Part 4:
Training the Student Council

This is not primarily a 'manual' about training Student Councils and their members. There are several such commercial kits available. However, ***Connect*** *has included several articles about some of the training approaches used with primary and secondary school Student Councils. These do not form a set program; rather they are ideas to be adapted and developed ...*

A Kit of Ideas

Training Junior School Council Members

Over several years, **Connect** has carried articles about the operation of Junior School Councils (JSCs) in primary schools. **Connect** 61 (February, 1990) drew these experiences together, in documenting the workshops or training days held for the primary school students who have been members of JSCs. While providing an overview of the activities in one region of Melbourne in 1988-89, these articles also, hopefully, provide a useful model for the operation of JSC support personnel in other areas.

So this report forms a resource kit from which activities can be extracted, changed and constructed to suit your own needs.

Each year is a new year. To some extent, that means that the training day activities will cycle back to the basic 'share and support' model. But we hope that these training days will also be directed towards documenting what has happened in schools: why have JSCs? why are the important? what sort of training is valuable?

Adapted from ***Connect*** 61, February 1990

Credits

The skill lists and story on pages 72 to 74 are adapted from materials from School Councils UK, with their permission, and originally appeared in ***Connect*** *150, December 2004. The following sections on 'Training Junior School Council Members' (pages 75 to 88) originally appeared in* ***Connect*** *61, February 1990, and were then reprinted in* ***Connect*** *issues 113 (October 1998), 114 (December 1998) and 115 (February 1999). The worksheets on pages 89 to 94 were developed for these training activities and originally appeared in* ***Connect*** *61, February 1990.*

Primary Schools:

STUDENT COUNCIL SKILLS

What are you good at? Tick the box that applies to you.

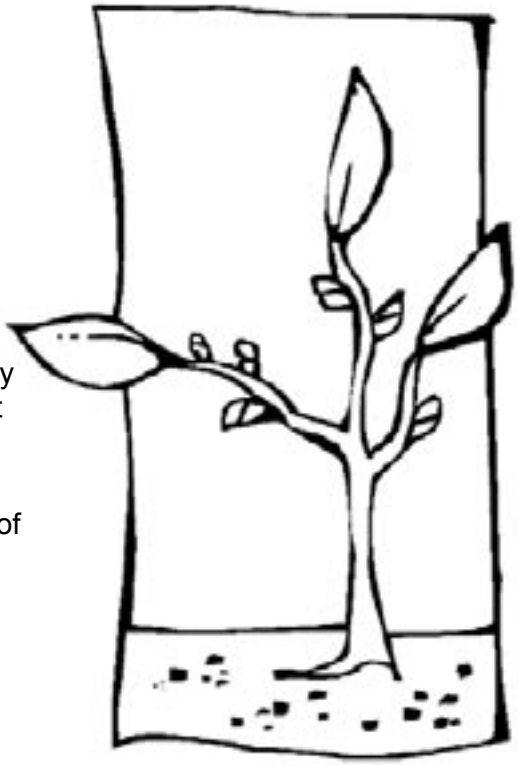
TASK (either on your own or as part of a team)	No thanks!	I'll give it a go	Easy!
Put chairs out for a meeting			
Talk in front of other students			
Talk in front of adults			
Chair a meeting			
Prepare an agenda			
Take minutes and write them up			
Write a letter from the Student Council			
Find a phone number or address			
Use a photocopier			
Look after Student Council money			
Organise a fundraising event			
Write a questionnaire			
Create a Student Council website			
Write an article for a newsletter			
Run an assembly about the Student Council			
Look after the Student Council noticeboard			
Design a poster about rubbish			
Co-ordinate Student Council elections			
Train other members of the Student Council			

STUDENT COUNCIL SKILLS

To help you identify your own skills, put a tick in the box that applies to you.

TASK (either on your own or as part of a team)	No Thanks	I'll give it a go	Need more practice	Easy!
Meetings				
Arrange a room for a meeting				
Talk confidently to a group of students				
Talk confidently to a group of adults				
Chair a meeting				
Find a date and book a room for a meeting				
Prepare an agenda				
Take minutes and write them up				
Administration				
Write a letter from the Student Council				
Look up a phone number or address				
Research a subject on the internet				
Use a photocopier				
Talk to your class about the Student Council				
Set up and look after Student Council bank account				
Remind Council members about meetings and other events				
Distribute minutes				
Place an order for stationery or other resources.				
Activities				
Plan and run a fundraising event				
Design a survey or questionnaire				
Meet with non-teaching staff eg to discuss catering				
Observe and evaluate lessons				
Raising the Profile				
Create a Student Council website				
Create a Student Council email account				
Write an article for a newsletter				
Write a press release				
Plan a Student Council assembly				
Produce a Student Council newsletter				
Look after the Student Council noticeboard				
Design and print posters for campaigns				
Research & Development				
Co-ordinate Student Council elections				
Evaluate the work of the Student Council				
Train other members of the Student Council				

JACK AND THE BEANS TALK



Jack was a pupil in year 4 at Butternut Primary School. It was February – the start of term and he had just been elected onto the Student Council. He was very excited and had lots of ideas.

During lunchtime he noticed that most students didn't eat their baked beans. Jack didn't like the beans either, but they were served with almost every meal. Even if you told the canteen staff you didn't want any, the answer was 'they're good for you' and a generous portion was scooped onto your plate… Students were not allowed to go out to play until they had eaten them, and some were so desperate that they put the beans in their pockets and pretended they had finished.

Jack had an idea: What if students could decide which kind of vegetables they wanted? He could do a survey and talk to the canteen staff about offering different choices. He decided to bring up the issue at the next Student Council meeting…

'That's an excellent idea Jack,' said the chairperson.

'I agree,' said the vice chairperson.

'Let's do it,' said everyone.

Jack felt very pleased with himself and looked forward to new vegetables on the menu at lunch.

A few days went by, and then weeks, and every day the beans kept coming. Jack was beginning to wonder what had happened to his idea. But the next Student Council meeting was tomorrow, so he would bring it up then…

'That's an excellent idea Jack,' said the chairperson.

'I agree,' said the vice chairperson.

'Let's do it,' said everyone.

Jack was a bit confused – it was as if everyone had forgotten that he had brought the same issue up at the last meeting. But nevertheless, he was happy that something was going to be done…

Days went by, the beans kept coming … and coming. Jack could not understand what had happened.

One day, during lunch, he saw the chairperson eating her lunch.

'Excuse me,' said Jack.

'Oh hello – would you mind putting a few of these beans in your pocket? - mine are full and I can't stand the things!'

'But that's the point. Don't you remember that I made the suggestion about doing a survey and talking to the canteen staff about different vegetable choices?'

'Oh, that's an excellent idea,' said the chairperson.

'I agree,' said the vice-chairperson, who was at the next seat busily stuffing baked beans down his socks.

'You should bring it up at the next Student Council meeting,' said everyone.

Jack sighed. He thought to himself: 'How can I make sure my idea actually happens?' and carefully placed a handful of baked beans into his pencil case.

What is your advice for Jack and the Student Council?

Training Junior School Council Members: Overview

In **Connect** 61 (February 1990), we outlined some ideas for Training Days for primary school students on Junior School Councils and Student Representative Councils. These ideas drew on practices in schools in the northern suburbs of Melbourne (some of these schools are highlighted in the publication **Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work** - available from **Connect**). These schools (and others) have continued to meet and to run training days for their students.

The following information is edited and reprinted from **Connect** 61 (now almost out of stock) as a collection of ideas. The work of students, teachers and consultants associated with these Networks is warmly acknowledged.

JSC Training Days

Training days for students on Junior School Councils were first offered within these Networks in 1988 as a response to requests from the schools for support. Sharing ideas between students was valuable, both in gaining ideas and also in encouraging students to reflect on what they were doing through presenting information to others about their own schools.

The training days were operated as half-day sessions - a session that ran longer than a half a day was both too long for the students and too disruptive to the schools.

Here is a program from one of the sessions, showing how approaches developed and changed; this is followed by the themes from the next three training days. (Note: these were very early examples - approaches have become much more sophisticated and refined since then. However they are included here to indicate timing and flow of days, and also some of the early formative decision-making.)

Day 1: (March)

"So we can let each other know what we are doing and so we can work on making our Junior Councils even better."

9.00 Registration
9.15 Welcome and introductions
9.20 Warm-up game
9.30 Session 1: Small group discussion: How does your JSC work? How did it get started? What are the good and bad thing? What kinds of issues are you working on and how?
10.00 Session 2: Report back: Each small group to tell the rest of the group what they talked about
10.15 Morning tea
10.45 Session 3: Student participation: Why it's important: video
11.15 Session 4: Individual school groups: time to work on any new ideas or problems your JSC may be having. If you haven't already got a JSC, how can you get one started?
12.00 Barbecue lunch - provided
1.00 Back to School

Day 2: (June)

"How do meetings work? What are office bearers? How to promote your JSC at your school. How to be a good representative. Making it all happen. Discuss good ideas."

Day 3: (September)

"More about meetings; how to conduct surveys."

Day 4: (November)

"Student democracy: being a good representative."

Planning Processes

These programs were constructed at meetings of the teachers, consultants and support personnel following a process of gathering information and feedback from teachers and students about the previous days. This involved:

- Reviewing previous suggestions from training days. The evaluation sheet comments from students and teachers were used to assist reflection on the success or otherwise of activities, on the structure and pacing of the days, and on requests for the next stage of training required. Thus, for example, following the screening of the video ***'Seen and Heard'***, many comments requested more information on surveys: when were they appropriate? how do you do a survey? etc.
- Discussing possible programs with teachers and students in schools. The consultants regularly visited schools in their networks, discussed the previous training days and gathered ideas and reactions relevant to the next one.
- Meetings were called for JSC support teachers in the networks to discuss proposals for the next training day. Sometimes these were not well attended, partly due to being held after school as an 'extra' duty; partly due to teachers feeling they were adequately consulted and involved informally.
- Several planning meetings of consultants were held before each training day. These moved from reviewing the previous day and setting outlines for the next session, to more detailed planning of programs.
- Specific tasks were allocated between and following meetings, both in relation to program construction and to implementation of decisions leading up to the training day. For example, it was important to think through the program and list such matters as name tags, provision of drinks etc, then share these tasks among the organisers.

Program Principles

In planning the training programs, the following principles have emerged. These are enlarged upon in the details of the activities given below:

- the program should involve students as actively as possible - even straight information presentations should be as practical and as active as possible;
- students should all be treated as competent and valued people and the program activities should build upon this sense of competence for all students;
- the program activities should encourage students to make presentations to the group as a whole;
- activities should stress cooperation rather than competition and should not allow discrimination on the basis of gender, background etc.

Program Booklet

The program material for each training day was put together in a booklet. This usually contained a face page reflecting the advertising leaflet for the day, the program outline, discussion guidelines, worksheets, information/notes, space for students to take notes, an evaluation sheet etc. Students appreciated being able to take something concrete away from the day.

Adapted from ***Connect*** 61, February 1990
and from ***Connect*** 113, October 1998

Training Junior School Council Members: Part 1

Training Day Activities: Purposeful Games

Games are played at these training days for a number of reasons - but it is important that there are reasons, and that the particular games are chosen with aims in mind that complement the whole day. In some cases, the actual content of the game can relate directly to the training session (eg the A-B Pairs game below gets students to argue around situations related to JSCs). In other cases, the games have underlying reasons to do with developing cooperation etc.

We have found that there are some general principles underlying these games:

- they must be **fun** - and encourage students to relax;
- there must be some **point** to the game - not just activity for its own sake;
- the game must seek to make everyone **welcome** and not belittle anyone;
- they need to involve the **adults** present as well as the students;
- they can be **'daggy'**, encouraging informality and friendliness.

Often these training days bring together large numbers of students who have not met each other before. At the start, students stay within 'safe' school-based groups, sitting quite separately around the room. This separation can easily continue into discussion groups, with students unwilling to speak in front of strangers. The overriding aims of these introductory games is to put students at ease.

There is a clear difference between training days that start with a game and those that don't. The games serve to introduce participants, break barriers between school groups, energise students and encourage discussion. (These games are not only applicable to primary school students - they are necessary and work equally with secondary school students or adults.)

We can identify particular groups of games with similar aims. However, these categories can overlap - a particular game might fulfil several of the requirements of these groups, or be used in different ways on different occasions.

For ease, we have grouped games according to what we regard as their principal aim:

- **getting to know you games:** to introduce students to each other and to the whole group;
- **breaking down barriers games:** to encourage students to break barriers between groups, or against talking in front of strangers - permission to speak;
- **energising games:** to build the energy of the whole group, especially after a fairly passive session;
- **cooperation games:** to build active cooperation between members of the groups.

The following games are by no means a full list of what is possible. They are a few games we have found useful - and we have usually found them somewhere else and adapted them to meet our circumstances. They will need to be further adapted to meet both your needs and the personalities of the organisers; they depend very much on the style and energy of those leading the day.

For lists and descriptions of other games, see also the manual published by Life Be In It and **The Hitch-hiker's Guide to Student Government**, by Charles Kingston and Les Vozzo (West Wyalong HS, 1982) which has a large section on games for student groups.

Getting to Know You Games

Pairs Introduce Each Other

A very simple introductory exercise. Ask students to find someone they don't know. When everyone is paired off, they have five minutes to find out information about the other person (sometimes you need to say "find out four important things") to introduce the other person. Use a "one minute to go" warning. Then ask students around the circle to introduce their partner.

Throwing Ball and Calling Name

A variation of the above aimed at learning names. After everyone has been introduced (or has introduced themselves) someone throws a ball (or a plastic chook) across the circle, naming the person to whom the ball is thrown. The person catches then throws to someone else, calling their name.

Picnic

A naming and memory game in a circle starts with one person (the facilitator?) stating: "I'm going on a picnic: my name is Roger and I'm bringing some rabbit." Explain that the second person has to summarise: "I'm also going on the picnic: this is Roger - he's bringing a rabbit; I'm Fiona and I'll bring a fork." (You may have to point out that the name and the picnic item both have to start with the same letter or sound.) Keep going round the group; each recitation gets longer and harder, but on the other hand, participants get to hear the names more and more times.

Pairing: Find Your Partner

The aim of this game is to discover the hidden name on your back and then to pair up with your partner.

Prepare stickers, each with a single name that is half of a pair eg 'hot' and 'cold', 'Adam' and 'Eve' etc. Make sure that names are ones that the students of this age group are likely to know. Move round the group and put a single sticker on each person's back (where they can't see it). Make sure that there are exactly the same number of stickers as people present - half a pair looking for a nonexistent partner is frustrating!

Students then ask questions of other people in order to discover 'who' they are. The questions must be able to answered by 'yes' or 'no' eg general questions such as "am I a person?" or specific questions such as "is my name 'cold'?" When students discover who they are, they find their partner and sit down together - this time can also be used to find out some information about their partner (for introductions).

A variation of this with older students is to use a three-digit number - students have to ask questions to discover their number.

Grid/Bingo

A grid of squares is drawn up (of any size - we use 4x4 to give 16 squares) and a question or instruction is put in each square: "Who is the tallest person present?"; "Who can speak another language?"; "Who has a sister called Anna?" Tailor the questions to the age group and to the locality - in Preston, "who can speak another language?" was too easy.

Students are given 10 minutes to fill in as many squares as possible. The answers are then used to introduce students to the group.

Find Some-One Who...

This is the variation on the 'grid' game. The sheet contains a number of JSC relevant instructions: "Find someone who has been chairperson of a JSC" etc. Names are filled in and then used to introduce people to the group. We used a variation of this when a group of primary school students from JSCs met a group of secondary school students from SRCs. We had two different coloured sheets, one asking primary students to "fine a secondary student who..." and the other asking secondary students to "find a primary student who..."

Star Signs

This game gets groups talking about common characteristics.

Start by posing a 'research' question: "I've always thought that there was something in star signs. People who have the same sign seem similar. I'd like to test this out with you." Ask students to get themselves into groups of the same star sign (mass milling around! - this might need some assistance) and then sit down in small groups. Ask them to discover what they have in common and to be prepared to report back to the whole group. After about 10 minutes (monitor groups for a feeling about how much time is needed) each group reports on what they have in common.

These groups can then continue as workshop groups for the training day - maybe some adjustment is needed to even up the group sizes.

This works well with a reasonably large group (around 70-100 students). However, do students from all cultural backgrounds use the same star-signs? With a smaller group (20-60 students) you can use the seasons in which students were born. Football teams etc are also a possibility.

Breaking Down Barriers Games

AB Pairs: small role plays

Students are asked to find someone they haven't met before and introduce themselves. (This is sometimes assisted by getting the whole group to walk around silently in different directions until a 'stop' command is given - then find someone near them.) Each pair is then to decide who is A and who is B.

The pairs are then assigned roles eg "A is a student on a JSC who has been asked to attend an evening meeting; B is that student's parent who is worried about the student missing homework". The pairs are told that they had better talk about the conflict. (Pick a variety of 'conflicts' relevant to the group: some ideas below.) The pairs have about three minutes (initially) to discuss the issue (monitor the pairs to assess when to stop the discussion).

Ask students to remember who they were with, what the argument was about, and where they had reached - in situation 1. The ask them to change pairs (again meeting a new person), choose A and B, assign a different situation and roles, and then again give two to three minutes to argue the views. This can be repeated a third and fourth time if the program permits - it is ideal to have four situations.

The whole group is then reminded of the four situations: "In number 1, it was about ... and you were with ...". The number of a situation is then called out and participants have to find their partner in that situation and resume the argument where it left off. Call out situation numbers at random, with increasing rapidity. This results in rapidly increasing chaos and noise! Choose a time to call a stop to the whole exercise - don't let it go on too long.

Some AB ideas:

A is a student who wants health foods in the canteen;

B is a student whose parent works for a soft drink manufacturer, who offers a deal to the JSC for a dispenser in the canteen (with profits to the JSC).

A is a teacher who supports assessment by marks out of 100;

B is a teacher who supports written or descriptive assessment.

A is a student who wants time off from a class to attend a JSC or SRC meeting;

B is the classroom teacher.

A is a student member of the JSC/SRC;

B is a student who says that the JSC/SRC is a waste of time.

Wind-Ups/Spirals

This is a quick exercise that can follow other games. It can build group spirit and break down barriers between students from different schools.

Students start in a large circle holding hands. The circle is broken at one point and one student at the end moves into the centre (still linked to one end of the line) with instructions to stand still and not rotate. The other end of the line walks forward in a circle around the whole group, pulling the line behind. The group winds round the stationary person. This can either be done in a small circle (around 10 people - it's quick) or as a massive 'wind-up' of the whole group (takes ages).

A variation is to end the wind-up by having the centre person bob down and draw the line out of the spiral through participants' legs.

Energiser Games

Trains

Students line up in several 'teams' with a single student out front, some distance from and facing the line. This student is the 'engine'; the others are 'carriages'. The engine has to run to the head of the line, pick up the first carriage (carriage put hands on engine's waist) and together they run round the line of carriages, round the original engine position, back to the line, pick up the second carriage and so on, until the whole train is formed. If the train 'breaks', carriages cannot move by themselves and must stop - the front of the train must then go around the course and pick up the stranded parts before proceeding to get more carriages. The game finishes when all trains are complete and back to the engine's starting point.

Oranges/Apples/Pears - musical chairs

All participants (including the organiser) are allocated names of fruit in rotation: orange, apple, pear, banana etc. Everyone except the organiser starts sitting on a chair in a circle. Remove any spare chairs. The organiser calls a fruit and everyone in that category has to change chairs - the organiser sits down on a vacant chair. The person without a chair calls out another fruit, and so on - keep it moving fast. 'Fruit salad' can be called, and everyone has to change chairs. The game can be ended whenever you like.

Barn-Yard Animals

All participants are labelled randomly as a few barnyard animals (cow, sheep, dog, cat, pig etc - choose the number of animals to leave about 8-10 people in a group). You can run through the noises that the animals make, getting people to practise making their sounds. Then mix up participants by getting them to walk around for a while. Everyone shuts their eyes (warning about 'no cheating ... no peeking!') and the groups are asked to find their group by making the noise of that animal. When they have found someone, they are to link arms and continue to listen for the rest of their group.

These animal groups can continue as discussion groups for the rest of the day.

Cooperation Games

Chain-Making

Each group (of about 6-10 students) is given a pre-prepared bag of materials - computer paper, coloured squares, string, scissors, stapler etc (each bag should be roughly equivalent). They are told that their task is to work as a group to make a chain that stretches across the room. (Other criteria can be added eg a definition that a 'chain' must be made of loops of paper, that the loops have a maximum size etc). They are told that they can get the materials out of the bag, look at them and talk about how they will make the chain, for 3 minutes, but not start yet. At the end of the talking time, tell them they can start and they have 10 minutes but ... "Oh, I forgot another rule: no talking from now on. Go!" After 10 minutes (with a 3 minute warning) groups display their chains.

It would be useful to have a discussion afterwards about how the groups worked. Did they find the silence difficult? How did they complete the task? Did someone become the 'boss'? Emphasise that the process of competing the chain is more important than the product.

Knots

A group of 8-12 form a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder, facing inwards. Hands are stretched in to the centre of the circle. Each hand grasps another across the circle - one hand to one hand. Without letting go, the group then attempts to disentangle itself and reform a circle (or sometimes a couple of separate or linked circles). If a group does it quickly, get them to repeat the process, but this time without talking. Again, the whole group can discuss the processes involved.

Games as Grouping

Reference is made here to using the games as a way of breaking up the large group into smaller discussion or work groups. Many of the training day programs involve mixed (ie interschool) groups, either sharing information or discussing topics. These games are useful starters for these small groups, as they establish information about and trust between group members. Care needs to be taken in a break-up to ensure adequate mixing of schools, gender balance, size evenness etc. It is remarkable how often any sort of 'random' numbering around a large group (1.2.3.4.1.2.3...) still results in small groups of divergent size and characteristics.

It is possible to pre-organise these groups, either by knowing names of participants before the day and allocating them to groups, or by allocating them at registration. We found it useful to prepare blank name tags with coloured dots, and then get students from each school to complete name tags in order on arrival, so that a distribution of that school is made across colour groups. It is then possible to talk about 'green group in the corner near the door' and also to play many of these games using colour as labels.

Adapted from
Connect 61, February 1990 and
from ***Connect*** 113, October 1998

Training Junior School Council Members: Part 2

Training Day Activities: Talking to Tell

*The previous section started a reprint of information originally developed in 1989-1990 (and published in **Connect** 61) about training day activities for networks of Junior School Council members. Part 1 concentrated on the nature and value of game-style activities. Part 2 provides further information, this time on the more 'structured' activities.*

High amongst the priorities for these training days was the sharing of information between students from the various schools, with the intent that:

- ideas would travel from school to school - effectively learning from each other;
- students would be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences by telling others about them.

Thus an underlying principle of the discussion sessions was that the discussions should be useful and should be seen to be useful by students - that is that the activities have more than just a 'temporary' value. It is important that discussion groups keep notes of the points raised and appoint someone to report back to the whole group. Similarly, information raised in the 'report-back' sessions was also recorded (usually, but not always, a consultant did this). In some cases, the discussion was directed towards a specific outcome eg "list three important problems you have faced" that would then form the basis for a future workshop. An emphasis was also placed on outcomes of these discussions that could be taken back to schools to encourage discussion with and participation of other students.

Some devices developed to facilitate such directed discussion were:

Report to the Whole Group

Each small group was provided with a topic to define discussion and asked to take notes and report back on this topic. This could be a common topic between all groups, or could differ from group to group. It was useful to produce discussion questions and to print these in the student booklet, with spaces for written responses. Even when someone was appointed recorder (eg on butchers' paper), it was useful to ask all students to record some points individually.

Here are some notes for workshops and discussion groups on some of the training days:

Group 1:
How does your JSC work? eg do you have a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer? Do you run the meetings or does the teacher? Are meetings at lunchtime or during classtime? Are all grade levels represented? Are there equal numbers of boys and girls? Do you report to School Council?

Group 2:
How did your JSC get started? How were your elections held?

Group 3:
List some good things about having a JSC. Can you list any problems relating to a JSC?

Group 4:
What kinds of issues can JSCs tackle?

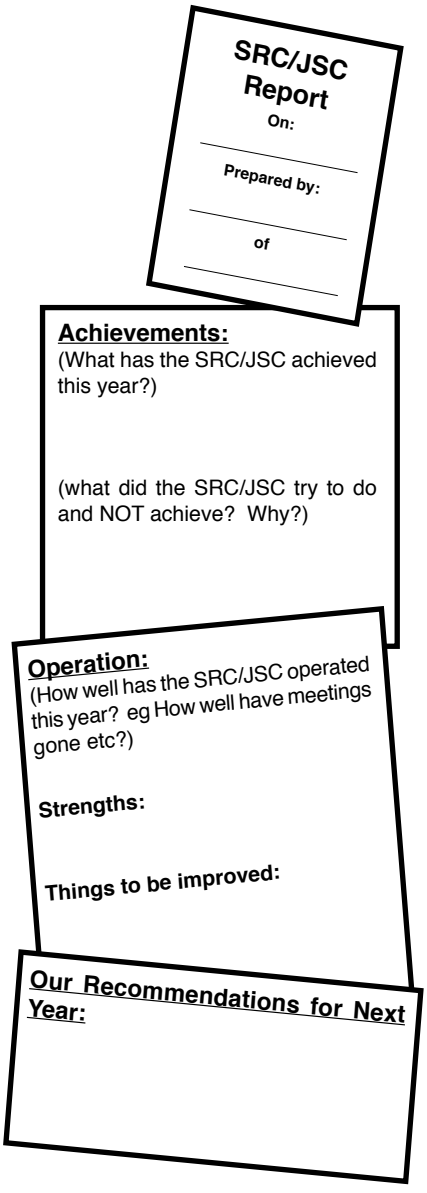
New ideas for your JSC:
- Make a list of important projects you might tackle.
- Which ones will you tackle first?
- Do you need any money? Where will it come from?
- If you don't have a JSC, how can you get one started?

What is a good representative?
What is a bad representative?

Later, when the Preston/Reservoir network was writing the book ***Democracy Starts Here***, this structured and purposeful sharing became an important part of the writing process, and the book, in turn, provided an 'external' reason for the sharing.

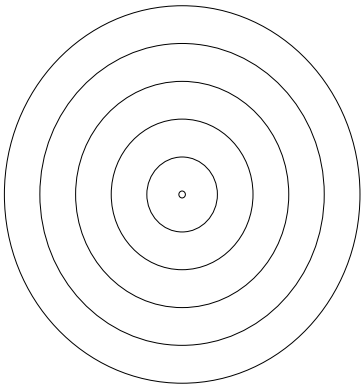
Write a Report

In this activity, carried out towards the end of one school year, two schools were paired up. This could be a primary-primary or a primary-secondary pairing. There were two to four students from each school in a group. The students from each school in the group were given the task of writing a 'report' on the other school. Towards this, they had to find out information about what the JSC/SRC had achieved throughout the year, and about the operation of the JSC/SRC. The two schools then split apart to write recommendations for the other school for the next year. A 'report form' was provided:



The schools were also asked to indicate on a target:

HOW CENTRAL IS YOUR SRC/JSC?



"How close do you think your SRC/JSC is to the centre of the action at your school?"

The reports and recommendations were then presented to the other school as part of the report-back session.

Present a Role Play

This activity was used to focus sharing of information and ideas about how to solve problems faced by (or that could be faced by) JSCs. The groups were again inter-school teams of around six students. They were given the following cards outlining situations and asked to discuss what should happen. They were told they had 15 minutes to:

- work out their responses to the situation;
- plan a 3-minute role play showing what happened;
- work out roles and practice.

Scene 1: Junior School Council Meeting

Issue: Peter, one of the senior school representatives, suggests that the JSC organise a fund-raising disco for the senior students only. Belinda, a grade 2 representative, asks: "Why can't it be for the whole school?" Peter says: "Shut up! We don't want the little kids hanging around."

Instructions: Older students in the group play the younger students in the role-play. The younger students play the senior students.

How does the group solve the argument?

Scene 2: Principal's Office

Issue: Most kids think Maths is boring! The JSC has discussed the maths program they heard about at Times Table Primary School and it sounds like fun. Mr Al Gebra (the Maths teacher) thinks our request is silly.

How do we talk to the Principal about changing our Maths program?

Scene 3: Junior School Council Meeting

Issue: Three girls - Tina, Tracey and Tanya - never come to the JSC meetings. Rocco raises this issue saying: "It's not fair ..." etc etc.

What should the JSC do to encourage participation and attendance?

Scene 4: Lunchtime in the School Yard

Issue: Janos and his family have just arrived from Greece. As a new student at the school, he wants to know what 'JSC' stands for. Some kids are telling him it's a waste of time. Tammy the Terror explains that "JSC stands for Jerks, Sucks and Creeps"!

Two JSC representatives are standing nearby. What do they do?

Scene 5: School Council Meeting

Issue: Two School Council meetings ago, the adults agreed to the JSC's request to provide a sand-pit for the junior school. So far ... nothing - no information, no sand-pit! School Council meets again tonight.

What should the JSC representative(s) say? And how?

Scene 6: Junior School Council Meeting

Issue: The prep grade representative says the class wants an elephant to play with in the school yard. Oh boy!! What'll we do?

How does the meeting continue?

Scene 7: Junior School Council Meeting

Issue: The school's computer nerds have struck a problem! At lunchtime, a small group of boys are busy using the computers. A few girls want a turn, but the computers are all being used. "This happens all the time," they say. They bring the issue to the JSC meeting.

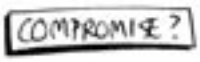
What does the JSC do about it?

Scene 8: Home, at the Dinner Table

Issue: I've just been elected JSC representative for our class! I think it's really important because it gives us kids a say. I know I'll have to go to meetings and be prepared to do things around the school. But Dad says student participation is rubbish! "Kids should just concentrate on their class work!"

How do I tell my parents that the JSC is an important part of the school?

(originally in ***Connect*** *57, June 1989)*



Using $1000

Groups were told that the SRC/JSC had been given $1000 by an outside group. They were provided with an authentic looking letter:

> **Attention:**
>
> **All members of JSCs/SRCs**
>
> The ... Club of ... has recently completed an audit of all its financial commitments and has discovered an abundance of money in a particular account set aside for youth initiatives.
>
> Consequently, upon discussion at the ... meeting on the 30th October, a recommendation was passed unanimously that all JSCs and SRCs within a 10 kilometre radius of ... be given $1000 each to use in their schools.
>
> The manner in which the money is used must be decided in a democratic way, and students' imagination, creativity and ingenuity should be demonstrated. The ... Club expects a full report from each school which gives an account of the processes and decisions made.
>
> Congratulations on being one of the selected schools and we look forward to receiving your report in the near future.

The groups (in this case, school groups) were asked to consider how they would respond to this offer and to hold a mock SRC/JSC meeting to receive and act on this correspondence. They were asked to report back on the **process** they would use.

Poster Making

Under the title of 'Selling Your JSC', school-based groups were asked to create a useful item to take back to school, while reflecting on the importance and achievements of their JSC. The activity notes in the program booklet said:

> **SELLING OUR JUNIOR COUNCIL**
>
> **(no, not for money)**
>
> We need to tell people about what we do:
> - so that they support us;
> - so that they help;
> - so that they bring their ideas to us;
> - so that they know we exist.
>
> Making posters for noticeboards is a good way.
>
> 1. Think about what your Junior Council has done.
> 2. What is the most important idea that you want to tell other students about?
> 3. What are some simple words that describe your Council or the idea?
> 4. Use these ideas and words to make a poster. You will take this poster back to school and put it on a board.
> 5. Make some more posters back at school.

In a variation on this, groups were given a pile of glossy magazines, scissors and paste, and asked to cut headlines and pictures from the magazines that described their JSC, and use these to make a poster.

Adapted from
Connect 61, February 1990 and
from ***Connect*** 114, December 1998

Training Day Activities: Main Themes

In addressing the main themes of the training days, we were again careful to make the information provision and subsequent exercises as active as possible. While information had to be provided 'straight' in some circumstances, we were careful to follow these up quickly with active applications.

The previous two sections reprinted information originally developed in 1989-90 (and published in ***Connect*** *61) about training activities for Junior School Council members.* ***Part 1*** *concentrated on the nature and value of games, while* ***Part 2*** *outlined some structured sharing approaches. In this final section, workshops that address some* ***Main Themes*** *are described.*

Good and Bad Representatives

Students were initially asked to consider what a good and bad representative was like. They brainstormed some ideas quickly. Inter-school small groups were then given sets of cards on which some descriptions of student representative behaviour were written:

- Carlos takes notes in discussions.
- Fadi always asks what the class wants before he goes to JSC.
- Francesca never has a copy of the minutes of the last meeting.
- Greg is a bossy chairperson.
- Richard takes time to explain things carefully if people don't understand.
- Sam listens carefully.
- If Barbara doesn't agree with an idea she always lets you know.
- Dharshini is very patient and listens carefully to what the prep children have to say.
- Meagan asks lots of silly questions.
- Bruce only speaks when he's asked to.
- Toula is all talk, no action.
- Georgina always lets you know what she thinks.
- Walter makes sure he only goes to every second JSC meeting, so that he won't get bored.
- Omar encourages other kids to discuss their ideas.
- When Harley is chairperson, he always sticks to the agenda and doesn't allow anything else to be discussed.
- Bobby likes to show off.
- Paris writes a JSC report for the newsletter.
- Amanda makes jokes during the meetings.
- Cameron likes to discuss ideas with John while the meeting is going on.

and so on.

The groups had to discuss each card and decide whether it described a 'good' or a 'bad' representative and why. The groups were also given blank cards and asked to write a further series of statements describing a good or a bad representative.

When the whole group reconvened, large figures marked 'good representative' and 'bad representative' had been posted at either end of the room. Going round the groups in turn, students were encouraged to pin a card on either figure and, where it wasn't obvious, explain why they had said they were 'good' or 'bad'. In some cases, students said they couldn't classify the description as one or the other: they understood why a representative might behave like that, or saw good and bad aspects of the one statement, or 'it depended' - and so they set up a third 'neither good nor bad' category.

During a break, students pinned up all the other cards (the ones we didn't have time to read out) in the appropriate place, and this display remained for the rest of the training day. Several schools wrote down the lists under 'good' and 'bad' headings.

Meeting Procedures

Video

An early activity was to show the video '**Seen and Heard**' (Victorian PEP, 1985). Even though made with and set in a secondary school, students easily understood the procedures illustrated and followed up the screening with an active discussion on how to bring about change within a school.

Discussion

We started the session on meeting procedures with a straight discussion of information. Students were in school-based groups with their teacher. All participants had discussion notes in their booklet on topics of 'Meetings That Work' and 'Making It Happen'.

This information was discussed for about half an hour (between two activity sessions) and was followed up at the next training day by a more active approach - for which these notes were made available again.

Meetings That Work

A meeting is when you get together to share information and to decide and plan things.

A meeting needs **rules** so that everyone understands what is happening and so that people work together. You can make these rules up. Make them suit what **you** want, like:

- only one person can speak at a time;
- you have to ask the chairperson for permission to speak;
- everyone listens when a person talks;
- when a decision is made, it's a decision of the whole group, even if you didn't agree with it or vote for it.

Agenda

An **agenda** is a list of what you want to talk about at the meeting. It has headings like:

- attendance (who is there)
- apologies (who said they couldn't be there)
- minutes of the last meeting (so you all know what was decided last time)
- correspondence (letters received)
- reports (from any group or from representatives)
- general business (anything else people want to talk about - but then write the name of the topic down)
- next meeting (when? where?)

Jobs

There are particular **jobs** to do in meetings:

- ***chairperson:***
  makes sure the meeting keeps going; introduces the agenda items, one at a time; makes sure everyone has a chance to speak; calls for votes and decides on the result.
- ***secretary:***
  writes down what happens (the minutes); reminds members about the next meeting; writes letters for the Council.
- ***treasurer:***
  keeps a record of the Council's money; tells the Council if they can afford to do something.
- ***everyone:***
  turns up on time; asks the Chairperson for permission to speak; keeps to the agenda and doesn't bring up side issues; suggests decisions that could be made; listens to everyone's views and thinks about them; shares in making decisions; shares the work!

Motion

A **motion** is a clear way of deciding something. Try to keep it to **one** idea and **write it down** so everyone knows exactly what is being suggested. Keep it simple.

You need at least two people to agree on a motion before you can even talk about it. The people say **why** they think it's a good idea or **why** they think it's a bad idea - usually arguing like this: for, against, for, against ...

At the end of the discussion, the Chairperson can take a vote to see if most people agree with the motion or not. Or maybe the Chairperson just needs to check that everyone agrees.

After the meeting, make up an **action sheet** to show what was decided and **who** will do the things that were decided. It can also show **when** they will be finished.

Making It Happen!

Your Junior School Council can have lots of great ideas, but they don't mean much unless you work out **how you will make them happen!**

PLAN

An **action planner** is a useful piece of paper - it's a way of writing down the main steps to get something done. Here is one example:

Name of our plan:
What we want to do:
The steps are: 1.
2.
3.
and so on ...
Who will do these steps:
When they will be done:
What we will need:
Who will help us:
How we will know what happened:

Group Leaders' Notes

This session is an introduction to how meetings are run and how action is planned.

It would be useful to start by asking members of your group about how their JSC meetings run at the moment. Who chairs? Who takes notes? What do you need to take notes? (to be able to write?) Perhaps there will be some stories about what can go **wrong** in a badly run meeting.

Do their meetings have **rules**? What are some examples?

The information sheet '**Meetings That Work**' could be introduced here and read through, stopping at points to make sure everyone understands or to see if people can tell stories about the points.

Practice: try making up an **agenda** for one JSC meeting.

Practice: have a quick debate - someone makes up a motion - you could chair.

In the second half, introduce the '**Making It Happen**' sheet by pointing out that it is important to do more than talk about things - doing is essential.

Get suggestions for some made-up topic to talk about: perhaps it's something that is facing a JSC. Suppose you have made a decision - now you have to **act** on it. What do you do?

Introduce the **action planner** on the sheet. Try filling it in together for the chosen example. What are the steps that would have to happen to make the action that was decided on, happen?

What do we **need**? Identify the three different types of resources.

If time: introduce the idea of **lobbying** for support - the last two lines hint at this: you could expand on it.

RESOURCES

What do we need to make something happen? What do we **have already**? These are our **resources**:

- physical resources (things)
- financial resources (money)
- human resources (people)

Work out who can support you, visit them, convince them of what you want to do, and ask for their help.

Role-Play of a Meeting

For the training day following this, a role play was developed by the consultants for a follow-up session on meeting procedures.

The play was intended to provide material for discussion of good and bad meeting procedures. The play was acted out initially by the consultants, pretty much as written here (but with some enthusiastic improvisation). Students then broke into small groups to write lists of the good and bad things they had seen happening. These were reported back and accumulated on a board.

The play was then repeated, but with students calling out 'STOP' when bad practices were seen and suggesting changes in behaviour. This was hard to do, so students were gradually called in to replace or advise characters and change their roles. The 'Conclusion' was written as a possible outline for an alternative end to the session.

This was then followed by a discussion in small groups about meeting procedures and rules, and then by a discussion in the same groups of action plans.

Students ranged from grade 3 to grade 6. In one session, it was their first training day; in another, it was their third.

There's nothing absolutely fixed about the approach; at a later stage, the network tried a 'fishbowl' in which some students prepared a meeting and role-played it, with the rest watching and able (eventually) to stop the meeting, make suggestions and replace 'actors'. (More details of this are in **Democracy Starts Here** - available from **Connect**.)

"Mucking About at the Meeting"

Characters: Chairperson, Secretary, Interrupter, Bossy, Bumbler, Good JSC Rep, Latecomer, Guest Speaker.

The audience has a set of minutes from the last meeting and an agenda for this meeting:

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of last meeting
4. Business Arising
5. Correspondence
6. General Business:
   a) Competitive Sport: guest
   b) School Camps
   c) Other business
7. Next meeting

Everyone's talking and mucking about:

GOOD REP: Look, the bell's gonna go in a minute. Shouldn't we start? We're 20 minutes late and we should start.

CHAIR: Today's main topics are 'Competitive Sport' and 'School Camps'.

INTERRUPTER: Angela Dimitriopoulos nearly got killed on the school crossing last night. My grade wants to talk about the school crossing.

GOOD REP: I think we should put that under General Business. Let's stick to the Agenda.

BUMBLER: Agenda? Agenda? I haven't got a copy of the Minutes or the Agenda!

BOSSY: My Aunt's got a holiday farm at Shepparton where we can go for our school camp.

GOOD REP: But my grade (and the other grade 2/3) all said they wanted a school camp down by the beach.

BOSSY: The grade 2/3!! What would they know?! They probably just want to go swimming all the time!

BUMBLER *(to guest)*: What does your class think?

GUEST: I'm not a teacher. I've been invited here to talk about competitive sport.

BUMBLER: Oh, that's good. If we had better swimmers we could probably win the swimming sports.

SECRETARY: Should I write that in the minutes?

BOSSY: Haven't you been writing all this down? We've decided that all school camps should be at my Aunt's farm. **Write that down!**

(LATECOMER enters with noisy apologies, but makes no other contribution to the rest of the meeting.)

CHAIR: Order! Order! Today we're also talking about 'Competitive Sport'.

GOOD REP: Didn't we say something about that at the last meeting? It should be in the minutes.

CHAIR: That's right. We've got the minutes of the last meeting ... here ... somewhere .. Has everyone got a copy?

BUMBLER: Coffee? Coffee? No thanks. But could I have an orange juice? And a piece of chocolate cake?

GOOD REP: Here it is! The minutes of the last meeting have recorded a motion which says: 'That the JSC invite a guest speaker to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Competitive Sport.'

INTERRUPTER: That car nearly knocked Angela right off her feet! Great big red Commodore it was! But she's alright. She's at school today.

SECRETARY: Should I put that in the minutes?

GOOD REP: Isn't that why we have minutes? To keep a record of what's going on at the meetings?

SECRETARY: Oh well ... I dunno. I just write down whatever I can remember. You know: a little bit here ... a little bit there ...

BOSSY: Well, have you written down that all future school camps will be held at my Aunt's horseriding farm in Shepparton? Go on .. write it down!

CHAIR: Did we really decide that? Who put the motion?

BOSSY: Oh, alright then! I move that we go to my Aunt's farm for our school camps. Alright? OK? ... Carried ... I win.

(The meeting has descended into complete chaos at this point, with everyone talking together, about completely different subjects.)

BUMBLER: So, are we going to hold the school sports at your Aunt's farm?

INTERRUPTER: My father drives a red Commodore, but he wasn't anywhere near that school crossing. He works in the city!

SECRETARY: Should I write that in the minutes?

BUMBLER: Were we going to have a coffee or orange juice or something?

BOSSY: Horse-riding is absolutely **the** best sport!

GOOD REP: I can't stand it any more! Meetings are a complete waste of time! *(storms out of room)*

The Good Meeting

At the end of this first run-through, the students are divided into small groups and asked to brainstorm around 'Good Meeting Procedures versus Bad Meeting Procedures' - they have to decide why the play represented poor meeting practice and where they will interrupt the replay.

The previous meeting is then replayed, much as it is written. However the audience is encouraged to interrupt and make suggestions about how things should be proceeding. Ideally, students will step into the meeting, become part of it and alter the direction being taken.

Conclusion

In order that the play can be drawn to a conclusion, someone should be aware of a possible scenario:

CHAIR: If the Council agrees, I'd like to suggest that we change the order of the Agenda. First of all, let's deal with the question of school camps. Bossy, do you have a motion you'd like to put to the meeting?

BOSSY: I move that all school camps be held at my Aunt's farm. Let's vote!

CHAIR: Don't you want to discuss it?

GOOD REP: It would be cheaper at the beach.

INTERRUPTER: It's too far to drive to Shepparton.

BOSSY: Come on. Let's vote!

(Great confusion; the vote is lost.)

CHAIR: The vote is lost. I suggest we really need more information and we should discuss this again next week. For that:

1. Bossy: will you provide us with details of how much it costs at your Aunt's farm?
2. Good Rep: will you find out about one or two beach camps?
3. Any other suggestions?

Now, let's move to the next item on the Agenda: 'Competitive Sport', and welcome our guest speaker.

*(originally from **Connect** 59)*

Surveys

The session on 'how to conduct surveys' grew out of an earlier training day in which the video **Seen and Heard** was shown. Students and teachers indicated an interest to learn how to survey students (and others) on school issues. The following was a first attempt to meet that request; of all these activities, this one probably still needs most modification.

Students worked in school-based groups with their support teacher, on the expectation that much of this material would need to be followed up back at school. Each group was given some general notes in their booklet on 'Finding Out Information' (see next page) and the teacher read through these notes with the group. (It was expected that some of the material on 'Ways to Show Results' would only be dealt with at school.)

The groups were each given a different topic and asked to choose an approach to finding out information about views on this topic:

- *What food should be sold at the canteen? Perhaps make a list of possible food.*
- *It is proposed that a football club be invited to the school to offer a football clinic. Should this happen? Only one club should be invited. If so, which one?*
- *There can only be one school camp this year. Which grade level should be allowed to go?*
- *Someone has proposed that a recycling depot be set up in the school. What items should be recycled: paper, glass, plastic, metals?*
- *The school is thinking about teaching a language, but which one? Greek, Italian, Japanese, French and Spanish have all been suggested.*

Each group then discussed how they would find out information: what question/s they would ask, the form of the question/s etc. Students were to work in pairs and then accumulate individual results at the end, to look at their group's results. They had 15 minutes to design and write up a simple survey form; 10 minutes was allowed for copying these forms; 20 minutes to undertake the survey. The people to be asked included the other students, teachers and consultants. We had also arranged that other consultants and personnel in the Support Centre (where the session was held) would be available to be surveyed if appropriate. The groups then reassembled to combine and present results: 20 minutes.

The particular value of the exercise was in exposing (for students as well as ourselves) other considerations involved in carrying out surveys: How do you ensure that a person isn't asked several times by different students in the one group? What happens if the questions aren't exactly the same? What do we mean by 'leading questions'? Topics like these emerged naturally from discussing the exercise. The whole topic needed more time than we were able to give it.

Finding Out Information

We need to find out information to help us make better decisions and to help us convince others about what should happen.

What do students think should happen? How about parents, teachers etc? How many support this ... or that ...?

There are many ways of finding out this information. The best way depends on:

- what you want to know;
- how you have to convince others;
- how much time you have;
- how many people you have to find out information from.

If there's a fairly small number of people, the best way to find **anything** out is just to **talk** with them and write down what they say.

With more people, where you have only a little time, there are several different types of 'surveys' - see below. You can use these to find out information from everyone.

With lots of people, where you don't even have enough time to give each person a survey, you can choose some of the people (a **sample**). But be careful you don't just choose your friends. The easiest way is to make a list of everyone possible (perhaps the school roll) and then pick every **tenth** person on the list and ask them.

But be careful! It is easy to make the survey come out to show anything you want, by picking the wrong questions, by picking just one group to answer questions, by having the questions suggest an answer etc.

Some Ways To Do Surveys

Some rules first:

1. Think carefully about what you really want to find out.
2. The question should be simple: only one idea in a question.
3. The question should be direct and clear: use language everyone understands.
4. Make sure the survey is easy to fill in: clearly set out.
5. Keep the survey short: not too many questions.
6. Test the questions out on some people before you start: does everyone understand all the questions? Do they mean what you want them to mean? Can you use the answers you get?
7. Before you start, think about how you will show the results afterwards.

Some Types of Surveys (there are lots more!):

A. Open-Ended Questions

The person gives an answer to a question in their own words.

Example: "What did you like best about the meeting?"

+ easy to write questions; people can say what they really think;
- takes more time to answer; some people have difficulty writing or deciding what they want; hard to record the answers and to add them up.

B: Sentence Completion

The person completes a sentence that you give them.

Example: "In this JSC meeting, I was pleased by ..."

+ and -: same as for A.

C: Checklist

The person is asked to tick the things agreed with.

Example: "In the meeting, I have:

[ ] taken the minutes
[ ] chaired a meeting
[ ] moved a motion ... etc"

+ easy to answer; easy to add up;
- people have to choose from just the things you put down on the list.

D. Ranking

The person is asked to put some things in order from first to last. Example: "Choose which sport you want to play - from 1 to 4:

[ ] basketball
[ ] running
[ ] cricket
[ ] archery ... etc"

+ and -: similar to C.

E. Agree-Disagree or Likert Scale

This can help you to show **how much** people agree or disagree with a statement. There are several different ways to do it:

2-choices: true/false; right/wrong; yes/no; agree/disagree; etc;

3-choices: true/uncertain/false; yes/uncertain/no; often/sometimes/never; etc;

5-choices: strongly agree (SA)/agree (A)/uncertain (U)/ disagree (D)/strongly disagree (SD); always/often/sometimes/seldom/never; all/most/some/few/none; always/usually/sometimes/not often/never; etc.

Example:
"The Principal is a nice person:
[ ] SA [ ] A [ ] U [ ] D [ ] SD

+ and -: similar to C.

Ways to Show Results

1. You can write down what people say, putting similar statements together or using headings (types A and B);
2. You can make a chart showing how many people chose each answer (types C, D and E):

   a) straight numbers of people:

	SA	A	U	D	SD
students	15	8	3	9	4
parents	8	2	9	1	1
teachers	2	2	9	2	8

   b) give the choices a score eg 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for uncertain etc, and then add up these scores:

   students: 138
   parents: 118
   teachers: 57

   Then each total should be divided by how many people were surveyed in each group:

   students: 138/39 = 3.5
   parents: 118/31 = 3.8
   teachers: 57/23 = 2.5

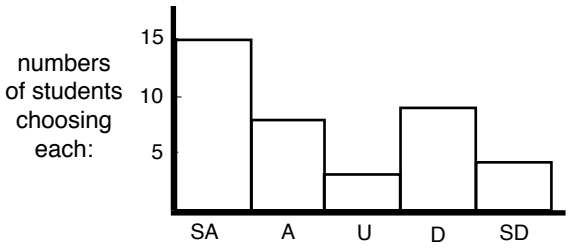
   This can show where each group is along a line.

   c) as a percentage:

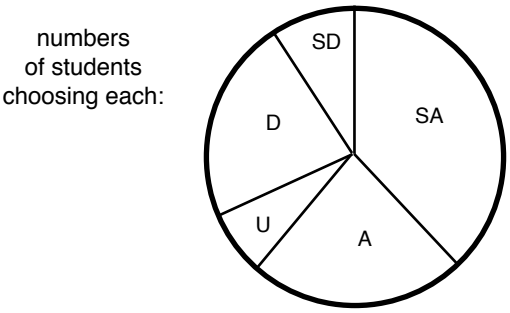
	SA	A	U	D	SD
students	38%	21%	8%	23%	10%
parents	26%	39%	29%	3%	3%
teachers	9%	9%	39%	9%	35%

3. You can draw a graph or picture to show how many chose each answer (types C, D and E):

a) a bar graph



b) a pie chart



Meeting and Introducing Representatives

Who Makes Decisions in Our Community?

In the final training day for 1989, several 'representatives' from different areas were invited to form a panel. There was: a representative from a Federal MP's office; a State MP; the local Mayor; a parent representative on a Primary School Council; a student representative from an SRC at a nearby secondary school (who was also a representative on the regional student network). Rather than merely name these representatives and have them speak, five smaller inter-school groups of students ('buzz groups') were formed and each met with a representative first and asked that person questions about their role. We had provided starter questions from which the buzz groups soon diverged:

- What is your job now?
- How did you get the job? (were you elected or appointed?)
- Do you work full-time or part-time as a representative?
- Are you paid to do the job?
- Is it hard?
- Why is your job important?
- Did you always want to do the job?
- Did you have Junior School Council when you went to school?

Each group was also asked to choose someone to introduce the guest speaker to the whole group.

After 10 minutes, the guests formed the panel and were individually introduced by a student from their buzz group, who told the whole group what sorts of things the representative did. The guest then spoke briefly about 'being a good representative'. After all guests had been introduced and had spoken, there was a brief general question time.

(A further account of this exercise is found in the description of this training day by students from Gowerville Primary School in ***Connect*** *60, December 1989.)*

The 'Who's The Representative?' Game

This activity was a follow-on from the previous one. The whole group sat in a semi-circle around a large board to which were pinned photographs of representatives of Federal, State and Local Government, as well as international figures. In the centre of the semi-circle were two piles of labels, face down. A student was chosen to pick a label from the first pile: names of the representatives. The student then had to pin the label under the appropriate photo. If the student couldn't identify the representative, or someone else in the group felt that the label had been incorrectly placed, they could challenge and put it elsewhere. The student then chose the next student to choose a label and so on; towards the end, some earlier challenges became resolved as the remaining photos became fewer.

If time, the second pile of labels contained role statements for the representatives, to be similarly matched with photographs and names.

The students were then all given a sheet containing photocopies and the names and roles of the representatives; these were to be taken back to school to be matched up as a revision exercise.

Evaluation

Each training day concluded with an opportunity for students and teachers to provide a formal evaluation of the day and of their future needs. These evaluation sheets were included in the day's booklet, and were either completed individually or in school-based groups (with a single response being handed in). Some examples of evaluation questions were:

A.
- I found today ...
- Today could have been improved if ....

B.
1. What things have you liked about today's program?
2. What things could have been better?
3. What things did you find hard to understand?
4. What action will you take when you get back to school to 'make it all happen'?

C. *Students:*

1. How many of these programs have you attended this year?
2. Can you describe how they have developed? What's the link?
3. What have you enjoyed most?
4. What are the most important things you have learned?
5. Any suggestions for next year?

Teachers:

1. Have these training days been helpful to you? How?
2. Have you faced issues we have not dealt with?
3. Will you be the teacher representative next year?
4. What issues should we tackle next year?

Adapted from
Connect 61, February 1990 and
from ***Connect*** 115, February 1999

Reflections from 15 years later:

We're still using these activities or similar ones, 15 years later. But there have been some changes and 'sharpening' of our approaches. In particular, these changes include:

- We now try to make sure that all activities have a productive and useful outcome for participants ie they don't only address their own understanding of the issues, but ask young people to apply and use these understandings in real situations. So, for example, we might make posters during an activity as a focus for thinking about a topic - but we also make sure that these posters can be used back at school.
- Secondly, we try to make sure that all sessions are active investigations by the students rather than involve simply listening to others and absorbing information. For example, when we share information between schools, we use 'bingo' style activities in which students have to find out what happens in the other schools by observation (of prepared displays) and questioning of each other.
- Thirdly, because only a small number of students from each school can usually attend the training days, we have a focus on 'training the trainers': asking the students to take the activities back to school to lead others and spread the learning. And then we try to build in reflection by the students (eg at the next Student Forum) about the effectiveness of this and what they learned by being 'teachers'.
- Finally, we have recently again begun using cross-age strategies, eg supporting secondary school students to run activities for primary school students at these days. The secondary students develop these activities as part of their curriculum and receive credit for their cross-age work.

We're always trying things, reflecting on their success and learning how to operate these forums better.

Student Council Training Day Worksheets

Around 1990, as part of an inter-school network, two half-day training sessions were held for primary school students on Junior School Councils in the Preston-Reservoir area in Melbourne's north. In these sessions, we concentrated on discussions with students who were new to these JSCs about issues such as the reasons for having JSCs, achievements to date, plans for the year, their fears and other barriers to effective operations.

Students wrote comments, built models and drew diagrams that would be shared with others through publication in ***Connect*** *as accounts of their JSC operations. The following descriptions are taken from* ***Connect*** *62 (April, 1990).*

As distinct from many of the previous training days, and reflecting both the writing tasks and the early-in-the-year timing of the days, students worked in school-based groups for each of the sessions, mixing through games and informal times. (It was pointed out that the next training day would mix students more.)

Each school was provided with a work folder that included past information (from **Connect** 61) together with a copy of each of the worksheets *(following)* for the day's sessions. In addition, at each session, all students received a copy of the appropriate worksheet for their immediate use. These formed the basis for discussion and writing. In some school groups, students worked individually or in small groups preceding and following whole group discussion; in others, a single sheet was completed collaboratively by the group of representatives.

In addition, various resource people were present to assist and add to the day eg a cartoonist was employed to draw ideas initiated by students; in another session, members of Playback Theatre took part, stopping the discussion at various points to act out situations that reflected and interpreted student comments and actions. They also used drama techniques in report-back sessions to the whole group and students and staff found these approaches extremely valuable.

Issue 62 of ***Connect*** *(April, 1990) then reports extensively on the student comments and writing from these days. The words and descriptions there are the words of the students who took part in these days, transcribed from worksheets.*

Models of JSCs

The second session with these schools was harder to interpret on paper. Students were asked about the structure of their Junior School Councils - both internally, and in relation to the rest of the school. To represent this, the students were provided with a pile of materials (from Reverse Garbage), as well as with large sheets of paper, and challenged to actually 'build' a model of their JSC and school structures.

The representatives built innovative and intricate structures and diagrams that explained the composition of their Councils and where they were placed in the school.

Some likened the JSC to a cake, where the correct ingredients were important; others drew or made models that showed the lines of communication to the rest of the school and to the wider community. The cartoonists attempted to capture some representations of these models.

However, descriptions or even photographs and diagrams of the models are inadequate to explain the complexities that students saw and depicted.

Worksheets

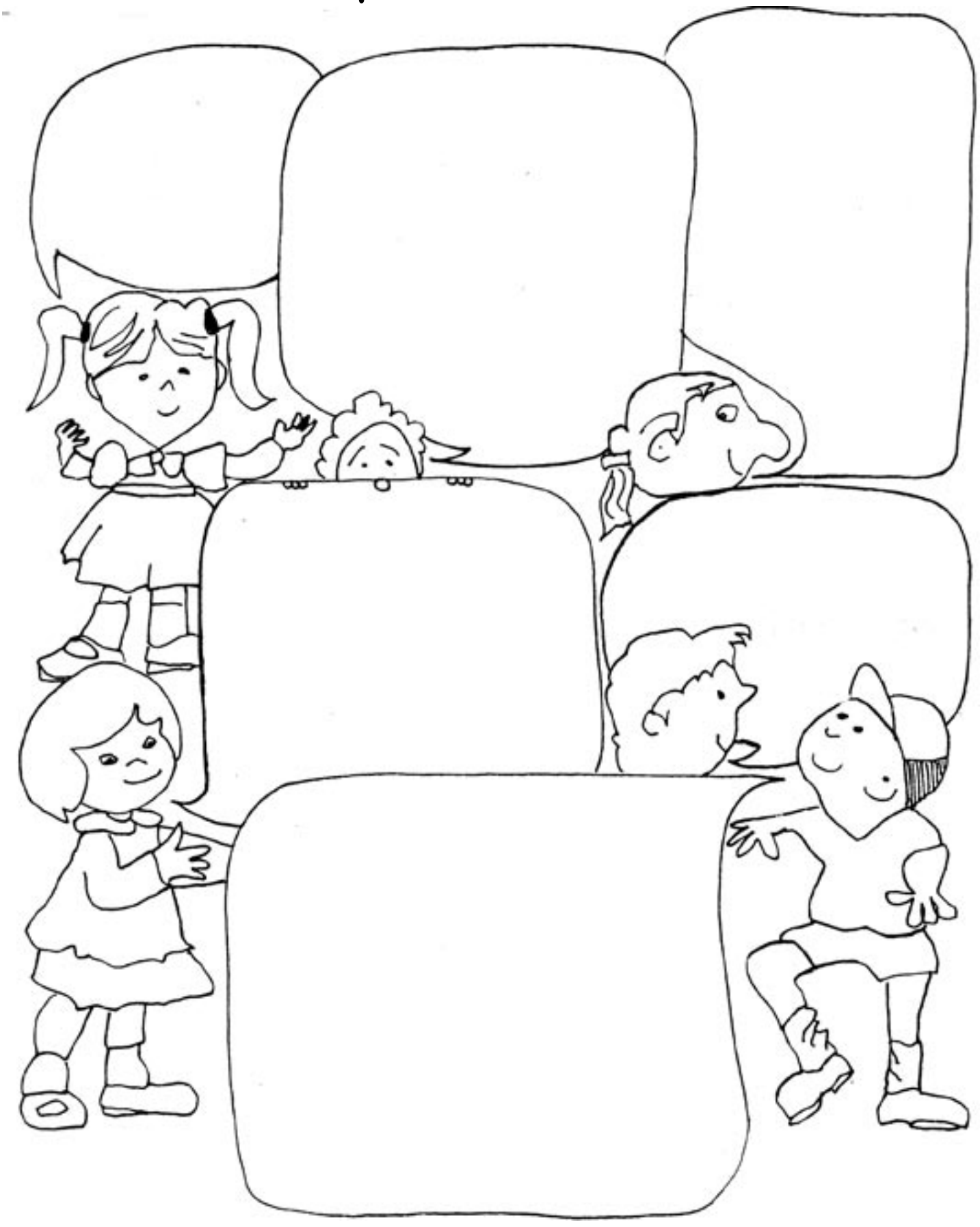
The following pages present some of the worksheets used in these activities. They are particularly directed towards primary school students and their JSCs, however the ideas and words can be adapted for your own specific circumstances. They may be reproduced by schools for non-profit use in student training days, with acknowledgement to ***Connect****.*

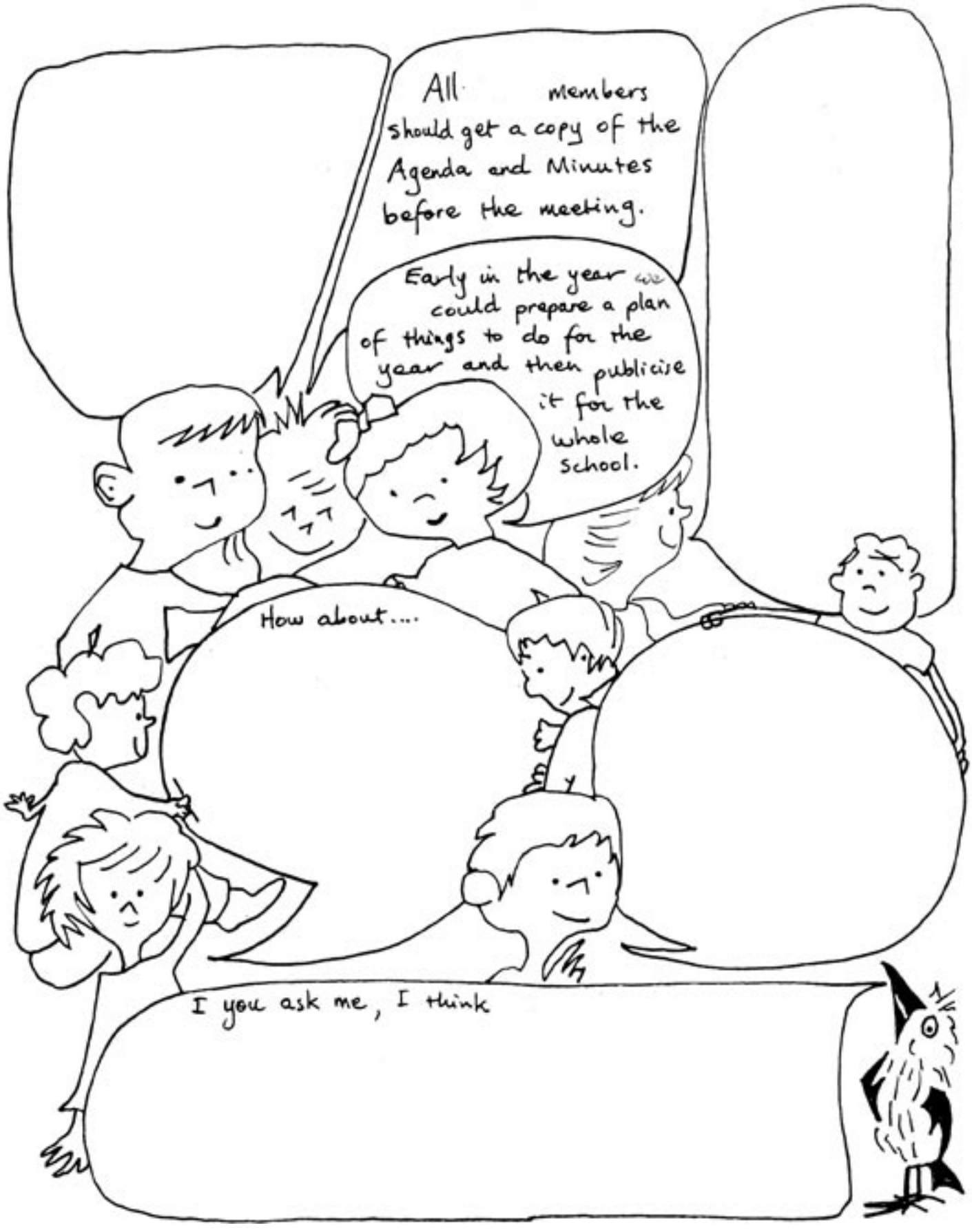
Adapted from
Connect 62, April 1990

Why Have Student Councils?

Structures of Student Councils
Butchers Paper
BUILD A MODEL
Small Page Drawings
BLOCK
Remember, we haven't got long to do this! Use this string...
We should mention our office bearers like....
Let's draw it and start with Senior School Council at the top.
But how do we show where we fit into the school? Let's try and describe it in a short paragraph.
Our School
Principal
JSC
What are those arrows and string for..... and what am I doing here?
JSC Rep

Things That Student Councils Have Done or Hope to Do This Year



Things That Make It Hard For Student Councils to Work - or that I feel nervous about

Ways To Make Student Councils Better This Year