and young people is core to all good youthwork. My practice is informed by social and cultural theory, which celebrates an informal approach to education because of the profound ways that learning relationships develop in the studio context outlined here. The relationships developed through the co-production of ‘EDM’, and Hip-Hop in particular, encourage young people to tell their stories, to rationalise their strategies of resistance and hopefully to make some sense of their experiences of exclusion. As an artist and youthwork practitioner, I aim to equip them with skills and tools to voice their anger and frustrations. It is a carefully orchestrated strategy that appears chaotic in practice, but responds directly to these young people’s rejection of formal education and their broader collective resistant response: the exclusion of the excludes by the excluded.

The inductive research I conducted in the UK (1999-2002) is an application of informal education values framed by the dynamic relationship between
time/space and social exclusion. That hypothesis is applicable to the current Australian context. The first part of this hypothesis is that:

A strong learning relationship between a significant adult and a young person can reduce the latter’s experiences of social exclusion through the identification and/or negotiation of cultural values, and by encouraging their capacity to construct multiple personal identities.

The second part of the hypothesis is that:

This learning relationship is increasingly difficult to maintain because the power of markets and communities, manifest in welfare, education, training and employment reform and the rise of single issue movements, have influenced youth work practice and policy in ways that neglect foundational principles of open-ended conversation and voluntary association.

On a daily basis I continue to enact my youthwork thesis in attempts to build long-lasting relationships with young people – some of whom, after nearly 20 years, are no longer considered young. I have found that teaching music production allows me to develop learning relationships with young people that genuinely allow for that open-ended conversation and voluntary association. These principles invoke deep connections with young people on a number of levels, regardless of context, whilst rejecting the use of preset criteria to evaluate a young person’s employability.

In the studio context, practitioners must be able to connect with students in two additional areas: music knowledge and technical proficiency. On first reading this seems straightforward, but what is required is intimate and sustained knowledge of popular youth culture and music technology. Over the years, many qualified music teachers have assumed that playing instruments and singing in a more traditional music education format will also attract high demand from this cohort of learners. This has not been true in most cases.

For example, the relationships my colleagues and I develop with young people through music production is supported by our deep understanding of ‘EDM’, its cultural practices and our ability to reproduce them, including Hip-Hop, House, Grime, Trap, RnB, Reggae, Dancehall, Dubstep and so forth. In order for open-ended conversation and voluntary association to occur we focus predominantly on re-engagement before certification, and choose to backward map our coursework assessments so that our relationships remain focused on our shared interest in music production.

Artistic activities
Teaching music production to teenagers and young adults is the fundamental activity I have performed full-time since the late 1990s. This activity takes place in purpose-built professional recording studios, usually within school grounds. They are certainly not drab computer labs with cheap headphones and keyboards (see the photos in this article).

A digital music recording studio with high-speed internet access presents practitioners with many opportunities to connect with young people’s cultural and artistic interests. Most students are not aware of what DAWs are capable of producing, and so it takes concerted effort from the practitioner to explain that studio classes are as much about participation in the production of popular culture as they are about playing instruments, singing or rapping. The music activities on offer are listed below in order of their popularity amongst typical students.

- **Rapping**: using DAWs to record original verses over existing Hip-Hop instrumentals
- **Rapping**: using DAWs to record original verses over original music productions
- **Beat making**: using DAWs to create original Hip-Hop instrumentals and/or other ‘EDM’ genres
- **Artistic activities**

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• **Rapping**: using DAWs to record original verses over original music productions
• **Beat making**: using DAWs to create original Hip-Hop instrumentals and/or other ‘EDM’ genres
• **Singing:** using DAWs to record covers (karaoke or vocal booth) of popular songs
• **Singing:** using DAWs to record original music and lyrics
• **DJing:** using DAWs to perform original mixes of commercial dance music
• **Instrument practice:** individuals playing guitar, piano and/or drums
• **Music Theory:** learning scales and chords using the ancient Greek ‘intervals’ method
• **Music Videos:** individuals and groups produce visuals to original music
• **Band practice:** a small group focus on playing live music
• **DJing:** using DAWs to perform original mixes of original dance music
• **Sound editing:** using DAWs to record radio interviews, jingles, sound for film etc
• **Music Industry Coursework:** using a word processor and internet browser (given the choice, most young people opt for this activity least often).

The professional ambience set by studio equipment greatly assists practitioners engaging young people in these activities. So long as a knowledgeable practitioner focuses workshops and certificate coursework on each student’s particular musical interest, engagement in production is almost always a fruitful and satisfying learning activity.

We invite potential students to attend a taster workshop. If they are interested in pursuing this learning pathway they begin with regular engagement sessions or, if they have existing music skills and knowledge, they can enrol in the certificate course immediately. There is stable and consistent demand for both these activities.

Project studios, like the ones we use to teach in a school setting, far outweigh the number of full size professional recording studios nowadays. We organise class groups around music interest and, due to the flexibility of our general program, average class sizes are six to eight. Studio sessions usually last between one and two hours and, due to the erratic nature of many students’ lives, about half of those who attend do so regularly, at the same time each week. This makes all studio class groups ephemeral, which requires us as practitioners to deliver personalised teaching material to whoever attends, regardless of experience, knowledge or skills. For one practitioner that is an artistic, educative and technical challenge, and I have only found a handful of colleagues who can work patiently with these complex student needs, at these ratios, using such technical equipment.

**Who is attracted to music production?**

I have documented the broader cohort of young people who are disengaged from mainstream education services elsewhere (Brader 2009, 2011, 2013). The sub group of students who engage with music production activities are heterogeneous, but also share certain characteristics. Although music generally attracts students from all backgrounds, ‘EDM’ and in particular the Hip-Hop music genre is the most popular amongst our students. In my experience these genres tend to attract a higher count of young people who have first hand knowledge of local criminal activity and/or have experienced the juvenile justice system.

Other generalised characteristics of typical students of music production include distrust of authority figures, regular illegal drug use, mental health issues, low literacy and numeracy scores on conventional tests, and a history of failure within the schooling system. Most are also celebrants and active participants of a ‘street culture of urgency’ (see Castells 1997, Brader 2010), where life is lived ‘to the max’: everything is pushed to the extreme today, because there is no tomorrow. It is fair to state that this subgroup of students poses considerable challenges for educators in typical classroom settings. If they attend at all, they often struggle to sit still, to engage with texts and/or one-to-many instruction. Yet the studio setting, with its
professional equipment and ambience, repeatedly brings out a more collegial, scholarly demeanor amongst these students of music production. When we consider this professional environment alongside the studio’s ability to capitalise on ‘street’ culture, our remixing of appropriate samples and loops motivates them to participate in authentic learning activities.

Goals of the activity
The goals associated with teaching music production vary and overlap according to context. This makes some intended learning goals more difficult to quantify than others.

First and foremost, the official re-engagement goal of music studios in school settings is to increase motivation amongst those young people who have struggled to connect with the curriculum offerings of their education thus far. If we manage to motivate a student through music production, we expect this to translate into more regular school attendance. The goal then, from the practitioner’s perspective, is to engage the student further, to explore and extend their personal identities, encouraging them to form new ones through their music productions. By definition, this cohort has limited experiences of educational success when they first attend an alternative schooling provider. The practitioner’s re-engagement goal is achieved when the student becomes excited by the prospect of learning to participate in the production of popular culture, and so starts attending regularly.

The second goal can be summarised as capacity building, which music production activities achieve consistently at individual and site level. For example, on a typical school day, several young men will want to record their original rap lyrics, and so wait for their turn, until the vocal booth and an operator of the DAW becomes available. To extend the studio’s capacity we train promising students to become volunteers. When a student can operate the mixing desk and the sequencing software independently, they extend their personal transferable skill-set, whilst increasing the studio’s capacity to record several artists per day. Building the skill capacity of an individual in this way contributes to the productivity of that student, their peers, teachers, trainers and administrators of the school. Lead students increase their artistic activity through digital music production, and subsequently tend to demonstrate more conventional gains in literacy, numeracy and computing skills. The goal of school teachers in this capacity building exercise is to recognise and document the transferable skills resulting from music production and make them count towards more traditional high school subjects such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). As a member of several professional staff groups I have witnessed umpteen cases of young people successfully acquiring additional credit for their high school courses, based on their music production activities. I have documented such exchanges happening regularly within and across Australian school sites (Brader 2009, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

The third goal of certification is synonymous with employability. There is real irony in the current situation for this subject area, as many commentators have noted music industries are not concerned with certification. Bennett (2012) advocates for all university level music education to include entrepreneurship skills that focus on the current and future incomes streams for musicians. She describes music graduates pursuing ‘portfolio’ careers where they learn to seek regular income from other services they provide, in order to support their less reliable sources from music productions and performances.

Also contested are the national competency-based frameworks serving the official music industry. These vocational qualifications focus primarily on major trade industries. Many of the creative industries and human services training packages (levels I, II, III) have been persuasively critiqued by academics and reviews bodies in the UK and Australia as ‘not fit for purpose’ (Whelan 2008, 2009). Such competency-based assessment, which favours a technical/adult level of literacy, perplexes most practitioners who deliver it to marginalised young people. The music industry is highly competitive and few students go on to pursue a
successful full-time music career. Although a certificate does ‘add value’ by further legitimising some of the activities that take place in a school-based music studio, it does not capture most of the impressive developments students make in this setting.

A core aspect of my youthwork since 2003 has been to skillfully attach soft outcomes (Ladwig 2012), which I developed through youth and community centres in the UK, to hard outcomes (ie national training certificates) in Australia. This is difficult because of the ideological differences between informal education advocates and competency-based training providers. Mark Smith’s work published online at infed.org and in peer-reviewed journals such as Youth Studies and Youth & Policy have systematically documented long-term informal education outcomes of open-ended conversations and democratic activities espoused by youthworkers since that work began at the turn of the 20th century. This approach to informal education struggles to adopt predetermined criterion-referenced assessment that insists on making all units of competency equal. But by necessity, those favouring informal education find creative ways to accommodate such certification.

**Achieving goals**

Of the three goals outlined above, re-engagement is met most often. We struggle to meet demand for the studio from our students, and so we use that reality as a vehicle for learning about the scarcity of resources. We are constantly trying to stay abreast of the latest music trends and production technologies, and this too creates additional demand for our services. It is through directly experiencing the scarcity of studio time that our students learn how to negotiate their use of shared facilities, including helping others through volunteering.

Our capacity building goalposts move frequently as they are dependent on the number of students enrolled, and how many of those require re-engagement and certificate pathways. This goal will never be fully achieved due to the nature of our clientele under current funding models. Although this sounds pessimistic, we have scored some remarkable goals in this respect. For example, I actively connect ex-students with new ones and sometimes they collaborate on creative online projects without ever meeting face-to-face. At the time of writing I know of one former student (Mark in case study 1 from Brader & Luke 2013a) who was recently connected with a current student. The former makes beats, the latter raps but has not acquired any beat making skills (yet), so he used the ex-student’s work as part of his submission to a music industry competition (HillTop Hoods Initiative).

We also witness a major unintended outcome from our principal re-engagement goal that impacts on our certification goal. Even though we use real world events, such as the competition mentioned above, we struggle to ensure complete passes for most students. Most of our students are realistic about the limited employment prospects associated with a music career, and elect to train for trade certificates concurrently. The majority enrol in the eight unit Certificate II in Music and complete a few of the practical ones, but manage to avoid most of the paperwork associated with the less exciting assessment tasks. The slow pace of course content revisions within nationally accredited training, alongside the rapid speed of development in the field of music technology, presents ongoing tension between the re-engagement and certification goals for us. The students recognise this tension too. When we achieve our re-engagement goal of students participating in the production of popular culture, many outgrow the course content and opt to focus on more polished productions, often including music videos. Given the choice between producing popular cultural products using hardware and software that was not available when their course was written and an outdated certification pathway, many of the brightest opt for the former.

Thus, a pattern has emerged amongst the cohorts I teach, which shows that many of our most prolific students of music production often begin with engagement workshops, progress on to the certificate course, learn to produce to a higher standard than the course requires, and subsequently stop attending before completion (Brader & Luke 2013).
A New Assessment Model

There are excellent examples of music production being used to engage young people throughout the developed world. Yet most rely on a certification/employment funding model, where course completion releases funds. That time-dependent model limits the face-to-face hours spent interacting with students, and rarely allows a student to revise and resubmit a piece of music for assessment several times after receiving online audience feedback in the ways that I advocate.

From 2008-2011 I worked with international experts in educational assessment to develop a new assessment model specifically for marginalised students, which would be consistent with our knowledge of the reality of these young people’s needs. This design experiment engaged students in assessment that led to the exchange of self, peer and teacher judgements for credentialing (Brader et al 2013). That design experiment is now being implemented internationally due to the case studies I presented from the pilot work with students of music production (Brader & Luke 2013). Clearly this work can be viewed as evidence of success because students, parents, teachers, research colleagues and my senior managers have all validated the educative and well being value added by music production activities.

The most persuasive evidence of success in engaging young people through this artistic activity is the maintenance and extension of learning relationships between young people and practitioners. As mentioned above there are several cases of ex-students returning as guest artists, volunteers and some even become full-time employed. The quality of applied learning within these long-term relationships inspires me to continue this important work at the margins of developed countries like Australia.

Music Production is an excellent vehicle for educators to use with disengaged young people. If facilitated well, it allows young people authentic ways to voice their values, develop transferable motor, cognitive and digital skills. It amplifies and connects excluded voices so they are truly heard by their excluders.

Links

http://www.urbancollectiveproject.org/
http://hilltophoods.com/hth/extras/hth-initiative/
http://vimeo.com/album/1824576/video/32827386
http://explodingart.com/jam2jam/jam2jam/Home/Home.html
http://implabs.net/100-songs-2011/
http://implabs.net/events/the-big-jam/

Andy Brader
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andy.brader@gmail.com
www.andybrader.com

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Brader, A. (2005). That’s how it was, this is how it is. [Creative Work]
VicSRC Regional Conferences enable over 1,000 students each year to work together on common issues, define what really matters to Victorian students, and drive positive change in their schools, communities and education system.

The series of one-day conferences ensures that students are consulted and heard on the issues that matter to their education, no matter their location. Creating spaces for students to meet, to express themselves and realise how much they have in common is very empowering for all involved.

Students leave the conferences with clear strategies for engaging with decision-makers to get their projects off the ground.

Suitable for Year 7-12 SRC members, school leaders and all students who want their voices heard:

• 1 day conferences in 12 locations across Victoria
• Network with other students and teachers to take action on issues that affect our education system
• Kickstart advocacy projects for the year ahead
• Real-world examples and ideas for student-led action
• **Plus** optional Teacher PD Workshop available
• Morning tea and lunch provided

**Locations, dates and RSVP**

**Term 1, 2016:**
RSVP for Term 1 Regional Conferences closes on Friday 11 March 2016

**Metro North:**
Thursday 17 March, 2016
Whittlesea City Council, South Morang
Register: [http://ow.ly/XPM8j](http://ow.ly/XPM8j)

**Metro South:**
Friday 18 March, 2016
Brighton Secondary College, Brighton
Register: [http://ow.ly/XPMak](http://ow.ly/XPMak)

**Barwon South-West**
Monday 21 March, 2016
Brauer Secondary College, Warrnambool
Register: [http://ow.ly/XPMca](http://ow.ly/XPMca)

**Term 2, 2016:**
RSVP for Term 2 Regional Conferences closes on Friday 8 April 2016

**Greater Geelong:**
Tuesday 12 April, 2016
Northern Bay P-12 College, Hendy St Campus, Corio

**Gippsland:**
Thursday 14 April, 2016
Hosted by Kurnai College at Federation University, Churchill

**Loddon Mallee:**
Monday 18 April, 2016
Bendigo South East College, Bendigo

**Outer East Metro:**
Wednesday 20 April, 2016
Wellington Secondary College, Mulgrave

**Metro West:**
Friday 29 April, 2016
Catholic Regional College Melton, Melton

**Inner Melbourne:**
Tuesday 3 May, 2016
The Arena at NAB Village, Docklands

**Dates TBC:**
The dates for the following venues are to be confirmed soon.

**Metro Inner East:**
Date TBC
Genazzano FCJ College, Kew
Register: [http://ow.ly/Y3uu8](http://ow.ly/Y3uu8)

**Hume:**
Date TBC
Shepparton HS, Shepparton
Register: [http://ow.ly/Y3uu8](http://ow.ly/Y3uu8)

**Grampians:**
Date TBC
Horsham College, Horsham
Register: [http://ow.ly/Y3uu8](http://ow.ly/Y3uu8)
Making positive connections

Strong positive connections within Brighton Secondary College between peers, teachers and community is a key goal. We, as students, also believe that this is key to a nurturing and inclusive school culture - which is our ultimate goal.

At Brighton Secondary College, many groups and committees support a range of interests held by students, whether for the environment, sport, art, or social justice. This allows for friendships to be made and change to happen. These groups are run by either passionate staff or students, which aids the ideas and concepts developed by students. Never will you hear the words "No we can’t" in these group meetings. These groups foster ideas. They build the ability to compromise and to refine ideas.

Through the opportunity to attend conferences and camps such as the VicSRC Congress, the conversation between students from similar regions within the state can be held over issues that affect us all. Here we can make promises to each other and set similar goals that help tackle these issues. Conversations between students not only help change to occur, but allows for ideas to be shared and helps assess the effectiveness of different approaches to the same issue.

Holding ‘Teach the Teacher’ sessions that are student idea focused, allows for the students to voice what is important to them in a proactive way. In these sessions, students are thought of as equals to teachers, which allows for respectful discussions to be had and for barriers between “them” (the teachers) and “us” (the students) to be broken down.

Moreover, having activities run that allow students to find out more about the teachers allows for a more relaxed working environment that nurtures growth and development. An example of one of these activities was "guess the teacher’s past career" where groups of students were to match the teacher to their past career. This not only allows students to exercise good communication skills but it gives the students a chance to find out a little more about their teachers’ past.

Connection between student and community is an ongoing focus with key groups in the school that are in charge of volunteer work. At Brighton, the school’s Rotary Interact group organises and promotes community service activities. Here groups of students from every year level partake in helping a cause and give the students a look into positive action that they can take to make a positive change. Volunteering not only helps those in need, it allows students to develop the mentality that they as an individual can make a big impact and as a whole group, serious change can occur.

The importance of connection between student and student, student and teacher, and student and community helps to create a generation of resilient, respectful and kind people – a unified future.

David Bourke
Brighton Secondary College
Some may think that creating change is difficult, and that change only comes from big ideas. But the thing is, you don’t have to organise a fete or a huge event to positively impact your peers or your school community. Yes, big leaps may lead to a big difference, but small steps do too.

Sometimes it’s not about the big idea or the huge leaps. Sometimes it’s about the tiny steps, tiny attempts, tiny mistakes, tiny successes and tiny changes that make a difference. Change is a sequence of small steps forward.

For example, showing viral videos at assemblies or putting up quotes around the school can motivate, inspire and encourage students, which will lead to an overall boost in student morale.

Things like random acts of kindness, helping fellow students and organising small lunchtime activities like blowing bubbles can make school life much more enjoyable.

Not only can a small idea potentially lead to a big, positive change, it saves time as it should be quick and easy to organise, and it’s budget-friendly as not a lot of money needs to be invested in the idea.

So how can you turn small ideas into big results?

- **Start thinking**
  
  Brainstorm small, random, innovative ideas to get started. Get creative and think both inside and outside the box. Also think about the impact it might have.

- **Realise that no idea is too small**
  
  If you’re second guessing your idea because you think it’s too small, don’t worry, it’s not! You can create the biggest of changes with the smallest of ideas.

- **Be positive, patient and persistent**
  
  Have faith in your idea. It may take a while for success to be visible but be patient and stick to the idea.

- **Maximise your potential with student input**
  
  Get student input – ask your peers for ideas on how to improve your idea, or ask them for new ideas. Your actions are generally targeting your peers so consulting them for their small ideas could lead to a big, positive change.

**Chester Ngan**  
*Mt Waverley Secondary College*
Are you interested to run *Teach the Teacher* in your school in 2016?

Contact Emma Myers on 9267 3714 or projects@vicsrc.org.au

Visit the website: www.teachtheteacher.org.au to find out more

(PS: there’s a new video there)

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**VicSRC 2016 Key Dates:**

*Save these dates:*

- **2015 Regional Conferences**
  - 12 Metropolitan and Regional locations;
  - 17 March - 6 May 2016 (Term 1 and Term 2)

- **Congress 2016**
  - Ormond College, The University of Melbourne;
  - 6, 7, 8 July 2016

- **2016 VicSRC Recognition Awards**
  - Metropolitan Melbourne; Thursday 20 October 2016

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Are you a VicSRC Member School? .... **Membership discounts**

Did you know that you can receive discounted event prices if you have a VicSRC Membership?

If you are not a member school and would like to take advantage of discounted ticket prices to the VicSRC Congress and Regional Conferences, simply select ‘VicSRC Membership (Annual School Membership)’ at the start of your online registration. Or check about membership on-line at: www.vicsrc.org.au/get-involved/school-membership

Need help? Unsure if you are a member? Contact Fiona Campbell, VicSRC Events and Communications Officer on 03 9267 3777 or communications@vicsrc.org.au

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To sign up to the VicSRC online e-newsletter ... visit:

www.vicsrc.org.au/joinin/mailinglist

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The VicSRC receives funding support from the **Victorian Department of Education and Training** and the **Catholic Education Office, Melbourne**. It is auspiced by and based at the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YAC Vic)**. It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne, on 1300 727 176; or by email: manager@vicsrc.org.au
With the launch of The Education State reforms in Victoria, the Department of Education and Training (DET) has developed the new Framework for Improving Student Outcomes. This includes six initiatives to help schools lift student achievement, wellbeing and engagement:

1. Building Practice Excellence
2. Curriculum Planning and Assessment
3. Building Leadership Teams
4. Empowering Students and Building School Pride
5. Setting Expectation and Promoting Inclusion
6. Building Communities

Student voice and participation is integral to school improvement. Practices that encourage student voice and the active participation of students are essential in all six framework areas.

On the following pages are some practical suggestions as to how schools can incorporate student voice into any area of school improvement. Each of these suggestions is based on current or recent practice, and examples have been documented in Connect or elsewhere.

The key idea behind these suggestions is that students and their organisations should be invited, encouraged, challenged and supported to be part of the discussion, debate and decision-making in schools about all areas of the Framework. Their participation should be valued and resourced as part of the active partnerships within the school community.

More information can be found about the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes here:

- www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/outcomes.aspx
- educationstate.education.vic.gov.au

For more information about:

- the Teach the Teacher program, see: www.teachtheteacher.org.au
- Student Action Team approaches, see: www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams
- VicSRC resources and support, see: www.vicsrc.org.au

Written by Roger Holdsworth in consultation with the VicSRC

When we challenge the expectations of what students can do, the possibilities are limitless.
Empowering students and building school pride

“Schools will develop approaches that give students a greater say in the decisions that affect their learning and their lives at school. The whole school community will engage with students so they have a voice in the learning process, and fully and proudly participate in school life.”

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Link your student organisation or Student Representative Council (SRC) to overall school decision making through election of students to the School Council and appointment to other committees and bodies
- Engage your SRC in discussion about the role students can and should have within the school, and how this can happen
- Support Teach the Teacher approaches through which students define and highlight aspects of the school that engender pride, and aspects that need improving
- Challenge your student organisation as to its own practices of inclusion and representation – and build its competence
- Involve students in producing student-led media (including social media representation) about the school
- Support a group of students to produce the school newsletter on behalf of the school
- Build the competent and effective role of student leaders at each level of school, including allocation of resources for training and succession planning amongst student representatives
- Appoint specific positions of support for student voice and participation across and within the school
- Include distributed support for student voice and participation in a range of job descriptions throughout the school

Building practice excellence

“Teachers, principals and schools will work together to exchange knowledge and ideas, develop and strengthen teaching and assessment approaches, build a culture of collaboration, master the use of learning interventions and student data, and enhance feedback to students and staff.”

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about the school’s criteria for practice excellence, of learning teaching approaches and of assessment
- Implement a Teach the Teacher approach to provide a student-led space for discussions between students and teachers about how the school can build practice excellence
- Support a team of students to formally evaluate specific practices as a curricular or co-curricular initiative
- Formally adopt a regular program of eliciting student feedback on curriculum content, processes, pedagogy and assessment
- Conduct a program of collaborative classroom/learning observations by students and teachers, feeding in to discussions about learning and teaching
- Engage students as technology leaders within the school
- Initiate a form of peer or cross-age tutoring approach or program within the school
Curriculum planning and assessment

“Schools will embed a culture of curriculum planning and assessing the impact of learning programs, and adjusting them to suit individual student needs so that students can reach their potential. Schools will strengthen their use of student assessment data and feedback to evaluate students’ progress, monitor the impact of teaching and adjust learning programs and interventions.”

Idea to amplify student voice and participation:

• Engage your SRC in discussion about criteria for curriculum planning and assessment, ways of collecting feedback and other data, and the meaning of results

• Implement a Teach the Teacher approach to provide a student-led space for discussions between students and teachers about how the school plans curriculum and assessment, and/or about processes of feedback to teachers and students

• Establish a Student Action Team to investigate responses to data collected eg meaning and implications of Student Survey data

• Seek and include student views and priorities in curriculum planning and assessment

• Provide formal representation of students on curriculum review structures and processes

• Formally adopt a regular program of eliciting student feedback on curriculum content, processes, pedagogy and assessment

• Support a team of students to formally evaluate specific practices as a curricula or co-curricular initiative

Building leadership teams

“Schools will strengthen their succession planning, develop the capabilities of their leadership teams in using evidence and proven coaching and feedback methods, build a culture of trust that is focused on improvement, and strengthen the induction of new teachers into the professional learning culture of their school.”

Idea to amplify student voice and participation:

• Recognise the SRC as part of the school’s leadership team, and include them in leadership discussions

• Engage your SRC and student leaders in discussion about the school’s leadership approaches

• Challenge the participation of your SRC by regularly asking it to consider and recommend on a broad range of important issues facing the school

• Support Teach the Teacher approaches that focus on building trust, respect and relationships

• Build the competent and effective role of student leaders at each level of school, including allocation of resources for training and succession planning amongst student representatives

• Appoint specific positions of support for student voice and participation

• Include distributed support for student voice and participation in a range of job descriptions throughout the school

• Involve students in selection processes for new teachers

Stand Up, Speak Up!
Setting expectations and promoting inclusion

“Schools will work across their communities to implement a shared approach to supporting the health, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement of all students, including setting behaviour expectations, building teachers’ understandings of positive classroom behaviour and engagement practices and ensuring students have the tools and skills to develop positive and self-regulating behaviours.”

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about expectations, behaviour, mutual respect – and their roles in this area
- Conduct student-led student forums around topics of expectations, including reasons for behaviour, respect etc
- Allocate time and resources to train and support student representatives to intervene around issues of positive behaviour
- Support Teach the Teacher initiatives that examine the setting of expectations and behaviour guidelines
- Establish Student Action Teams to investigate issues of inclusion and exclusion, and of expectations
- Explicitly challenge and invite students not otherwise engaged to lead roles of investigation and recommendation

Building communities

“Schools will strengthen their capacity to build relationships with the broader community by partnering with the community sector and providers (for example, through the GPs in Schools initiative), make strategic use of existing community resources and capabilities, and increase the services delivered ‘inside the school gate’. Schools will realise the value of harnessing the full capacity of the community and parents to collectively encourage students’ learning and enhance student outcomes.”

Ideas to amplify student voice and participation:

- Engage your SRC in discussion about relationships with community, parents, local business and services
- Create Student Action Teams around issues of interest and concern to both students and the wider community
- Build curriculum links with local resources such as Aged Care, Men’s Sheds, Neighbourhood Houses – where students can undertake collaborative programs of support
- Implement forms of Peer Support and/or Peer Mediation
- Support students to write articles for the local/community newspapers, to present programs on local community radio, and to produce programs for community television – about issues of community concern
- Support students to produce community resources and materials and conduct community-based research as part of their curriculum

Roger Holdsworth
in consultation with the VicSRC
Harris Student Commission on Learning

Launched in October 2008, the Harris Student Commission on Learning in England was set up as a research and development project to bring together hundreds of students and teachers to create a new design for learning across the Harris Federation.

The Commission wanted to bring about:

• Significant and lasting changes to teaching and learning
• A step-change in student engagement, motivation and learning
• To achieve these changes the Commission established an ambitious programme of enquiry into the most effective learning approaches in the UK and abroad. This enquiry has been co-led by students and staff who for the past two years have worked and learned together in powerful partnerships and teams.

The Commission was designed to go beyond traditional ‘student voice’ work, helping students become leaders of their own and others’ learning with a real stake in how education is organised and delivered.

More information, including a video of the Commission’s work and links to other documents, can be found at: http://ow.ly/Xg7hk

Student-Led Conferences: Empowerment and Ownership

Putting students in the driver’s seat of their parent-teacher conferences creates opportunities for reflection, engagement, and agency.

Parent teacher conferences at Wildwood Elementary (USA) are actually a time when the teachers do very little talking. Instead, the students run the conferences, informing their parents about how they’re doing, what their goals are going forward, and what kind of learners they are.


Connect on facebook

Connect has a presence on Facebook. Find us at: http://ow.ly/L6UvW

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

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

www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams
Save the Date: Student Voice Seminar 2016

The follow-on international Student Voice conference/seminar has been announced for July 2016. It is a collaborative effort between Pennsylvania State University, the University of Vermont and UP for Learning. The dates are July 6-8 and the title is: International Seminar: Amplifying Student Voice and Partnership.

This will continue to be a small, basically invitational event. For more information as it becomes available, and for early expressions of interest to attend, contact Helen Beattie, UP for Learning: hnbeattie@gmail.com

Student Voice Research and Practice facebook group

www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

This open facebook group was initially established by Professor 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.
It is, given the times, quite appropriate that this book starts with a quote from David Bowie:

And these children that you spit on
as they try to change their worlds
they're quite aware of what they're going through

(David Bowie, 1971: ‘Changes’ from Hunky Dory (RCA)

These words resonate strongly with the articles by Hannah McDermott and Andy Brader in this issue. As we talk about student voice and democracy, we need to keep thinking about the systems and approaches we use, the modeling that occurs within school and, most importantly, how these interact with and perhaps even create the most marginalised and unheard voices.

Those issues are amongst the themes addressed in this small book from Marc Brasof. As Dana Mitra notes in her foreword, this book is based in “the experiences of a high school focused on civic learning – a school designated with the intention of building students into the decision-making process through participatory governance structures.” (ix)

She notes that it names “the behaviors that enable and constrain students in achieving power in negotiation and decision-making” and “takes on the issue of power head on.” (xii)

To do so, the core of this book is the four practice-based chapters that illuminate and challenge the possibilities and normalities of how students participate in the decision-making approaches in one US school: Madison High School. Around these, Brasof provides a useful context of theory on school improvement, organisational learning, school (distributed) leadership, and student voice, and then finally reflects on lessons from the year’s observations for schools generally and hopefully globally.

That’s an enormous canvas to cover and it addressed richly and provocatively – with solid evidence. I found myself stopping throughout to think about what Brasof was documenting, and to reflect on its usefulness for my own practice. And despite a context that might, in the first instance, appear ‘foreign’ to Australian readers, strong parallels and lessons do emerge. I kept thinking: “Yes, just like in schools here!”

In Chapter 3, Brasof introduces Madison High School’s governance structure as one that had been modeled closely and intentionally on the US constitutional principles and powers. So there is an elected House of Students, a Faculty Senate, a Supreme Court and so on. The Constitution (usefully appended to the book) outlines how school changes should be proposed in the form of ‘bills’ that must be passed by both houses, but can then be vetoed by the Principal. Perhaps the parallel and similarity is with Australian schools that build formal student participation within structures that reflect Australian parliamentary houses and processes.

(It is, however, interesting to reflect that the Constitution outlined here is strong on eligibility and process details for students, but much weaker on similar clauses defining and limiting faculty powers.)

Yet, as Brasof notes throughout the book in the stories he tells, and formalises in his conclusions in Chapter 9, the reality of the wider ‘democratic’ process is that such ideals are frequently by-passed by “economic elites and organized groups representing business interests” (152) – and he finds similar things happening within the school governance arena that he observes in this book. The same frustration, anger and, in many cases, disengagement from change and representation processes occurs in the school, as happens in the wider society; Brasof notes (162) that at least a third of the US electorate doesn’t vote in Presidential elections, and reports research that “two-thirds of Americans do not trust the federal government as an institution.” The book is quite explicit in drawing a parallel between these arenas.

Changes have occurred at Madison High School since it was established to explicitly teach and model democratic processes. Budget cut-backs, staff changes and curriculum ‘reforms’ (often linked to the demands of external testing) are the backdrop to a challenge to student engagement in the school. Student interest, commitment and results are seen to be declining and the students take up a challenge to address this.
The Student Government within the school, themselves aware of such deterioration in engagement, is also challenged by the administration and teachers to act to build ‘school spirit.’ Initially they call after-school student meetings to discuss this – but poor attendances at these add to their disappointment, frustration and confusion. However, out of their discussions with those students who do attend, emerges a growing understanding that the underlying issue is not one of ‘school spirit’ or of blaming students for their own disengagement (as some staff were doing), but rather that these symptoms have arisen as logical student responses to structural changes: schedule changes, less time to work on what was deemed important within the school and, belatedly, an awareness that students no longer had the opportunity to learn about the democratic principles and practices that were supposed to underpin the school’s operation. Rather than working on ‘school spirit,’ the students decide to address issues of curriculum, pedagogy and school organisational structures. (As a side note, you might recognise that I was reading this as I wrote a short piece on ‘school pride’ in the last issue of Connect.)

So the core practice chapters outline initiatives taken, through the voices of students, teachers and the Principal, regarding these as data for learning about how to influence and bring about change – and the nature of resistance to such change. In Chapter 4, the student body president delivers an annual State of the School Address to confront the school with the results of student observation and research; in Chapter 5, the Principal launches action through the school’s Supreme Court to challenge a student-led name change of the school’s newspaper, claiming that legal and democratic processes had not been followed; in Chapter 6, students attempt to engage the faculty Leadership Team in discussions about curriculum, learning and teaching, and school organisation; and in Chapter 7, student leaders co-teach an Active Citizenship Unit within social studies classes. These are all seen as action initiatives taken by students, staff or the Principal – but all involving some form of student voice, and all met by forms of support and resistance. They are reflected on here as effective or less effective strategies for change: what is learnt by trying this?

In particular, conflicting outcomes of hope and disenchantment within the student team lead to strong arguments within that team. Some students strongly advocate for student participation in all levels of decision-making and come to see new possibilities; others, faced with rejections and dismissal, argue that they are necessarily being ignored and hence should restrict themselves to social events (over which they can have some influence). Sound familiar?

As teachers (one in particular) and students come to realise that students in general no longer have any opportunity to learn about the democratic processes in practice – in the way that the school operates – and that this is a key element of students’ frustration and disengagement, initiatives are taken to return such studies to a core course through the Active Citizenship Unit, with student leaders playing an important role as co-teachers. At the same time, further budgetary attacks on the school, with consequent implications for staffing, resources and curriculum, lead the discussion directly to what action students can take. Students within the Unit raise funds for a class trip, but also then take part in a large student-led school-wide walkout to protest the cuts … and this extends to other schools in the area.

These initiatives together galvanise and engage large numbers of students – to the surprise of many student leaders. This includes students whose voices had traditionally not been heard.

We too are challenged by those same issues: whose voices are heard? whose are dismissed? Student leadership can involve a very small group of students. Some Australian reports have estimated this at around 3%. And that 3% tends to be the ‘usual suspects’ chosen on criteria of existing confidence, literacy and compliance – characteristics that are also aligned socioeconomically. If we focus our attention only on the engagement and other outcomes for those students, we’re correctly criticised about the inclusivity of these initiatives.

Brasof deals directly with this, as the student leadership group grapples with their responsibility to work for the inclusion and success of all students – and develops approaches to build the voices and agency of all, particularly those seen as ‘hard to reach’. If we see this work in ‘student leadership’ as an alliance between students and teachers to transform education, is more defensible than seeing it as primarily delivering outcomes for the few.

Student Voice and School Governance finally draws together lessons about the essential roles of all those involved. In particular, there is explicit discussion of the role of the Principal, the ‘Government Advisor’ and the Student Leaders. Here too, the experiences during the year of this study provide us with solid information for our own reflection, as issues such as integrity, transparency, truthfulness, acquiescence and challenges surface. Australian Student Council Advisors would do well just to read Brasof’s reflection on what worked and what didn’t for this role (pp 144-148).

Throughout the story there is strong evidence of the need for appropriate research and study – both about the underlying principles and practices, and about the processes necessary to gather views and initiate (and reflect on) action … particularly for those often ignored. Student participation in school governance is not something to be entered into lightly or tokenistically, with a seat of the pants ignorance. It essentially benefits from a deep-seated commitment to the study of democracy in action.

I wonder at the end of this highly engaging and thought-provoking book: what then happened at Madison High School? Faced with political and economic constraints, and with important pedagogical divisions within the school, did students re-gain their serious place within the decision-making structure? What happened to their engagement? I’d love to read Brasof’s follow-up book … when he writes it.

Yet to some extent, that doesn’t matter. This is one school, one story, within one set of (to Australian readers rather artificial) structural circumstances. What matters is that we are all faced with the same underlying challenges: how can student voice be seriously and honestly a part of school governance, in a way that goes beyond tokenism?

This book provides a model both for initiatives that schools can take but also, perhaps more importantly, for how we must reflect on and understand the outcomes of those initiatives – within our own contexts.

Roger Holdsworth
Student Voice and School Governance

Student Voice and School Governance is one part educational essay, other parts an exposé on Madison High School from the United States and their unique democratic system of ruling – with all its shortcomings and triumphs discussed and examined throughout.

The book opens with a detailed explanation and run down on some of the key frameworks and ideologies that surround student voice and governance within schools and how they’ve evolved over the years. Author, Marc Brasof, introduces the concept of student voice and all its key points before he dives into telling the story of Madison High School (MHS), a history-focused school that bases its governance upon both democratic principles and constitutional law that seeks to involve both faculty and students.

Upon hearing that, it can be easy to fall into the idea that MHS is some form of utopia: a pie-in-the-sky for schools across the world to look to. The idea that a school would have a Supreme Court of both students and teacher that could debate and discuss policies? That sounds like a wild dream of sorts for most schools!

However, as Brasof begins to tell this narrative of MHS, it soon becomes clear that this school, despite its attempts at a unique structure, falls victim to the same failings and shortcomings of most education systems around the globe: school pride.

In the multiple stories that Brasof relates, the central theme and focus of all of them is based around the notion of student engagement and school pride and how for the most part, kids just aren’t caring about school. But that is not for lack of trying of course. The student electorate bends over backwards and then some to try and get the student body more involved and to care for their education and the school in which they do it. But the story is one that many of us are all far too familiar with.

Meetings designed to discuss issues set for 500 people – 14 show up; faculty attempting to engage students but ultimately failing; the sense of hierarchy and pay-grade over actual knowledge and understanding; a disparity between both staff and students.

These are things that all SRCs go through at some stage and MHS is no different. It’s almost comforting to see how universal these sorts of issues are.

However, at around the halfway mark, Brasof begins to tell us how things started to pick up. The student electorate doesn’t back down despite their shortfalls and, soon enough, find themselves meeting with the rest of the staff and the principal himself. They discuss the lack of engagement and have a real conversation about teaching and learning and, slowly, we see the disparity between staff and student disappear as all parties see that they all want the same thing: a better education.

Despite meeting hostility and struggle throughout their journey, the student government persists and persists, never back peddling from the whims of uncooperative teachers or letting the strained relationship between staff and principal get in their way of fighting for their learning.

At times, this book can be painful to read, as you’re brought back to the memories of empty lecture halls, unfilled surveys and tension between your young ambitious ideas and the traditions of older educators. However, at the same time, this book is both enlightening and encouraging in many ways. It reminds us of the reason we fight for student voice and representation in the first place. It reminds us of why it is so important that students are not only heard, but taken seriously and understood and it most certainly reminds us that, above all, we can never back down from what we want and that is a better system of learning for all involved.

Student Voice and School Governance may at times be quite wordy and loaded with jargon and it may present its ideas and anecdotes as if this were some intellectual high-brow paper meant to only be read for those studying for a doctorate in education.

But it’s not.

At its core, this book is the story and struggle of a group of students who faced tradition and structure in their way to a better education. It’s a narrative that so many of us can relate to and a narrative many of us from SRCs have lived through.

But most importantly of all, this book is a reminder that we need to keep fighting for education and for the right for students to be heard.

Not as children. Not as clients. Not as statistics and not as passes or fails. But as people.

Matty Sievers
Year 12, Bendigo Senior Secondary College
VicSRC Executive
The US-based SoundOut organisation has a new re-vamped website with lots of useful materials: www.SoundOut.org
Student Councils
and Beyond:
Students as Effective Participants in Decision-Making

This Connect publication supports effective and relevant participation of students in decision-making through Student Councils in primary and secondary schools. It brings together a collection of practical ideas and articles about how Student Councils can go beyond tokenism ... and make a difference. Now on-line for FREE on the Connect website.

Available on-line for FREE from www.asprinworld.com/connect

all these publications available on-line: FREE

Student Action Teams
‘How To’ Manual
The original Student Action Teams Manual from 2003: ‘Learning in the community’ is online and available free through the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:
Check:
or http://ow.ly/VvSkA

Represent!
Represent! is a Resource Kit for Student Representative Councils and their support teachers.
It was written and published in 2010 for the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) and is available on-line from their website. Further publications (Represent! Plus+) are being added regularly.
Check:
www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent
or http://ow.ly/VvSpj

Back issues of Connect
All back issues of Connect magazine are available on-line for free through a partnership with ACER.

You can download PDFs of all issues. A hyperlinked index to all back issues exists on the Connect website.
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2016

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Student Action Teams: Implementing Productive Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms

Student Action Teams, as part of their school curriculum, adopt a community issue that they care passionately about, research it, decide what needs to be changed or improved and take action to achieve that.

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

ISBN 978-0-9803133-2-1; 90 pp; 2006 $30/$25*

Reaching High: A Program Promoting Positive Approaches to Learning Differences

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

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

ISBN 978-0-9803133-0-7; 120 pp; 2006 $30/$25* (with DVD); $20/$15* (without DVD)

Switched On to Learning

Student Initiatives in School Engagement

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

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

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

ISBN 978-0-9803133-3-8; 52 pp; 2009 - re-printed 2012; $6/$5*

Democracy Starts Here!

Junior School Councils at Work

How do we learn about citizenship and democracy?

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

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

From these schools in Preston and Reservoir, you can learn: what Junior School Councils do, how to set up and structure a JSC, about reporting to students and others, about valuable resources and networks, and how to support Student Councils. 48 pp; 1996; $6/$5*
**Foxfire**

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

**Foxfire: 25 Years**

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

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

Anchor Books; 359 pp; 1991
ISBN 0-385-41346-7; $20/$10*
(Limited copies available until sold out.)

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

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

Doubleday Anchor Books; 438 pp; 1985
ISBN 0-385-13359-6; $20/$10*
(Only 1 copy - available until sold.)

**A Foxfire Christmas**

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

Doubleday Books; 170 pp; hardback;
ISBN 0-385-41347-5; $20/$10*
(Only 1 copy - available until sold.)

**Foxfire 9**

Connect has one copy of this collection, with some cover damage. This is available from Connect for postage costs.

493 pp; 1986; $10/$5* (Only 1 copy - available until sold.)

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**Students and ...**

... was a series of small publications from the Victorian Participation and Equity Program (PEP) in 1986. It included studies reprinted from Connect 1979-1985. There were books about Students Tutoring, Students Publishing and Students and Radio (all out of print, but may be in school libraries). The final volume was ...

**Students and Work**

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

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

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

ISBN 0-7241-3995-8; 80pp; 1985; $6/$5*
(Limited copies available until sold out.)

**SRC Pamphlets**

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

(Only 2 sets available until sold out.)
1988; $6/$5*

* discounted prices for Connect subscribers
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

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ASPRINworld: the Connect website!

www.asprinworld.com/connect

Connect has a website at ASPRINworld. The Connect section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, index of recent back issue contents (hyperlinked to PDFs) and summaries of and order information for Student Councils and Beyond, Student Action Teams, Reaching High and Switched On to Learning.

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

All issues of Connect are archived through the ACER Research Repository: ACEResearch. Connect issues from #1 to the current issue 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.

Articles from Connect are also discoverable through EBSCOhost research databases.

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

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 and we’ll work something out.

Australian:


Research Developments (ACER, Camberwell, Vic) February 2016


International:

Democratic Public Education (Michael Fielding & Peter Moss; American Sociological Association, 2012)

Rethinking Schools (Milwaukee, WI, USA) Vol 30 No 2, Winter 2015-16

UP for Learning (Vermont, USA) Winter 2016

Whole school meetings and the development of radical democratic community (Michael Fielding, Studies in Philosophy and Education, 2010)

‘Student Councils and Beyond’ On-Line! FREE!

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

Donate to support Connect

Connect now has no income except donations and sales of literature (previous page). By supporting Connect with donations, you keep us going. Even though we are now solely on-line, there are still costs associated with publication. 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.
All back issues of Connect from 1979 to the present (that's now over 36 years!) are freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), all back issues of Connect have been scanned or uploaded into the ACER's Research Repository: ACEReSearch.

You can find these issues of Connect at:

http://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

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