

# *Connect*

*supporting student participation*

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**Number 207**  
**June 2014**

## **Student Voice and Participation Globally!**

### **Resources:**

- VicSRC Congress 2014 Date
- Safe Schools Hub
- NSW: Students in Decision-Making; Improving Policy and Practice
- Primary School Blog
- *Unity through Diversity*
- *Connect ... on facebook ... archived ... available on-line ... access to other resources on-line ...*
- **Going Global!:** *International Students' Forum*
- **International:** *Students and the Bill of Rights; Student Voice in Italy; Stevenson Improvement Club, NY; Students in Europe; Danish Students; Student Voice Collaborative, NY; Transforming Schools, Vermont, USA*
- **Negotiating Open-Ended Rich Mathematical Experiences**
- **Student Safety Student Action Teams & Caritas Solidarity Day**
- **SRCs:** *Ensuring Student Voice, Peer Support, Smile Day*
- **VicSRC:** *Smart Phone App; 'Unlocking Potential' Panel*
- **VISTA:** *Get your SRC meetings in order*

## Connect

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### Cover:

**Student participation at home and internationally**

An image from the 2013 JSC State Conference

Cover photo by Piper Huynh.

## 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.

### Connect:

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## This Issue:

International or global ideas about 'student voice' or 'student participation' are addressed in two ways in this issue. First, students are discussing issues and taking action at an international level: through forums of those students who travel for their education, through the international structures that link student representative groups, and through students' international awareness and concerns within their initiatives. Secondly, ideas about student voice and participation are found in different countries and, in those different locations, may be understood in different ways.



The first approach to internationalism is found here in several articles: the International Students' Forum held recently in Melbourne, the work of students across Europe, and the concerns of primary school students about world poverty. The second aspect of internationalism is represented here in articles about Grade 5 students' investigation of the US Bill of Rights in Eugene, Oregon, USA (with an old friend of and inspiration to *Connect*, Dr Art Pearl), in a reflection on lessons learnt (or not learnt) from a student-run survey of student opinion at a New York High School (USA) in 1986, in a contemporary exploration of notions of student voice in Italy, and in short introductions to the current work of the Danish Association of Students, the Student Voice Collaborative in New York, USA and Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together in Vermont, USA.

Some of these articles have come together through contacts made at the annual Student Voice Conference/Seminar in Cambridge, UK, the fourth of which is about to be held in late June, 2014. There is both a growing international interest in the ideas of student participation and student voice, and also a growing commitment to sharing stories and learning from each other. If you can't be in Cambridge, you can read about the Conference in *Connect* - and also follow it through the facebook group: Student Voice Research and Practice ... an active community that attracts new members every week.

### Next Issue ...

But the focus for *Connect* remains primarily on Australian practices - and primarily on the wider issues of student participation. We are reminded of the multifaceted nature of participatory approaches through the varied other foci of this issue: an exciting account of negotiated learning in Mathematics; a Student Action Team tackling school and community change around bullying; Student Councils transforming the ethos/culture of schools - and also liaising with Government agencies on behalf of students.

The next issue in August should (we hope) continue both local and international themes: reports from the VicSRC Regional Conferences and State Congress, and from initiatives on the NSW Central Coast ... but also about Students as Researchers around the globe. And news of your initiatives ... please tell us!

Roger Holdsworth

**Next Issue: #208: August 2014**

**Deadline for material: end of July, 2014**



# Going Global!

## Student experiences and perspectives

International Students' Forums are held each year by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) for secondary school students. This year the Melbourne Town Hall played host to the event on April 30th. 126 participants attended, drawn from both international students studying in Victoria, and local students from the Government, Catholic and Independent schools they attended – 27 schools in all – with students hailing from over 20 countries. The conference was opened by the Minister For Education, Hon Martin Dixon, who invited the students to explore the best recommendations and ideas for improving the experience of international students but also acknowledged the valuable contribution that international students can make to our schools.

The theme: *Going Global*, represented for the students a mindset that a full understanding of the world was more and more essential in a modern education. As one student eloquently put it in one of the opening speeches: *"Globalisation is not an option."*

Another student speaker, Xiaoyun (Jane) Yang, set the tone for the forum with tales of the fears and excitements when first arriving in Australia.

The forum discussed a wide range of topics around getting the most out of the international student experience for local and international students, and integrating international students into the school better – especially the social experience, which can be isolating.

One week later, the recommendations of the forum were submitted to

the Secretary, Richard Bolt, and Deputy Secretary, Sonia Sharp, of the DEECD in person by a delegation of students from the forum. That delegation was later described by department officials as *'insightful', 'professional', 'sophisticated'* and *'compelling'*. They certainly made an impression, as the both the Secretary and Deputy Secretary pushed back other commitments to stay longer and ask more questions.

Chief recommendations were:

### 1. Socialisation:

- Students commented that schools should not try to force friendships between local and international students. Friendships are created through *"shared experiences and common interests"*. Opportunities for these to occur can be created

and asking international students to be involved as leaders of such activities is a stronger method than simply asking them to participate.

- Buddy systems are good but guidelines, training and support are required. It is important that local students volunteer for such tasks rather than being appointed.
- More regular activities involving local and international students working together (ie sport, games, community service programs etc) should be available.
- International festivals – sport, culture, art/fashion – help understanding.
- Trips and excursions with Homestay Families should be increased. The Homestay experience is a vital foundation for a good study experience and good guidelines are needed.

### 2. Language Skills:

Students suggested:

- Increased participation in intensive EAL programs.
- International students encouraged to teach skills and languages.
- Written documentation of classes – as some students find it easier to understand written rather than spoken English.
- Greater socialisation to help foster language learning – see ideas above.



### 3. Intercultural Understanding:

- Cultural awareness workshops, run by international students.
- Offsite camp for international and domestic students.
- Orientation programs for newly arrived students.
- Adjustments to school curriculum.

### 4. Challenges and Opportunities:

- Looking at issues around homestay programs: no clear guidelines, improved interactions between families and students/schools.
- International Students being able to purchase concession cards.
- Improve welfare support for international students.

It's often hard to include international students in student voice projects or processes in individual schools as there is a tendency, when in a different country, for a student to become more compliant and accepting, and less likely to raise different opinions. It can be difficult enough to navigate a new culture and language let alone then to try to debate the way a system of education runs, when you've only just begun to experience that system for yourself. Forums such as this become particularly important then; they can remove a level of confrontation that can exist when discussing an idea that may sound like a criticism of the way things are currently done.

Following the final discussion of the day, themed around actions the participants could and would commit to taking on themselves, an open microphone session had students summarising the day, highlighting best ideas and making their own final challenges to the entire gathering. Some of the most insightful words came from a Parkdale Secondary student: *"If we keep labelling 'international students' and 'local students' then we will keep having this divide we can't get over. We need to start thinking and acting as if we are all just 'students'. Because we are."*

The **International Students' Forum** was organised and facilitated for the DEECD by **Second Strike**. For the full forum report contact David Mould: [david.mould@second-strike.com](mailto:david.mould@second-strike.com)



## Portland Secondary College, Vic

# Smile Day – Send in the Clowns



During the last week of term, the SRC at Portland Secondary College organised a fundraiser for the Humour Foundation (Clown Doctors) to help bring laughter and relief to seriously ill children. The SRC members demonstrated great organisation and enthusiasm as they set about arranging a casual day and some lunchtime fun at the Marriott Theatre.

Our two clown hosts, Dwaine Hayes and Jake Stevenson, did a superb job entertaining us with some juggling and very silly clown puns and then invited the crowd to participate in some joke-telling. A popular fundraising activity involved tossing a coin at the nose on one of our clown murals to win a prize.

To keep the lunch crowd smiling, SRC representatives had busily made popcorn during the morning to sell as part of our fundraising efforts. We are pleased to report that we managed to raise just under \$700 to be forwarded to the Humour Foundation.

Thanks to our fantastic SRC representatives for your outstanding teamwork and to all students and staff for your support. You certainly made us smile!

### SRC Representatives Have Their Say...

*"It was good to see the number of donations to fill the clown mural!"* Patricia Thompson

*"The coin toss was really good."* Oscar Shepherd

*"It was good to see so many people getting really involved."* Ellicia Holman

*"It was a great success. Thanks to Daniel Brown for suggesting 'The Humour Foundation' as worthy of our support."* Gwen Atchison

*"Everyone loved the coin toss and being able to win a lollipop."* Jayme Cannon

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# Negotiating Open Ended Rich Mathematical Experiences!

## *A Positive Approach Towards Creating an Engaging Curriculum*

When I plan the entire maths curriculum at our school, for Foundation to Year 6, I plan the first three terms of the school year, and leave the fourth term vacant. In that time, we encourage our students to have a say in what they would like to revisit.

Further, students learn best when they can relate to things and this is what I base my maths classes on: linking mathematics with real life experiences to give their learning meaning.

Providing students with **Rich Mathematical Experiences** is the most valuable tool you can offer students. Providing my students with open-ended rich mathematical problems and activities, that not only challenge their thinking but also extend their knowledge and understanding, has allowed my students to excel in maths.

I have been fortunate to have worked with two of Australia's top maths consultants: Robert Vingerhoets and Michael Ymer. Michael believes in planning for the first three terms of the school year, leaving the fourth term vacant in which **no** new topics are to be introduced but rather topics revisited, whereas Robert believes in planning according to the amount of quality teaching days you have in the term.

Using both of these philosophies, I have created my own. I plan the first three terms according to AUSVELS and I allow the students to dictate the fourth term. At the end of Term 3, we gather as a class and discuss what has worked well in the previous terms and what hasn't. We look at the misconceptions that have been learnt and discuss how we can rectify the issues. As a class we collaboratively plan Term 4 of the school year.

Allowing students to have a say in the classroom is extremely vital. It is giving them a voice, allowing them to express their opinions. Students will inform us

when they are bored and uninterested so why not allow them to inform us of what interests them? By adopting this approach, I have seen an increase in student participation and morale in my classroom.

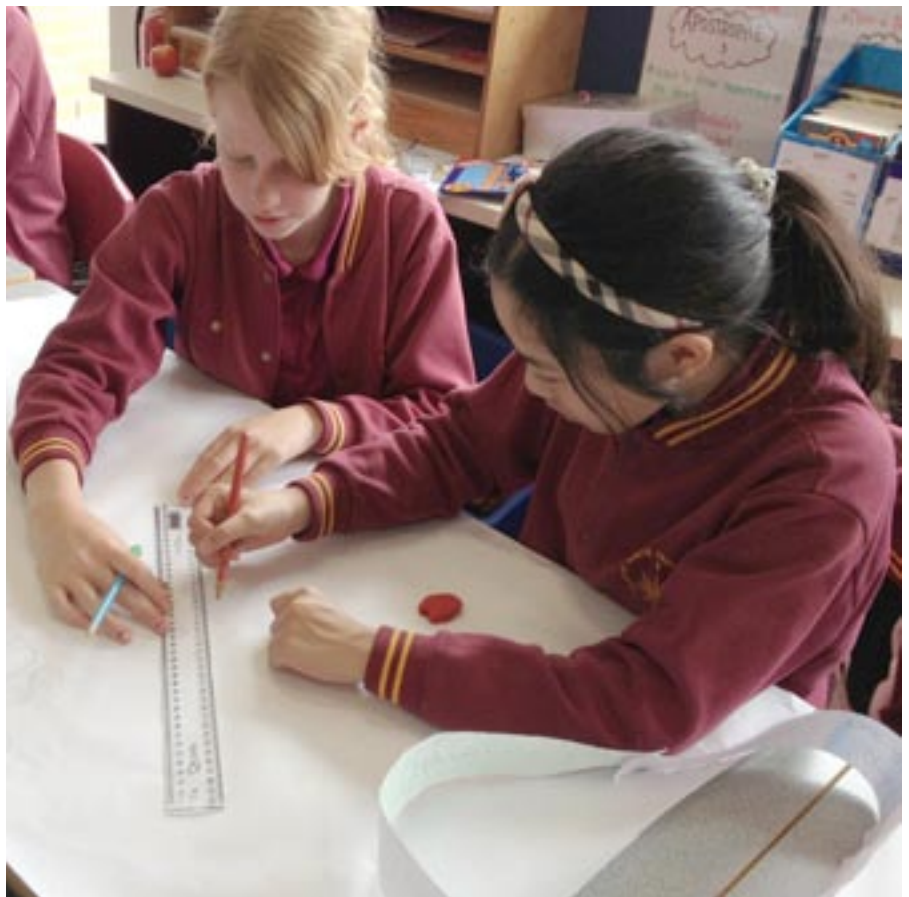
Not only were my students engaged, but they were excited to learn about mathematics due to the idea of being heard and having a say. They had an input into what they wanted to learn and this was very rewarding for them.

Due to the success of this initiative in 2013, I again sat down with the Year 5 students at the end of Term 4, and asked them to reflect on the year. What topics worked well in each term? What changes would they like to make?

From these discussions, I went away and adapted the interactive maths planner. In 2014 I have taken on board the suggestions from the students and implemented them in my planning.

The following is an example of an activity that involves using open-ended rich mathematical experiences in the classroom to engage my students.

During the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, I provided the students with a



Medal Tally of the 13th day of competition. My Learning Intention for this lesson/ week was to allow the students to work collaboratively towards interpreting the data in any way they found useful.

This was fantastic as it was not only a hands-on approach to learning mathematics, it was problem solving at its best. Students were able to interpret the data and present it in many different ways such as:

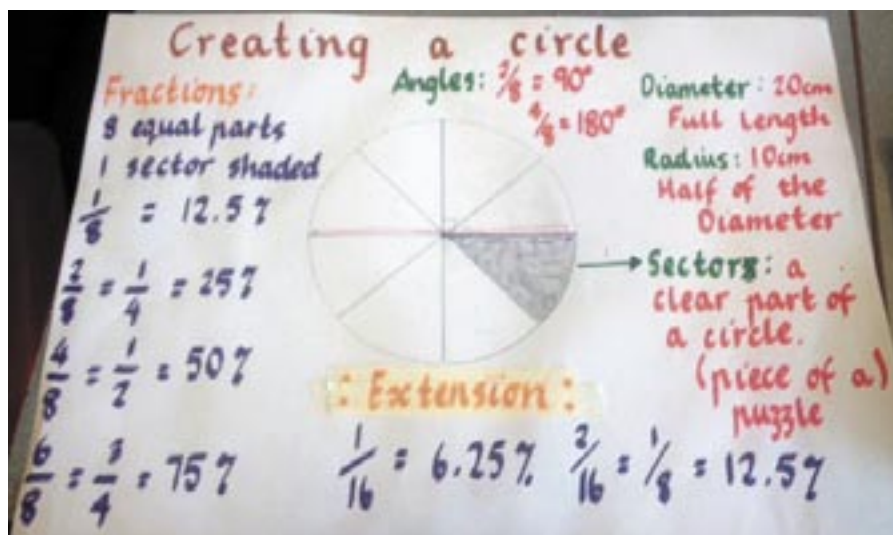
- \* Data Analysis and Graphing (Line, Bar and Pie)
- \* Fractional, decimal and percentage value representation and comparison
- \* Geographical spacing between countries
- \* Distance travelled by nations around the world
- \* Converting measurements in metres and kilometres
- \* Greenwich Time and Elapsed Time
- \* Number Patterns
- \* Area and Perimeter of the Olympic Site
- \* Estimation

During this activity I was able to link many mathematical concepts together.

After gathering my students' work, I found one student's piece of work quite interesting. I noticed that, although his work was beautifully presented, the majority of his mathematics was completed using *Microsoft Excel*, an ICT program. This program allowed this child to enter data onto an *Excel* spreadsheet that automatically produced detailed pie and line graphs. So it was here where I thought of my next mini lesson: "How do we create a circle by just using a 40 cm geometry ruler?"

As I gathered my students around a table, we started to brainstorm ideas about how this could be done. Collaboratively we worked together to create an anchor chart that, in turn, became our learning intention for the lesson.

As I posed the question, ideas and maths terms were being discussed. Two in particular were 'diameter' and 'radius'. After explaining the definition of these terms, I began my modelling and recording on the anchor chart. Using these two fundamental maths terms, we created a circle with a diameter of 20 cm and a radius of 10 cm. From this, students noticed that the circle had eight equal parts with one part shaded in. Instantly



students began to interpret the circle and discuss the fractional value of the shaded parts, which led to finding the equivalent percentage and decimal values.

For example, I overheard one group of students explain their mathematical reasoning to others: *There are eight equal parts with one part shaded in, which means the fraction of circle is 1/8 (one eighth), so if 1/4 (one quarter) is 25%, half of 25% is 12.5% which means that 1/8 is 12.5%, and if I halve 1/8, I will get 1/16 (one sixteenth) which means that if 1/8 is 12.5%, half of 12.5% is 6.25%.*

This was very rewarding for me, as I was able to witness students gathering around to listen to the group's reasoning and then apply what they heard to their own work.

From here the terms 'sectors' and 'angles' arose. Students began to make the connection between fractions and angles. Students explained that 2/8 (two eighths) could also be represented as a 'right angle' and 4/8 (four eighths) as a 'straight angle'.

To see my students thoroughly engaged and wanting to learn was very pleasing. My Learning Intention was not in the form of a written paragraph; it was in the form of an anchor chart that was

collaboratively created with my students – which had illustrations and definitions as topics were being discussed and introduced.

This is the reason I do **not** use worksheets in my maths classes. Every maths class I teach has meaning and purpose behind it: activities that are rich and open ended; problems that allow students to explore and try techniques to find solutions to those problems to give their learning meaning. I believe in providing students with an equal opportunity to learn, catering for all ability levels and being open to differentiation.

We don't pay our students enough credit. We don't give them the benefit of the doubt. Students retain knowledge and, if mathematical experiences are fun and enjoyable, they will retain information taught in previous years due to those positive memories.

I once made the mistake of assuming that students don't understand what you're teaching. I now allow them to share their knowledge with me and together create memorable learning experiences.

**Michael Nicolaides**  
Maths Specialist

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A news story about this approach to mathematics was published in *The Age* on March 26, 2014. It contains an insightful video of Michael and his students talking about their work. It is available at:

[www.theage.com.au/national/education/albion-north-primary-students-take-a-handson-approach-in-class-20140325-35ghy.html](http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/albion-north-primary-students-take-a-handson-approach-in-class-20140325-35ghy.html)

**Albion North Primary students take a hands-on approach in class**

March 26, 2014  
Benjamin Poyles

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# Student Safety Student Action Teams (SSSATs)

Students can play a central role in investigating, understanding and responding to bullying in a primary school community. At St Charles Borromeo Primary School in the Melbourne suburb of Templestowe, we conducted a research and action project in 2013, in which students led a focus on positive relationships that extended across the whole school community.

Our project ran across two terms with students in grades 3-6 developing **Student Action Teams (SATs)** as a vehicle for a better understanding and how to respond to bullying at school, online and in the community. The project engaged **all** students in grades 3/4 and targeted students in grades 5/6 using the SAT model, by providing training in how to research and set action for a broad range of issues relevant to bullying in our school and community (ie cyberbullying, exclusion from play, verbal and physical bullying, etc).

Grade 3/4 students carried out research amongst all year levels, parents and staff into the nature and causes of bullying, and also had the opportunity to meet and/or contact community 'experts' about these issues.

At the end of the research phase, students shared their findings with each another and school staff and received training about how to develop appropriate actions that responded to their findings. Possible actions they suggested included (but were not limited to):

- peer lessons for younger students;
- class based activities for all year levels;
- family 'challenges' (to get students and parents/carers talking about bullying at home);
- 'campaigns'; and so on.

One team was given the opportunity to work with the trainer to develop a **'Family Forum' on Cyber Bullying and Resilience**. Students co-facilitated this Family Forum, which provided opportunities for families to participate in shared activities, to discuss the issues together with their child, and learn strategies for safety and resilience online and beyond.

## Our key objectives

Our main objective was to increase our students' knowledge about what constitutes bullying and about different types of bullying, and also about ways to respond if they or another student they know were being bullied.

We also aimed to see a decrease in bullying behaviours and a knowledge of how to keep our students safe online by participating in the project.

## What we did

All students in grade 3/4 participated in **SSSATs**. This included the provision of four sessions about bullying, cyberbullying and how to respond. Then, during the course of their research and actions, students created their own learning about these issues.

All students from P-6 participated in at least one peer-led session about bullying/cyberbullying and how to respond.

The Family Forum was held for parents of students in grades 3/4, and this focused on educating parents/carers about bullying/cyberbullying and how to support their child. 100 per cent of parents/carers and extended families attended the forum.

## Achieving our objectives

The objectives that we aimed to achieve were met – above and beyond our expectations. The students' engagement and learning was exceptional. The involvement of students was high from beginning to end and their learnings have influenced all members of the school community through their leadership in all classrooms and their expo held for parents/carers.

Feedback data were collected from the parents/carers attending the expo and this reported that the conversations the students took home and the explanations they shared regarding bullying issues, allowed for rich family discussions and education.

Throughout the life of the project there was definitely an increase in positive relationships and conversations at school. Because the project was student led and the students took their responsibility seriously, these rich conversations have continued both at school and home.

The project far surpassed what our expectations were at the beginning. The impact it has had on the whole school community has gone beyond our expectations. It has provided the foundation for keeping a focus on positive relationships in the school community.

This project was made possible by a **Bullystoppers** Grant. All members of St Charles Borromeo Primary School would like to acknowledge and thank **Kate Wilde** who led us through this project.

**Sue Cahill**

*Student Wellbeing Leader*

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# Caritas Solidarity Day



Our school, St Charles Borromeo, works closely with a charity called **Caritas Australia**. Caritas raises millions of dollars each year to support people in third world countries. At our school we have a student leadership team who work alongside our teachers to create days where our students are taught about different cultures and how other people live.

On Tuesday 25th March, the Caritas Leadership Team went to a Caritas Information Day. On the day we watched a *powerpoint* that inspired us to create our school's first ever **Caritas Solidarity Day**. We came up with four items that people in third world countries would have very little of or they would not have at all.

We planned a day where our students would experience being at school without these four items. We went without tables and chairs because we wanted all the students to experience what it would be like to sit on the floor all day. We went without technology and sports equipment. To give the students a chance to understand what it would be like not to have our lunch boxes filled with our usual food for recess and lunch, we provided rice only for our students.

To complete our goal we had to plan lots of meetings and we all had a part to play. In our meetings there were lots of ideas and tasks we had to be responsible for. We allocated people to the different tasks eg prepare a *powerpoint* for our introduction assembly, make a flyer to inform our parents/carers, email the staff to find who had rice cookers and ask them to bring them on the day and, most importantly, speak to our Principal to organise a date for our special day.

A student who experienced the day first hand said: *"The day put me into a person living in a Third World countries' shoes. I realise how plain their food is and I now remember poor people by donating to Caritas."*



We made a time with classroom teachers when we could come and speak to their students to let them know what to expect on the day.

We asked the members of the Caritas Leadership Team how they felt when they were presenting to the classes and with the planning for the day. One said: *"When we started the project, we didn't seem to be making much progress. At the end it went exceptionally well."* Another said: *"I think our teamwork made it work. Teamwork means everything to me."*

The day went fantastically well. The assembly was great and everyone was so enthusiastic about the day. Students and staff are still talking about it. It was a pleasure to work with the Caritas Leadership Team.

**Fiona McAuley and Isabel Adams**

*Grade 6*

**St Charles Borromeo Primary School**

**Templestowe**

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# Our SRC: Ensuring Student Voice

We are proud of our SRC students and their achievements over the last few years. The students develop confidence and leadership skills as they work on projects throughout the year. Each year is different and the students continue to develop projects by surveying their fellow students, ensuring student voice.

Last year we were most impressed when the 2013 SRC wrote a play that they performed at assembly. In the play the members of the SRC had to complete four projects in an imaginary kingdom. Each time they completed a project they received a magical gemstone with a letter engraved on it. The four projects were the real projects the SRC had worked on during the year: developing a plan of a seat bench for the Dandenong City Council, an Easter egg hunt for the whole school, a school talent show and establishing a vegetable garden.

When the four gemstones had been gathered they worked out that it made the word **LEAD**. The message for the audience was that, in completing the four projects, the students developed the skills and confidence to lead. This was the power of the gemstones. The play, which included music and dance, was performed for the whole school to encourage students to join the 2014 SRC.

This year the SRC organised an Easter Art Competition for the whole school. Students had 15 minutes to

produce their Easter art piece. We had seven sessions during the day with approximately

100 students at each session. The SRC developed the project based on a Google doc survey that 400 students completed at the end of 2013.

Alan Brew

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# The SRC's Magical Quest

Before we begin our performance, we need to explain that this play is about our journey this year, 2013, as the **Student Representative Council (SRC)**. We have created a parallel adventure story where you will need to think about how the characters and places in the story relate to St Joseph's Springvale.

For example: The **Island of Joseria** is really St Joseph's Primary School ('Jos' = St Joseph's and 'eria' means area, therefore Joseria means St Joseph's Area). Other changed names are: **Librius** = Library and **Ofaria** = Office. The Junior/Senior States are the different levels within the school. The year 5/6 grade rooms are called **Faron** (5/6F), **Maridium** (5/6MA), **Chardon** (5/6C), **Meicia** (5/6M), **Feizano** (5/6Fz), **Lefauna** (5/6LF) and **Selvia** (5/6S).

The SRC are portrayed as adventurers.

In the play, the SRC is formed and learns to work together. They have four tasks to complete; at the end of each task they are awarded a magical gemstone. When all four gemstones have been collected, the SRC receives the power locked by the gemstones.

*Begin Music.*

*Characters take their position:*

*SRC members and class groups and Madam Refuna and Sir Brewen (teachers) centre stage.*

On the island of Joseria, most of the inhabitants were unsatisfied with the way it was.

*Hold up a sign for audience participation:*

**"We want more fun! When do we want it? Now!! We want more fun; when do we want it? Now!!!"**

A little town, found in the heart of this island, named Librius was where the two island elders, Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna met up one day, after their long break. They had gone on a trip around Joseria, and came back to report.

*Ask the audience:*

**"What do you like about Joseria?  
How could Joseria be a better place?"**

*Listen to ideas and pass microphone around.*

*"Not bad, but it could be better."*

*Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna  
discuss the current state of the island.*

Thus, Sir Brewen and Madam Refuna assembled a special group and, to make it fair, they informed each of the seven towns in the senior state to elect two worthy adventurers and assemble at Librius.

**Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna gave orders for the group to form.**

An election was held and all was decided. From the seven towns (Selvia, Lefauna, Feizano, Meicia, Chardon, Maridium, and Faron) a boy and girl were chosen - fourteen adventurers in all.

*Students take the microphone and introduce themselves individually: Lina, Jordon, Kevin, Anna, Vinh, Angie, Angela, Phu, Anthony, Lisa, Kimberly, Kyle, Kim and William.*

Added to these 14 chosen ones were four town leaders.

*School Captains introduce themselves:  
Charles from Meridium, Andy from Feizano,  
and Olivia and Stephanie, both from Meicia.*

These four adventurers had been automatically chosen to be in this group, due to the fact that they were previously elected town leaders, and had various leadership skills and responsibility already.

**Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna call for the first meeting.**

They met in Librius. Once each and every one of them assembled in Librius, Instructor David and expert trainer was asked to teach the group.

*Speech by David.*

He showed them how to work and have fun. Carrying out these skills, the group named themselves the **Student Representative Council (SRC)**.

**"We are called the Student Representative Council.  
Three cheers for the SRC!"**

The four hour training course taught the group different essential skills: Planning, Speaking and Writing. But what was important was that a group was now ready to help the people of Joseria. They danced to celebrate their unity as a group.

*Dance routine.*

The SRC had gathered again to meet in Librius. Charles went searching around Librius to explore this new town.

**"What secrets have been left hidden or undiscovered  
in this new and unusual town?"**

There he stumbled upon a peculiar book, named **Minutus**. On reading the book, he discovered that it held the knowledge and wisdom of a previous and forgotten SRC. He discovered that, if this newly established SRC performed exceptionally well at tasks to support the people of Joseria, they would receive one magical gemstone for each of four completed tasks.

Charles ran out and told his new friends.

*Charles shows the book and  
explains what it says to the SRC.*

First, they asked Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna if they could go and begin a task, to get the gemstone.

*Begging.*

After much begging and pleading, Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna allowed them to begin the quest.

**"OK we'll give it a go."**

So the SRC set out on their journey to gain a magical gemstone. Their main mission was to make sure Joseria was happy. After all, that was why this group was formed. So, they began planning their first event.



The SRC put their heads together to come up with a good plan to settle on. They were thinking of an Easter egg hunt, hoping it would improve Joseria's co-operative spirit. Almost immediately, they started preparing and purchasing items for the big event. And the event was carried out smoothly, in a whole week period, with one town from each of the two states coming to participate every few minutes.

*Hide 4 Easter eggs and choose two children from the audience to find them.  
Play music while children hunt for Easter eggs.  
Congratulate them on finding the eggs and ask them how they feel about winning.*

And, you know what? The Easter egg hunt was so great, not only were the citizens satisfied, but the SRC felt more confident about themselves. After the event, the SRC decided to look around in case any eggs had not been found. To their surprise they found a sparkling egg somewhere on the ground. It cracked open once they touched it, and inside there was a gemstone, with the letter 'a' engraved on it. Stephanie carefully picked it up and put it on the display board where all members could gaze upon its mysteries.

**"Wow, amazing, what will it do?"**

Around the town, the SRC noticed that there were only trees, and not much fresh produce. So the adventurers met with Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna and begged for a vegetable garden, for the fellow civilians of Joseria.

*Begging.*

Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna agreed.

The vegetable garden was built with the help from a neighbouring island, called Buntings. The people of Joseria watered and cared for their garden. Many vegetables were produced and enjoyed. Then the SRC noticed a strange cabbage growing very quickly. When Anthony looked inside he discovered a second gemstone with the letter 'd' engraved on it.

*Anthony explains what he has discovered and places the gemstone on the notice board.*

The SRC gathered again to plan the next event. Joseria needed a nice park bench for people to sit on, and so the SRC held a competition that required people to design their dream park bench, with an environmental theme. The SRC looked through all the benches, and getting ideas from each one, they designed a final piece that everyone was satisfied about. It was then built and put into a local park in Joseria. When Kimberly sat on the seat, to get a feel of it, she noticed something shining under her foot. She bent down and picked up a third gemstone with an 'l' engraved on it.

*Kimberly explains her finding to the rest of the SRC and places the stone on the notice board.*

By now, the SRC were beginning to wonder about these stones. What were they? What did they do?

*SRC make comments about gemstones.*

For the final task the SRC decided to host something that everyone could enjoy.

**"A talent show! Let's have a talent show!!"**

It was a perfect idea. So once again they began to beg.

*Begging.*

Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna agreed to their idea. Posters were made and put up, and prizes were organised. Then the auditions were held.

*SRC announce the Auditions.*

*Ring held bell and call all member of Joseria to participate.*

There were two talent shows, senior and junior. From the senior state, there were 11 performances. From the junior state, there were 17 performances.

**"And our next act is ...."**

*Have the winner of the Junior show perform her piano piece. Child plays the piano/keyboard.*

**"The winner is Angelina."**

*Present her with certificate.*

As the SRC tidied up after the show, Kevin walked up the keyboard to pack it away, and noticed a gemstone sticking out between the piano keys. He pulled and discovered a letter 'e' that was engraved on it.

Kevin places it on the board as he tells the group about his findings.

**"How can we unlock the magical powers of these gemstones?"**

**"I think it could have something to do with the letters on each stone."**

**"Why don't we try and rearrange them to make a word."**

*Rearrange and read out silly words and look confused.*

**"I have an idea – I think they go this way!"**

**"Look, she is right; that makes a word we all recognise: L..E..A..D."**

*Lead.*

The magic of the gemstones is not in the gemstones themselves but in the four tasks we carried out:

**We all now know how to lead.**

**We can plan organise and lead events.**

**We are not only adventures but real leaders.**

*Music and movement....*

The SRC had made Joseria a better place. The citizens had had a lot of fun and all the people of Joseria were more confident and outgoing.

*Sir Brewen and Madam Rufuna congratulate the SRC on completing their tasks and discovering the real message of the Gemstones.*

We think that it would be good for a new group to join the SRC next year and have their own adventures.

And they can also learn from the wisdom of the SRC book of Minutus.

*Charles holds up the book.*

**"Three Cheers everyone for the SRC!!"**

*Final Music and dance.*

**written by: Charles and Olivia, SRC**

# SRC & Peer Support



MODBURY HIGH

In 2013, two Year 11s (now in Year 12) from the Student Representative Council established an anti-bullying campaign with the help of both Mr Wood (Deputy Principal) and Mr Rumsby (Principal). These two students were Sharna Hartwig and myself, Frank French. During an SRC Executive meeting, Mr Wood came to the group asking how we could prevent bullying. Sharna and I proposed a system where that, instead of completely stopping bullying (which we knew would be almost impossible because it is unfortunately a way of life), students could go to their peers to talk about their bullying issues.

With this new way of students being able to go to other students and talk about their problems, they might feel more inclined to talk about their issues because they were not forced to talk to what may appear to be an intimidating teacher or counselor. When we presented this idea to Mr Wood and Mr Rumsby, they loved the idea and thought the new system should start right away. Our timing couldn't have been more perfect. A week afterwards, during one of our whole school formal assemblies, which was about cyber bullying, Sharna and I were given the task to present this new idea on stage to all of our peers. The following afternoon we were met with varied responses. Some students told us that it was a waste of time; others thought it was a good idea; others were worried that these new 'mentors' would become targets of bullying themselves.

After the initial proposal of the new idea, we came across our first big issue, which was the recruitment of the new peer support leaders. We knew that we needed people with certain characteristics such as being patient, being able to listen and so on so that the individual who is going to the peer support leader could feel comfortable talking to them about their issue. With all these considerations in mind, we went to Mr Wood and Mr Rumsby and offered them the idea that those wanting to become a peer support leader would need to submit a half page application stating why they felt they should become a peer support leader. Mr Wood then went through all the applications and chose a select number of students he felt would make good peer support leaders.



Before too long, all the members of the new Peer Support Program (which included both Sharna and I) were in our school's Conference Room with Mr Wood for our very first meeting. We were briefed on what our task was and how we should go about completing it. We were told our responsibilities and how we should uphold them. It was the 'training' program for the new leaders of the school. These leaders' responsibilities were not to try and take the bullying matters into their own hands (that's not how we envisioned the leaders would act) but instead help the student go through the school's bullying processes such as telling someone, asking them to stop, etc. The leaders would act as a proxy or as second for the individual when wanting to talk to someone they felt uncomfortable talking with, like a teacher or a counselor, or even the bully. The leaders also had the responsibility to spot bullying within the yard or online and report it. These responsibilities were set in place so that all the leaders knew what they had to do and could act upon it as soon as they could.

This year, we revamped the Peer Support Leader Program to publicise what we were doing and to remind the school that the peer support leaders were still in place. New badges were ordered for each member and the recruiting happened again, which gained us a few new members. I also convinced the counselor Ms Simmonds to join our cause, which she happily agreed to do and help run the system along with Mr Wood. Our badges were presented to us during one of our weekly Thursday morning school assemblies to get our faces known.

The current goal for the peer support program is to eventually have students no longer needing to come to us because students become self aware, confident and learn to deal with bullying on their own and perhaps eventually become a peer support leader themselves.

**Frank French**

*Modbury High School Captain*

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# Potential to create improved policy and practice through *Student Voice*

The Central Coast Principals' Alliance grew from the determination of the 15 Principals in 13 schools and colleges to increase student engagement in learning, through recognising the need for a different approach. One Principal's commitment to research and the implementation of **Student Voice** initiatives provided the answer. The Alliance developed a project to transform learning through the interrelationship of **Student Voice**, reflective practice and teacher professional learning.

A **Continuum of Student Voice** that went from 'student voice as token' through to 'democratic partnership' was developed by the Alliance from existing research (Fielding). This allowed each school to develop and implement their own contextually relevant project. These projects were shared by students and teachers and sparked a strengthened commitment to further action.

The Alliance's success is due to:

- the belief of every school's leadership in the potential of Student Voice to transform learning;
- the commitment of every Principal in the District to support the work of the Alliance;
- the employment of a project officer responsible for the conferences, the development of the professional learning module, and for supporting each school with relevant resources and building communication networks;
- celebrating success through sharing and learning from each other;
- visible and measurable positive outcomes as a result of listening to student voices, and responding to what they say.

Inadvertent discoveries are contributing to the success of the Alliance as it functions and supports change at different levels:

- **At the school level:** It is about the nature of learning. Teachers learn from students and classroom teaching improves. Students are empowered as participatory learners and feel a greater sense of belonging. Reciprocal respect, trust and support increase and policies are more effective and students have a more authentic role in governance.

- **At the school level:** The model works for every school as it is responsive to each school's individual context. It encourages collaboration and professionalism. Whilst some schools are at the beginning of their journey, their successes alleviate any uncertainty about power struggle between teachers and student.

- **At the system level:** We are a strong and sustainable public education network, building collegiality and trust. There is collaboration and knowledge creation between schools, with barriers dissolving. Thirteen individual Student Voice projects are moving along a continuum and projects across groups of schools are at the conceptual stage. The Alliance is a model for other regions to facilitate professional learning and support change. The professional learning module will contain all resources, plans, projects and documentation to support implementation of contextually relevant student voice initiatives in any school.

## We are ensuring the sustainability of the Alliance

- Through a core group of principals who lead the development of the Alliance and will report to every Secondary Principal Council Meeting. They are preparing a three year strategic plan (2015-17) that will be embedded into each Alliance school and underpin their strategic direction for the next three years.
- The SPC will continue to support the employment of a project officer through contributing funds to a central account.

- A **Central Coast Student Voice Alliance** has been created with representatives from every secondary school on the central coast. They will use the continuum to describe where they would like to see their schools located, to share their schools' initiatives and to plan for action. There will be opportunities to discuss the important concerns of their peers in terms of what they see as critical. Their inaugural meeting is on 16th May 2014 and will be opened by Senator Deb McNeil.

- The Module will have comprehensive resources to support schools in their own journey.
- Presenting the Alliance work in Student Voice at conferences and sharing our successes to promote similar action in other contexts.
- Class Movies Documentaries in the Collaborative Practice Portlet of the NSW Department of Education and Communities website.

This Alliance, through its outcomes at each level and the quality of resources developed, has significant potential to change teaching and learning practices and the teacher professional learning programs in schools – plus the nature of how and why we engage in reflective practice, as well as create a model for school collaboration.

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# Students and the Bill of Rights

Close to the beginning of the year, our teacher, Susan Dwoskin, brought in her friend and mentor, Dr Art Pearl, to our class. They asked us what we knew about **our rights**. At the time, we knew nothing about them.

Then Dr Pearl taught us how the **Bill of Rights** was created. He started teaching us about our history: George Washington, the Constitution and, most importantly, our rights. We continue to meet each week to research, learn and talk about what rights are and what they look like in our country.

## Rights of Expression

The first amendment to the Bill of Rights is the **right of expression**, and it includes five rights: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, right to petition, and the right of assembly:

- **Freedom of Speech** gives you the right to express yourself against the Government's doings, without being arrested.
- **Freedom of Religion** lets you believe what you want to believe and keeps you from being forced to practise a religion you don't believe in. It also makes sure that there is a separation between church and state.
- **Freedom of Press** allows you print criticism of the Government.
- **Right to Petition** lets you start a petition about something you dislike that the government is doing or to get the government to do something you think is important.
- **Right to Assembly** allows you to assemble peacefully.

People who are trying to change these amendments are threatening our rights of expression. They are also being threatened by the ongoing war.

The most important thing that threatens our rights is that people are not learning about them. Actually, students never had rights in school until Beth Tinker, her brother, and other supporters wore black armbands protesting the Vietnam War. They were suspended for disrupting education. They took it all the way to the Supreme Court, and by a

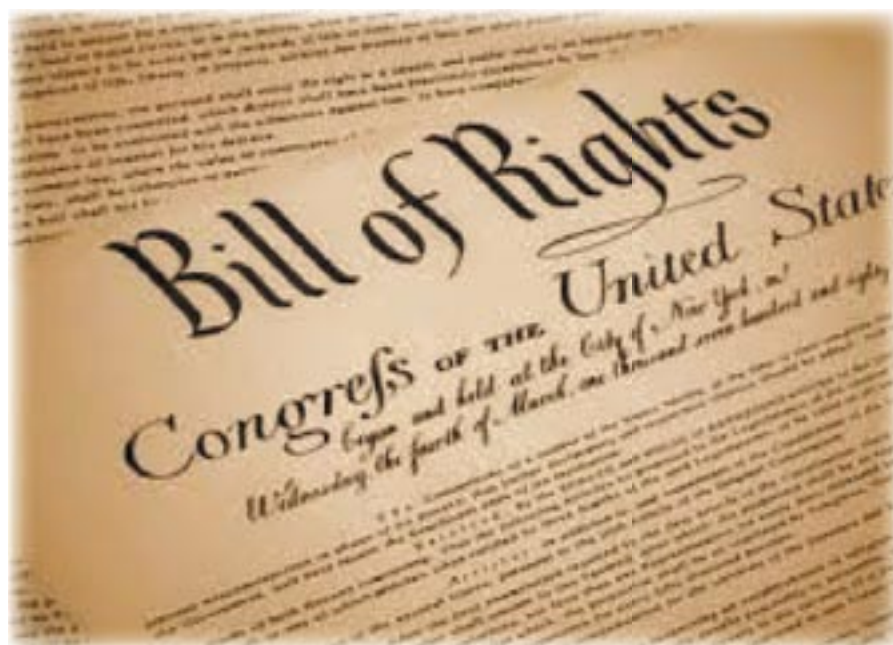
vote of 7-2, the Supreme Court granted students rights of expression. We think it's important for people to learn that the Supreme Court decides what is constitutional and what is not. The president, with approval of the Senate, appoints the Supreme Court and a judge can stay on the court until he or she dies.

arrest you for having illegal drugs. They must go back to the judge and get a new warrant for the different crime. The **Fifth Amendment** promises that no person is required to testify against his or her self.

Would it bother you if someone could just go through your stuff? What if there were cameras in the classroom or the bathroom? How would that make you feel? Would you be okay with it?

We wouldn't!

Do your backpacks, diaries, and personal space mean anything to you? Well, they're being violated!



## Rights of Privacy

The **Rights to Privacy** are stated in the third, fourth, and fifth amendments of the Bill of Rights. These rights are important for maintaining our personal space. The **Third Amendment** states that no soldier can take quarters in a person's house in a time of peace. In times before the Bill of Rights, you could be forced to have soldiers live in your house for as long as they liked. The **Fourth Amendment** says that people have a right to their belongings. If the government wishes to search somebody's house they must have a search warrant based on probable cause. If the government searches your house for murder clues, they cannot

**There are things we all can do to change what we think is wrong! We can learn our rights.** We can tell you about your rights and you can choose to follow them or not.

## Have no fear; Due Process is here

These are a person's rights before they can be arrested, during a trial, and after conviction. Before these rights, a person could be charged with anything and for no reason. They would have to prove their innocence. These rights made a big difference.

**Before a trial:** In Due Process you have the rights to know what you're accused of blowing it. For example: if an Instructional



Aide or a Teacher sends you to the office for no apparent reason, well guess what – because of *Habeas Corpus* you have the right to know what you were accused of doing! **Habeas Corpus:** you also have a right to a lawyer, reasonable bail, and a speedy trial.

If you're still wondering what due process is, here's a better example: Simon Vurlgouw is accused of bullying Will and Ursula Shelet. Well before the trial, he can have all the things we listed above!

**Due Process during a trial:** means no one shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. So Simon has the right not to testify against himself. He also has the right to a lawyer and a jury of peers, and most important, he is innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt.

**Due Process after a trial:** If Simon Vurlgouw is found innocent, he cannot be accused of the exact same crime a second time. Not even if the police or anyone else has found more evidence against him. Without this right, a person could live an entire life afraid of being forced to go back to court for the same crime. This protects people from living in constant fear. If you are found guilty, you are protected from any cruel and unusual punishments. This means you cannot be tortured!

## Rights in our Classroom

These rights are so important that we've decided to try out our own due process system in the class. Every Friday we plan

to have a trial with judges, lawyers and a randomly chosen jury of our peers. We will spend an hour at the end of the day to have trials for the accused. The accused will be students who have not followed our classroom agreements. The trial will be serious, with our teacher, Susan, presiding as the Supreme Court.

Some of the things that would result in a classroom trial are bullying, harassment, taking things that aren't yours, and disrupting the class. Defacing or destroying school property would also be just cause for facing a trial.

## Under Attack

We are learning about our rights because they are under attack. Rights are generally lost during wartime, but our wars in the past ended after a few years. Now we are in the longest war and there is no end in sight.

Technology has also been used to take away our rights. The government couldn't spy on our emails and *Facebook* until there were emails and *Facebook*, and cell phones.

Rights of privacy can also help young people. Now people invade privacy and put embarrassing photos and other stuff on *Facebook* or *YouTube*, and it causes so much pain that people actually kill themselves. So we've talked about how we need to do something to prevent that from happening. We also want to be sure we have rights of expression and due process.

Not only are **rights of privacy** under attack, but so too are **rights of expression** and **due process**. But mostly, all our rights are threatened because so few people know what they are.

## What We are Doing

Last week we spoke before a town meeting about rights and we are going to go to the School Board because it is important that rights be taught to every fifth grader in our school district. And we thank you for your interest in what we have learned.

The most important thing we learned:

## IF YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, YOU DON'T HAVE THEM

*The students in*

*Susan Dwoskin's Fifth Grade class:*

**Addie, Aiden, Alex, Ben, Brooks, Calder, Carmen, Celia, Chloe, Cleo, Desmond, Ella, Emilie, Etta, James, Jinger, Joe, Josh, Lena, Maeve, Mason, Nicholas, Nora, Olivia, Owen, Suhayb, Tae, Trevian, Trevor, Will, Zachary**  
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*When the students entered my class last fall, only one or two had heard of the Bill of Rights. Since that time, their ability to comprehend and connect them to current US and world events has amazed me. I was even more impressed with their desire and ability to communicate their passion and understanding so effectively to an adult audience. While the initial part of their presentation was rehearsed, they willingly fielded challenging questions from the audience about rights, race and more. The students demonstrated an understanding of the importance of those rights, but more importantly shared what they mean to them and how threatened they are today, mostly owing to the ignorance of the population.*

*As Art Pearl tells us, in 21st century education the students will educate their parents. This is precisely what the students did. As one parent exclaimed, with eyes beaming, "I've just discovered a side to my daughter that I've never seen!"*

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# The Stevenson Improvement Club:

## *Some student voice approaches in 1985*

In 1985, after teaching for a couple of years at Adlai Stevenson High School in New York City (in the Bronx), and after decades of witnessing and/or experiencing ineffective or damaging education resulting from – as I saw it and still see it – small numbers of generally out of touch people running the schools with very minimal input from teachers, parents, and especially students, I founded the **Stevenson Improvement Club**.

The SIC was open to everybody – students, teachers, parents, secretaries, counselors, administrators, custodians, etc. Everybody! Our mission was to honour

We got a very good response with the survey: 1798 completed surveys, 140 additional written comments, and 620 essays describing the ideal high school.

***Students make a school, and if you don't listen to the students, you have no school.***

**Rita Martinez, student**

the voices of every member of the school community, consider every suggestion, and work together to make Stevenson as good a school as it could be, and to improve public education generally.

You can't fix something without knowing where and how it is broken. And you need to know its strengths as well as its weaknesses. Occasionally – very occasionally – student surveys would be conducted; but the questions were almost always designed by out of touch adults who asked the wrong questions! What good does that do?! That's almost like having your car checked out by a mechanic who is asking you questions about your favourite foods!

So in Spring 1986, **we** designed a student survey – but the '**we**' were the 15 or 18 **students** in our group! They came up with 25 statements that were to be assessed with a '1' to '5' (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not Sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree). Students were also invited to write their own assessments or suggestions. In addition, some of the teachers were able to assign students to write an essay entitled '**The Ideal School**.'

The 25 statements (or phrases) were as follows:

*Bad lunches; Not enough equipment/supplies; School is dirty; Need more effective security system; Class programming is messed up; Need more courses related to life; More doors should be open in the morning; Too many bathrooms are closed; Need more respect between students and teachers; Students need more say in what goes on; Not enough counseling is available; Need (more) time to get from place to place; There is not enough individual attention; Criminal behavior exists here (eg drug abuse, stealing); Continually disruptive students should be transferred out; Teachers should listen to students; Need more guidance counselors; There are too many unnecessary classes; Some security guards are disrespectful; Need more student recognition/encouragement; Graduation requirements are unfair; Need to showcase students' talents more; Need more after school activities; Need more variety of classes.*

### **Some of the results:**

- 89% of the 1798 responders agreed that we need more respect between teachers and students
- 87.6% agreed that teachers should listen to students
- 85.7% agreed that too many bathrooms are closed
- 84.8% agreed that students need more say in what goes on
- 77.8% of the 1798 agreed that we need more student recognition and encouragement
- 72.4% felt that continually disruptive students should be transferred out. (38% strongly agreed)
- 72.7% agreed that we need to showcase students' talents more
- 70.2% agreed that we need more variety of classes
- 68.2% agreed that we need more guidance counselors (36% strongly); note: 83% of Seniors felt this, including 44% strongly
- 63.8% agreed that we need more courses related to life
- 56% agreed that there are too many unnecessary classes
- 55% agreed that we need more after-school activities

Students requested more than 100 new extracurricular clubs or courses; including International Travel, Comedy Club, Creative Writing, editorial (publishing), Job placement, Self-Protection, Peace, 'Shop Till You Drop' club, peer counseling, positive attitude club, travel (throughout NYC and USA), debate, video rental in library, rapping, graffiti, aviation mechanics, Spanish music and dancing, Russian, wildlife, Black Studies, volunteers (eg hospital), expedition club, life awareness, Human Relations, Ecology, and "a Science club for those who like it but aren't so good in it".





## Some student comments:

*I would like my ideal high school to be fun, not like Stevenson. The only time you have fun in Stevenson is when you're leaving.* (Veronica Husby)

*The ideal high school would have a counselor who has time for you.* (Lisa Oreauana)

*My counselor is very nice, but there are other counselors who always have an attitude. They are supposed to help (students) to graduate and to solve problems they have, not ignore them.* (Jennifer Pagan)

*The principal has the responsibility to (discipline) students who break school rules.* (Nicholas Diaz)

*The ideal high school should not have students who are continually disruptive in class. They should be transferred out or suspended from school because if they are kept in class the other students won't be able to learn anything.* (Cynthia Dominguez)

*...Those who want to learn learn. Those who want to joke and hang out do it elsewhere.* (Carlos Joseph)

*It's equal treatment, respect, and a sense of belonging that help build an ideal high school.* (Mitcheline Marshall)

*The number one rule is for everyone to be considered special.* (Theresa Garcia)

*The school wants the students to stay in school but never asks why they leave.* (Jeffrey Lebren)

*Students make a school, and if you don't listen to the students, you have no school.* (Rita Martinez)

We compiled the results into a 107 page typed report, which we then pared down to 50 pages and sent out to more than fifty officials: the Governor of New York State, the State Education Commissioner, the Mayor of NYC, the Chancellor of the school system, college heads, education groups, newspaper education reporters (*NY Times*, *the Daily News*, *New York Post*)...

From those 50+ send-outs, we received 12 or 14 'nice' letters, congratulating us on producing such an interesting (and sometimes it was described as **important**) document; but nothing really came of it. No newspaper mentioned it; no news telecast mentioned it. No response from the Governor nor the State Education Commissioner. One of the Mayor's assistants wrote a cordial response but offered no support.

Inside the building the next steps should have been to study the survey results, analyse and discuss them, and to figure out next steps. A new principal took office right around the time when the survey results came out. Though he can only be held partially responsible, very little attention was paid to the opinions, suggestions, and requests the students made in the survey. **No analysis and discussion occurred. No next steps. Almost nothing changed; almost nothing improved.**

## 2014: Reflecting on this experience

Looking back on this experience and looking again at the survey, I see things that I could have done better, and I have also gotten ideas on where we can go from here.

Back then I was operating out of a feeling of: "OK, we've done our part in showing all of you the things that need fixing; now you go ahead and fix them, or give the OK for the rest of us to move forward on fixing these, or you media people go ahead and share this with the public so more people will see all the problems, and then somebody will do the fixing."

***I could have done much more!***

Those 12 to 14 letters we received deserved a response, but it did not even occur to me to write back with a thank you! And what makes that worse is that, besides thanking them, my response could have initiated a valuable conversation.

I could have asked questions, such as: ***What in particular stood out for you? Or what feelings came up for you? Was your high school experience anything like this, and what do you make of that? We think the Stevenson survey is germane to many schools; we think our school is a fairly typical inner-city school and that these results could manifest into widespread change in many urban school districts – what do you think about that? You are a respected journalist (for example); would you be willing to share this with the public?***

In addition, I could have contacted all those who didn't respond to ask whether they in fact received the report, had a chance to read it, etc.

I also messed up with the new principal. I had taken a leave of absence for a semester to compile all the survey results and type them up. During that time the SIC was pretty dormant, and the new principal took over. When I came back I overheard the principal complaining about us, and I took that to mean that nothing was going to change. What I should have done was talk with him and suggest a different perspective!

For example, this survey was completed before he was assigned here, so he could not be blamed for any of this! On the other hand, he could use this to his advantage; these survey results could inform the direction of his administration, and in a very positive way! He could have announced to the staff, students

and parents that he was delighted to read/hear the students' assessments and suggestions, and that he suspects that there are quite a few things that the staff and students agree on. He could have told us that he was committed to continuing the collaborative and respectful tone of the Stevenson Improvement Club, and that: ***"Together we will work to make this school the best it can be!"***

That's in the past; we can't change that. But partly due to thinking about these issues, this has been valuable in impressing me with the need to always reflect on things and especially to ask ourselves what I/we could have done differently. Funny how things line up because for the past ten months, I have been a participant in a group called ***Mindfulness Into Action***, and self reflection is also a major part of the ***Mindfulness*** methodology. In fact, maybe the MIA group's focus and energy are the reasons I went back to find that survey – locked away for 27 years – and decided to go public with it.

## What Now?

### ***Can this have an impact on today's schools?***

The reason why the 1986 **Stevenson Improvement Club Student Survey** can be helpful to society and particularly young people today – in 2014 - is simple. Very little has changed during these 28 years in our mainstream schools and, in fact, much of what has changed has changed for the worse!

Here's more of the reasoning:

Stevenson was\* a pretty typical inner-city public (state) high school – if anything maybe a little better than most. (Now some would disagree with that because we had the highest dropout rate in NYC, but I say this because there were lots of outstanding teachers and students at our school.)

At any rate, Adlai E. Stevenson High School was typical enough for our results to have been exceedingly significant – **if enough people had gotten to see them!**

\* I say 'was' because Stevenson doesn't exist anymore. The building is still there but it now houses five or six small schools with no Stevenson connection.

Remember too, that 1798 students completed this survey! That is a significant representation! And the responders represented a strong cross-section of the students we had there:

- approximately equal numbers of 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders, and
- Mainstream, Special Education, Honours, and ESL/Bi-lingual students

The only 'groups' that were not well-represented were the 'cutters' and the LTA's – the ***Long-Time Absence*** 'kids'. We administered this survey via the English/Language Arts classes – ie inside the school building - so that's why these two groups were not well represented. In fact, if I had it to do over, we would have tried our best to get as many of these students taking the survey too. Many of them used to spend their time hanging out right outside the school, so we probably could have gotten one or two hundred of their responses too.

## Comments on the survey results

First, look at how high are the percentages of dissatisfaction – ***in areas that are crucial to having a good school!*** Between 63.8 and 89%: almost 2 out of 3 students to almost 9 out of 10 students (!) said or implied that we need more variety of classes and more courses related to

## ***The school wants the students to stay in school but never asks why they leave.***

Jeffrey Lebren, student

life; that students must be listened to and have a say in how the school is run: that we need mutual respect between students and staff, that students (need to have someone to talk with about school issues or personal problems – ie 'We need more guidance counselors'); and that students cannot learn effectively in classes where other students are being continually disruptive!

And let's look again at the quotes from some of the students in the year 1986 – and compare them to the reality that exists now in 2014:

- *I would like my ideal high school to be fun...*
- *The ideal high school would have a counselor who has time for you.*

- *The ideal high school should not have students who are continually disruptive in class.*
- *It's equal treatment, respect, and a sense of belonging that help build an ideal high school... The number one rule is for everyone to be considered special.*

And especially these two!

- ***Students make a school, and if you don't listen to the students, you have no school.***
- ***The school wants the students to stay in school but never asks why they leave.***

By the way, it should be noted that very few – and probably none – of these students knew anything about democratic education or unschooling. They had no idea that a school or learning program could exist wherein students could choose for themselves what they wanted to learn about. Imagine how much greater the dissatisfaction might have been if they knew about these other options!

For as long as I can remember – including right now, in the year 2014 – almost all the people making the decisions about our mainstream schools are the so-called education experts with PhD's and/or published writings, and political appointees who sometimes don't even come from the field of education – and almost none of these people are asking the students what they feel and think, and only a minority of them are even asking the teachers.

### ***What?! Are you kidding me?***

Students and teachers are the two groups who know the most about what's going on in our schools! How can you claim to want excellent schools if you don't ask for their input?

What I think would best serve our young people and the general global population would be to make this survey very public – share it all over the world – and invite parents, students, educators, and school and governmental leaders to use it as a barometer to compare it to current conditions in their particular schools or districts!

And then ask themselves: what do we need to do now?

**Roger Dennis**  
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# Meanings of 'student voice' in Italy: *Emerging experiences and practices*

**S**tudent Voice is not a very well known perspective in Italy.

For some years, the educational literature at the international level has acknowledged an emergent public awareness about the urgency and opportunity to entrust students with an increasingly central role within the contexts of school management and reform (Angus, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2006; Mitra, 2004). Nevertheless it seems that, in Italy, the potentialities of **listening to** and **co-responsabilising student stakeholders** in these processes and in general, have not been considered as central strategies for the improvement of teaching/learning practices and the management of schools. Little room has been given in particular to students to enable them to provide researchers and teachers with important elements on which to base improvement and evaluation of the processes of teaching.

Even though such considerations are very well-known and discussed among the followers of the 'Student Voice' perspective, these are currently not well explored in Italy. Only recently have some pieces of research and practice emerged that are aimed at providing students with an increasingly central role within education processes – and at acknowledging how they can be co-authors of the same processes, not only passive end-users. As we asserted in the first Italian book dedicated to 'Student Voice', that arose from the fruitful international collaboration between the Italian researcher Valentina Grion (me) and the American leader of the Student Voice movement, Alison Cook-Sather:

The vision of collaboration is key. Those who are part of the Student Voice movement do not argue that students' voices should become the only ones we listen to but rather that their voices should be brought into dialogue with those of educators, researchers, policy makers, parents, and other stakeholders. (Grion, Cook-Sather, 2013, p. 17).

Moreover, the need to involve students in the decision-making processes which affect them, has recently been emphasised by the European Council in its recommendations for young people under the age of 18 years (Council of Europe, 2012). This document highlights that:

the right to be heard and taken seriously is fundamental to the human dignity and healthy development of every child and young person

and emphasises the importance of:

- establishing the active participation by children and young people in all aspects of school life, notably through formal and non-formal methods of influencing teaching and learning practices and the school environment, and through integrating school pupil councils in the governance of the school community;
- providing education in a way that respects the human dignity

of the child or young person and enables free expression of her or his views and participation in school life, for example through using interactive teaching methods and the recognition of non-formal education and informal learning.

## Policy on pupils' engagement in the national indicators for curricula of kindergarten, primary and lower-secondary schools

Some sensitivity towards the **necessary co-participation** of young people in school life is emerging nowadays also from the Italian Ministry for Education. As mentioned several times in the 'National Recommendations for Curriculum' (a national document that all Italian schools should refer to in order to design the curricula for their students), schools should be welcoming places which the students have been involved in creating. As a matter of fact, the wellbeing conditions at school need to be ensured "in order to achieve the greatest amount of participation of children and young people in a shared educational project".

From **pre-school**, the participation of children needs to be enhanced by promoting their **direct involvement**, favouring the **expression of their opinions** to motivate choices and behaviours. Moreover, their **participation** should be characterised "as a dimension which allows for the formation and development of **relations of co-responsibility**, for the fostering of **dialogue** and for **cooperation** within the creation of knowledge" (2007, p. 30).

The **first cycle of schooling** (primary and middle school) "promotes the conscious practice of **active citizenship**" and uses "disciplinary skills for one's personal self-fulfillment" and for one's **active participation** in social life. The aim of active citizenship needs to be developed through experiences that enable students to exercise their "duty



to **choose and act in a conscious way** and which imply the duty to develop ideas and promote actions aiming at the continuous improvement of one's life context" (2007, p. 44).

Schools should also promote the **participation of students in public functions** – in the various forms that these can take. The active involvement of students can be supported within a wide range of 'spaces' within schools: the design of curricula (which should occur as shared projects by the members of the school community), to evaluation (where educational **co-responsibility** should take place among **all** the actors/authors of school life). The first aim of the educational system is to "form citizens able to consciously take part in the creation of wider and increasingly diverse collectivities, may they be national, European or worldwide" (2012, p. 6).

The entire text of the Recommendations is dominated by the principle that students should develop **the ethos of responsibility**, in contexts where they can choose and act with awareness, and **personally commit** themselves to the development of ideas and actions aimed at the continuous improvement of their own life contexts.

The idea that emerges is of schools as a 'common good' – and of the subsequent **responsibility of all**, including the students, towards this.

## Some promising experiences in a dull panorama

In spite of these illuminating documents and of an Italian pedagogic history characterised by the presence of very important and enlightened precursors of the Student Voice perspective (such as Maria Montessori, Don Milani and the School of Barbiana, Lamberto Borghi, scholar of Dewey, Loris Malaguzzi and the 'Reggio Children'), too many Italian schools today do not seem to be sensitive to the importance of giving pupils an increasingly central role within school processes.

Unfortunately, across the country, too many young students at school are still simply seen as 'numbers': children who know that they must go to school to listen carefully to lessons, do activities in the best possible way, make their greatest effort to study, and show the best results in terms of performance. What they think about the school and their surrounding environment,

how they may contribute actively and intentionally to the processes that take place there, what role they may have in their school life (which is a place that, for many years, will still represent their everyday life) – these are all aspects that seem to matter little to schools that pay scant attention to them.

However we have to acknowledge that some encouraging experiences, that move away from this dull panorama, do exist in the contexts of educational research and the world of school.

In the first Italian book dedicated to Student Voice, mentioned previously, we can observe the emerging interest of a group of young Italian educational researchers who acknowledge students as research partners and emphasise the need to listen to them in order to better understand educational contexts.

At a school level, practices of a student voice perspective do exist, particularly in primary schools, even though they have not been specifically identified as 'student voice' experiences due to the scant knowledge and diffusion of this perspective in Italy.

Therefore, in the second half of this article, I will offer a little picture of these practices, by describing some particular activities taking place in a Northern Italian primary school.

## An example: participatory teaching

In a little village near Treviso, North Italy, one primary school provides an illuminating model of a 'democratic school' where 'student voice' practices are at the core of all processes. In this school, all participants try to build, day-to-day, a 'democratic community'. What they pursue is a different distribution of power among all participants in the school community.

This intention is realised in particular in the context of classrooms. All participants of a class – teachers and students together – make continuous efforts to realise practices based on "**co-planning**" (Mercadante, 2007), where aims, proposals, and activity plans are not



the prerogatives of only one subject, the teacher, but responsibilities for all of these activities are completely distributed.

According to the '**participatory teaching**' logic, this approach needs to be extended to all moments of everyday school life: from the sharing of the results of evaluations, to the identification of the aims to be pursued; from the discussion of the learning processes, to the choice of the content to be learnt; from the planning of the activities that will take place, to their organisation.

It is actually within this possibility, "in the presence at the same time of a great number of perspectives", that changes to the teaching perspective can be located. The way in which we stay at school is not 'solitary' anymore: "I, the student who carries out the activities that I have been told to do", or "I, the teacher who prepares the lessons, while directing and imposing my point of view". It becomes a choral activity. Pupils and teachers discuss with each other and share the rules of the game. By working as such during the class, "whoever is giving the lesson is the person who is conveying an opinion or a point of view and it can be the teacher and also the student after having thought and prepared the message to be conveyed in that situation and selected the most suitable code: in this way both can communicate information and aims."

So that this can occur, the teacher should pursue democratic leadership and guarantee:

- The communication and the conversation space as a routine and recurring moment;
- The actual adoption of points of view by everyone, in order to be able to change one's own which needs to be adapted continuously to the context;
- The timing and the modes of participation.



## Communication and conversation spaces as routine and recurring moments

The communication and conversation space is the interface that allows for the opening of a dialogue window between the thoughts of the teacher and those of the students. It is the environment in which the thoughts of everyone meet and interact – of those who want to speak and of those who want to remain silent, to listen and to speak afterwards. Here a communicative feedback is created as a “communication space where each person understands the sense of the discourse” (De Vecchi 2007, p. 240). All of this allows for the creation of the conditions for a democratic environment.

In order for everyone to actually understand the content of what is being said and for authentic communication and reciprocal understanding to take place (which is the basis for co-participation), a continuously open dialogue window is needed in order to acquire the habit of speaking, of expressing oneself, of gaining awareness of ‘what is being said when one speaks’, of extracting hidden meanings and of discussing statements that are so clear that they seem not to need further explanations. In this codified space, the rules and the content of communication are widely shared and decided together. It is of fundamental importance to listen and to be listened to; it is a space where one can move and go beyond the uni-directionality of one’s stay at school. The uni-directionality of the teacher means that sometimes he or she says sentences that are ‘very clear’ (such as “*The test did not go well*”; “*Write the text well*”; “*Behave properly*”) but that actually may not have a great impact on the listener and on students who tend to answer or say what is expected from them.

The meaning of the communication is not considered anymore as a stable and univocal entity, but is the result (that is only partially achievable) of attempts of intention sharing, in which the context, the function and the interactive dimension, the recurring dialogue, allows for the fine-tuning of knowledge and for the appropriation of all the shades of the same thought. In this sense the recurrence of these moments favours the co-creation of meanings, of knowledge specific to the class, to that context, to

those children who interact with one another and with the teacher, within a continuous repetition and recurrence of concepts, phases of a project and shared indicators. In this sense the teacher lets a narration take place gradually, where the actors become co-authors of the narration.

## The timing and the modes of having and giving voice: co-planning

When co-planning the teaching process, various phases follow each other to establish a continuous dialogue between the teacher’s thoughts and those of the children. Each have questions that design the itinerary that needs to be followed. At this point it is important to highlight the fundamental role of the ‘*questions*’ in a communicative exchange. Just as in philosophy, the questions are important “because they open up the problem, whose solution often depends on the way the questions have opened the problem” (Galimberti, 1988, p.44, vol 1.).

The co-planning process takes place in three separate phases:

- **Phase I: the sharing of meanings and the co-creation of knowledge through the adoption of the points of view of everyone**

This first phase is very important because it gives everyone the opportunity of expressing themselves and provides the basis for the subsequent communicative exchanges. The possibility of reasoning together on a concept that will be discussed in that period, embraces the unique value of representing a common heritage of ideas. The various statements of the children and the teacher allow for the collection of the many sides of the concept in question and for enriching one’s own point of view. In this phase the teacher, together with the class, accomplishes two very important activities: the various ideas are integrated with other definitions and formalisations; and the teacher re-organises them eg in a map. This activity is of fundamental importance because it places everyone in the situation of knowing what they are talking about, it enables everyone to express themselves and expand their horizon of knowledge, and enables

all to envisage and understand the work that will be done afterwards.

- **Phase II: the sharing of grading criteria and of assessment and self-assessment modes**

In this second phase, all those activities which the teacher ‘normally’ does in solitude and away from pupils’ eyes, emerge and become explicit: to-do activities, ways of performing activities, assessment criteria. Students directly take part in the planning and organisation of these activities. After having shared and organised everyone’s knowledge during the previous phase, the participants agree on the goals to reach, on the path to undertake and on the criteria that will allow for the evaluation of the potential results to be achieved. Everyone shares and agrees on the assessment/self-assessment framework; everyone is able to assess others and themselves during and at the end of the activities with respect to the co-created criteria.

- **Phase III: from reflection to the new co-planning of activities, timing and modes**

At this point, the teacher and the students, using the assessment data that have been collected, shared and visualised with the entire class, start a reflection on the direction of the activities that they have planned and actually carried out, and share the re-definition of the next goals to achieve.

The table of the goals that have already been achieved, which has been shared and visualised by everyone, allows for the understanding of the strengths of the class and about which points need further ‘investment’ in terms of common effort and working together.

## A brief conclusion

Can we speak about student voice practices in Italy?

A good deal of evidence leads us to hope in this direction. The national documents for the curricula of primary and lower secondary schools in 2007 and in 2012, the actions of some researchers in the field of education, but above all some emerging practices in schools such as those previously briefly described, suggest the existence of a prolific environment for the greater diffusion of the principles and

of the practices that authorise student voice in school contexts.

However the way to go is still long and difficult for 'student voice' to become a significant foundation of Italian pedagogy. We still believe, however, that the premises are suitable and that the achievement of greater awareness and concrete actions is not that far away.

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Danske  
Skoleelever



## Danish Association of Students

The Danish Association of Students is a non-governmental organisation representing all Danish students at the primary and lower secondary schools in Denmark – corresponding to elementary and middle school education in the US. The purpose of our organisation is to create a better school life for all students, through an organisation led by students for students. Overall, we have the best interest of the students in mind when reviewing and responding to topics related to the current agenda of Danish education politics and political statements made in the Danish press, and by and about education stakeholders.

Our focus is to educate students, so they become better positioned to make a difference in their daily school life through their local Student Council. Our second mission is to serve as spokespeople on behalf of the students, especially in regards to new political initiatives relating to the elementary and middle school system of education and its treatment in the media.

Currently, our organisation is involved in a large-scale research and student participation project in cooperation with the Danish Ministry of Education and Aarhus University. The focus of the project is to look at ways to secure democratic involvement of our elementary school student body in the process of planning and evaluating the standards and methods of our academic instruction, with a view to contributing to improving students' academic performance as well as their overall well-being in the school. Furthermore, the Danish Parliament has just approved a large-scale reform, changing our school system, which includes all the Danish elementary and middle schools. Now the task is to introduce the reform in a way agreeable to all stakeholders across the country.

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## Secondary Students in Europe

*In the last issue of **Connect** (206), there was a small item about OBESSU - the Organising Bureau of European Secondary Student Unions. Luke Shore, a student active within the UK StudentVoice organisation and more broadly with European school student movements, and Derry Hannam, a long-time supporter of student organisations both in the UK and Europe generally, swapped some observations about the background and effectiveness of such groups in Europe. This exchange took place through the facebook group: Student Voice Research and Practice (referenced elsewhere in this issue).*

In Brussels this week, the European Students' Union are holding the 27th European Student Convention. 47 national student unions from across Europe are representing the voice of Higher Education students to European Union policy makers at the EESC - European Economic and Social Committee.

The European level student unions ESU and OBESSU cooperate with the European Commission and the European Parliament almost every week. EU policy makers give equal credit to student unions as they do to teachers' unions, business groups etc.

**Luke Shore**

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Luke has up-to-date experience of European policy making in 'education and culture' and can correct me if my impressions are a little obsolete but, in my opinion, the Council of Europe places greater emphasis on the importance of student voice or student participation in decision making in schools and school systems via its Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) project than does the EU.

During the Blair regime, the UK government was quite an active supporter of the CoE EDC project. The problem for the EU is that the treaties of Maastricht and Lisbon exclude education as a policy area for Europe-wide legislation; education policy is totally under the control of member state national parliaments. So even if EU policy were to actively support student voice, this would have no legal effect in the UK for example. The situation is further complicated in the UK by the fact that education policy is further delegated to the parliaments of the four nations of the UK. Having said that, the EU does engage in educational activity through information (EURYDICE) and cultural and practical exchanges of teachers and students (ERASMUS +).

I entirely support Luke's view that both the EU and the Council of Europe (more member states than the EU) are keen to hear the voice of school students through OBESSU (Organizing Bureau of European School Students Unions) which represents many, but not all, student voice organisations in Europe. Ex-officers of OBESSU and its member organisations now work for different parts of the EU bureaucracy and a few are now members of national parliaments. For example two young Norwegians who were active in the Norwegian school students' organisation and OBESSU, with whom I have worked on student voice/school democracy projects in recent years, are now MPs in the Norwegian Storting and are actively supportive of student participation in schools.

(The Norwegians have currently left OBESSU as they feel that it is not sufficiently democratic and of course Norway is not a member of the EU.) Unfortunately the UK school student organisation created in 2005 as ESSA, has left OBESSU as it was felt to be too dependent on adult support - though it has recently relaunched as 'Student Voice' with its first conference in London in June/July and hopefully it will reapply to join OBESSU.

**Derry Hannam**

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Just to add to what Derry says: it's exactly right, education is still entirely a national competence, so the EU can make recommendations, guidelines and frameworks but it doesn't have the legal authority to make education law. Nevertheless, the EU has an education programme (Erasmus+) worth (I think) 14.9bn EUR over the next seven years. In higher education, the picture is slightly different (better?) because it's already more internationalised and, through things like the Bologna Process, the ESU can have quite some influence on higher education policy in Europe.

The Council of Europe are indeed more supportive of student voice; necessarily, because two of their three central tenets are democracy and human rights. The CoE actively support youth participation, they have a 20-strong Advisory Council on Youth made up of European youth NGOs, they maintain two European Youth Centres (one in Strasbourg and one in Budapest) that are residential educational establishments where European NGOs can run international training courses, and they support projects through the EYF, the European Youth Foundation.

The current (and perpetual) big debate in our circles, between student representatives and the institutions, is over education as a human right and public good versus education as an economic good - as a tool to remedy skills mismatch and reduce youth unemployment. This is a debate that's especially strong with the European Commission. UNESCO and the CoE are really the only two institutions that support education as a public good, but they are also the two least powerful. So they are happy to partner with us but for the political influence, we have to try and persuade the more neoliberal EU.

**Luke Shore**

And just to add to what Luke says: In early 1999 I remember sitting in a dingy room in Strasbourg with an Irish priest and one or two others with heavy snow falling outside, drafting what became Key Issue 6 of Appendix III of the May 1999 Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Budapest Declaration celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Europe, which reads: 'learning democracy in school and university life, including participation in decision making and the associated structures of pupils, students and teachers.' You can still haul it off the CoE website - and someone must have read it because it was signed by the UK foreign minister, Robin Cook, and caused some irritation in the Education Ministry as they had not been consulted over the wording. Student participation moved ahead through the Citizenship curriculum in the following years in England - though since the change of government in 2010 it is in reverse sadly.

**Derry Hannam**



# Get your meetings in order

## The art of doing business as a Student Council

Over the last few weeks, I have been coaching another teacher who is new to the role of SRC Teacher Adviser. They have gone about the process of recruiting their team and are now trying to get their Student Council functioning like a well-oiled machine. Meetings play an important part in helping that machine to function. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your meetings with your Student Council.

### BEFORE THE MEETING:

**Organise a chairperson:** The role of the chairperson is to direct the flow of the conversation. Your SRC may have a set student who chairs each meeting or may decide to rotate the chairperson to give all students the experience.

**Develop the agenda:** An agenda outlines what is going to be discussed during the meeting and in what order. As the SRC Teacher Adviser, I like to develop the agenda in consultation with the student/s who will be chairing the meeting. This allows me to 'brief' these students on some topics prior to the meeting so they are aware of any background information that they can share when they are running the meeting. (The less talking I can do as the Teacher Adviser, the better!)

**Confirm the date/time/location:** You may need to let others know about your meeting in advance. Depending on your school, you may also need to book the room you are using to hold your meeting.

**Prepare the materials:** Make sure copies of the agenda (and previous meeting minutes) are available for all attendees. Depending on the number of people attending the meeting, you may like to have a sign-in sheet to assist you in taking attendance.

As a person attending a meeting, it's also important that you come prepared. Bring along any information, facts or details based on topics on the agenda. Read through the previous meeting minutes so you are aware of what was discussed and check that any tasks you needed to undertake have been completed.

### DURING THE MEETING:

**Start the Meeting:** Make sure the meeting starts on time. Students and teachers are all busy people with lots of other commitments. Starting the meeting on time values those who have turned up on time and helps to ensure the meeting finishes at the agreed time.

It is the role of the chairperson to start the meeting. Having some formal process in place for starting the meeting makes it easy for the chair to get the attention of those present. For example, the chairperson may have a gavel or gong that they sound to get everyone's attention. The chair then likes to call for order and 'declare the meeting' open.

**Keep the meeting moving:** Again it is the role of chairperson to help keep the conversation flowing throughout the meeting and manage the process of making decisions. A useful format for facilitating discussion and decisions is:

- Present the proposal/idea and provide information
- Allow an opportunity to ask questions
- Discussion
- Decision
- Next action

**Record the discussion and the decisions:** that take place at the meeting. This document is referred to as the 'minutes' and will help ensure everyone present remembers the decisions made and also lets anyone who couldn't make the meeting read what was discussed and decided.

**Close the meeting:** Most SRCs will have a set date for their meetings, however for groups that meet infrequently, you may wish to lock in the date for your next meeting to ensure everyone is available.

### AFTER THE MEETING:

**Reflection:** Spend some time reflecting on how the meeting went. What worked well? What strategies did the chairperson effectively use to facilitate the discussion and decisions? What changes may need to be made?

**Share the minutes:** Once the meeting has finished, aim to get the minutes out to people as soon as possible. This will remind them to complete any tasks they needed to complete and allow people to check that the document reflects the conversation and decision made while it is still fresh in their memory.

**Follow through:** If you received a job to do at the meeting be sure to complete it before the next meeting. There is nothing worse than sitting in a meeting when nobody has completed any of the tasks, as it prevents things from moving forward.

As the SRC Teacher Adviser, I have found it useful to offer a 'workshop' or check-in time where SRC members can seek support or touch base with me regarding any tasks they need to complete between meetings.

### RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOU:

Section 3.5 of the VicSRC Resource Kit, *Represent!* explores effective meetings in more detail.

The *Meeting Procedures* Resource Kit developed by **Second Strike** also contains further ideas and suggestions about how to improve your meetings.

VISTA has some great resources that can assist you in running effective meetings:

- Developing an agenda flowchart
- Guide to facilitating a discussion in a meeting
- Agenda and Minute Templates

Scott Duncan and Joel Aarons discuss their meeting processes in Episode 6 of **The VISTA Podcast**. Download it from *iTunes* or from [vistapodcast.global2.vic.edu.au](http://vistapodcast.global2.vic.edu.au)

**Scott Duncan**  
VISTA Executive

### CORRECTION:

In the previous edition of *Connect* (Issue 206) we made reference to Episode 7 of **The VISTA Podcast**. Unfortunately, due to poor sound quality of our recording, we were unable to publish this podcast. We hope to re-record our conversation about involving students outside the SRC and bring this episode to you soon.

### VISTA MEET UP:

Be sure to register for our next **VISTA MeetUp** on **Thursday 19th June** from 4:30pm – 6:30pm at **Narre Warren South P-12 College**. It's a great chance to meet, eat and chat with other teachers from schools working in similar roles in an informal and casual environment.

RSVPs are essential so send through your details to us at [vista@srteachers.org.au](mailto:vista@srteachers.org.au)

VISTA currently receives no additional funding to operate its programs and relies heavily on memberships to support its programs. Visit us at <http://srteachers.ning.com> or e-mail us at [vista@srteachers.org.au](mailto:vista@srteachers.org.au) for details on how to join.





## “Where to now?”

### Can it be turned into a smart phone app?

The VCAA produces a guide for students on the range of options available to them in their last two years of secondary school. It is called ‘Where to now?’ The VicSRC asks: Can it be turned into a smart phone app?

On Saturday the 22nd of February, the VicSRC and its Student Executive had the pleasure of meeting with the Director of the VCAA, Mr David Howes. The VCAA (Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority) works with the Department of Education on the structure of curriculum and reporting for students from Grade Prep to Year 10, and most importantly with Year 11, 12 and VCE students.

The Executive and David discussed each of the six resolutions that were prioritised from the 2013 VicSRC Congress, and also asked questions about assessment and learning methods in the secondary system.

This included:

- Creating a student portal, or a secure email or chat room site for VCE students and their subjects, combined with a list of valuable resources with contribution from the VCAA.
- The Australian Curriculum, focusing on the remodelling of both the Victorian Secondary and VCE exams and assessment periods, and the pressures and concerns of exams, the exam layouts and the connection between the content of the exam and the real world.



- Producing a VCAL/VET app (a resolution from the 2012 VicSRC Congress) and the possibility of a partnership with the VCAA to create the app, or a website, Facebook or Twitter page as well.
- The need for more practical and engaging work in the classroom – the lack of this type of learning environment may be causing many students to drop out early – and also the expansion of hands-on learning through a study design.
- School Councils’ opinions on teacher dress codes and ways that could make sure those students have enough input into their school’s recommendations.

The experience was really worthwhile, and was a once in a lifetime opportunity to get more of an insight into the fine print of our education, the logistics about the way we are taught and why we are educated the way we are.

Following our meeting with David Howes, we had the pleasure of meeting with the CEO of the VCAA, Mr John Firth, to further discuss our proposal to turn the VCAA ‘Where to now?’ resource into a smartphone app. If you check out the resource you can see they are already thinking about the same kind of thing.

On behalf of all the Executive, I would like give a big thanks to David Howes and John Firth for meeting with us and listening to the views of students. Their comments were much appreciated and gave us a broader understanding of Victoria’s education system.

**Kristen Sellings**

VicSRC Executive 2013/14



**The VicSRC has rebranded!**

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

[www.vicsrc.org.au/joinin/maillinglist](http://www.vicsrc.org.au/joinin/maillinglist)

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

## Executive Camp, April 2014

From Monday 7th to Wednesday 9th of April, the VicSRC Executive went to camp to plan for Congress, conferences and resolutions. On the first day we worked on strategic planning and decided our aims for the rest of our time as the Executive. Following on from that, we ran our first Congress planning session. The next Congress planning session was the next morning after some time for resolution work. After the Congress planning, we went for a walk down to Point Nepean and gosh was it cold! We came back to camp drenched in water as it was raining so hard, but we toughened it out and did another planning session. Overall the camp was fun, hard-work, wet, but a great experience. Now I feel ready for Congress! Thank you so much to Krista, Roger, Dave, Scott and Claire for coming to the camp; you really made it a fun and exciting experience! Bring on the conferences!

**Bridin Walker**

Exciting, enjoyable and enlightening are merely a few words to describe the VicSRC camp at Bayplay Lodge. We started the camp off with a pile of work and preparation for upcoming events including planning for conferences and of course, **Congress!** Although we had so much to do, we managed to find time to relax and enjoy the scenery as well as allow time for team-bonding experiences and activities that helped us improve our public speaking and confidence and this was beautifully exemplified by the debate on whether the current school structure unlocks the potential of students. All in all, it was an action-packed camp and simply an **exhilarating** experience!

**Qais Sadat**

The camp at Bayplay Lodge was very productive and I had an awesome time with all the other Executive members and supporters. We had lots of sessions to continue planning Congress and to do work on our resolution portfolios. Along with all the planning, we also spent time doing activities that improved on the leadership skills we will need in the future. Throughout the whole camp our group continued to bond and we all worked together to form a great team. I am sooo excited for all the regional conferences and I can't wait to meet all the students across Victoria who intend coming to Congress.

**Emily Smith**



After a few jam packed days of camp, the VicSRC Executive came out with some great results. We were able to sort out a lot of the plans for Congress, prepare for the numerous public speaking forums coming up and get to regroup with our resolution portfolios to see the amazing work that has been done. This camp gave us a chance to bond even closer by working and learning together on how to be better leaders (with guidance from Dave) and become more passionate in our work (with guidance from Roger). Krista was able to pull together a fantastic program that led to myself, Emily and Sammy getting some great directives on how we would continue on with our portfolio on the subject of recording VCE classrooms. I loved getting closer with the group and how close we have formed over the first half of our term in the Executive. Hopefully our progress keeps up its pace in the next few months leading up to Congress so that everyone coming along gets the best possible experience they can, and that you can see this bond in the upcoming regional student conferences.

**Sarah Bibby**

It has been eight months since we first met each other and, up until now, our connection as a team has never been better. After a very long and half-sleepy drive to the camp, we found ourselves in the midst of a full-set schedule which benefitted us to work much further within our roles as ambitious leaders of the VicSRC. As we take steps day by day to finishing our term as an Executive, we also come closer to the major events we thoroughly planned, such as the regional



conferences, and the annual, traditional and foremost event, Congress. Many ideas and designs were thrown across the table as to how we could and would run our functions, and at the same time, bond much greater than ever within this time as a group. We also worked much deeper into our portfolio, both operational and resolutions, which would indicate the impact we've made to schools and the organisation as a whole. Aside from the main work, there were other activities that we happily engaged in, and this training camp proved to be highly productive.

**Ron Garcia**

This camp was not like any other camp. Of course it was fun and it was a time to bond with each and every VicSRC Executive member, but it was thinking time for us. The three days were put aside for planning future meetings we are having such as with the Board of Education, Congress, conferences and our resolutions. Work has been done and we are feeling even more confident that we are representing Victorian students. The camp was memorable during the fun times and tense times. I never knew a group that was as political, loud and opinionated as us!

**Margaret Tran**

The latest VicSRC Executive Training Camp was a really great experience. Throughout the three days, we worked really hard on our Resolution Portfolios, planned for our upcoming presentations and the regional conference, finalised a concrete basic running sheet for Congress 2014, and our debating skills were tested through a gruelling and heated debate about the structure of school, and if it unlocks or locks students' potential. Everyone is getting on really well together, and you can see a huge difference between the Executive at the first camp and now at the latest camp; we are now 'one, big, hardworking, passionate family!' We have evolved into a dedicated and determined team, and a group that will go through everything to have the student body's voices heard!

**Kristen Sellings**

On our last Executive camp for the 13-14 elected Executive, we ventured down by the sea. With lots of Congress preparation done and lots of team building work, we see a clear and bright future for the VicSRC. Even in the rain we enjoyed the outdoors and consulted with others on the health of young Victorians. Truly, it was a great way to kick off the year for all of our work.

**Sammy Chapman**



## Unlocking Potential: *Panel at Bastow Institute*

Today was a very eventful day for members of the VicSRC Executive. With Krista, our co-ordinator, in the morning we made a presentation to the DEECD Board of Education and in the afternoon, we took part in a panel to discuss education issues.

This panel was held by the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership for aspiring school Principals and was hosted by Maxine McKew. It revolved around the question: "Do current school structures allow for students' potential to be unlocked?" The panel included two Victorian Student Representative Council Executive members (Margaret and Qais), a parent voice (Gail McHardy), Principals (Peter Corkill and Esme Capp), an entrepreneur (Adam Smith) and a system improvement expert (Wayne Craig).

It was an interesting night, and began with the Bastow Institute's Bruce Armstrong opening up the panel on the topic of what inhibits students' potential. Many things were discussed such as how the lack of funding stops students from achieving higher and what testing does to students.

Adam Smith said: "there is a perception in schools that if it's not funded then it is not possible. Let's just take a look at 'Pozible' in Education."

It was also noted that the leaders and teachers of education need to engage more with students; the Bastow Institute was applauded for inviting students onto the panel.

Gail McHardy from Parents Victoria stated: "If you take parents on the journey and effectively communicate, you will build your school community".

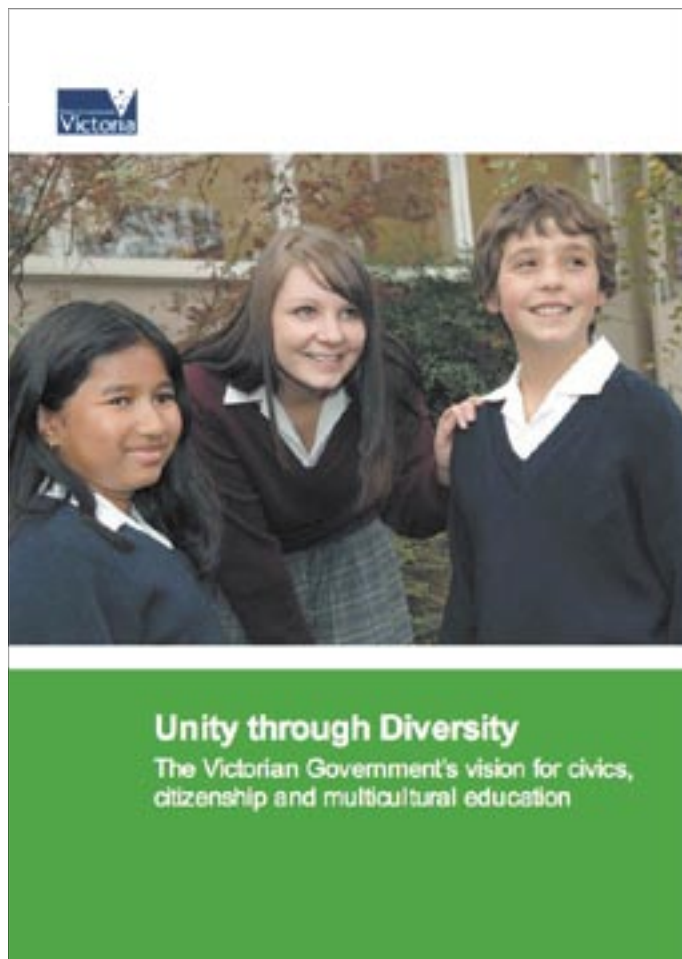
Qais and I, as the two student representatives, spoke about peer to peer learning, on-line education platforms and ongoing integrated assessment. We mentioned the everyday difficulties that we faced as students at school and what restricted us from unlocking our potential.

The panel concluded with many questions from the aspiring principals. I was very surprised to hear the views of principals on such topics of education. Some agreed that we weren't teaching Victorian students the topics that they need. Others said that our education was too inflexible, with teachers being locked in their place as teachers, and not open to suggestions from students. Also, they said that the training to become a teacher in university was not adequate and didn't actually teach you how to teach students, but instead only taught context. It was an amazing opportunity and I thank the Bastow Institute for inviting the Victorian Student Representative Council to attend the event.

**Margaret Tran**







## Unity through Diversity

This Victorian education policy document, issued in March 2014, builds upon national commitments in the Melbourne Declaration around *"citizenship and informed civic participation as the cornerstone of a successful, cohesive and prosperous multicultural, secular and multi-faith society"* (p 3).

With images throughout from the JSC Congress, State Schools' Constitutional Convention and the VicSRC, the document contains explicit mention of active participation in student organisations, conventions and congresses - 'learning democracy by doing democracy'. The section quoted here (right) on page 8 highlights the VicSRC and its work.

The policy also contains commitments to *"authentic opportunities for young people to be involved in decision-making at schools and other education settings and in the community"* (p 12). It highlights **action** to continue support for the range of forums and conventions around active citizenship, and to identifying and publishing case studies of *"leading practice in student voice, civics, citizenship and multicultural education"* (p 13).

The full document can be accessed at: [www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/cultures/unitydiversity.pdf](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/cultures/unitydiversity.pdf)

## Student Representative Councils

*Students develop knowledge and understanding of democratic processes in the classroom and through participation in Student Representative Councils (SRCs). SRCs provide students with the opportunity to actively engage, participate, lead and learn. SRCs enable student voices to be heard and students' interests and concerns to be addressed. SRCs exist in schools across all sectors and regions of Victoria.*

*Victorian students have established their own democratic network of SRCs – the VicSRC. The VicSRC is a student-run organisation working to strengthen SRCs so that they can speak and act on behalf of secondary students in schools and throughout Victoria. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) and receives funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.*

*Student leadership and student voice in schools are also encouraged through programs such as the VicSRC developed student-led professional learning sessions 'Teach the Teacher', which bring students and teachers together to discuss teaching and learning.*

A **resource kit** for students and teachers interested to implement a **Teach the Teacher** program at your school has been developed by the VicSRC. It is part of the **Represent! Plus** resources on the VicSRC website: [www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/representplus](http://www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/representplus)

# Safe Schools Hub

The term '*student wellbeing*' covers a very wide field, from *cybersafety* and *restorative practices* to *playground design*, and there is a bewildering range of online contributions to this important body of knowledge. Some contributions are based on sound experience and evidence from education practitioners, while others are little more than pop psychology.

One enduring policy document is the **National Safe Schools Framework**, which has had the support of all Australian education authorities for over a decade.

This evidence-informed blueprint for whole-school-based student wellbeing initiatives has now been turned into a website. Here, you can watch more than 300 video interviews and case studies from schools, demonstrating good

practice in student wellbeing, and you can undertake an online **School Audit Tool** linked to the elements of the Framework.

There is also an extensive section for students with carefully selected age-appropriate activities and FAQs. The parent section is a useful tool for schools to inform parents about best practice in student wellbeing and to answer their

questions on a range of student wellbeing issues.

Another key feature of the site is professional learning. There are three extensive self-paced online learning packages: one for teachers and school leaders, one for specialist professionals working in schools and a third for pre-service teachers. These offer rich activities for staff meetings and teacher professional development.

The site also has over 650 links to the best online resources on student wellbeing from around the world. It truly is a one-stop shop for everything about student wellbeing. Go to: [www.safeschoolshub.edu.au](http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au)



SAFE  
SCHOOLS  
HUB

We can make a difference by working together to build safe and supportive schools. Starting now.

Schools | Parents | Students

Take a quick tour of the Hub



### Safe Schools Toolkit

Practical examples and resources  
The Safe Schools Toolkit explores the detailed characteristics of the National Safe Schools Framework, providing case studies and an online audit tool to pinpoint the areas of priority. Discover more about the Safe Schools Toolkit.



### For parents

Suggestions and guidelines  
Parents, this part of the Hub is your starting point to get an insight into the National Safe Schools Framework and to explore the wide range of online resources designed for parents.



### For students

The Safe Schools Hub for Students  
Students have their own Safe Schools site, with carefully selected, age-appropriate online resources to engage them in the challenge of creating safe places to learn and grow. Discover more information for students.



SAFE  
SCHOOLS  
HUB FOR STUDENTS





## NSW: Students in School Decision-Making

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People is undertaking research with the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University to find out how students in NSW schools can have more of a say in school related decision making.

The research will:

- explore existing models for student participation, both in Australia and internationally
- analyse their strengths and limitations
- identify the most effective models for NSW schools.

We will also develop a practical resource for schools that helps them to meaningfully involve students in decision-making processes.

[www.kids.nsw.gov.au/What-we-do-for-children/Promote-children-s-participation/Student-Voice/Student-Voice](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/What-we-do-for-children/Promote-children-s-participation/Student-Voice/Student-Voice)

The Commission is also trialing a new approach for including a wider range of children and young people's voices in policy and decision making.

The approach involves carrying out online classroom consultations on specific topics in NSW schools.

The aims of the classroom consultation model are to:

- enable the Commission to consult with a broader range of children and young people
- extend the experience of participation to a larger group of children and young people
- provide a mechanism for the participation of children and young people in policy decisions.

After the Commission evaluates this pilot study, we hope to invite all NSW schools to participate.

Our first classroom consultation sought advice on children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. This consultation also asked young people to tell us how well equipped they are to recognise when their peers are experiencing mental health problems and to provide appropriate referral and support to them.

Please contact us if you would like your school/class to participate in our classroom consultations.

[www.kids.nsw.gov.au/What-we-do-for-children/Promote-children-s-participation/Classroom-Consultation](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/What-we-do-for-children/Promote-children-s-participation/Classroom-Consultation)



Office of  
Communities

Commission for Children & Young People



Save the date

VicSRC Victorian Student Representative Council

Congress 2014

[www.vicsrc.org.au/congress](http://www.vicsrc.org.au/congress)

15-16 August

Lord Somers Camp and Power House

[www.vicsrc-congress.eventbrite.com](http://www.vicsrc-congress.eventbrite.com)



## Student Voice Collaborative, New York



The New York (USA) **Student Voice Collaborative's** year-end event is occurring on Thursday May 29th (4:30 pm; The New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street). Students will be sharing and facilitating conversations around Quality Review Student Shadowing, student-led school improvement campaigns, and a 6-point agenda for systematising student voice across NYC schools. <http://tinyurl.com/pmd4cf7>

Participating schools are: Academy for Young Writers, Baruch College Campus High School, Brooklyn Frontiers High School, Flushing International High School, Institute for Collaborative Education, James Baldwin School, Landmark High School, Murray Hill Academy and School for Tourism and Hospitality.

Ari Sussman  
suss0017@gmail.com

## Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together

YATST recently hosted a conference entitled "*Bridges to Partnership: Youth and Adults Learning new Skills to Redesign Schools*", featuring Dr. Margery Ginsberg. She has worked at Cleveland High School in Seattle, Washington, developing professional development opportunities which include young people.

One conference workshop was entitled: "*Elevating Student Feedback in Instructional Design*", hosted by the Dean of Students and a student at Cleveland High School. They have established a "**Student Instructional Council**". Participants do classroom observations and write an "**Instructional Memo**" to the teacher as a means of feedback. Here is the video of this session, along with a link to the handouts:

video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEBy5ofzPws>

handouts:

[http://www.yatst.com/images/Student\\_Feedback\\_Packet\\_Final.pdf](http://www.yatst.com/images/Student_Feedback_Packet_Final.pdf)

Helen Beattie: <http://yatst.com/>

## Primary School SRC Blogs?

We have established an **SRC Blog** at our school (follow the link to check it out at: <http://alanjohnbrew.global2.vic.edu.au/>). Do other primary school SRCs have such blogs? We'd be interested to see what you do - contact us via the blog.

Alan Brew



## Connect on Facebook

Connect has a presence on facebook. Find us at:

 [www.facebook.com/pages/Connect/360372760717566](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Connect/360372760717566)

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

## Student Voice Research and Practice Facebook Group

[www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/)

This open **facebook** group was initially established by Dana Mitra, and is now supported by the work of academics, practitioners and students throughout the world. It provides a valuable community of people working and interested in the area of 'Student Voice' - in Australia, USA, UK, Italy and elsewhere - as well as access to useful resources and examples, and up-to-date information about initiatives. You can easily log on and join the group at the above address.



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

[www.asprinworld.com/student\\_action\\_teams](http://www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams)

# Connect Publications: Order Form

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... copies	<i>SRC Pamphlets Set</i> (2 sets available) \$	\$ 6.60	\$ 5.50*	\$ .....

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# Clearinghouse

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## Donate to support *Connect*

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

## ASPRINworld: the *Connect* website!

[www.asprinworld.com/connect](http://www.asprinworld.com/connect)

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

*Connect* is now also  
archived and available electronically:  
[research.acer.edu.au/connect](http://research.acer.edu.au/connect)

All issues of *Connect* are being archived through the ACER Research Repository: *ACEReSearch*. *Connect* issues from #1 to #194 are available for **free** download, and recent issues can be searched by key terms. See the *ASPRINworld* site for index details of recent issues, then link to and download the whole issue you are interested in.

[www.informit.com.au](http://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.

[www.asprinworld.com/connect](http://www.asprinworld.com/connect)  
&  
[research.acer.edu.au/connect](http://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 at *Connect*.

### Australian:

**FSP e-Newsletter** (Family School Partnerships, Catholic Education Office, East Melbourne, Vic) Issue 16; Term 1, 2014

**TLN Journal** (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 21 No 1; Autumn 2014

**Unity through Diversity** (DEECD, Melbourne Vic) March 2014

**Yikes!** (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 14 Edition 1; April 2014

### International:

**Educators and youth activists: A negotiation over enhancing students' role in school life** (Cynthia Taines; in *J Educ Change* 2014: 15: 153-178)

**Rethinking Schools** (Milwaukee, WI, USA) Vol 28 No 3; Spring 2014

## '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](http://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](http://www.asprinworld.com/connect)



Articles from *Connect* are now discoverable through **EBSCOhost** research databases.



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# Connect On-Line!

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

You can find these issues of **Connect** at:

**research.acer.edu.au/connect**

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

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



## Let us know

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

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