

## Part 2:

# ReThinking Student Councils

*In this section, we discuss some **challenges** to Student Councils - their structures, their powers, their operations...*

## What's Wrong with SRCs and JSCs?

Let's recognise that at least some of these important criticisms of Student Councils can be true:

- they're **elitist**: involving only a small number of the already successful students;
- they're **trivial**: dealing with relatively unimportant issues in the school, not consulted on important issues and stuck in charity fund-raising;
- they're **unconnected**: to students generally, and to the important decisions and decision-making structures of schools;
- they're **non-curricular**: not recognised as part of the school's teaching and learning;
- they're **ineffective**: having little real impact, and leaving school structures, approaches and relationships unchanged.



We need to hear stories about SRCs and JSCs that:

- **overcome elitism**: actively involving the whole student body, particularly the full range of students who are not otherwise involved or experiencing success;
- **reject trivia**: challenging restricted agendas; examining the most important issues facing the school; working on models of 'change not charity';
- **are connected**: recognised and integrally part of the decision-making structures of the school;
- **are part of the curriculum**: concerned with learning; recognised as part of an educational program; going beyond 'voice' and 'representation' to support broader student participation and action on important matters;
- **are effective**: in reviewing, challenging and changing the ways that schools operate, and in the creation and development of local and school communities.

**We're committed to developed and supporting effective SRCs and JSCs!**

**We're committed to sharing practical examples of approaches that go beyond these limitations and criticisms!**

**Do one or more of the criticisms describe your SRC or JSC?  
Are you unhappy with an ineffective SRC/JSC?  
Does it have to be that way?**

**What are you doing about it?  
Are you ready to take the next steps?**

# Angela's Story

During our action research for the *Alienation to Encouragement* project, we conducted many interviews with students about their transition from primary school to secondary school. Our aim was to get the students' perspectives about our transition programs, orientation days etc, which we thought were excellent. We really wanted to find out which of our programs 'engaged' students and which were 'alienating', so we could make some small adjustments to the programs. We were not looking for any information about the formal participation of secondary students in decision making. The Student Representative Council (SRC) is an unquestioned structure in most secondary schools in Australia. Our action research was not concerned with what was seen to be a very workable way of representing students' opinions.

Wow: did we get a hit between the eyes! I interviewed Angela, then in her second year of high school - an articulate, above average student, who had never been in any kind of trouble, one of the secondary students who is at the school, but not noticed for anything in particular.

Angela was from one of our small local primary schools. My first question to Angela was about her experiences in the first year of secondary school, and how our programs had helped/hindered her to settle into high school. She gave the usual evaluation: visits to secondary schools were good; our talks at her primary school gave her a lot of information etc.

My second question to her was about what made her happy in secondary school and what made her sad. I was writing whilst listening and happily taking notes on fairly standard responses. Then Angela talked about what made her sad. **She started to raise the volume of her voice, and with great emotion told me a story of the deskilling of her leadership, the anger and alienation she felt about the lack of opportunity to use her leadership skills.** All because secondary schools 'elect' only 10-15 students to the only leadership body for students: the SRC.

Angela told how in primary school they had class meetings where every student participated and you could practise and develop your leadership skills. Your participation wasn't based on being popular or the best in the class: everyone had a go. You could pick what level of

participation you wanted, what you felt comfortable with, but everyone had the opportunity and everyone participated at some level.

I stopped writing and listened intently. Angela continued. She had participated at the highest level: she helped organise various student presentations, she met with the Principal regularly, and the students were involved in some decisions about their work in the classroom. Angela painted a picture of a student using her skills to the fullest, learning about leadership and participating fully in her school.

"What happened when I came to secondary school?" she angrily asked me. Not waiting for my reply, she launched into a story of a student alienated by secondary structures. A deep, hurtful alienation that was powerful in its hurt and emotion.

She told me how we elected 12 students to the SRC: the students voted - wow! What about the other 400+ students: what about their leadership skills? And how could she possibly get elected to the SRC? She was from a small primary school and not many students knew her. And why should you have to be known? "What does 'known' mean?" she asked. "Popular, pretty ... what? What happens to the rest of us? You don't have class meetings in secondary school; the SRC seems more concerned about where to place the Coke machine. The SRC reps just come to our classroom and say: 'what do you think of this? ... vote yes or no ... OK ... thanks.' That's the SRC! Even if it was more

representative than this, why is it only for the select few? Why?"

No answer from me.

Angela said: "I loved participating in my primary school, but I feel I have lost those skills in secondary school. I do my work, I don't get into trouble, but I'm not really part of the school. I'm not one of the chosen 12."

The tears rolled down her face ... and mine. This is alienation that the research never talks about. It was right here in front of me. She challenged me to check it out with other students, and to ask them about their feelings of alienation.

I did. The following year, with the aid of a national grant, we conducted an intensive Action Research project about leadership and participation in the early years of secondary school. The conclusions were:

- 98% of secondary students felt like Angela: their voices didn't matter; they weren't heard;
- The students made a plea for a new look at student participation. They thought the SRC was elitist, out of date. All student voices should be heard;
- Everyone should have the opportunity to participate at a level of leadership appropriate to their skills, with the opportunity to move in and out of the structures set up to represent them.

I can only say that we at Paralowie School have been, and still are, on the most wonderful journey of releasing our students from their hidden alienation and that we are benefiting enormously from listening to all student voices, not just a select few.

The journey is not complete. We are still evaluating our new look student-teacher designed Student Forum, but I hope I never hear Angela's story again.

Gael Little

*Angela's Story is taken from Connect 115, February 1999. At the time, Gael Little was head of the Middle School at Paralowie R-12 School, Whites Road, Paralowie SA 5108*

## 2.1 Student Council Structures

### The Challenge:



...unrepresentative  
...elitist ...the same old students

"Relatively few students get to be representatives. Who gets chosen depends on how representatives are selected eg it can easily be a 'popularity contest' with those elected having few ideas and little commitment. Or, if an emphasis is placed on competitive elections (speeches, campaigns etc), those elected will be the already able, articulate, empowered students - and unconfident, different, marginalised, inarticulate students will not be elected. The same few students continue to get opportunities and to be called upon to 'represent' all. We also know that girls are more likely to be elected than boys, but that boys disproportionately take higher profile, higher power positions."

#### Possible Strategy 1:

Limit the terms of Student Council members - eg change members every 6 months - to enable more students to be representatives; the consequence is, however, that students do not have the time to develop in-depth skills.

#### Possible Strategy 2:

Make a conscious effort to involve students - as individuals and groups - who don't usually get represented on the Student Council. This might be on the basis of ability, or background, or age. See the articles here from South Australia's *Open Access School* and from the SRCs at *Millicent North PS (SA)* and *James Fallon HS (NSW)* for three examples of such approaches.

#### Possible Strategy 3:

Increase the role and importance of democratic classroom or home group meetings. Encourage all classes at all levels to hold these regularly. See the articles on *Classroom Meetings* in the Appendix, originally from **Connect** 142 (August 2003) for lots of ideas on how to do it.

#### Possible Strategy 4:

Develop whole school student discussions and forums which explore what the important issues are, support student discussion around these, and result in the formation of action committees of interested and involved students to follow them up. See the article on *DART* (following pages).

#### Possible Strategy 5:

There are many different structures for Student Councils: ways in which you get to be a member (nominated, elected, volunteered), and ways in which Councils can operate. Each approach has positive and negative features. See the long article reprinted here, originally in **Connect** 133-134 (February-April, 2002) on *Organising for Success: Structures for Student Councils*.

#### Possible Strategy 6:

Set up the Student Council as a cross-age roll-group or home-group. This provides regular time to meet every week - even every day - to plan and organise activities. It also locates the SRC as a recognised part of the school on the daily timetable. But time also needs to be found to report to and get input from other students; be careful not to separate and isolate Student Council students from the wider study body they represent! See the article about *Kelso High School*, NSW in **Connect** 141 (June 2003).

#### Possible Strategy 7:

Diversify the range of decision-making and action committees that students are elected, appointed or volunteered to. Make sure that these deal with all the real tasks and decisions around the school. For examples, see the information about *Student Forum at Paralowie R-12 School (SA)* in **Connect** 117 (June 1999), and also the article here from *Melaleuca Park Schools*.

# DART = Discussion Action Representation Thought



Being elected democratically to the SRC does not automatically mean you are representative of the student body. It means you have been asked to be a representative - which is different. In order to actually be a representative you need to be able to:

- collect opinions from all the people you claim to represent; and
- report back to these same people on what you are doing about their concerns.

Schools seem to have no end to the methods a student can use to communicate their progress back to the students, especially for a creative SRC member, and yet there is little avenue for listening to the students. SRCs must create a culture of listening, and not just telling.

Believing that, because the representative is also a student, they will therefore 'know' or have a better feel for what the student body is thinking, defeats the point of representation. We would be terrified if an Australian politician openly announced that he or she was an adult human and therefore could adequately represent the rest of the population because of that. That's not how democracy works, and it is essential that students make the same demands of their Student Councils or run the risk of trivialising them.

Gathering opinions from students can and should be done in a number of ways, from simply talking to people to running surveys. Six schools in Banyule went further.

The **DART Forums**, a project created by Banyule City Council Youth Service, are about SRCs talking to all the students in the school and determining their agenda for the year based on the student feedback. DART stands for **Discussion, Action, Representation and Thought** - the essential components of a functioning SRC. This was created out of a frustration at state and national forums that claimed to genuinely represent all young people - and yet again only two students out of all of Banyule's ten thousand attend.

A **DART Forum** typically takes two periods to run and takes the place of normal classes at that time. Beginning in a hall or auditorium where the SRC will explain the concept of the forums, the students are then separated into groups of about ten and taken to different rooms right across the school. The Student Council members, with a few specially selected assistants, facilitate the discussions of each group for the next hour or so, unaided by staff except upon request. The facilitators receive several sessions of training prior to the forum to do this job - without doubt the toughest part of the day, and the most rewarding.

The traditional reporting back session concludes the forum, at the end of which the SRC find their arms

overflowing with recording sheets and butchers paper filled with opinions, ideas, suggestions and sometimes some pretty cool drawings. It can take a while to filter through all this information but, at the end of it, the SRC has a very clear picture of what the rest of the school is thinking. This is what a 'grass roots connection' actually means!

Following a DART forum is the opportunity for schools to join forces and have their collective views - of all students, not just some token representatives - presented to the Local Government and a range of other relevant groups.

These forums are challenging in many ways but are basically easily organised, especially when the school grows into this process and really values this communication. SRCs can use such a forum as a sounding board for their ideas, canvassing students on issues around the school, determining whether to spend their energies on fixing facilities or changing school policy: what interests students most? This is also a fantastic publicity tool, showing the SRC really listening and genuinely responding, rather than making the classic mistake: "Of course I know what students want - I am one."

**David Mould**

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For more information on how to run a DART forum, contact Peter Sartori at Banyule City Council on 03 9457 9938 or [Peter.Sartori@banyule.vic.gov.au](mailto:Peter.Sartori@banyule.vic.gov.au)



## Involving Younger Students

At our school, we have a very successful SRC. It successfully organises school fundraisers, discos and special events.

School Captains are elected by the whole school student body at the beginning of the school year.

We think that SRCs need more communication with the younger students in the meetings. They tend not to speak out in meetings because they are intimidated by the older students. We think the School Captains should have a special meeting with the junior primary representatives. That will give younger students' perspectives of what they want in our school. It will also give them confidence to speak out in front of groups because they feel comfortable with people their own age.

**SRC, Millicent North Primary School**  
Second Street, Millicent SA 5280

The previous pages, and others that follow under the theme of 'Facing the Challenge' were originally included in **Connect** 145-146, February-April 2004. Two years previously, in **Connect** 133-134 (February-April, 2002), the following extended article provided an overview, with examples, of different possible structures for Student Councils.

# Organising for Structures for Student Councils Success

## What's the ideal structure for an effective Student Council?

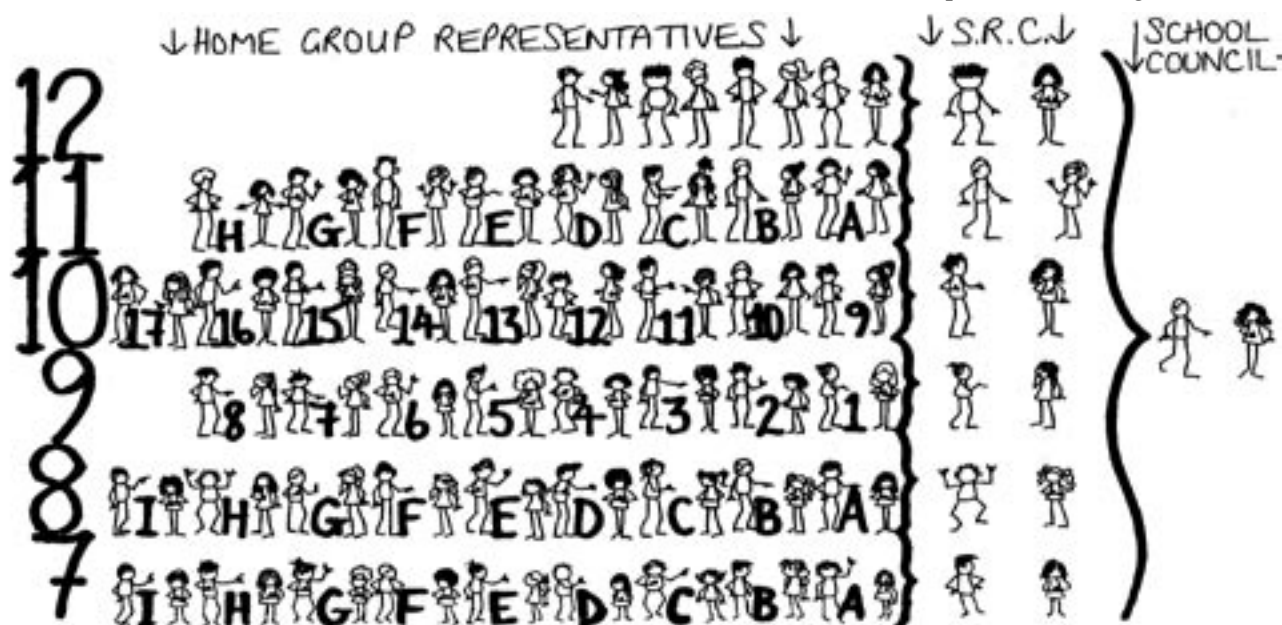
In some ways that's an impossible question to answer - it depends on the school situation and characteristics (size, other structures, resources and activities and so on), the role of the Student Council, the nature of support in the school and the history of student participation in that school and community. But it's still a frequently asked question. So, here's an attempt over the next few pages, to define some of the possibilities - and the questions you might need to be asking yourself.

First, I think there are some basic **principles**:

- The Student Council is a **student** organisation, and thus must be 'owned' by students and driven by their needs and wants. The structure must make sense to them, be one they have 'invented' and serve their needs.
- Issues of **equity** must be considered: the Student Council cannot be 'captured' by one particular group in the school and lock other students out of participation. It cannot be a small, isolated and separated group; this is also a practical question if it is to be able to operate with student support.

- The Council must be **practical** and able to do things. This means that attention to functions and structures are essential - it must be able to get on with its work; it also means that structures must pay attention to issues such as the amount of student and teacher time available.
- The Council must be **supported**: one or more staff advisors who are interested, accepted by the Student Council, and recognised by the school administration, need to be provided and resourced; students also need to be provided with time and resources (space, funds, training etc).

The practices of a Student Council are then always open to challenge around these principles, in considering how well the Student Council is operating. Are students in control? Is it representative? Is it functioning efficiently? Does it have support? Good Student Councils are always reflecting on and reviewing their operation, and considering possible changes to their structures. Just because 'it has always been like that' doesn't mean that it has to continue that way. Just because it worked this year, doesn't mean it'll continue to work after the current personnel have gone.



... and beyond

# How do you get to be on the Student Council?

There are four basic options for the appointment of students to the Student Council. Each has pros and cons:

- students are **elected** by students;
- students **apply** and are chosen (eg by a selection panel);
- students **volunteer**;
- students are persuaded to join or are **co-opted** because of their skills or interests.

These measures should be specified in the Student Council's constitution, so that everyone is clear as to how these processes happen.

In practice, many schools use a combination of these approaches, for example where criteria are made public, students must present an application, and an election is held, plus other interested students can be co-opted to the Council or to its working groups.

## Election:

*Students nominate or are nominated, present reasons (speeches or in writing) and an election is then held by the appropriate body (class, year level etc), either publicly (hands up) or privately (ballot papers). Usually a fixed quota of students is to be elected from a group and this is specified in the Council's constitution.*

### Positives

- traditionally democratic;
- can ensure all classes and /or grades are represented;
- can be linked to learning about parliamentary processes;
- often builds on models already existing in primary schools.

### Negatives

- easily becomes a popularity vote;
- some groups may not wish to elect a representative;
- some groups may have several people interested;
- forming reasonably sized electing groups can result in a large Council.

## Volunteers:

*The Student Council is advertised and interested students turn up; a commitment may be asked for (eg students have to turn up for the whole year) or membership may vary from meeting to meeting.*

### Positives

- maximises student interest;
- likely to get a group that understands the function of the Council;
- usually a more manageable group.

### Negatives

- can be dominated by an in-group or a group with a specific agenda;
- can be un-representative;
- can be subject to passing enthusiasms.

## Application and appointment:

*Students apply for positions on the Council, usually in writing and giving reasons; a selection panel is then set up (teachers, past-Student Council members, administration, outside 'friend' etc) and applicants are interviewed (as for a job); appointments are made by the panel.*

### Positives

- can focus commitment;
- can make sure applications are examined carefully;
- can specify criteria;
- encourages students to keep records of their involvement and learn how to apply for things in a positive way.

### Negatives

- may choose only already competent, confident and advantaged students (who can present good applications);
- can mean that those already involved select their mates;
- can move control away from students;
- can ignore the benefits from 'non-conventional' students.

## Co-option:

*Students with specific skills or interests are identified by past Student Council members, teachers or the current Student Council and approached; they are invited and/or persuaded to join the Council, either long-term or short-term (and either with or without a formal vote).*

### Positives

- encourages talented individuals to use their skills in different ways;
- flexible – can deal with short-term appointments;
- broadens the appeal and profile of the Council.

### Negatives

- can mean only a clique get invited;
- may invite on someone who is destructive to processes;
- can mean people are persuaded to serve unwillingly.



# Possible Student Council Structures

The following is an attempt to suggest some general models. Variations with these exist, and it is possible to put together your own model drawing on bits from each of these.

## Home-Group Based Model (Traditional)

There is a single group: the Student Council. It is composed of a set number of students drawn from each class, home group or roll group. Usually the class votes annually for representatives (often two, so that a girl and a boy are elected; often also appointing representatives and deputy representatives). Sometimes there are discussions within the class group about the characteristics of good representatives.

The Council then meets regularly (fortnightly, monthly) as one team, makes decisions, usually appoints an Executive (a smaller group drawn from the whole body, which meets in between main meetings to put decisions into action), and organises activities. If there are student representatives on the School Council, they are drawn from the Student Council.

### Positives

- All classes are represented;
- There is a direct link between representatives and school units, and this facilitates voting/reporting back;
- The structure can encourage home group meetings, discussion and decision-making;
- There are usually regularly timetabled opportunities for discussion with the student body without having to negotiate with individual teachers and classes;
- The majority of staff are more likely to be aware that the Student Council exists and that it is doing something.

### Negatives:

- As soon as school gets beyond about 400 students, appointing a Council in this way creates a large body, which has difficulty meeting and working together;
- Some classes might not want to have representatives;
- Classes or home groups may not be the natural or best basis for appointment – they may not be focused on students' action on issues;
- Relatively small numbers of students involved – can lead to elitism and separation from the general student body;
- Can easily lead to a popularity context within the home-room, or a 'dobbed-in' job for the least popular student to an ineffective body.

## Sub-School Model

The structure is based in separate sub-school Councils (sub-schools might be 'vertical units' or year-levels or a junior-middle-senior breakdown and the Councils follow this structure eg a Junior School Student Council, or a 'Red Unit Student Council'). There may be a single overall Coordinating Council that links discussion and action between the Councils. A set number of students are drawn from each sub-school (eg a whole year level votes for a group of student representatives from that year). The sub-school Councils meet to discuss issues relevant to that sub-school; they might also occasionally meet as a whole school Council, or a smaller number of representatives from each sub-school form the Coordinating Student Council.

Similar processes of appointing an Executive and student representatives to School Council occur as for the first model.

### Positives

- All areas of the school are represented;
- Student numbers in each group are smaller and hence meeting processes are easier;
- More students can be involved at different levels;
- Links exist to reporting back (eg at assemblies);
- Senior Student Council members can play important mentoring roles with other students and groups.

### Negatives:

- Appointment and reporting back can be more distant from students (eg 300 students at a year level voting for students they don't know);
- Still relatively small numbers of students involved;
- More open to popularity contests and to appointment of only advantaged, literate, competent students;
- Where sub-schools are 'horizontal', can isolate junior students from opportunities to learn from senior students.

## Working Groups Model

A multiplicity of groups are formed by and from the Student Council to create a larger 'Student Forum' structure. Students are drawn from home or class groups or sub-school groups as above, but nominate for and are appointed to specific positions or portfolios. Thus a range of bodies is created by students according to need eg an Activities group, a Canteen group, a Curriculum group, a Fundraising group and so on. All year levels may be represented on these groups, or some may concentrate within some year levels. The working groups may be continuing committees or short-term groups; they may also change from time to time. Working groups may also involve or co-opt other students for expertise and interest.

A coordinating group or Executive also exists, and is simply one of many examples of student participation. The Student Forum (whole structure) may meet alternately in whole session and in working groups.

School Council representatives may be elected directly by the whole student body, may be a specific portfolio within the Student Forum, or may be drawn from the Executive.

### Positives:

- *Larger numbers of students can be involved;*
- *The student structure can reflect broader school structures;*
- *Can spread out the Council over a range of activities and not get bogged down in one type of activity such as social activities or fund-raising;*
- *It can involve a range of support teachers who work already in these areas;*
- *It formalises existing activity groups within the school (social service, canteen, sports etc).*

### Negatives:

- *It can be time intensive for students and teachers, particularly in providing support for a range of groups;*
- *Sub-groups can lose sight of the 'big picture' and their potential place in it;*
- *Only some students get to make the 'big decisions' of overall coordination and advocacy;*
- *Can make on-going or long-term projects more difficult to sustain.*



As students, we often feel that what we have to say is ignored. I've just finished Year 12, and I fought to be heard all the way through school. The fact of the matter is that everyone feels ignored if you speak alone. The trick is to work together, find other students with like views, convince a staff member to agree - together is where a difference is made. It should never be that a student fights so hard for their voice to be heard that they lose the support of staff. As students fighting for our voices to be heard, my friends and I learnt that you have to work with, and accept help from, as many sources as possible. The trick is always to stay in charge and keep your goals in mind. Students can achieve anything: the proof is all around us. Student voice means active students, students in charge of their lives, students being heard. It doesn't mean students alone!

**Beth Atkinson**, ex-SRC student, Sale College, Vic

## Interest Group Model

This has similarities to the previous model, but the areas of interest and activity already exist within the school. Instead of using home or class groups or sub-schools as the basis for appointing students, existing involvement areas (where students volunteer for participation) each appoint a representative to form a Student Council. Student representatives to the School Council are appointed by a separate process (eg directly elected from the whole student body).

Again, the existing interest groups continue to meet, alternating with Student Council meetings. Where necessary, larger forums may be held to involve larger numbers directly in big decisions.

### Positives:

- *It recognises natural action-based structures in the school, and increases student decision-making over directions of these groups;*
- *It is more likely to lead to student participation in action rather than talk;*
- *Larger numbers can be involved in the whole structure;*
- *Can involve a range of staff in supporting areas that they're already involved with.*

### Negatives:

- *Bypasses possibilities for curriculum linkages;*
- *Can be resource intensive for support;*
- *Can isolate students who aren't already involved in some activity;*
- *Groups may concentrate on their own areas (possibly competing for resources) without awareness or attention to larger pictures;*
- *Can focus on short-term, limited goals rather than on-going needs.*



## Multi-Level Model

A broader student structure is defined, involving an occasional student Forum (eg once a term) – a large body which sets up other structures, hears reports, makes big decisions (like an AGM); sub-school groups and/or working groups are appointed around set tasks (short-term or continuing) and meet regularly as the 'engine room' of the Council; a formal Student Council consisting of representatives from these sub-groups meets frequently to coordinate groups and allocate work. The powers and responsibilities of each group are defined in the Council's constitution.

School Council representatives can be elected separately (and co-opted into this structure), appointed at the Forum meetings, or drawn from the Student Council.

### Positives:

- Can involve relatively large numbers of students;
- Can link to existing school curriculum and other structures;
- Can enable students to target action levels for their involvement;
- If some areas break down, other parts of the structure can continue.

### Negatives:

- Can be expensive on staff and student time resources;
- Can have some occasional large meetings with attendant difficulties;
- Can become a complex structure that confuses people.

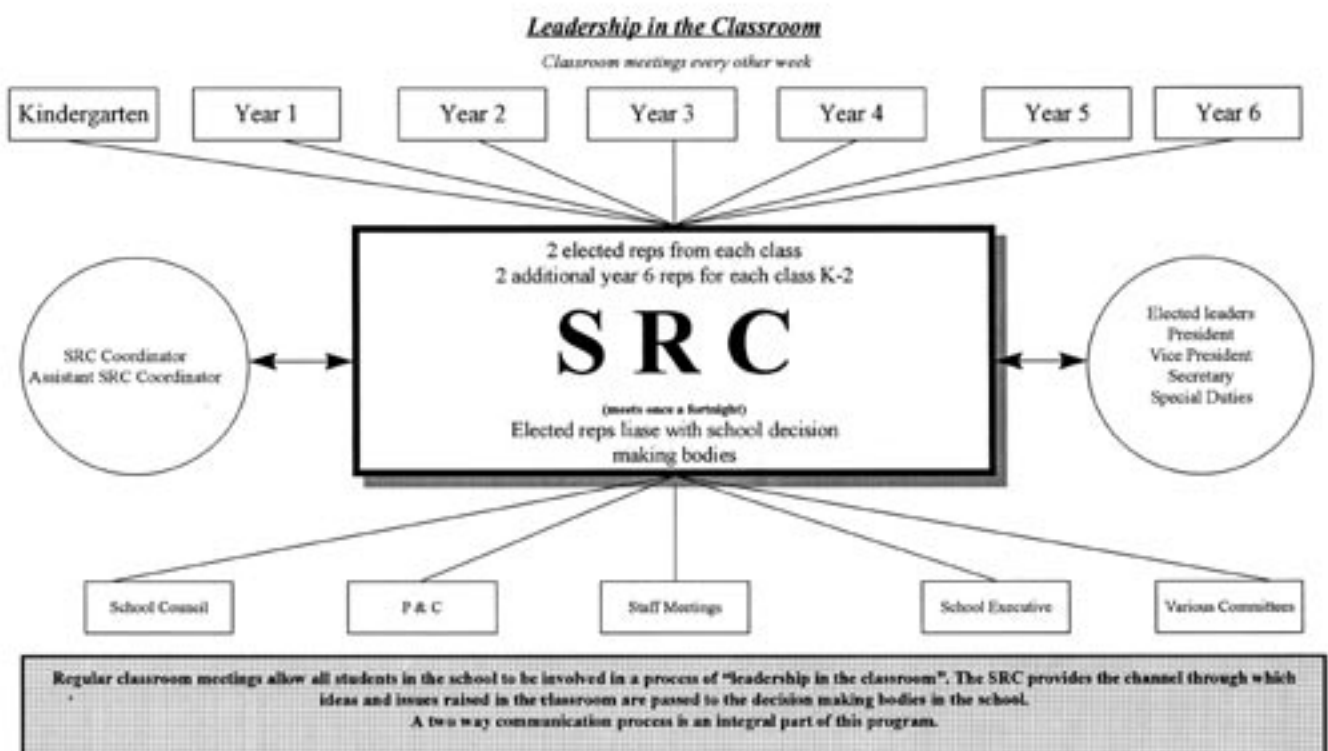
These are just some possible ways of building a Student Council. I think they could apply to both primary and secondary schools - with variations. The best Councils look at the range of options and put together a structure that suits the size, conditions and needs of their school. **Connect** would be interested to hear of different ways that schools organise their Student Councils, how they work, and how effective they are.

Roger Holdsworth, February 2002

with advice and comment from Charles Kingston, Cathey Dragasia, Paul Tresidder



## Primary Student Representative Council



## Berwick Secondary College Student Voice

**F**orums are the formal meetings of Student Voice, whilst studios are the informal gatherings ... Leaders will need to attend one compulsory forum per fortnight. The other week will be an optional negotiated studio (a suitable time to run committee meetings) and a compulsory extended studio... The monthly meeting schedule therefore is: forum, negotiated studio, forum, extended studio...

*(Student Voice Constitution)*

### Forum

**Forums** are the formal meetings. Student Voice **Forums** will be the formal platform for ideas and issues to be discussed before being taken on by leaders. **Forums** are compulsory for all Student Voice leaders and the correct process must be followed if a leader is unable to attend a **Forum**.

### Studios

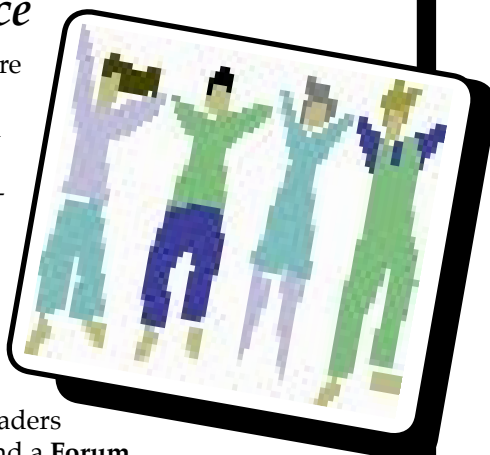
**Studios** are informal meetings. Student Voice **Studios** will be the platform where leaders implement their ideas and work to make things happen.

**Extended Studios** are held after school, once a month. They are compulsory for all Student Voice leaders and productive use of the time is essential. Once the roll is called, and attendance and absences recorded, each leader works alone or in a team (depending on the project on hand). The coordinator is available for guidance and assistance nearby.

**Negotiated Studio** weeks are held once a month. Student Voice leaders can determine which classes to miss (up to two periods) and arrange to have those sessions off to work on Student Voice projects. **Negotiated Studios** are encouraged, but not compulsory. Committee Officers may choose to hold committee meetings during those weeks.

Effective **Studios** require initiative by all leaders, taking on a project and working through the stages to ensure it is successful... The types of activities to be done during a **Studio** include: making phone calls, designing posters, putting up posters around the school, speaking to administration and staff and the student body, preparing a speech for Year Level Assembly, writing Action Plans, creating a hand-out, counting money etc.

*Berwick Secondary College Student Voice Induction Camp booklet, Vic*



## Gladstone Park Secondary College

**T**he social dynamic of the school is very important in deciding about what structures to institute:

In a large school, where most students say a lot but don't get involved much, with a core group (as there usually is) pushing forward, the Multi-Level model works well.

The Working Groups model would work for schools with strong support from different corners for each different group. This would translate into a strongly supported SRC with lots of people pitching in.

The Sub-School model works where all Year levels are actively involved. Otherwise I personally think it's better to keep the groups together so that those involved can still carry it forward effectively with enough support from their peers in other year levels.

The home groups model and the multi-level one can be integrated (like Gladstone Park Secondary College is doing). They now elect one representative per class to a Forum and then the Forum elects the SRC. That group then takes on portfolio positions (in theory). A bit of a combination.

In general I see the home groups model (traditional - as you said), working in schools with a strong student leadership tradition. The danger with such SRCs, I guess, is that if the school administration is all that keeps it going, then it could very easily become a token body.

**Paul Tresidder**

*ex-SRC President, Gladstone Park Secondary College, Vic*

Originally from *Connect* 133-134 (February-April, 2002)

# Community Groups at Melaleuca Park Schools

Melaleuca Park Schools is situated in Mt Gambier and was formerly known as Mt Gambier East Schools. Mt Gambier is a regional centre with a population of about 26,000 and is located in South Australia about 400 km south east of Adelaide.

The school has a student population of about 270, many of whom come from low socio-economic backgrounds. About 70% of students receive school card assistance.

## Background: Values Education

In 2001/2002, the school focused on developing a set of school values. Staff, students and the school community developed a statement of these values. Students then discussed the values and described what each value would look like in practice. These descriptions are now on display in all teaching areas.

In early 2003, the values became part of a two week Values Education program that also included intensive work in Brain Theory, Program Achieve, Quality Classrooms and Student/Community (this is based on a similar program run at Warrnambool East PS in Victoria). All classes were involved in the program for the first two weeks of the school year. The aim of the program was to build cohesive classrooms, encourage responsibility and a sense of community and to establish a positive ethos for the year ahead. The Values Education program has now become an annual program for which the first eight days of the school year are set aside.

Staff found that, in order to meet the learning needs of all students, to ensure their success and to avoid behaviour management issues, students needed a program with a real purpose and where they could be involved in gaining skills and knowledge beyond the classroom.

## Community Groups Program

In 2003, Melaleuca Park Schools developed and implemented a Community Groups Program that builds on the learning of the Values Education Program. The aims of the Community Groups Program are to increase student self esteem, develop a sense of community pride, provide a forum for student voice and decision-making and to develop a deeper understanding of the Key Competencies.

Community Groups are groups of between six and sixteen students that work on real decision-making tasks around the school. Some are just Junior Primary, some are just Primary, but there are some that are R to 7. At the beginning of the year a list of Community Groups is compiled (this year, students suggested some of them) and students elect four Community Groups that they would like to be part of. They are then put into one of these.

The types of Community Groups include Front Office Helpers, Tuckshop, Fundraising, Environment, Boandik Lodge, Kindy Support, Grounds, Radio Melaleuca, Melaleuca Maintenance, News-breakers, Promoting our School, ICT, Art Displays and so on. There are 20 groups in all. All teaching and leadership staff and some SSOs facilitate a Community Group.

In addition, there is now a Student Executive (see below) with a representative on each Community Group. The Student Executive member runs a half hour discussion/decision making/planning meeting and then the group does an hour of 'hands on' work.

The Community Groups Program provides all students with experiences that reflect the school values, develop social skills and develop literacy and numeracy skills.

How did it develop?

In 2003, the school won a grant from the SA Civics and Citizenship Whole School Professional Development Project. The aim of our project was to review and refine the Community Groups Program to better meet the needs of all students. Staff members made observation visits to schools in Adelaide that were recognised to have good practice in Civics and Citizenship Education and that ran established programs that were similar to our Community Groups Program. Following the visits the staff involved reported in detail their observations of each school's program.

At the end of Term 2, with this new knowledge and understanding and with the experience of having run Community Groups for half of the year, the whole staff undertook a review of Community Groups and SRC and the two were then modified to make them more effective and to improve learning outcomes for students.

Community Groups are now run for one and a half hours a fortnight as staff felt that half an hour a week was insufficient to actually get much done. Some Community Groups are created that are Junior Primary only so that the younger students' involvement in the program was more than just token, as staff felt it had been.

SRC was abandoned in its previous form. Staff and students had much discussion about the usefulness of the SRC now that Community Groups were running. The SRC lacked direction and was floundering. In the past the SRC had been little more than a token effort with very little true decision-making power. It was responsible for some fundraising and organising events like Bad Hair Days and discos. It involved very few students and Junior Primary students had next to no input.

Instead, a Student Executive was formed. Year 6 and 7 students represent each Community Group on the Executive. These students apply for and win their positions. The Student Executive meets for one and a half hours on the alternate fortnight to Community Groups. There are leadership roles within the Executive – Chairperson (held by School Captains), Secretary, Reporter and Timekeeper. The Executive discuss whole school issues, report on the progress of their Community Group and plan and organise events. When making decisions or being part of a discussion, each student's role is to represent their Community Group.

Following the meetings, the Student Executive report back to their Community Group. The first half hour of Community Groups is a meeting time run by the Student Executive member for

the purpose of information giving and discussion. The other members of the Community Group have an opportunity to voice their opinions and bring new information or issues to the Student Executive. The Student Executive can also bring issues for discussion to Staff and Governing Council.

The Community Groups program has developed in students a sense of ownership and pride in the school and a feeling that their input is valuable. Students are keen to offer suggestions and continue the work of their Community Group outside the allocated time slot. For students at risk, it gives them a sense of achievement that they may not get in the regular classroom. Behaviour Management issues during Community Groups time are virtually non-existent. From this we assume that students are participating fully and that it is

meeting some of the needs of the most disinclined learners.

For some staff, letting go of power continues to be a challenge but they are keen to continue to improve student voice and student decision making in the school.

The Community Groups Program and the formation of Student Executive are vast improvements on what was in place but there remains much scope for further developing opportunities for student empowerment at Melaleuca Park Schools.

**Helen Widdison**

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Originally from *Connect* 145-146,  
February-April 2004

## SRC at Asquith Girls High School, NSW

*What is the SRC? / Who is in the SRC?*

SRC is one of the many leadership teams in the Asquith Girls High School community. Each year every year group votes on representatives who they want to represent them in the following year.

There are: three representatives in Year 7, three representatives in Year 8, three representatives in Year 9, four representatives in Year 10, two representatives in Year 11 and four Executives in Year 11.

*What do the SRC do?*

Each Wednesday the SRC President hosts a meeting in which representatives from each Year group come together to discuss issues that need to be considered within the school as well as upcoming events. Many issues involve activities that are taking place within the school community eg fundraising events, which involve raising money for various charities or to purchase new equipment to improve the school and make it a better environment for the students.

*What happens next?*

After these issues are discussed, the Year 11 executive team then passes it on to the Principal and the prefects at a morning tea meeting every Monday morning. This way everyone is informed of what is happening in the various leadership teams within the school.

*How are meetings prepared?*

Each Tuesday morning the SRC Executive meets with the SRC Co-ordinator and discusses an agenda which is prepared by the SRC secretary for the next meeting.

*Are there any special roles?*

Yes there are. Each representative is assigned a special role they are responsible for during the year. For example there are Year representatives for each Year group. These representatives are in charge of asking their Year group about their concerns and things they would like to see happen and improved around the school.

*Special Roles include:*

Year Representatives, Canteen Liaison, Microwave Monitor, Sponsor Child (World Vision), Soap Dispenser Monitors, Notice Board Monitors, Notice Board, Suggestion Box.

*Are the SRC representatives involved in other events?*

Each month there are district meetings in which four SRC students from each school within the district meet in order to discuss issues that have been brought up in their individual schools. They share each others' ideas and students are more familiar with what is happening in schools in the district.

The SRC are also often invited to community forums and other events that deal with leadership and issues in society.

All in all the SRC is a vital part of the student leadership team at Asquith Girls High School. Without their commitment and continued efforts many improvements, activities and events would be very hard to achieve.

**Rana Saleh**

*Year 11 SRC member  
Asquith Girls High School, Stokes Avenue, Asquith NSW  
2077*

Originally from *Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004

# ‘Tuning In’ to Distant Voices at Open Access College

Open Access College (OAC) in South Australia caters for students who, for a range of reasons, cannot access face-to-face schools. Traditionally distance learners were students living in geographic isolation. However, more recently, the majority of the school population at OAC is made up of students who are isolated as a result of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and behaviour disorders that affect their ability to continue to attend face-to-face schools. Some of this trend can be attributed to the rising incidence of alleged bullying and harassment in educational institutions and the inability of many schools to redress this issue and successfully provide a learning environment that truly accepts and caters for the diversity of the young people who make up our society.

**Student Voice** began in the middle school of the R-10 School in 2002 when a group of students met for a teleconference. The teachers attending this meeting had no pre-conceived ideas about how a student body would work in this context, so it was essential to listen to the students’ perceptions and ideas and allow them to lead the process of creating OAC Student Voice.

As educators, our goals were to find out what the students wanted in addition to the distance programs we were offering and to establish a sense of community at the school so the students could connect with each other and gain a sense of belonging to their school.

Hearing the students describe and compare their school experiences was very informative and it became immediately clear that if we could tap the knowledge and ideas of this group, we would greatly improve our ability to successfully engage with distance learners.



Gabe and The Honorable Christopher Pyne

... and beyond

In that year, OAC Student Voice achieved a great deal. They formed a team and surveyed the school population, generating a program of activities to meet student interests and needs. The group also attended a face-to-face camp where they wrote a constitution and devised a marketing strategy to maximise participation by students in the following year. Their plans have proven to be extremely successful strategies that have led to the establishment of a dynamic organisation that works creatively to promote skill development and curriculum engagement in our setting.

***“...But, I’m not the sort of person who would ever be chosen to be part of the SRC...”***

***(Daniel, Year 10)***



Daniel, as a member of the Leadership Team, giving a speech during Democracy Week Celebrations

To avoid elitism, the Student Voice Leadership Team is made up of students who nominate themselves to take on a leadership role within the organisation. They make a voluntary commitment and participate in the program at the level with which they feel comfortable. Each year the groups have been very diverse and have included students from across the State from all backgrounds, cultures and sexual orientations. As yet, we have never had any issues generated by lack of acceptance and students have worked together productively without demeaning or excluding one another.

Students opt to attend meetings via teleconference or face-to-face. The meetings take place in the College Boardrooms and the group is now recognised as an integral part of school life.



*Michael talking to The Honorable Christopher Pyne*

Creating effective opportunities for participation has been a goal of the SV Team. Last year, to celebrate Democracy Week, the students conducted a forum at which they shared their experiences in education and made recommendations for the future. The guests included The Honorable Christopher Pyne, Secondary School Principals, Social Workers and the Project Officer from the Anti-Bullying Project from the South Australian Education Department.

In the words of Senior Secondary Assistant Principal, Jan Kelly: "It was a very moving and highly effective event which clearly highlighted the value of the Student Voice program. I was very impressed by the confidence and honesty of the students in articulating their own issues, their success in dealing with these issues and their ability to make suggestions about how schools could be different."

Strategies involving Student Voice initiatives now feature predominantly in OAC action plans and students will collaborate with educators to help achieve the objectives of the Strategic Directions of the school (*Well Being, Social Inclusion, Curriculum Renewal and Community Partnerships*). To better facilitate the plans, decision-making teams within the school will be devising strategies to enable purposeful involvement from student representatives on appropriate committees.

Another initiative for 2004 will be the formation of a second Student Voice group for students in years 1-5.

In addition, the SV Leadership Team is implementing a Peer Support Program. They want to build networks by establishing small support groups. Members of the group will connect via telephone or internet chat and in this way the leaders will offer guidance and friendship to other distance learners.

Teachers working with this group of diverse young people over the last couple of years have found their involvement extremely rewarding. It has allowed us to witness the transition students have made from a place where they felt dejected and marginalised to where they are able to influence the education agenda on issues that relate to curriculum and student well being. The insights provided by the students are helping us to analyse what constitutes good curriculum practice. Together we hope to build a learning environment that promotes engagement and builds resilience, giving our students another opportunity to find success.



*Discovering Democracy Week Forum*

**Annette Bulling**

*Open Access College, SA  
<abulling@oac.sa.edu.au>*

## Being Inclusive

There is a huge cross-section in our SRC, ranging from Year 12 to Year 7, special education students and, at the moment, we're organising a way to include Koori students. Our executive members are not always the popular people of the school.

In all of the activities that we organise, we include everyone. We have had a lot of positive feedback from people who are involved with us about these things.

A group of seven to eight SRC representatives regularly go to our biggest feeder school and give talks about the SRC and what it's all about. We also talk about the responsibilities that are associated with being on the SRC and we talk to their sporting and school captains about their responsibilities. We are doing this because we are trying to keep up the numbers of students to come to our school because over the last two to three years, we have had competition from other (private) schools starting up around our area. This is one of the biggest problems facing our school.

**Freya Hunter**

*Publicity Officer, James Fallon High School SRC, Albury NSW 2640*

Originally from *Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004

## 2.2 What do Student Councils do? Getting Out of the Fundraising Trap



### The Challenge:

...trivial ...unimportant  
...just raising money for charity

"The issues that Student Councils deal with are the most trivial ones in the school. They don't address the important aspects of teaching and learning or decisions about school policies, structures and organisation. Instead, Student Councils get bogged down in fundraising for school or community. Yet we need to recognise that the development of the organisational skills involved in fund-raising can be an important bridge to enabling Student Councils to tackle larger issues. How do we go beyond these limitations and walk across that bridge?"

See pages 30-32 ...

### Possible Strategy 1:

Develop a clear **mission statement** for the Student Council that defines its involvement in the full range of important issues discussed and decided in a school. Each year, review how much time the Student Council has spent on various sorts of activities. See the suggested activity: *How Do We Know What We Have Achieved?* in the following pages - originally in **Connect** 116 (April 1999).

### Possible Strategy 2:

**Just say NO!** Simply refuse to do any fund-raising at all. Send the letters back saying: "Not relevant to this group."

### Possible Strategy 3:

Set up a Fund-Raising Subcommittee of the Student Council and restrict financial activities to this group. They are then only one report amongst many at full Student Council meetings. Other subcommittees and the whole Student Council can get on with other important things as well!

### Possible Strategy 4:

Develop a Student Foundation around the idea of 'change not charity' and use students' fund-raising powers to drive changes in the school and its community ... and follow them up! See the article on *Student Foundations* here.

See pages 33-36 ...



# HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED?

How do you know if your Student Council is working successfully?

To answer that question, you need to have some idea of what is possible: a **vision**, that is, of what a Student Council can and should do. You also need to work out some way of **monitoring** what the Council has done and matching its work against that vision.

One aspect of that evaluation of success is simply to look at **what** the Student Council has worked on over a period of time - perhaps for the past 12 months.

*This activity is one way of doing that. It can be adapted for individual Student Councils, networks and conferences. It can also be presented in simpler or more complex forms.*

I usually start the activity by explaining to students that, in talking with various groups of students, the following patterns have emerged:

## How?

There are three ways in which Student Councils appear to work:

1. They **do things** themselves - they organise activities, most often of a social or fundraising nature, or internal to the organisation of the group;
2. They **ask others** to do things - they discuss an issue, decide that something should happen and approach staff, the Principal, the School Council etc and ask for action;
3. They **share decisions** - student representatives take part in broader decision-making bodies which receive student proposals and they then share in decisions, usually on larger, more complex or policy matters.

An effective Student Council should see itself operating in all of these three

modes, and should recognise which is appropriate to a particular issue. It should be asking: "How is a decision to be made on this matter? Who has the power to make such a decision?" It might be necessary for the Student Council to draw up a **decision-making map** of the school, showing what other groups exist, who is on them, what decisions they make (*see later for more details on this*).

It should, however, be noted that most **real and important decisions** will be made in association with others: things that the Student Council can **do** without reference to others are essentially more limited and trivial; the process of simply **asking others** for action does nothing to enable students to learn to act or to take responsibility for decisions.

## What?

Secondly, we can list some of the common topics that student groups work on. In order of increasing complexity (and, perhaps unfortunately, in order of decreasing frequency), I hear of:

- **just surviving:** the group spends all its time on internal operational matters, worrying about things like meeting attendance;

- **fund-raising:** students raise money for charities, for the school, for the student group or for specific projects;
- **social:** students organise social activities for other students within the school;
- **uniforms:** students discuss, survey, decide and approach others about uniform details, policies and changes;
- **facilities:** students discuss existing and possible school facilities (canteen, library, shade areas, classrooms, computers, books etc) and work for improvements and changes to these or to student access to them (this is often linked to fund-raising efforts);
- **rules:** students discuss, survey, decide and approach others about changes to school rules and other policies (eg welfare and discipline);
- **environment:** students develop and implement programs around the school and in their community about environmental issues (that usually, but not always, go beyond cleaning up the yard);
- **advocacy:** students advocate for changes on behalf of specific students or groups of students, who may want something, or who feel aggrieved;
- **curriculum:** students discuss, survey, decide and approach others about matters of teaching and learning (eg assessment, subjects, teaching and learning approaches) at levels of policy, programs or practices;

- **community action:** students become involved in community issues beyond the school and discuss, decide and act on matters such as employment, safety, environment etc.

We can now put these two observations together to form a sort of chart (next page).

## Evaluating

This could be a useful chart to monitor and reflect on what a Student Council has achieved. At the end of a year (or a term) the group would list everything they've worked on - successfully or unsuccessfully - and mark it in the appropriate place on the chart. If an issue has been worked on in different ways, it could be listed in more than one column. Or if an action has involved more than one topic, it could be listed in several rows. Alternatively, the group could write details of all their issues on pieces of paper, with the size of individual pieces giving some indication of the amount of time or attention taken up on working on this issue in that particular way. These big and small pieces of paper can then be stuck in the appropriate square on the chart.

Look at the picture this reveals:

- What do we notice?
- What's the pattern?
- Do all the activities tend to group in one place?
- Are there empty squares?
- Why is this?

(For example, it might be that all curriculum issues naturally have to be worked on in a 'sharing decisions' mode.)

In taking a student group through this exercise, I usually finish by pointing out that there's nothing wrong with working on fund-raising and social issues (which usually dominate the reports), but that there's a concern

if a group only works on these and if they work on them in isolation from other areas (that is: if fund-raising becomes the dominant first issue, rather than being a means to achieve other ends).

After all, what is a school essentially on about: raising money and having socials? If the Student Council is an important/vital part of the school, how come it's not working on the areas that are central to what schools are about?

We can also recognise that the organisation of fund-raising and socials provides valuable experiences in joint action and decision making. But the very effort of doing these activities can take up all the time allocated to the Student Council. (The time commitment is another issue: when do these bodies meet? For how long? Is there any way of building their work into the school curriculum?)

Using this chart suggests one way of getting round these issues of 'balance'. If the Council sets up fund-raising and/or social subcommittees within the Council, these bodies would be the focus for organising these activities (seeking overall approval from the Council) and thus freeing the whole group to get on with other, broader matters. The other chart headings could also form the basis for sub-committees and working groups.

But in some schools, it's almost as if walls are built across the above chart. "Students are not allowed to jump over this wall!" And despite other schools' statements about the desirable broad role of the Student Council in the decision-making structures and processes of that school, perhaps it's the students themselves who continue to behave as if the walls are still there!

*Roger Holdsworth*

## Activity Ideas:

The chart referred to in this approach is reproduced on the next page for copying or for making into an overhead transparency.

In using this, I usually start by asking students to tell me what they've worked on during the year - or during the previous year if the activity is used at the start of the year. I then say that I've been struggling to make sense of what I hear from many Student Councils and have come up with the following grid - and then show it (on an overhead projection). Perhaps, I suggest, there could be other categories...

If I'm working with a multi-school group (eg at a conference or a network meeting) I give each school an A4 sheet of blank paper and tell them this represents the time for the whole year. I ask them to write a list of everything they've done and then allocate roughly how much time each took up. Then the sheet can be torn/cut up to indicate how much time was spent on each separate item - write its name on a separate scrap of paper. A similar approach can be used with one school, but with more discussion to reach common agreement.

When they've finished this, each group is invited to post their scraps of paper onto the grid. (With lots of time, I ask them to think about HOW they worked on it; with less time, I just use the WHAT rows.)

Finally, we look at what is revealed: a rough bar graph. What does it tell us? What do we notice? Why is this so? What could we do about it?

I suggest that groups try this again later in the year or in a year's time.

*From Connect 116, April 1998;  
adapted from an article first printed in Connect 75, June 1992*

<b><i>How?</i></b> <b><i>What?</i></b>	<b>Do things</b>	<b>Ask others</b>	<b>Share decisions</b>
<b>Just surviving</b>			
<b>Fund-raising</b>			
<b>Social</b>			
<b>Uniforms</b>			
<b>Facilities</b>			
<b>Rules</b>			
<b>Environment</b>			
<b>Advocacy</b>			
<b>Curriculum</b>			
<b>Community action</b>			



# Creating a Student Foundation

'Change,  
not  
Charity'



The ideas of a Student Foundation has been developed by the r.u.MAD? (Are You Making a Difference?) program (see references below). It turns fundraising on its head by seeing that raising and distributing funds can be a student action for 'change not charity'. Students are supported to make a difference in areas of concern to them, not just through money, but also through 'time and talents'. This approach builds on the belief that students are capable contributors to society, they have valuable ideas and they can take on responsibility with energy and skill.

Student Foundations follow the principles of the r.u.MAD? program by addressing the causes of problems, rather than the problem itself. A Student Foundation may decide to fund school or wider community projects if they 'make a difference' and meet the Foundation's criteria.

## Educational Focus

A Foundation combines the action of community change and service with research and reflection. The Foundation:

- helps students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organised experiences that meet actual community needs and are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community;
- is integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provides a structured time for students to think, talk, or write about what they did and saw during the activity;
- provides students with the opportunity to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
- enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community, and helps foster a sense of caring for others.

## Establishing a Student Foundation

The r.u.MAD? Program suggests a series of three workshops to investigate and design a Foundation. Details are provided in the MAD Foundation's Resource Guide at: <http://www.rumad.org.au/resources.htm>

**Workshop 1** examines 'What is a Foundation?'; it includes a hypothetical, and culminates in a decision to set up a Foundation. **Workshop 2** is critical: it identifies values and areas of interest, and develops a **Mission Statement** for the Foundation. At this point, students make decisions about what changes they wish to bring about in their school or community, and about any criteria or guidelines they wish to set eg things they won't fund, or physical location of projects (eg in the local community).

*"We are the Grange College Student Action Team. We are concerned about youth issues, particularly in the area of education and human rights. Through supporting the values of everyone's right to a good education, freedom, respect and equality, we hope to assist community projects and organisations by the donation of our Time, Talent and Treasure."*

*The Grange College Student Foundation Mission Statement, 2002*

**Workshop 3** is more practical: appointing teams of students such directors, research, publicity and funding and deciding on their tasks. Directors provide the overall coordination; the Research Team investigates and advertises for community applicants for funding from the Foundation - and then recommends on what grants to make; the Publicity Team promotes fundraising and (later) the funded projects; and the Funding Team budgets and manages funds and coordinates the actual fundraising. The students may also appoint an advisory group of non-students, to support them in legal, accounting, publicity and so on.

The Foundation advertises that it has funds available and then looks at applications for its grants. It matches these against its Mission Statement. How will funding these requests make the changes that the students desire? Once grants are made, the Foundation is also able to follow up the progress of its funding and see how the funds are being used, and what outcomes there are.

## Examples

Student Foundations have been set up in both primary and secondary schools. Some have been established as part of, or by the Student Council; others run in parallel, as separate organisations, but keep the Student Council informed. There have been previous articles in **Connect** about Student Foundations at:

- **Melbourne Girls College** (see *Connect* 135-136, June-August 2002);
- **The Grange P-12 College** (see *Connect* 133-134, February-April 2002);
- **Spensley Street Primary School** (see *Connect* 138, December 2002).

The r.u.MAD? website also contains several other examples of Student Foundations, as well as providing an extremely detailed Resource Guide, with information, forms, advice and contacts. This Guide can be downloaded from the website. Check:

<http://www.rumad.org.au>

<http://www.rumad.org.au/home.htm>

<http://www.rumad.org.au/resources.htm>

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**r.u.MAD?** is a program of the Education Foundation, 4/252 Collins Street, Melbourne 3000. It is supported by the Stegley Foundation with several philanthropic foundations, including the Myer Foundation, William Buckland Foundation, Paul Edward Dehnert Trust and individual donors.

For more information contact Julia Kubincan or Adrian Bertolini (**r.u.MAD?** Schools Coordinator) at the Education Foundation on (03) 9650 4277.



**r.u.MAD?**  
(03) 9650 4277

**Education Foundation**  
<http://www.rumad.org.au>

## Student Foundations

**M**aking A Difference (MAD) Foundations have been set up in three Melbourne schools.

The newest one, Spensley Street Primary School, formed by the Junior School Council, raised over \$800 in a special fund-raiser called PJ day. This money has been matched by a grant from the Council for the Encouragement of Philanthropy in Australia (CEPA). The students have, in turn, made grants to three causes in accordance with their **mission statement** - the homeless, refugees and to Very Special Kids. They are also retaining \$300 of their money as a starting fund for next year's JSC, who are expected to continue the Foundation's work. The photo below shows the JSC Executive with the local butcher, where JSC President Tom Clune went one Saturday to negotiate an extremely good price for sausages, enabling the students to raise the \$800. Enterprise Education in action!

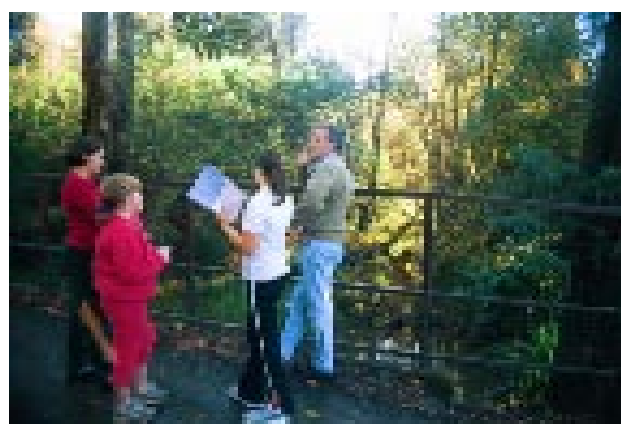


Next, The Grange College in Hopper's Crossing has raised \$2150 this year for grants to students and worthy causes within the school community. Ellen Koshland, President of the Education Foundation will present their matching grant at the Grange Presentation Night on 18 December.

Finally, Melbourne Girls College Foundation has made its second round grant for 2002 - to 'Girl Power', a young women's support group run by Grassmere Cardinia Youth Services (in the Pakenham area).

Particular thanks to Ron Clarke from CEPA for providing the matching grants to these schools.

## Whitfield Primary School



**W**hitfield PS up in the King Valley (Victoria) has been developing a MAD campaign about the local Jessie's Creek, which runs around two sides of the school before looping past the pub and through the town. Jessie's Creek is badly polluted, choked with ivy, jasmine and other non-natives. The willows are causing erosion and the creek has been used as a rubbish dump for many years. It's also the main water supply for Whitfield! The photo shows Principal Owen Dixon and some of his senior students on the bridge over the creek, leading to the school.

The students have organised and led a campaign to both restore the creek (planting 197 indigenous trees themselves) and to mobilize community support and build partnerships to save Jessie's Creek. They've lobbied the local NRE office, made submissions to the Catchment Management Authority, issued media releases, surveyed the community and published their own newsletters. They've been invited to present at a regional Principals' conference.

Now they've been granted \$25,000 by Landcare to build the campaign further. Congratulations for going MAD!

Originally from *Connect* 133-134, February-April 2002

# Student Foundation

The idea of establishing a Student Foundation at the Grange College seemed an ideal solution - by consolidating the endless amounts of requests from organisations to assist in their fundraising activities. As a college, we boast a proud fundraising history; activities have always been well supported by the student body and community. Although all fundraising requests have been worthwhile, the Student Action Team quickly realised the sheer number of requests made it impossible to commit to all. Sorting through all the weekly mail, deciding which activities we would take part in, proved rather complicated. Many seemed to overlap. All members of the Student Action Team shared different views on what they perceived to be significant. One thing was certain: it was impossible to say yes to all. Therefore, the concept of establishing a mission statement offered a new approach to the way we, the Student Action Team, intended to make a difference in the community.

Through The Education Foundation, which administers the **ruMAD?** Program, we were extremely privileged to have David Zyngier and Claire Brunner spend an entire day with us, going through various workshops and activities to assist us in forming a foundation. We learnt about other foundations, and about each other. We discovered that we shared common values and developed a greater understanding of global, national and local issues. We were then left with an enormous task of writing up our very own

mission statement. After several meetings, long discussions and at times disagreements this is what we came up with (box below).

We have now begun the new school year with a clear vision of what our fundraising goals are. We sort through our mail with ease. We discuss each request for fundraising and decide whether it fits our mission statement. We respond to all organisations that ask us to join in their fundraising activities, outlining our foundation and the process we have chosen to pursue. We look forward to



their response and feedback. Our Mission statement will be revised at the end of the year.

We are currently planning our fundraising activities for the year and have already successfully raised just under two hundred dollars by having a sausage sizzle at our annual swimming carnival. We look forward to distributing our funds in the latter part of the year. Let's hope we have a successful year.

*We are the Grange College Student Action Team. We are concerned about youth issues, particularly in the area of education and human rights. Through supporting the values of everyone's right to a good education, freedom, respect and equality, we hope to assist community projects and organisations by the donation of our Time, Talent and Treasure.*

*The Grange College Student Foundation Mission Statement,  
November 2002*

*For more information regarding our student foundation, please contact Mr Frank Vetere, our Student Leadership and Participation Co-ordinator at the Grange on: (03) 9748 9166 or on e-mail:*  
**[vetere.frank.v@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:vetere.frank.v@edumail.vic.gov.au)**

**Frank Vetere  
and the  
Grange Student Action Team**

Originally from *Connect* 133-134,  
February-April 2002



# ruMaD?

## a toolkit for change not charity

The *r.u.MAD?* program is proving itself a versatile toolkit for teachers wanting to enhance student participation, leadership and decision-making. *r.u.MAD?* stands for "Are You Making a Difference in the Community" and is a web-based program ready to download from [www.rumad.org](http://www.rumad.org). In essence, it helps teachers get their students involved in authentic community projects with the slogan "change not charity".

The program is values based and set out in stages (preparation, planning, action and evaluation). Students start by considering events or situations they consider unfair or problematic. They brainstorm the "big possibility", ie the ideal solution, such as world peace, or an end to homelessness, or sustainable environmental practices. They then devise creative but manageable local solutions which will contribute to the "big possibility", such as forming a peace club to run street stalls, or donating old coats on National Coat Day, or getting the local supermarket to stock calico bags as an alternative to plastic.

The above are all real examples from Victorian schools using the program.

There are many other 'case studies' mentioned on the website. One example is Melbourne Girls College which formed an actual philanthropic foundation to raise money, invest the capital, call for applications and

then make grants to local community groups. In July they made their first such grant, \$750 to the Brosnan Centre's "Cook'ns Cool" program which helps young offenders re-integrate into society. The photo shows the foundation's executive handing over the cheque, outside the Centre in Brunswick. This is "enterprise education" in action.

Another use for the program is to underpin SRC and JSC procedures and decision-making. For example, at Spensley Street Primary in Clifton Hill, the Junior School Council were 'workshopped', to clarify and articulate their personal values. The student representatives then took the listed values back to their homegroups and repeated the workshop with their classmates. At the following JSC meeting a slightly amended list of shared core values was agreed on – friendship, family, generosity and having fun at school. A Mission Statement is now being drafted based on these agreed values, and a number of initiatives have been launched including a review of playground equipment and play spaces, special days to raise grant money along the lines of a Student Foundation, and publicity amongst the student body to explain the role of JSC. The student executive has also attended the 'Senior' School Council to explain their Mission Statement and activities.

**John Davidson**

*r.u.MAD? Schools Coordinator, 2002*



Originally from *Connect* 135-136, June-August 2002



## 2.3 Participation as Curriculum

### The Challenge:



...not recognised as learning  
...the curriculum is the same old same old...

"The Student Council is 'co-curricular' or, even worse, 'extra-curricular'. Though individual and group skills are being developed, they are not recognised as 'learning'. Or we just expect students to be able to work on such bodies without building in skill development.

"By concentrating on Student Councils, we forget about active student participation in all other areas of the curriculum, so the same teacher-directed or manufactured student-inquiry approaches remain unchallenged. Students ask: 'what's the point of learning this?' to be told 'one day ... one day...' We ignore opportunities to change the ways in which students learn, so as to recognise them as valued citizens who can work on and achieve immediately useful outcomes within their communities as they learn!"

#### Possible Strategy 1:

The Student Council **mission statement** needs to contain clear and specific guidance about the Council's purpose. Why do we have a Student Council? What's the bigger picture in terms of Civics and Citizenship Education? What outcomes are desired for students? How will we make sure that all students learn and grow?

#### Possible Strategy 2:

Develop a Student Council or Student Decision-Making **curriculum**, defining the outcomes - skills, knowledge, attitudes to be achieved. Have this endorsed by the schools' Curriculum Committee. Where and how will it be taught ... to all students? What time will be made available? See information in *Connect* 127, February 2001.

#### Possible Strategy 3:

Develop **curriculum-based approaches** that support students to play real, valued and purposeful roles outside the classroom - within the community - as part of their learning: students as tutors, mediators, researchers, documentors of community history, environmental activists, producers of community media. See a comprehensive list of ideas in *Connect* 116, April 1999.

#### Possible Strategy 4:

Teachers and students **negotiate** their everyday curriculum: goals, content, ways of learning, assessment. Make sure that a diversity of learning approaches enables **all** students to be included - both in the negotiations and in achieving outcomes. See ideas about negotiation in *Connect* 105, June 1997; *Connect* 106-107, August-October 1997; *Connect* 124-125, August-October 2000; and *Connect* 133-134, February-April 2002.

#### Possible Strategy 5:

Set up **Student Action Teams** or **Students as Researchers** to research and implement action around issues within the school or community that are of student concern. These Student Action Teams can be set up as part of the Student Council, or report to Student Council, or be parallel groups that involve many other students. See the information in the next pages about the operation of Student Action Teams.

See pages 38-48 ...

# Student Action Teams

Student Action Teams have been developed in primary and secondary schools in Victoria for several years. At a state level, two program rounds provided support to schools for the formation of Student Action Teams on community safety between 1999 and 2002.

These Student Action Teams were supported by the Victorian Department of Education, with funding provided by the Victorian Department of Justice through its Crime Prevention Strategy and Safer Cities and Shires Program, and by VicHealth. Teams of students discussed and decided on priority issues about community safety (what it meant, how it affected their communities, what students thought about it), carried out community-based research, and then developed action plans to address these issues. Previous issues of **Connect** have reported on these teams and their work: **Connect** 124-125, August-October 2000; **Connect** 128, April 2001.



## Student Action Team Principles

Student Action Teams are characterised by:

- student engagement with a project focus or topic: either student choice of this, or substantial student decision-making on how to approach it;
- student engagement with project decision-making and implementation;
- a focus within the community - preferably beyond the school;
- identification and formation of a student team or teams;
- processes of research and action by students that intend to make a difference around the chosen focus/ topic within the community.

## Local Student Action Teams

Other similar approaches have subsequently been developed in various areas, using the same principles. Hume City Council provided support to secondary schools in its area for the development of local Student Action Teams around safety issues; Werribee Youth Law supported a Student Action Team approach to local legal issues; Adelaide City Council commissioned North Adelaide Primary School to research young people's use of Rundle Mall, and of play spaces within the city (see **Connect** 141, June 2003); a group of primary and secondary schools in the City of Darebin developed a Student Action Team approach to investigating and acting on local traffic safety in 2003 (see **Connect** 140, April 2003 and **Connect** 143-144, October-December 2003).

## Student Action Teams and Student Councils

Student Action Teams have sometimes been set up by Student Councils as an arm of their work. For example, the Student Leadership Council at Karingal Park Secondary College initially discussed issues of concern to students in their school and community at their annual orientation and training camp. They highlighted some community safety concerns in the area, and got support from the overall Program to set up a Student Action Team to lead the research and action around these concerns. The SAT then reported to the SLC.

In other cases, the SAT has operated in parallel with the Student Council, enabling the active participation of other students. In some cases, Student Action Teams have deliberately and spectacularly involved marginalised students who had little contact with (or respect for) the Student Council, and enabled them to become active participants in important school decision-making.

In other cases, Student Action Teams provide bridges between student decision-making (Student Councils and so on) and the formal curriculum: the Teams are set up within classtime, or whole classes take Student Action Team approaches. In one instance, for example, a Year 9 Health class decided to form several Student Action Teams to investigate and act on bullying within the school (and community) as part of their curriculum.

You'll find similar approaches also documented within the **r.u.MAD?** Program and under the heading of 'Students as Researchers'.

Roger Holdsworth

## Student Action Teams Resources

Two evaluation reports have been produced by the Australian Youth Research Centre (The University of Melbourne) and these document program implementation and outcomes for students. (Contact the Centre on 03 8344 9633 to buy copies of these.)

In addition, a Student Action Teams '**How To**' manual has been produced, has been recently revised and republished and is freely available on the web:

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/engagement/studentactionteams.htm>

This summary originally from **Connect** 145-146, February-April 2004

# Traffic Safety Student Action Teams

Summarising the Year's Action: What was Achieved? How?

If you travel in or through Melbourne's northern suburbs of Preston and Reservoir these days, I wonder if you see or feel a difference? Is it safer to be traveling near the schools?

Maybe there's better school signage, new speed zones, possibilities for improvements to tram stops and turning lanes, or pedestrian barriers. Perhaps these are some of the physical indicators of changes brought about by student action in 13 primary and secondary schools in 2003.

There's also increased awareness by whole school populations of issues around pick-up and drop-off, there are pamphlets going home about safe paths to school, whole school participation in walk-to-school days, and student willingness to identify dangerous practices - in themselves and in others. Is there an increased awareness of traffic safety issues in these 13 schools? Certainly!

The 13 primary and secondary schools have been part of a major **student action team** approach to local traffic safety that has been operating all year. This has involved students in school-based research, in sharing their results at forums, and in designing and taking varied and effective action at their local level to make their school communities safer.

The first two Student Forums were reported on at some greater length in earlier issues of *Connect* (issues 140 and 142) this year, and now, with the project's conclusion (or is it?) with the third Student Forum, this report draws together accounts from each of



the schools, to look at what was achieved and summarise how the project developed.

## Background

There has been an active network of primary schools in the Preston-Reservoir area for over 14 years. Their Junior School Councils (JSCs) provide the focus for shared training and support. Each year, this Network organises opportunities for students to meet together to talk and plan around areas of common interest. In the past, the group has documented the operation of their Junior School Councils (**Democracy Starts Here: Junior School Councils at Work** - still available through *Connect*), worked on *Civics and Citizenship Education*, focused on peer mediation and community problem-solving and so on.

In 2002, the group began discussions about a possible larger project for 2003. The schools had been approached to incorporate traffic safety education into their

curriculum. "Rather," the schools proposed, "let's work together and use a Student Action Team approach to traffic safety - where students **investigate** the safety issues around their school, and propose and take action to improve safety." It was proposed that this would be a shared curriculum initiative, to be supported by the availability of Departmental materials and lessons.

This proposal was endorsed whole-heartedly, both by the schools, and also by a range of other bodies with interests in traffic safety: the Department of Education and Training's Traffic Safety Education consultants, VicRoads, the Darebin City Council, local police and so on.

The group of schools interested to take part grew to include three local secondary colleges, as well as the original 11 primary schools. Schools were asked to commit early to *working together*, to attending *teacher planning meetings* and *student forums*, and to carrying out *school-based curriculum work* between these forums.

In return, the schools would get consultancy support, road traffic safety materials, and small grants from the Darebin City Council to support their work.





And so a tentative plan emerged: three student forums, with student teams coordinating school action in between these - a phase of research, a phase of action.

### Student Forum 1

Student Forum 1 was held in April at Northland Secondary College with about 80 students from the 13 schools attending. As previously indicated (*Connect* 140), it was important to present the issue to the students, to engage them with it as real and important, and to give them the opportunity of accepting the challenge as something they wished to undertake. This was done by presenting them with raw statistics about state and local traffic deaths and injuries, challenging them to analyse these by age, gender etc, asking them to interpret what was happening, and then bluntly asking them whether they wanted to do something about the picture that emerged.

This was highly successful, with students expressing concern - even anger - about the current situation (and identifying local examples and illustrations of lack of safety) and making strong decisions that they wanted to do something to make their areas safer. In some ways, the difficulty was to hold students back from 'leaping' straight to action suggestions. Rather, they were asked to research the traffic safety issues that existed around their schools, consulting with students, parents, teachers and others about the nature and causes of problems. After all, were these just concerns of

some people, or were they more widely held? Some ideas and resources were provided about research methods.

It was invaluable to have consultants from the Department of Education and Training and VicRoads working with

the project, and these people were available to visit individual schools with resources, advice and questions. The small grants from Darebin City Council's Road Safety Strategy also enabled teachers to spend time with their teams, and develop their resources.



### Student Forum 2

The student groups came back together in June to share their results. They were asked to report on how they had conducted their research, what they had found out, and what they were focusing on as a issue.

Their topics were as diverse as the schools and their communities: parent drop off and pick up, lack of crossings, traffic speed in near-by streets, student lack of traffic awareness, concentration of students on tram stops, crossings on major roads, parking restrictions and so on. Students reported to the Student Forum with charts and photographs, powerpoint presentations, videos and slides. Representatives stood up and clearly and articulately identified the concerns of their communities, and their commitment to action.

This Student Forum also discussed possible forms of action that could be taken, with three areas of possibilities emerging: **engineering** (changes to physical situations such as roundabouts), **enforcement** (asking others such as police to stop or control activities) and **education** (trying to change the way people behave). In practice, schools talked about taking on a mix of all three of these, entering into discussions with the local Council and other bodies, supporting better signage, advising on illegal parking practices, and also publishing educational materials for use within classrooms, homes and the broader school communities.

This analysis emerged from concerns from some schools that, if students were identifying only engineering solutions, the expense and timelines involved would mean that action outcomes would be distant and unlikely within the project's timeframe. Educational activities - trying to change the behaviour of students, parents and others - were much more accessible to student action, though many schools also entered into negotiations with the local government engineers, with public transport companies and so on, towards tackling the larger proposals.

Work continued within the teams, back at the schools, again supported by consultant visits.

### Student Forum 3

The third Student Forum in October brought the student representatives together again to report on their achievements. Each school was asked to bring along and set up a small display around two topics: 'What We Did' and 'What We Achieved'. A 'bingo' style game encouraged all participants to visit these displays, ask questions, and find out answers to set questions. All schools also introduced their displays with short speeches.

The schools were also paired, and each was asked to act as a 'consultant' to one other school team, commenting particularly on their work and advising them on future directions. This feedback was given publicly and provided an





orientation to the bigger question: 'What now?'

Visitors from the Department of Education and Training, Darebin City Council and VicRoads responded to what they had seen and heard, congratulating students on their work, and also encouraging them to maintain their commitment. Many of the schools, in fact, indicated that they were still involved in action which they hoped would be on-going.

There were some highly significant reports: of heightened awareness by parents about dangers associated with parking near schools and with picking up or dropping off students, of student focus on

correct road-crossing procedures, on the need for controlled traffic flow around schools, of the achievement and importance of restricted speed zones near the schools.

In some cases, there were 'Safety Festivals' planned at schools, or days when the entire school population would walk rather than drive to school in order to both highlight dangers and also relieve traffic congestion.

There is a continued commitment to maintain this initiative, with students monitoring changed behaviours and following up promises of engineering and enforcement.

Late in the year, the Network heard that it had won the Victorian statewide award from the Victorian Association for Traffic Safety Education Teachers and this was particularly encouraging of this form of learning.

### Where to now?

The important aspects of this project: secondary-primary cooperation, working as a district, the support from government and community bodies - will continue. The group is now planning work over a three-year period around student engagement and action, that will possibly take many forms, but which recognises the important elements of the **Student Action Team** approach:

- engaging and challenging students to take ownership of curriculum;
- focusing on a real issue, which incorporates student inquiry and action, and an expectation of significant community outcomes;
- collaboration between schools and other agencies, in which these bodies provide the real challenge or commission;
- incorporation of these approaches as part of the curriculum rather than as an optional extra.



Last Wednesday I had the privilege of accompanying six Junior School Councillors from our Year 5-6 grades to a Student Forum at Northland Secondary College. This forum was related to a major **Road Safety Project** which has involved students from 13 schools in our local area.

After the extensive survey work conducted by our students earlier in the year, we have been looking at ways of making the roads around our school safer for everyone.

At Northland SC, our students were able to report on the actions we have taken and the outcomes for our school community. They were also able to hear of the problems encountered at other schools and the ways in which difficulties were overcome.

As an educational experience, this occasion was superb! It demonstrated the ways in which students' problem solving abilities can be strengthened in real life situations. It also enabled students to develop their communication skills, both orally and in written form.

This approach to education is seen as a vital part of our methods of teaching at Preston South. **When situations are meaningful, students want to learn!**

The success of the Road Safety Project has been acknowledged by the Victorian Association for Traffic Safety Education Teachers. At a ceremony this evening I will be accepting a major award for the achievements of our Road Safety group. It is very rewarding to have all our hard work recognised.

**Thérèse West**  
Principal

Preston South Primary School

## Some Resources

### Student Action Teams:

- The Australian Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne has produced a Working Paper (2001) and a Research Report (2003) on the evaluation of a statewide Student Action Teams project. These are available from the Centre (Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne Vic 3010; ph: 03 8344 9633). The Working Paper is \$11; the Research Report is \$16.50; plus \$5 p&h per order.
- A Student Action Teams Manual is available free: down-load it from the Victorian Department of Education and Training at:

[www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/engagement/studentactionteams.htm](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/engagement/studentactionteams.htm)

### Road Safety:

- CrashStats is a Victorian on-line database containing all reported road injury statistics since 1991. It can be searched at:

[www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au)

### This Project:

- For more information about the Darebin project, contact Thérèse West, Preston South Primary School, Hotham Street, Preston Vic 3072. Phone: (03) 9484 1544.

This summary originally from  
*Connect* 143-144, October-December 2003



... and beyond

# Junior Primary Action

Magill Junior Primary (in Adelaide, SA) has a strong history of active student participation in its R-2 school. We recently published the first issue of our newspaper, the **Magill J.P. Messenger**, which reports on a new model of participation that has been trialed in 2004, with all children and staff involved. This model is based around **Student Action Teams**.

Here are some children's descriptions of some of the Teams:

## Action Teams

At Magill Junior Primary School, every child belongs to a Student Action Team. The groups meet each Monday and have a special focus or task. Some groups plan special events. Others talk about being healthy and fit. Others solve problems at school.

There are seven groups which are called buddy groups.

The Action Teams are important to our school.

**Thomas Nunn**

## Choir

The Choir Action Team does performances at assemblies. Every Friday, the choir practises in the Music Room. One of the songs we sing is "I am boy, I am girl, We are children of the world". It is fun to be in the choir because it is fun to sing.

**Lara Seymour**

At choir you have to sing at the start. Everyone has been working hard. When you sing you sit in a circle and sing your name.

Next we listen to songs and we sing together. It is really cool and sounds very good. At choir I have met new people. I think we should have many more people in the Choir Action Team. It is great fun and I like it!

**Mariam Mehn**

## Helpful Peer Mediators

The peer mediators are there to help you solve problems. The peer mediators have been working with Mrs Cooper. They have been talking about telling the Year 1s about being a peer mediator and how the peer mediators are chosen. Peer mediators also plan the 'Focus of the Fortnight'.

**Anthony Markey**

Peer mediators are here to help you. If you have a problem, go to them. They will tell you to get the other person and bring them to the peer mediators so they can talk to them. The peer mediators help us all.

**Niel Renna**

## Who Wants to Hear About AFL?

The AFL (Active for Life) group have been busy all year. This term, we have learnt about PE (Physical Education) Week and planned special activities. One of the special activities was a Jump Rope display and the Jump Rope team showing us how to skip and how to tie the ropes. I like to be in AFL because I like skipping.

**David Huynh**

Casey has been a member of the successful Magill Junior Primary Jump Rope team in 2004. The team is the youngest in the state and is regularly invited to schools to give skipping demonstrations and talk about being fit and healthy.

**Jordan Leovic**

I think Jump Rope is good because it keeps you healthy. Skipping gives you strong bones and your heart beats strongly. Jump Rope is good for your lungs.

**Evea Noble**

## Buddy Groups

I am in Yellow 3 buddy group. We read a book about Franklin. At buddy group I have met new people. I felt happy.

**Daniel Hvasanov**

## Busy People in the Library

The library monitors have been working hard but it is still fun. I know because I am a library monitor. We plan and move the tables and sort out books. Other library monitors from Yellow 2 are Tim, Mitchell and Third.

Other classes have library monitors too. I feel great being a library monitor because I like books.

**Lilly Hay**

The library monitors have been very busy. They have been stamping books, moving shelves, moving books onto the new shelves and moving crates of books.

I feel grateful to be a library monitor because I like helping and learning more about the library.

**Mitchell Fehlandt**

The library monitors have been doing difficult things like stacking books, moving shelves and doing work on the computer.

They move tables, put the books in the right shelves and make posters. They have to check the numbers and letters to put the books on the right shelves. If they are not on the right shelves, they have to move them. They stamp new books.

I think the library monitors are important because they do important jobs.

**Logan White**

## Environment Team

The environment team does lots of cleaning up. Each day they find lots of rubbish. They do some gardening and they make posters. They like it in the environment team. They do lots of sweeping and picking up rubbish. They like making posters.

**Callum Horan**

The environment team does lots of cleaning up. Each time they meet they find lots of rubbish. They also do some gardening. They pick up rubbish and sweep the paths and steps. They make posters to remind people about putting their litter in the bin and about special events like Environment Day. Lawrence said he liked making posters.

**Lawrence** (interviewed by Callum Horan)

## Student Council

Every Wednesday, the Student Council meets and talks about different things that are happening around the school. Each person on the Student Council has been voted in by the members of their Action Team or Buddy Group.

Student Council is like a class meeting. We think about new ideas for the school. It is interesting being on Student Council because we can tell the class about new things in the school.

**Grace Anderson**

## Magill J.P. Messenger

Magill Junior Primary School

November 22, 2004

### Action Teams

At Magill Junior Primary School every child belongs to a Student Action Team. The groups meet each Monday and have a special focus or task.



Some groups plan special events. Others talk about being healthy and fit. Others solve problems at school.

There are seven groups which are called buddy groups.

The Action Teams are important to our school.



By: Elizabeth Nissen

### BUSY PEOPLE IN THE LIBRARY

The library monitors have been working hard but it is still fun. I know because I am a library monitor.

Other library monitors from Yellow 2 are Tim, Mitchell and Third.

We plan and move the tables and sort out

Other classes have library monitors too. I feel great being a library

a report by  
**Lilly Hay**

For more information, contact:

**Susanne Rogers**

Magill Junior Primary School  
Adelaide Street, Magill 5072 SA  
08 8331 8675

## School Image

The School Image Action Team has planned several casual days during the year and also organised Children's Week. During Children's Week, we had a casual day and raised money for children in an orphanage in Cambodia. We work very hard for the school. I am glad that I have been part of the School Image Action Team.

**Benjamin Krieg**



# Students' Voices

## Strategies for promoting student participation in Primary Schools

In my first year as Principal at Woodville Primary School, I elected to work with staff members to ensure they all knew about participatory structures and had experienced the benefits of engaging with others in collaborative work. In the following year, I adopted a controversial strategy by allowing the existing student participation processes to fade.

When I arrived at Woodville, I discovered a student representative council (SRC) that was managed by one staff member. This teacher had accepted this responsibility for the past three years and was passionate about the importance of students having a say about aspects of the school. As well as the release time from other teaching duties, this teacher volunteered many of her lunchtimes to work with students. However, there were significant problems with the functioning of the SRC.

The first problem concerned the lack of support shown by the teachers. They had little connection with the SRC other than sending their class representative to weekly meetings. They did not provide their classes with time to discuss suggestions or to provide feedback to the SRC. Further, several staff regularly complained about the involvement of students during class time because they were "missing out on their learning".

The second problem was the limitation of SRC business to subjects on which the adults believed that students should comment. Participation in school governance was restricted to electing student representatives to existing decision-making structures that had limited terms of reference (see Hart, 1997; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Wyse 2001). They were able to plan for special days on which school uniform was not to be worn and to promote ways of reducing the litter in the schoolyard. There was little room for students to be innovative and to raise issues that were of importance to them.

The third problem, which was perhaps the most fundamental, was the lack of student engagement with the SRC. Although each class had a representative, the process for selecting these students determined the candidates. Younger students were threatened by the required formality of candidates presenting speeches prior to a secret ballot. Because of the resulting lack of candidates, many classes had their representative nominated by the teacher. Older students excluded

themselves from the process knowing, from their previous experience, which of the more popular students was likely to be elected. Further, the organisation of SRC was hierarchical; it operated with an executive of older students under the nominal leadership of male and female presidents.

For these reasons, the SRC was counterproductive in enabling the majority of students to speak about their learning and their school. In spite of this, the decision to let the SRC lapse could have conveyed to students, staff and parents that student participation was not valued. This, of course, would have been contradictory to our espoused focus on student welfare and learning.

### New forms of participation

While allowing the previous student participation structures to fade, I gradually introduced new ways of allowing many students to share their comments about the school and to demonstrate their learning. This included inviting students in Years 4 and 5 to train to become school 'ambassadors'. The ambassadors welcomed visitors and took them on tours of the facilities during which they talked about their school. Students from each year level actively participated in talking about their learning by demonstrating aspects of their work to the parent community at the school's Annual General Meeting. All students acted as ambassadors for their parents on the school's Acquaintance Night. We introduced reporting processes that required active student involvement. Students contributed to interviews and also presented, in non-written form, an aspect of their learning to an authentic audience. Students also provided written comment about their academic and social progress as part of the reporting process.

At the same time as the trials of these initiatives, several staff members were released to visit other schools to talk with students and teachers about other ways of promoting student voice. Teachers reported back to their colleagues at whole staff meetings. Several staff professional development sessions took a critical look at these and other ways of increasing opportunities for students to play central roles in the daily operations of the school.

The replacement of the SRC with these alternatives allowed more students to share their experiences of schooling with a variety of audiences. The student participation initiatives also engaged all teachers working with their classes. However, the structures were largely adult-initiated and there were no formal and visible protocols for students to make suggestions or

raise concerns. The winning of a Values Education Study grant from the federal government in 2003 enabled us to create new ways of working with students based on our school's values of respect, mutual trust, fairness and social cohesion.

We held a Kids' Conference week during which children were regrouped into smaller multi-aged groups working with different staff members to learn co-operative skills and ways of making the values explicit. The week culminated in a social cohesion day. Prior to the Conference Week, a small group of volunteer teachers was released to compile and "launch" a resource booklet of games and activities designed to teach specific behaviours. This acknowledged staff workload, supported staff members who did not have experience in working in these ways with students, encouraged congruence of expectations and promoted the importance of explicitly teaching the attitudes and skills to enable students to work well in groups.

An outcome of the Kids' Conference was the establishment of playground observations by volunteer staff and students. The observations indicated how far the values had been transferred from the classroom to the playground. As a result of feedback from students and staff reflection on this data, student action groups, known as Values in Action (VIA), were formed. The focus of these groups was to allow students to initiate changes they would like to see, rather than have them respond to problems. The emphasis was on creating rather than resolving issues. Students were selected, using a method agreed on by the children in their classes, to be members of VIA for the remainder of the year. Two volunteer staff members met with each group every fortnight. Initial reflections on VIA identified the benefits as:

- the provision of formal and visible structures of student participation;
- an increase in the number of students meeting at VIA (there were 84 involved);
- the increased number of staff taking responsibility for the facilitation of these groups (there were 8);
- a range of topics generated by VIA (eg VIA Social Cohesion planned a whole school end of year ceremony and VIA Trust suggested changes to the time out room).

### Problems and possible pitfalls

It has taken three years of strategic action to introduce a culture of staff collaboration and participation in decision-making, to redirect the school's focus onto student welfare and learning, and to initiate methods of enabling authentic student participation. However, the

retelling of the tactics that have enabled us to progress this far has several inherent dangers.

The description of the underlying thinking and the change processes presents change merely as a managerial approach which, with adequate resourcing and appropriate professional development, results in the eventual achievement of the desired outcome. This brief overview of events at Woodville has not explored the human and emotional aspects of the changes. It has not conveyed the concerns or resistance of individual staff members and has only hinted at the anxieties of many parents. It has not acknowledged that one particular group of students was disenfranchised by, and therefore disenchanted with, the new student participation structures.



Children who currently received many rewards and much recognition under the existing ways of operation may be reluctant to pursue the recommendations proposed by some of their peers. (Howard and Johnson, 2002)

Students who were academically able, popular with their peers and in their last year of primary school had looked forward to becoming the executive members of the SRC. Many of them had ambitions of being the presidents of this

exclusive group and felt that they were not valued in the new processes.

### Future possibilities for student participation at Woodville

The introduction of student voice at Woodville has been systematic and sustained. For it to be extended so that working in partnership with students is an established way of operating, several interrelated factors need to be considered. These include the allocation of human, financial and physical resources, congruence of all the school's structures and systems, and staff commitment to student voice.

#### Resourcing

The VES grant enabled four pairs of teachers to be released to support a structure that created greater staff and student involvement, and increased ownership of student voice structures. With the conclusion of the funded project, the additional resourcing for teacher release has ceased, posing significant questions about the sustainability of this approach to school change.

- How important is it to have more than one staff member leading this aspect of the school's work?
- How important is it for staff to continue to work in pairs (or small teams) with students in this way?
- How would students interpret the reduction of this approach?

- How could the involvement of several teachers be maintained?

If student voice is to be authentic, another financial consideration is submissions by the students through the school's budget for funding to enact some of their proposals. This raises the more specific and highly significant question about the extent to which the school's complex budgeting processes should be shared with students. It further raises a larger issue about the transparency of the budget process for adults, how well informed staff members are about the financial operations of the school and how confident they would be in teaching this to students.

The continued regular meeting of four VIA groups will necessitate designated spaces in which they can gather. Apart from the practical organisational considerations, the creation and naming of a meeting place will make visible the importance of VIA and will enable students to develop their collective identity and autonomy as agents of change (Thomson and Holdsworth, 2003). However, there is already considerable competition from many specialist programs needing work spaces in a crowded school.

Competing systemic demands, conflicting expectations from within the school community and a shrinking resource pool may challenge the continued long-term allocation of appropriate human, financial and physical resources to student participation.

## Congruence of school's structures and systems

Closely aligned with appropriate resourcing for genuine student participation is the challenge of ensuring that student voice is not a single, unrelated program. Instead, principles of student voice need to permeate every aspect of the school's organisation and operation.

Student councils may engender the perception that students are actively involved in their school when, in practice, their voices may be restricted to formal, hierarchical meetings with agendas set by adults. In such circumstances, students are not informed of or engaged in everyday decision-making about their classroom, school, learning or teaching. Similarly, the creation of VIA groups at Woodville may promote the perception that student participation is addressed by these four groups. The danger is that the community is therefore absolved of further responsibility to look critically at what is actually occurring in all aspects of the school. If student voice was limited to the formal business of VIA meetings, even with enthusiastic support from all classes for each of the VIA, claims of enabling students to work in partnership with other members of the school community would be overstated. Some questions

which will assist our critical reflection on the degree to which student voice permeates the school's operations include:

- Have students been informed about this? (eg via special events, concerns raised at staff meeting or Governing Council, changes to grounds and facilities);
- What student consultation process is in place for the review of policy and practice? (eg homework, time out room, appeal against suspension, dress code, bell times);
- What does this process, practice or facility say about students and their position/role/opinions? (eg students prohibited from entering certain areas such as office and staffroom, classrooms before school);
- How do adults respond to students' enquiries about the reasons for certain expectations?
- Is there a process for students to resolve unfair behaviour from adults?
- What impact has student participation had on decision-making and school change?

Each of these questions interrogates many of the routine customs of the school and will assist us to be alert to Alderson's caution:

...children have well-tuned antennae for tokenism and inauthenticity. (Alderson, 2000, p 244)

## Staff commitment to student voice

I acknowledged the importance of staff understanding of and commitment to student participation by:

- deliberately structuring collaborative experiences for staff;
- making explicit the purposes and processes of participatory decision-making;
- providing opportunities for staff to develop the skills required to enable them to contribute to decision-making; and
- making clear the links between student participation and constructivist learning theories.

By allowing time for staff to become familiar with the principles and practices of participation, while simultaneously gradually introducing structures to promote greater student engagement, I aimed to ensure that staff members were skilled in the techniques, knowledgeable about the methods and increasingly convinced of the value of student voice. However, during the three years since I have been at Woodville, there has been considerable staff turnover. Some vacancies were caused by staff members deciding they did not wish to remain at the school, some resigned from DECS and others were the result of our practice of encouraging teachers to apply for promotion positions.



Combined with illness, limited tenure and a variable staffing formula, these factors resulted in 12 new staff members in 2003. Although an evenly paced, sequential approach to student participation has been in practice for three years, a significant proportion of staff has not participated in all of it.

Further, it cannot be assumed that increased staff understanding and development of expertise automatically leads to greater belief in the importance of student participation. Their long-held beliefs about children and their expertise may continue to challenge our advocacy of student voice.

Even those who have endorsed Epstein's claim that "children's abilities to make adequate judgements are much greater than we give them credit for" (Epstein in Walford 1998, p 38) face the dilemma of listening to what their students are saying, while at the same time trying to teach them to express themselves in acceptable ways. Teachers at Woodville take seriously their responsibility to teach their students appropriate ways of seeking change. Non-compliant behaviour may certainly convey student response but it is often unsuccessful in achieving the desired outcome for the student. Within the context of busy classrooms with a multiplicity of competing demands, there is a tendency to disregard underlying causes of behaviour and focus instead on only the overt behaviour. Another difficulty is for staff to listen to the message when students are telling us something we don't want to hear. Considering the following questions may assist them in listening to what the students are saying:

- Are there opportunities for informal as well as formal conversations with individual students?
- Have we structures in place which encourage us to consider and discuss with the student, non-compliant and disruptive behaviours?
- As a whole staff do we examine aspects of students' school experiences to identify those school structures that may generate undesired behaviours?
- Have we processes in place to enable us to reflect on challenging feedback?

Enacting the advice of Hill and his colleagues, who use children's own words in summarising ways to include their perspectives, may support adults at Woodville in their endeavour to hear what children are saying.

STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN.... stop and give time to children, look at children to give them attention and listen much more completely to what children are saying. (Hill, 1998: p 12)

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Kaye Johnson is Principal of Woodville Primary School in Adelaide, South Australia. This article is extracted from a longer article in *Connect* 152, April 2005



# A Student Action Team: Investigating & supporting ... learning that makes a difference to someone

Developing from my involvement in the *Discovering Democracy* Grants Program, I have become more informed about the importance of providing an environment for active student engagement in our schools.

I am Student Wellbeing Coordinator at St Charles, a primary school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Here I was well supported by our principal, Gunnar Rasmussen, as I ventured to explore how our community would benefit by more participation of our students in all decision making areas of our school. *Connect* magazine provided many strategies for us to look at to see what would be the 'best fit' for our community.

One of the approaches we undertook in 2003 was to set up a Student Action Team (see a short article about this in *Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004). Students in grade 5/6 were briefed about what a Student Action Team was and were invited to apply to join the team. Twenty eight students applied and eight were chosen (four from Grade 5 and four from Grade 6). The students met and brain stormed what project they would choose to be involved in - something they could undertake to make a difference to something they cared about profoundly. The consensus was to investigate the needs of St. Gemma's school for disabled children in Papua New Guinea.

We invited Kate Wilde from Manningham Youth and Family Services to join the team as a mentor and asked her to run a training session for the team members on group rules, public speaking, organisational skills and responsibility for delegated tasks. The students benefited greatly from this training as it empowered them to be confident, active team members.

The team members then researched Papua New Guinea and the school; they made contact with Brother Jim who runs the school and discussed what their immediate needs were. This information was shared with our school community through assemblies, the newsletter and through speaking at staff meetings and the school Education Board. These roles were shared by all team members. The

team members wrote up their research and this document was put into the school library.

Through their consultation with Brother Jim, they found that stationery was in great need at the school. The team set about organising for our school community to donate pencils, exercise books, rulers, rubbers and so on. They then approached local businesses to also contribute. Four crates of materials were sent to PNG.

In 2004, four members of the Student Action Team moved to secondary school and four new members joined the team. After ongoing contact with Brother Jim and the children at St. Gemma's, the team took on the responsibility to supply software for the school. The team contacted computer companies, held a sausage sizzle at school with the assistance of Doncaster Police (who helped with the cooking) and support of local businesses (who donated sausages, bread and so on) and met with Councillor Gerry Dale from Manningham Council to see what the council would do to help. They wrote many letters and made many phone calls, sometimes ending in frustration as they had to realise that their dream to help the children wasn't everyone's. However, during 2004 the team were able to organise 14 computers for the school and also raised \$1500 which bought software for the children to use on these computers.

The team continues to have regular contact with Brother Jim and the children as they begin to set their goals for 2005.

The team makes their own decisions and sets out how best to implement these decisions. I sit in on meetings and observe and am constantly amazed at what wonderful active citizens these young people are.

**Sue Cahill**

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## 2.4 Student Councils: Partners in School Decision-Making



### The Challenge:

...unconnected to the real decision-making in the school

"Student Councils seem to exist within a vacuum. They make decisions, but have no power to enact them; they present student voices, but no-one is listening. There's not even a forum for the voices to engage and discuss issues seriously.

"Sometimes a couple of students are on School Council; even more rarely, they are elected there by students (once upon a time that was legislation in Victoria!). Even then, their voices are isolated and ignored. Occasionally someone turns to the students and asks: "What do you think?" But in the absence of background information, support and a chance to consult with other students, the representative is mute or can present only a personal view. The discussion moves on.

"No training currently exists for student representatives on School Councils (though there once was!)."



### Possible Strategy 1:

Research decision-making structures in the school. This can be a Student Council training exercise, or a Student Action Team project (eg in Social Science or Politics classes). See details of a proposed training exercise: *Mapping the School*.

See page 50 ...

### Possible Strategy 2:

Request Student Council representation on **all** school committees. There should be at least two student representatives on each group.

### Possible Strategy 3:

**Organise Training Days for School Council student representatives.** A group of nearby schools could run an annual cluster day where all students on School Councils get background information on their roles, assertiveness training and so on. Ask the Department of Education to support this.

### Possible Strategy 4:

Develop strategies for inclusive meeting procedures. These will benefit all members of meetings, not just students. Ideas for *Inclusive Committee Procedures* are included in an article on page 51.

See page 51 ...

### Possible Strategy 5:

Keep other groups particularly parent organisations, P&C etc fully informed. Visit parent and community representatives on School Council prior to meetings and ask for their support - even ask them to lead on some matters. This is called **lobbying** and is quite legitimate.

# Mapping the School

*This is an in-school 'Students as Researchers' exercise that can be run with primary or secondary school students; the level of complexity can be adapted to the age range. It requires at least an hour; perhaps it would be better to run it in two half-hour sessions a week apart.*

The aim of this activity is to draw up a 'map' of how decisions are made in a school. It asks questions such as

*Who makes the decisions in our school?*

*What bodies and committees exist?*

*What do they have power over?*

*Who else is involved in making decisions?*

*How does it link together?*

Start by asking the students what they already know about who makes decisions in the school. Which individuals? What groups exist? What decisions do they make? Do the individuals report to and/or are responsible to others (eg other committees or individuals)?

As students contribute information, map it onto a whiteboard, checking about details: "Who is on this committee?" "What do they look at?" "How often do they meet?" "Who do they report to?"

This builds up a first map of what is known - a 'box and arrows' diagram. More importantly, it starts to define what is **not** known. It suggests questions like: "Who would know what this group does?" "Who do we need to ask about this?"

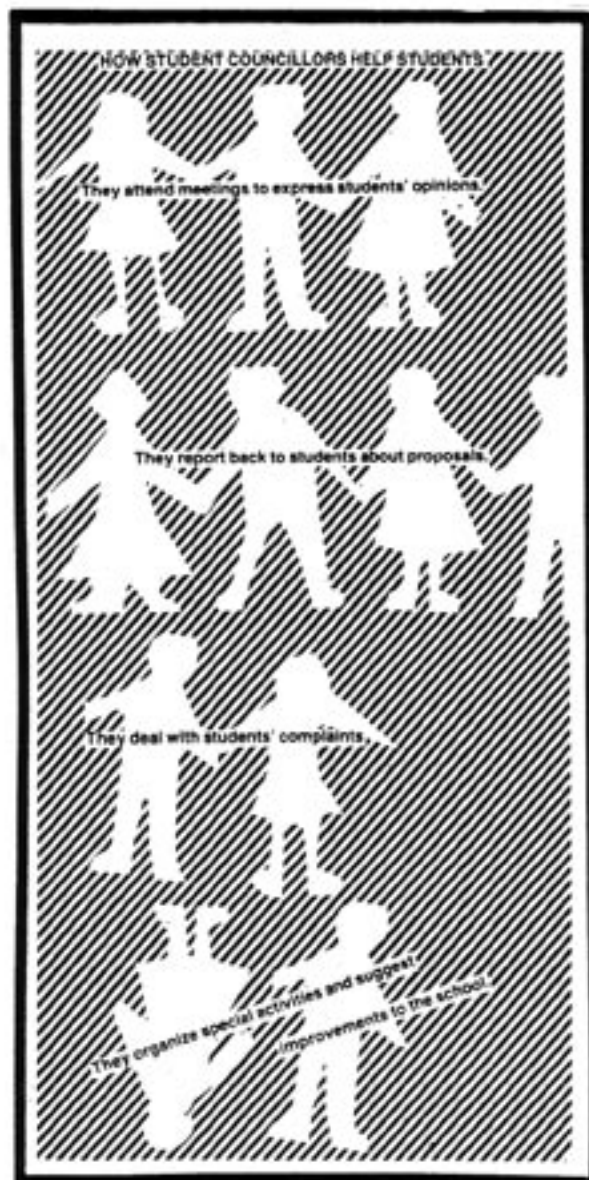
Ask students to look at the diagram and identify the gaps: what bodies exist, meeting times, powers. Mark these in a different colour or write these up on the map as research tasks. Then ask: "Who can help us fill in the gaps?" Identify available 'sources' in the school who could provide information.

Set up small volunteer research teams to undertake research tasks: a group of three students might elect to interview the Principal about specific questions; another group might volunteer to attend a meeting of a canteen committee and find out who is there and what they do. If I'm doing this as an 'outsider', I prepare for the training by arranging for key people to be available at that time, and the student research teams go off and interview them and bring the information straight back. If I'm in the school, I'd do this over a longer time period (eg a week) and suggest that the information be brought back and shared.

On reconvening, the research teams report and correct, clarify or add to the map - what a person or committee makes decisions about, who is on the committee, when they meet, who they report to - until all are reasonably happy that it represents how decisions are made in the school.

Looking at the map also directly raises questions of: "Where are students already represented?" "Where should they be?" as well as targeting student input: "Who do we go and see about this issue?" The completed map can also be put on a student noticeboard or published in the student diary.

**Roger Holdsworth**



## Keeping All Informed

The SRC at James Fallon High School (Albury, NSW) always attends School Council meetings, so that we can advise them, the P&C and other groups with the decision-making power in the school. We give them regular reports and represent the student body to the fullest of our ability.

We regularly talk to our Year advisers about issues that affect every Year group. We also have a very good rapport/relationship with our Principal and we always talk to him and bring up issues about the students and the school, and work through many projects.

**Freya Hunter**

*Publicity Officer, James Fallon HS SRC,  
Albury NSW*

Versions of this activity originally appeared in *Connect* 135-136, June-August 2002 and in *Connect* 145-146, February-April, 2004

Originally from *Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004



# Inclusive Committee Procedures

**E**arlier in *Connect*, we discussed issues associated with students on bodies like School Councils. Students have complained that procedures here are obscure and difficult to follow, and that this locks them out from being able to participate fully.

*It's not just the students who have to change and learn! If a School Council or any other body is serious about supporting the participation of students, then it needs to look seriously at how it operates. It might also find that improvements in its processes serve to empower others on those bodies.*

*The following ideas about changing committee procedures to encourage the active participation of students were first drafted in 1984. While they were particularly written about students on central Education Department committees, they have wider relevance to other representatives and other committees - both of student groups and where student representatives share decision making with others (eg at School Councils).*

## Before the Meeting

1. A detailed agenda should be sent out, giving (where possible) recommendations to be moved.
2. Discussion meetings should be held before the main meeting, to go over the agenda and the main business. For example, students could meet with other students and with an advisor, to talk over what is likely to happen.
3. Meetings beforehand could be held with other committee members where they explain to students what they aim to do in the meeting and how they will do it.
4. In particular, experienced committee members who will act as in-committee 'mentors', should meet with students before the meeting.
5. Pre-meeting meetings should be seen as part of committee members' commitments. In particular, accurate time commitment information should be given to students when approaches about committee membership are made.
6. A support person should be allocated to meet with students before the meeting and, where possible, to sit with students during at least the initial meetings.
7. The meeting should be held at a time when student representatives can attend with minimal disruption to their studies.

## At the Start of the Meeting

1. An experienced committee member should be nominated as 'mentor' to each student member for each meeting. This role could rotate between members, with attention paid to positive gender role models.

2. All members should be introduced and identified, for example, with a place name. This should show both the name and the organisation/role represented.
3. All documents should have a face sheet summarising the main ideas and recommendations.

## Procedure of the Meeting

1. The meeting should stop before decisions are made, to allow time for students to:
  - talk with each other;
  - talk with committee tutors/mentors;
  - talk with any support persons present;to make sure they understand the issues involved.
2. Motions should be written out and, where possible, copied for and circulated to all members of the Committee.
3. There should be a clear statement about the **style** of each part of the meeting, identifying 'brainstorming' and 'formal' times.
4. Arguments and discussion from subcommittee meetings should not be repeated in committee meetings.
5. At the end of each item of business, the chairperson should summarise the decisions on action to be taken and clearly indicate responsibility for action.

## Language

1. All members should avoid forms of jargon:
  - initials should be avoided except where they're explained in documents;
  - other groups, committees or individual roles should be explained fully;
  - an attempt should be made to put motions and discussion in direct and plain language.
2. Any member should be able to query the use of a name, word or phrase and have that query treated seriously.

## After the Meeting

1. At the end of the meeting, the chairperson or Executive Officer should summarise the major decisions made, especially indicating what action is to be taken, by whom and by when.
2. The committee mentors and/or support person should meet with the students to talk over what happened in the meeting. This should also be regarded as part of the meeting commitment.

Originally from: *Connect* 27/28, June-August 1984;  
*Connect* 116, April 1999 and  
*Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004

# SRCs: Getting the Active Support of the Principal

*Some thoughts from a former SRC President who tried numerous times (usually successfully ☺) to get a variety of events to happen at school.*

Getting the active support of the Principal or administration can sometimes be tricky. Your Principal is a busy person and can sometimes be hesitant when students propose something new that they would like to do in the school. A good Principal will take the time to listen to new ideas, especially if they come from a formal student body such as the SRC. You should be able to expect, at the very least, to hear the reasons behind a 'No' explained. The following, however, is more about what you can do to get your proposals through by being organised.

Sometimes when you propose something, this is how it goes:

## Stage 1: The run-around

This is to see how serious you are about your suggestion. The Principal asks for additional information (sometimes more than is needed). So if you don't get your initial request in some time before the approval needs to be given, the chances of missing the boat are pretty big. Strategy: get all of the Principal's concerns out at the start so that you can track down all the material you need to support your case.

## Stage 2: Indecision

The Principal agrees to look in to it and get back to you. Again it's a race against the clock. Principals are busy people too and sometimes they just forget. Before you finish the current discussion, make your next appointment to see the Principal, so that you both have a time frame.

## Stage 3: Logistics

By this stage, unless you missed something, you'll know if the Principal is supporting your proposal or not. If you haven't been given a flat 'No', then a discussion will no doubt take place about how to run your activity in terms of managing venue, staffing, etc. If you both put your minds to it, you can usually solve these problems. After all, the organisation exists to timetable a whole school into classes, doesn't it? If arguments like this are brought in as a reason that the event **can't** happen, you may need to ask bluntly whether the school wants to do it at all.

If you have a teacher supporting your proposal, then this organisational meeting is a good one to have them in on because they'll keep an eye out for procedural difficulties and for possible solutions. The more you already have things organised before this discussion, the better the outcome should be. For instance, getting permission to use a certain venue from the staff member who looks after it, or approaching some friendly teachers on behalf of the SRC to ask them to supervise at the event. This way, the Principal needs only to give the "Yes, this all sounds fine" approval without having to take on all of the organisational responsibilities.

**So what if you get a flat 'No'?**

## Stage 4: Accountability to School Council

If your proposal is a genuinely good idea and there are no apparent reasons as to why it should not go ahead, but you still don't feel as though you are getting the support of the Principal, then the School Council are good people to keep informed of what the SRC is working on. If the Principal has already vetoed the proposal then this probably isn't a good idea. However, if over some time, you have reported to the Council about your initiatives, then you will have the option of informing them that your proposal was rejected. Consequently, the Principal will most likely need to explain and justify the reasons to the Council. If you don't have student reps on the Council, send a concise report to each meeting with one of the parent or staff reps. Note that the objective here is not to go over the Principal's head but to discourage a 'No' response in the first place unless there are good reasons.

While all of this sounds like doom and gloom that's more trouble than it's worth, in general, most Principals will support you if you demonstrate that you are organised, keen and responsible. When you are planning and negotiating, give yourself plenty of time, perhaps starting the wheels in motion months in advance. Be flexible but firm, and have a number of contingency plans up your sleeve. Eventually you will have the opportunity to run a student activity from scratch, which is a most rewarding experience, and an achievement to be proud of. And remember: "If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving might not be for you."

*Paul Tresidder*

Originally from *Connect* 135-136, June-August 2002

## 2.5 An Effective, Relevant and Supported Student Council



### The Challenge:

... irrelevant ... ineffective

"The sorts of discussions and decisions made by Student Councils are peripheral to real decision-making in the school. Sometimes the Student Councils appears to make some decisions - but they have been allowed to make these because they really change little at all - only the details. When important decisions are to be made, the Student Council is absent or not consulted or ignored. Therefore students regard the Student Council as irrelevant to their needs. When students do raise issues through the Council

that they regard as really important, either members of the Council 'censor' these: "Oh, that wouldn't be achievable" or, if they take them up for action, they're usually or always knocked back by school decision-makers, sometimes with no explanation."

### Possible Strategy 1:

Run a **Staff Development Day** on student participation, representation and voice. Discuss why it is important that students are treated as full partners in decision-making. Explore barriers and solutions. Develop a list of opportunities for participation: in School Reviews, cyclical planning, curriculum submissions, student welfare discussions and so on.

### Possible Strategy 2:

**Publicise success.** Make sure that Student Council achievements are known about inside and outside the school.



### Possible Strategy 3:

**Adopt a Teacher!** Each Student Council member (perhaps working in pairs) is assigned a teacher - perhaps one they get on well with - who they will brief about student initiatives after each meeting. The task: to make sure that teacher knows about and will be an active supporter of student interests.



### Possible Strategy 4:

Never ask a question or for something in a way that can lead to a 'no' answer. Ask: "How can we achieve this?" instead of "Can we do this?" Always be prepared with arguments for, but also be prepared to listen to reasonable alternatives and compromises. Always ask for reasons for decisions.

*In the following pages, some active students outline their ideas for an effective Student Council...*

# Students Taking the SRC Seriously

I have been heavily involved with the SRC for my entire high school life. Here's a little background: I was elected as class representative every year from Year 7, then at the end of Year 9, I was elected onto the executive for a two year term. First year I held the position of Secretary (Year 10), then in Year 11 I was President. I was on the District SRC from Years 9 to 11 where I have held the position of Vice President. Also from District SRC, I was elected onto the NSW SRC - the peak of student leadership in NSW - for one year (Year 11). Through the school SRC I have been on various school committees such as the uniform committee, and also on the School Council. Also, in June-July of 2003 I traveled to the USA with 16 other students and four advisers from around Australia, to attend the American National Student Leadership Conference (Buffalo, NY) and a National Leadership Camp (Lake Tahoe, Nevada). The trip was organised by PASTA that publishes a segment in **Connect**.

So I have had a lot of experience with SRC and student leadership. I have also had the opportunity over the years to talk to a lot of different people from lots of different places and hear about their experiences with SRCs - problems and successes!

One of the first things I learnt about SRCs is that they are all different - every single school has different systems and styles, different goals, and of course different students and teachers. Everyone has things that work and things that don't work. Because of these differences there is an opportunity to learn from each other and yes, as cheeky as it sounds, steal each others' ideas!! You have to find ideas that are relevant to your school and your students in order for them to be successful, so if that means doing something another school has done, go for it!

## Overcoming Elitism

All SRCs face this problem, whether it is that all the 'cool kids' only get in the SRC, or the SRC is only for 'geeks and teachers' pets'. Some schools overcome this by allowing the teachers to

vote in elections because they will pick the right people for the job. Personally I disagree with this because it takes the 'student representative' out of SRC. Let the students elect their own representatives. Often kids don't even know about the elections or what they are voting for/about and sometimes that's why one elite group is always being elected. Make a big deal about elections: get up on assemblies,



The worst SRC members don't turn up.  
The best ones have a lot of good ideas  
and opinions.

write in school newsletters, just make sure everyone knows. Self-nomination is good coz then kids who otherwise wouldn't stand for

election, then go and nominate. Promote how rewarding it is and all the awesome stuff you do because then students have a better idea what SRC is about and they will be more interested.

At my school we have a couple of policies written into our constitution that prevents elitism from occurring. Firstly, we have a senior and junior representative from the special education section of our school, and for the first time this year we are doing the same thing with Aboriginal students. Also, we allow every student to nominate, even if they are on the worst levels of our welfare system. We believe everyone has to be represented, even the bad kids! Sometimes kids who are really disobedient, actually do a great job and bring new dimensions to your SRC.

Small things like this help to get a better cross-section of your student body, and therefore a more effective SRC.

## Reject Trivia

SRC stands for **Student Representative Council**, not 'raise money for everything' council, or 'teachers know best' council! All members of the SRC and the school community, including teachers, have to know this.

How do you get the message across that you are the voice of the students and not a fund-raiser?

- *Communicate.* Get representatives to talk to students and search out the problems in the school community. It may be something as small as they want soap in the bathrooms,

or something as big as there is a bullying problem. We have a huge advantage because we are not teachers, we are students – people feel more comfortable talking to their peers.

- *Set goals.* Once you know what the students want, you have to make plans on how to fix these problems. Be realistic and do things that are achievable. You may still decide to support charity, but only pick one or two for the whole year. Remember, you're not a charity case; stay focused on your school and your goals.
- *Students making decisions.* When your SRC is making any decisions, it should be done by the student members. Although teacher advisers play a huge and very important role in the SRC, they should not be dictating what happens. Decisions must be made for the students, by the students.
- *No joke, we're serious!* The student body and the teachers have to know that you are serious about what you're doing and you're not just there because you get to skip class sometimes. Listen to the people you represent. Don't just say you're going to do things: actually do them. Always be active and publicise what you're doing. Earn respect.

### Being Connected

Ditto to the above point. It's all about respect. If everyone knows you're serious, hard working and committed, then the stigma attached to your SRC will disappear: just create a good image.

At my school we have found that we always inform the staff about what we are up to and what we have planned for the future. We just find that they like to know what's going on, even though they may have no influence on our decisions. If we are planning something big and new, we always send a couple of representatives to discuss the idea with our principal. We never talk to him or the staff unprepared – we plan exactly what we're doing and what we say before we go in there. Because we have been organised and promote everything we do, we are at the point now where we have the unconditional support of our principal (which is just fantastic!). Staff are seeing that we are a great thing and we have more support from them than we have ever had. We now have teachers coming to us with problems and having them say: "I want the help of the SRC with this because I know you can do it", or "what do the students think about this issue?" If there is that good relationship with staff, your SRC can do almost anything it wants, within reason!

Another good idea is to make sure you have student representatives on all decision-making and

influencing committees in the school – that includes P&C, School Council, welfare, uniform etc. The student voice must be heard.

### Part of the Curriculum and Effective

As a school SRC, we try to stick to the recommendations handed down by the NSW SRC that deal with issues such as student participation, student well-being and health etc. We invite guest speakers from the police and community centres to come to school and talk about having parties etc, and issues that really affect us. We have some members involved with our local community health centres. We held a 'spirit week' where the aim was to get everybody actually wanting to come to school and also have lots of participation.

Every year we organise 'motivational media' to come to the school to show their presentation. It is compulsory for all students to attend and then year advisers use the new information to teach students during guidance lessons. If it wasn't for our SRC, MM wouldn't come and students and teachers wouldn't have that wonderful resource. We also promoted and offered incentives to use the recycling bins around the school. Whatever the issues are in your school, you have to act on them even if it's seen as not cool to do it – like the recycling in our school: make it cool!

On being effective, it's all about having a great team to work with; everyone has to be hard working, passionate and really want to change how things happen. To get them that way, you have to have a great executive. If the leaders of your SRC won't work, why should anyone else? You have to have great teacher patrons who are actually interested in what you're all about and support you no matter what. And lastly, you need that never-give-up attitude; the staff and students aren't always going to support you, but if you keep doing new stuff or keep doing the stuff that needs to be done, you will earn that respect that you deserve. Just stay positive!!

I hope that this has been of help to you. A member of my school SRC is also preparing a response on behalf of us as well: I just thought my extra experiences would add another spin on things.

Best of luck!

**Melissa Haberfield**

*Year 12 student*

*James Fallon High School  
Albury, NSW*



Originally from *Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004

## How to Elect an SRC

It's one of the most important events in the school year – the election of the student representative body: the SRC.

Most people regard it as the 'popularity vote' where the real potential leaders are yet to be found – hidden amongst the student population. So instead, you get the confident loud mouths that are only in it for the badge and so called 'prestige'. They promise the world, but don't deliver; in fact their attendance rate to meetings is extremely low.

However, I disagree with this stereotype; I believe that the election of the SRC is fast becoming a choice to vote for the candidate who will do the best job. The problem is how will you know that they will do a good job and serve/represent their fellow students? You don't and that's the risk every sort of election has.

I've come to realize that there are a variety of student leaders, all who have a magnificent potential as

an SRC Representative. The problem is getting these students elected. Yes, I've written above that students will vote for the best candidate, but it's how these candidates are presented that will ensure their successful selection.

The SRC that I am a part of at my school, reviewed its selection criteria a few years ago. The process was for all interested students to write an application, saying why they wanted to be a member of the Student Representative Council. Then, once their application was read by the Student Leadership Coordinator, they were allowed to give a speech to the Class Captains of the school, and they were then voted on by the captains on the impression they had given them through their speech.

Though this process may seem fair and doing justice to the belief of a 'representative election', there is one flaw. Many of the candidates aren't confident public speakers and hence don't perform

well enough in the presentations to get elected. This is a big problem.

While investigating a new way to elect the SRC, my school's student council came up with a great new election process initiative. Just as before, candidates write an application to support their interest. Once the Leadership Coordinator has informed them that he/she has received their application, the applicant can then choose whether he/she would like to sit an interview with a panel of students and teachers or speak in front of the class captains. This way applicants get a choice; if they don't like public speaking, they can choose to sit a less daunting interview. Hopefully, this way, non-confident people have a better chance in getting successfully elected.

**Chris Varney**  
*craskoo@hotmail.com*

Originally from *Connect* 143-144,  
December 2003

## Mooroopna Park PS JSC, Vic

## How We Elect Our JSC

**H**i. I'm Emily. I am the Vice President of Mooroopna Park Primary School's Junior School Council (JSC).

There are 16 representatives in our JSC and each person is responsible for something that must be done.

We have a meeting every second Tuesday at one o'clock. During these meetings, we talk about raising money for our school, what we would use that money for, and how it would benefit our school. We also have letters written to us from organisations such as the PAL Guide Dogs, SIDS, the Cancer Society, the Deaf Foundation and many other things. We decide if we want to help them and, if so, the activity officers organise an activity that the whole school can participate in. These activities cost 50¢ per person, or if you have more than two children at the school, you can pay \$1 per family. There are activities like out of uniform days, colouring competitions, guessing jar competitions, dress-up days etc.

At the start of each year, we elect new representatives to be on the JSC. These children are from each class in grade 3 to grade 6. Usually we have a 'hands-up' voting system. But this year, because it is the Centenary of Federation, we decided to use ballot papers to vote on. Everyone who showed interest in the JSC had their name written down, and the idea was to list, in order, who you think would be a responsible representative ('one' being the person you prefer the most). The votes get counted the same way as they do when voting for a Prime Minister or Premier (called the preferential system of voting). This happened in every participating class. Whoever had the most votes at the end, was one of the two people to represent that class. That is how we elected all the people who are now on JSC.

**Emily**  
*Mooroopna Park Primary School  
MacIsaac Road, Mooroopna 3629*

Originally from *Connect* 131, October 2001

# Practical Ideas for Student Representative Councils (SRCs) and Student Leadership Groups in Secondary Schools

I hope this article will give you, as a student leader, many ideas, approaches and ways in which you will be able to effectively represent your school.

It is important for you to know that, as a member of your SRC or student leadership group, you provide a vital link in voicing the opinions and views of your peers and perhaps, under certain circumstances, a voice for members of your community and/or teachers in your school. It is also vital to realise that your thoughts and views are being taken seriously.

**TAKE ACTION** throughout the year and help to get your SRC or student leadership group operating more effectively than it already does. It is essential to put into action what is relevant to your SRC, your school and the dynamics of your local community.

## Getting your SRC or student leadership group started!

A great way to kick-start your SRC or student leadership group is by **brainstorming** what the members hope to achieve by the end of the year. This should lead to the development of two or three key goals that allow the whole SRC to take action. Remember that the goals need to be *achievable*! Develop a means of ensuring that the goals are regularly reviewed as the year proceeds. Your SRC needs to be **accountable** for its actions.

**Delegate liaison roles** within key sectors of school operations such as:

- Publicity;
- Parents and Citizens (P & C);
- Teacher committees such as Curriculum, Technology, Finance, Student Welfare, Environment, Special School Initiatives;
- School Executive;
- SRC Fundraising.

Every SRC meeting should follow **formal meeting procedure** with an elected chairperson, secretary/minute taker, treasurer. All minutes should be published and presented to students, staff and the school executive.

In order to have a successful SRC, good relationships need to be developed. To complement this, **promotion** of the SRC and effective representation is also required. Achieving this is really simple. You could:

- Roster regular weekly meetings for your SRC members to meet and discuss actions. Many SRCs now meet during class time rather than at other times of the day when it may be difficult for students to meet. This requires full staff support but it **does work**!

- Have a **Suggestions Box** as extra back up;
- Work with the P&C to develop a joint project(s);
- Recognise and promote SRC members by holding an **Induction Ceremony** or present a leadership award annually at presentation nights, or even once a term;
- Remind the school visually of the ways your SRC helps the students, school and community. Make the publicity effective and flashy to attract attention. Your Publicity Officer could be in charge of implementing this;
- Give regular reports in your school's newsletter and at school assemblies;
- Keep the local community aware of positive things that are happening in the SRC and the school and how they can be involved in the school. This can be achieved by an article in the local newspaper;
- Consider holding open meetings where students can personally voice opinions to the entire SRC or student leadership body. **Open Forums**, where SRCs invite interested students to voice ways of positively improving the school, have proved to be really effective in promoting student democracy;
- Develop a school SRC **e-group** with other school SRCs. This allows student leaders to communicate ideas across schools;
- Put up SRC display boards in prominent areas of the school where you can promote the work of the SRC;
- Talk to People! Get their opinions and thoughts because you are representing them!
- Develop links with local primary schools. There is an increasing need for schools to improve links between senior primary students and junior secondary students. This promotes a sense of belonging and connection to the school.

I hope from these suggestions and many ideas of your own, you will be able to make the SRC a fun, exciting and enjoyable experience for everyone. Remember that what you put in is what you get out and the benefits of hard work are very rewarding. I hope 2003 is a highly rewarding year for all SRCs.

Put forward your ideas, develop strategies and **take action**!

Lauren Ross

Originally from *Connect* 139, February 2003



## Being Effective: James Fallon High School, NSW

The James Fallon High School SRC is an effective body. We get guest speakers to come and speak to the students; we organise for 'Motivational Media' to be viewed by all Year groups each year.

We have done many things that change and review how the school operates, and been involved in the creation and development of local and school communities. These are just some of them:

- We raised the issue to revamp the senior girls' dress. We came up with new designs and one was picked and now the dress is more attractive and practical.
- We organised the new bell times, deciding whether we have two recesses or a long lunch etc. Now the bell times are more appropriate to how the school operates.
- We got more healthy things available in our school canteen.
- We also got EFTPOS at the front office so paying fees, excursions etc is easier.

- We made a very professional school promotional video. Due to difficulties with the media profile legislation, it was hard to show it to the public, but anyone who did see it said it was funny and very professional, but at the same time promoted the school very well.

- We always helped and discussed many working bees, putting the student body's opinions forward in advising the organisers of the project.

- We also attended a seminar with four other schools to promote and make students aware of the facilities that our local health centre provides. We attended numerous meetings over a six-month period - all in our own time. This was a very big development for us.

I hope we have shown you how we have been and still are 'stepping beyond'.

**Freya Hunter**

*Publicity Officer, James Fallon HS SRC, Albury, NSW*

Originally from *Connect* 145-146, February-April 2004

## What every Student Council needs ...



Originally from *Connect* 131, October 2001

## 2.6 Student Council Linked and Networked with Others

### The Challenge:



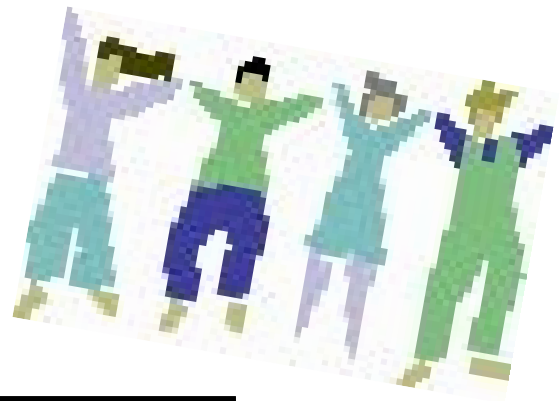
... isolated from others ...

"Each Student Council operates in isolation, without any realisation that similar problems are being faced at other schools. Sometimes the Student Councils meet at adult-organised training events, but no further contact is encouraged ... or sometimes allowed.

"When bigger curriculum or structural issues are raised by Student Councils, they are met by the response: 'Those issues are beyond this school and out of your control.' No students are represented in the discussions that form and shape those issues."

### Possible Strategy 1:

The Student Council at one school organises an inter-school training day and invites neighbouring Student Councils to share the costs involved (venue, lunch, trainer). At the end of the day, schedule a session to ask how the contact will be maintained.



### Possible Strategy 2:

Students respond to Government and Department inquiries eg into powers of School Councils, or curriculum issues - how often are students asked for their views on these big questions? Call an after-school meeting and invite a speaker. Ask which students are interested to follow-up the submission.

### Possible Strategy 3:

Set up an e-mail list linking the Student Councils in an area. Each week or month, students from one Student Council take the responsibility to start a discussion about something that is happening. This is particularly valuable in large rural regions where face to face meetings are more difficult.

*In this section, we briefly introduce some ideas about Student Councils working together to organise student networks...*

# why?

## student networking

### What is a Student Network?

A Student Network exists when students from two or more schools (SRCs, Student Councils, JSCs) get together around shared needs and interests. It can be a formal network - meetings or conferences - or an informal network with casual contacts and shared resources, face to face and/or by e-mail. It can be local, regional, statewide or national.

### Why is networking important?

Here are some ideas suggested by students and others:

#### Sharing Resources

Students can share information (eg about Student Council constitutions, publications, meeting procedures) and physical resources (eg 'how to' kits, equipment) - and this will help each Student Council group operate better.

#### Learning How

Information can be gained (often best done in face-to-face discussions) from other students about **how** to make decisions, how to take part in school committees, how to organise things and so on.

#### Reflecting Together

Students learn about making their Student Councils better by reflecting on and thinking about what they have done. Talking about a Student Council to other students is a useful way of thinking about what's working, what's not, and why. Other students can help this process: 'we are not alone'; 'we found that too'; 'that's different to what happened to us'; 'because' ...

#### Supporting Each Other

When students and Student Councils are having problems in one school - in being heard, in getting things organised, in keeping focused, in getting motivated - other students can help with encouragement or advice or visits or ideas or letters or phone calls or e-mails or SMS or ...

#### Partnerships in Decision-Making

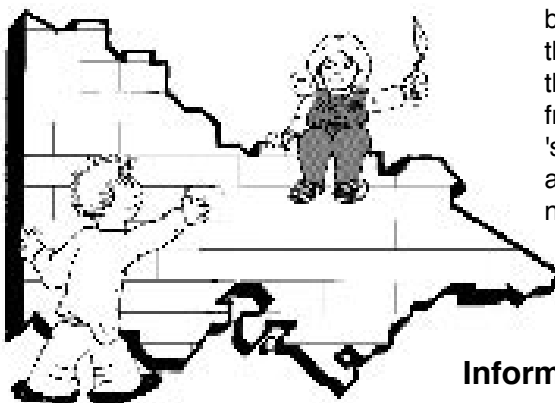
At Regional and Statewide level, Education Department committees and officers are often interested to consult with students, to invite students to form advisory groups, or to share in decision-making through student membership of those committees. But who do these student represent? Students need to meet to understand these issues, to talk over their views, to hear and present the diversity of student voices, and to advise their representatives. Otherwise these students will only be able to represent their own ideas.

#### Influencing Policy

Education decisions that affect schools are often made outside the school - they are the bigger issues within which individual schools operate. If students want to have an influence over these policies, they need to be represented at the levels at which they are made - regional, statewide, national etc. And a local network can be a first stepping stone towards student participation in these big issues.

#### Learning About What's Possible

Student groups can 'get in a rut' and be limited by what they've done or thought about in the past. In particular, some Student Councils get trapped into thinking that they can only be involved in fund-raising or social events. They might dismiss some other possible actions as 'impossible' because they've never tried them! Or they might never think of them at all! Hearing from other schools can 'shake up' a student group and encourage it to think of new possibilities.



#### Information Paths

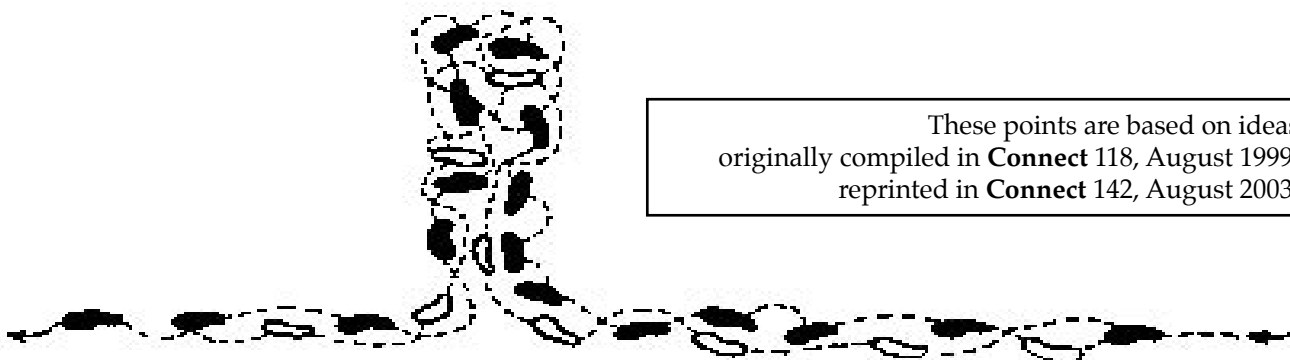
Network meetings provide efficient and alternative pathways for information to students about education policies and programs. Students and student groups may not always receive this information or realise its significance through individual school sources. Speakers are more likely to be available to talk with inter-school groups, than with each individual Student Council.

#### Efficient Training

A training day shared between representatives from several schools can be an efficient use of scarce resources. For example, several schools can share the cost of hiring a venue or employing a trainer. Training each other is also an economical use of human resources.

## Contributing

A Network is not just about what you get from it - it's also about what you can put into it to help others and to work together for shared goals.



These points are based on ideas originally compiled in **Connect** 118, August 1999; reprinted in **Connect** 142, August 2003.

student networking

# how? 20 Steps to set up a Student Network

Here are some suggested steps - one way that a local Student Network can be set up. How you do it will depend on what your local needs are, where you are situated (in rural areas you will probably meet less often and communicate more by e-mail etc), what support you have, how enthusiastic people are and so on. This is also just an outline and there are many more tasks involved in each step:

1. Propose an idea to your Student Council/SRC: that you hold a local meeting and training day for local SRCs. Get agreement from the Student Council that it will sponsor this. Set up a small organising committee. (Make sure you report back regularly to your Student Council.)
2. Clear the proposal with the school administration and negotiate a suitable date and spaces. Book rooms; if it is to be very big, you might want to book a hall or look for a community venue.
3. Draw up a list of the local schools you want involved. You should include **all** relevant schools. Decide if it will be primary or secondary Student Councils or both. (If both, you might need separate sessions for primary and secondary students.)
4. Send out invitations well in advance - at least one month before the day. You will need to have made some decisions: How many people from each school? Will there be a charge to cover lunch etc? How long? (Remember to allow for travel time.)
5. Work out a program: what do you want to cover on the day? Do you want 'experts' to lead groups? Or students to share experiences and information? (See the box - next page - for a sample program.)

6. Who can you get to help you? Contact your local Council, the district or regional Education Department, community groups etc for speakers, workshop leaders and so on.
7. Send out the program with a reminder notice approximately two weeks before the date.
8. Organise the details of the day. You will need to think about: catering (lunch, tea/coffee/juices, biscuits), name-tags, information material/booklets, group facilitators, equipment, people to greet and guide visitors, recording outcomes etc.
9. **Enjoy the day.**
10. Make sure there is a large group session to consider any action proposals from workshop groups. (Perhaps these are reported, not voted on, but referred to an on-going group ... see below.)
11. Ask the key questions:

**What will we do with the outcomes of the day?**  
**How will we follow these up?**  
**Do we need to set up some on-going group of students on the proposals, to keep these ideas going?**

12. If there is general agreement to this proposal (maybe even propose this formally and ask each school if it will support the idea), ask each school to then nominate one or two (or more) people to form an 'interim network committee'. Each Student Council might have to take the idea back to its next meeting to formally decide whether to be part of it. This small group meets briefly to set a meeting time. Swap names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses.

13. Set a meeting date for the first network group to meet, perhaps about two weeks away. One school (it'd be good if it were a different one) offers to host, convene and chair the meeting (and send out reminders). Work out a suitable time: perhaps about 4 pm (but this depends on transport).
14. At this meeting, talk about **why** you want a local network, and **what** it could do (see ideas on the previous page). How will you work? Who will be involved?
15. Ask each school to formally appoint network liaison persons who will come to meetings or keep in touch.
16. Set a meeting and task schedule for the group. There will be things to follow up from the training day and cluster meeting that can also be extended: make a day of it and hold seminars based around common problems and struggles an SRC faces.
17. Identify people who can help you organise - by sending out notices, organising a place to meet, assisting with transport.
18. Start organising another training day - say in 4 to 6 months - to report back on what was decided, what has been done etc.
19. Set up some communication links with the schools eg a local Student Council newsletter, to keep all schools in touch with what's happening.
20. Look for other local networks and make contact with them so that you can link up on a wider level and share your experiences. If Student Councils can help each other, so can local Student Networks!

*Roger Holdsworth  
with Chris Varney and Teigan Leonard*

## Student Network Stories

Here are two examples of local student networks in Victoria that have operated in the past:

### Western Region Student Network

Student representatives from many of the secondary schools in Melbourne's western region met regularly for several years. Each meeting was hosted by a different school, with another school acting as secretary for the meeting and then sending out minutes and the invitation for the next meeting - which they then hosted. They were supported by workers from the local Education Centre, who assisted with mailings and arranging transport.

Meetings usually went for one to two hours, about once a month, after school. Each school reported on what the SRC (or other groups) had been doing, what difficulties had been met and asked for ideas and support. In one case, the Student Network wrote to a School Council at one of the schools, in support of the SRC at that school, until a satisfactory outcome was achieved (about locks on toilet doors). At other meetings, students asked Education Department and others to attend to provide information about programs.

The students decided that Network meetings would be entirely student-run, with non-students only allowed to speak at the request of the meeting, and then for a maximum of three minutes.

### SOS

Students at secondary schools in Shepparton set up a group called Students of Shepparton (SOS). (There were several other local groups in the Region: like the Student Network of Wodonga: SNOW, and the Student Network of Ovens-King: SNOOK.)

These met at training days, with an executive that organised the days and kept in contact with each other and with the SRCs in the schools. They had support from Curriculum Consultants at the Regional Office. The group was also asked to represent students on local boards and committees.

### Network Day: A Possible Program Outline

- 9.30 **Welcome** and intentions of the day; housekeeping
- 9.40 'Meeting each other' **activity**
- 10.00 **Sharing Information** about what's happening in the Student Councils: each school presents a brief report
- 10.30 Break
- 10.50 Defining the important **issues** (for future meetings): schools suggest topics and the group decides on the main ones
- 11.30 **Workshop session 1:** On topics previously suggested by schools: discussion/decision
- 12.15 Lunch
- 1.00 **Keynote Speaker:** "A Challenge to Student Councils"
- 1.30 **Workshop session 2:** Repeat the topics or new ones eg skills
- 2.15 **Action Proposals** from Workshops (plenary session)
- 2.45 **Thanks and next steps;** evaluation of the day
- 3.00 Close



Originally from *Connect* 142, August 2003