

# Appendices:

## 1: Classroom Meetings

*Connect has stressed the fundamental importance of effective and democratic classroom meetings. These can be at the core of student participation approaches: the ways in which students discuss issues in their classes that will go to the Student Council; the ways that students and teachers discuss, decide on and organise projects that meet real community needs; the ways that students and teachers negotiate about learning and teaching. In 2003, several teachers (all from primary schools) responded to a call to write about practices they had found effective.*

## Meetings, Tribes, Community Circles

For my grade, classroom meetings are a natural extension of the Tribes process. As a community we have invested time and energy into establishing a safe, caring and supportive environment via the five agreements at the heart of the Tribes process. Attentive listening, mutual respect, appreciations – no put downs, the right to pass and personal best are not only a part of the language used by all members of the Point Lonsdale Community but also form the basis for the culture and mode of operation in my class.

Beginning our work in the Inclusion phase of the Tribes journey, a series of activities and reflection ensured that all students are included, valued and appreciated in the grade. Community Circles enable students to share, listen and contribute constructively to classroom discussion with support and empathy. The activity titled *Cares, Concerns and Compliments* empowers students to raise issues, celebrate success

and to actively contribute to solving issues within the class.

The next step in implementing classroom meetings was to develop a student-leader-for-the-day program. As a grade, we created a program outline where students take responsibility for beginning our day by running a meeting and an activity to engage class members. From this process it was an easy progression to the development of a regular classroom meeting. Time is set aside each week for our meeting and students take turns at filling the roles of chairperson and note taker. Students fill these roles with ease as this process gives a voice to all students due to the expectation that all will lead the discussion and meetings. The classroom meeting structure has also provided students with leadership skills, with opportunities to mentor and support others in the grade.

The meetings take place in the familiar structure of the Community Circle where students feel supported in expressing their opinions.

The right to pass agreement ensures that all students are comfortable with and included in the meeting as they have the option of passing rather than being forced to contribute to the discussion. All items for discussion must be placed on the agenda the day before the meeting takes place. Only items on the agenda can be raised at the meeting, and any person who places an item on the agenda must be prepared to speak to their item. The process includes the development of solutions, students taking responsibility for following up on issues on behalf of the class, and celebrating our successes as a group. This process not only ensures that all issues, concerns and feeling within the grade are open and public, but has also been invaluable in providing students with the opportunity to explore and understand the how/process in addressing issues and in taking affirmative action to better their community.

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# Real Change Begins Here!

**A**n ideal class meeting to me looks something like this. It's what I am aiming for anyway.

1. The agenda is set by the whole class through a communication board or similar. Mine looks like this - opposite page - and is based on a recommendation from The Australian Quality Council.
2. We use post-it notes to agenda items where they best belong. The post-it notes are collected and agendaed.
3. Sections can be as shown or your own design. My chart includes: bright ideas, positives or things that are going well, questions and issues.
4. The chair is rotated with guidance from the teacher being as little as possible. Model, model, model then step back. Initially I sit next to the student leading the meeting to guide/assist quietly if needed. Student pairs leading the meeting are another option to consider.
5. The item is presented and discussed using DeBono's hats to guide the discussion. Going round the circle, students comment or pass.
6. Discussion is recorded as a shared/whole focus on overhead projector or whiteboard or computer. Keep a record as a class book or on-line website. Minutes become the responsibility of teams within the grade, with parent help/older student assistance for the younger kids. This is a great activity for an on-going whole class literacy project.

These class-meeting sessions can be a powerful tool for you to get a vibe for the morale and resilience of your kids, find out what is really happening in their lives, develop values intrinsic in democratic philosophies and to raise the opportunities for student input into class and cross-school decision making one hundred fold.

- Questions ... Is there any bullying in the school? Are kids happy at this school? Any focus question can be addressed.
- Use this time to work with your school's ISDES document and implement drug ed.
- Make sure clear ground rules are set. Get the kids to develop these. What would a great class meeting look like?
- Use the process to demonstrate democratic processes as much as possible.
- Set explicit expectations of what is acceptable behaviour, including things like only one person may speak at a time; keep things general ... no individual students/staff are mentioned by name ...
- Everything relating to your school values can be agendaed here.

Respect, tolerance, lifelong learning and all that stuff ... The current values research in education indicates leaders of education have recognised the fundamental importance of values education within all school curriculum and philosophies.

The Golden Rule with class meetings, apart from 'timetable it in', is to keep to this as things crowd and demand time in the school program, and unless rigidly maintained, this is often the session that goes by the way. Class meetings can be ten minutes daily or a weekly session. It may be our most important Civics and Citizenship Education opportunity each week. School leadership needs to support the integration of class meetings into the fabric of the school life, including a committed timetabling arrangement across the school and the facilitation of PD opportunities such as teachers sharing what works across staff groups and within the region. National testing of CCE gives street cred to CCE becoming the core of curriculum and encourages schools to become values based, truly democratic environments.

### And some further thoughts:

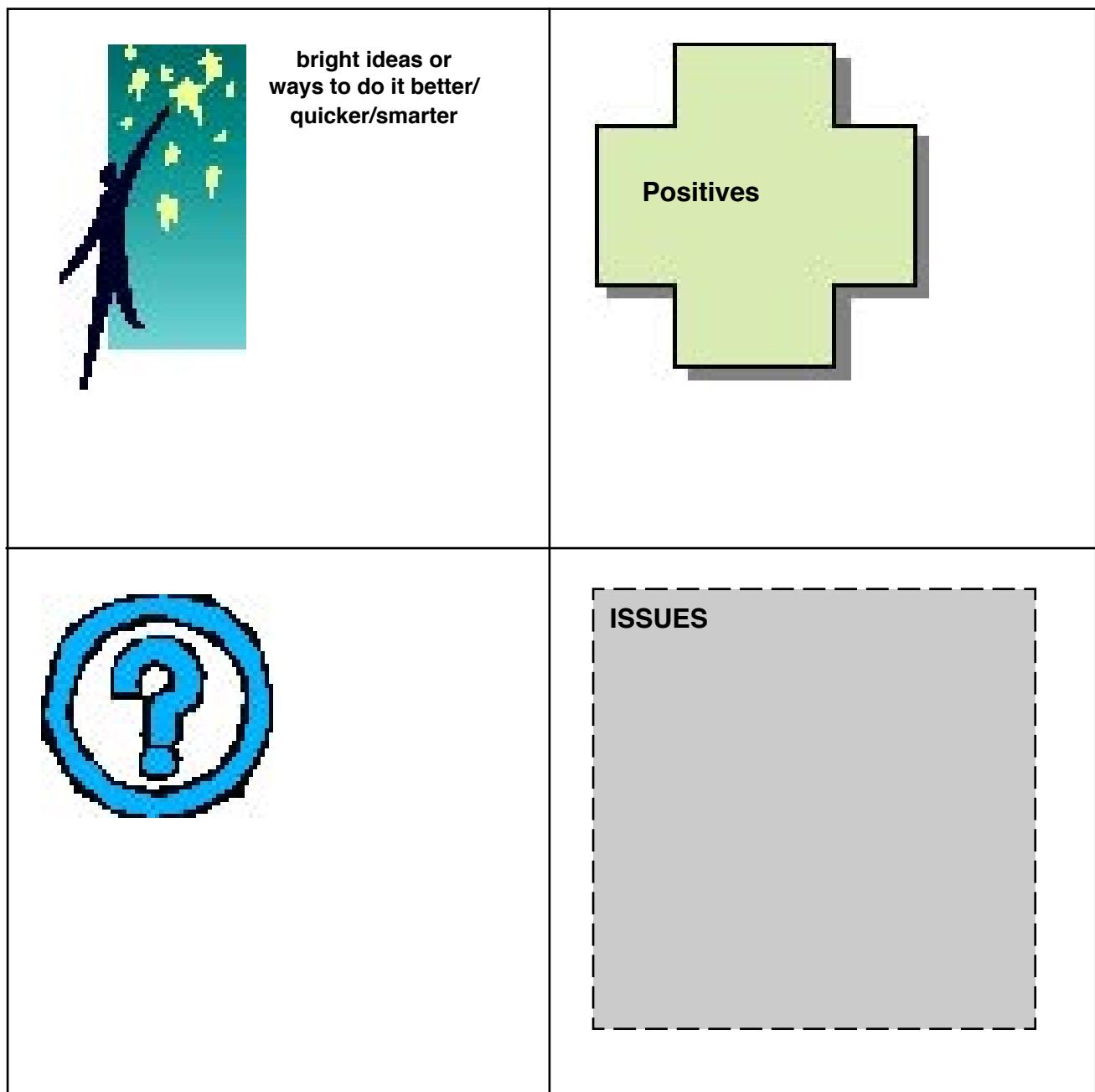
- Respect the issues raised. If a student feels strongly enough to agenda an item then it must be treated seriously.
- Using DeBono's hats for meetings is a fabulous way to go too. Use the hats to further explore all aspects of discussed items. Go GREEN to creatively explore possible solutions to issues. WHITE will give us facts and RED is great to look at the feelings raised.
- A class chosen item/mascot can be passed round the circle allowing the holder of the mascot permission to speak; students are allowed to pass sometimes.
- Explore and recognise the types of thinking required and used.

- Use the class meetings to develop understandings of more formal meeting processes.
- Use the class meeting forum to contribute suggestions and respond to Junior School Council/SRC/etc. We are currently using class meetings to determine who and what to support with fund-raising.

If we are going to change the world, then the ideals must begin in the classroom and class meetings are an easy, effective and valuable way to start.

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# Discovering Democracy

Students belong to a variety of communities. The class unit is one of the smaller communities that a child belongs to and spends a lot of time in. It is important that each child feels valued in this community.

The weekly class meeting in my 5/6 classroom has become an integral and valued part of our weekly timetable and sets the tone for the rest of the week. Students look forward to class meetings because they provide each one of them with an opportunity to be heard, to acknowledge others in the group and to be acknowledged by them.

The organisation of the class and the allocation of roles for the meeting are essential in creating a 'democratic' environment for the students.



- Students sit in a circle with the teacher part of it.
- Students take turns to chair the meeting and take the minutes on behalf of the group. (These roles are modelled by me in weeks one and two of the year.)
- Each child is given five tokens. This gives them the opportunity to speak five times. Each time the student has a say, he/she returns a token to the token jar, in the middle of the circle. The chair can see clearly who to ask and encourage. Quieter students are able to have a say and set themselves goals

week by week to use more tokens. The more confident students need to prioritise and make decisions about which contributions are most important.

- The chair writes the agenda on the white board using this format.
  - **SRCreport:** given by the SRC representatives who are elected by the class, based on policy speeches, to represent them in the wider school community. These policy speeches ensure that students are elected to the SRC on the basis of their ability to present and understand the issues that are vital to the class and the school community not because of their popularity.
  - **Feedback to the SRC:** students provide SRC representatives with any issues to take back to the next SRC meeting.
  - **Election of two 'kids of the week':** Students are nominated for this role by members of the class based on some qualities or actions seen during the week.
  - **Compliments:** Students have the opportunity to acknowledge other students.
  - **Rupert and Esmeralda:** Students raise any behavioural issues concerning them in the class, using these chosen pseudonyms to avoid embarrassment. The class then discusses appropriate action. This is reviewed the following week.
  - **Other issues.**

A well planned class meeting which takes place at the beginning of the week creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmony, based on a clear and shared understanding of expectations, feelings and desired outcomes.

Students feel safe and valued and know they have an opportunity to implement and influence change.

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# Thinking Hats in Classroom Meetings

Meetings in my classroom initially began after a PD with Helen McGrath based on her book **Friendly Kids, Friendly Classrooms**. This was based on a desire to teach students social skills, and allow them to practise problem-solving strategies. I have structured my class meetings based on Edward De Bono's Thinking Hats. I have continued to modify my classroom meetings approach to better suit the needs of the children I am working with and I have been extremely gratified by the results.

## My belief in classroom meetings comes from the following philosophy that:

- Confidence comes from acceptance and the freedom to express oneself.
- Everyone has the right to express his/her opinion, whilst respecting the views of others.
- We are all problem solvers and choose and are responsible for our own behaviour.
- Learning is most effective when it is fun and we have a sense of ownership over it.
- A teacher's role is to nurture, nourish and foster learning. Teachers have the power to equip children with the necessary tools to be life long learners.

## Why use DeBono's thinking hats for class meetings?

I need not stress the importance of teaching thinking skills to students but I will share with you a couple of things I have found interesting. The need to teach thinking skills has been made imperative by Edward De Bono.

- The main difficulty in thinking is confusion. We try to do too much at once. Emotions, information, logic, hope and creativity all crowd in on us.
- A very simple concept (six thinking hats) allows a thinker to do one thing at a time. Putting on one of these hats defines a certain type of thinking. (De Bono, 2000:2)

## I have found that using thinking hats during class meetings allows students:

- a clearly defined framework for thinking during meetings;
- to focus on one type of thinking at a time. This is important as it allows for a cut off between each section of the meeting and stops students dwelling on issues that may have been raised during a particular section of the meeting;
- to further develop their thinking skills (including brainstorming, challenging assumptions and questioning ideas);
- to practise the hat process regularly which enables students to then adapt these skills to other aspects of their learning.

The thinking hats allow students to explore various aspects of thinking. For those belligerent students they are given a way to focus their black hats issues to a particular time and for those submissive students, there is an expectation that everyone in the class explore their feeling (during red hat).

## Overall meeting outline:

- Class meetings are carried out weekly.
- The whole class sits in a circle with someone chairing the meeting.
- During each stage of the meeting we put on a different hat with the emphasis being on that type of thinking.

## Issues:

In my classroom I usually chair the meeting, however this depends on the grade level I am teaching or the needs of the students. I know of other teachers who have a different student chairing the meeting each week. This works well, allowing students to further develop their level of independence and leadership skills.

Initially, particularly after we had discussed problems during our black hat thinking, some students found it difficult to stop raising issues and change to the next hat. Some students did need to be reminded that 'we now have our green hat on ...' etc. This process of changing this mode of thinking does take some practice and time to master.

## What makes meetings so critical in our classroom?

When I mentioned to my grade that I was writing an article about class meetings, our class then began to discuss why class meetings are so significant. The overall thoughts were that this was an important time to air our opinions: 'we all have a right to have our say,' said one child; 'could you please send this article to my new school when I move so we can have meetings there,' was another response; and 'how would we work out and talk about our problems (if we didn't have meetings)?' was another.

I believe the best class meetings are those that are adapted to suit your own needs. What may work for some, may not necessarily work for others but there is no harm in giving a new approach a go and adapting it to suit yourself.

Class meetings have now successfully been introduced into quite a few classrooms at my school. Teachers have found this structure to be straightforward, successful and easy to apply to the classroom.

I now leave you with some thoughts about the importance of class meetings from some Grade 2 and 3 students:

'I like class meetings because we get to tell the teacher about what is happening through the week.' *Lachlan*

'They can help you and everyone gets along better. The fact that we express our feelings is good.' *Samantha*

'You get to sort out things. You get to vote and say how you are feeling.' *Chris*

'In yellow hat if I say I really like some things that we do in the classroom, she will give us more of it.' *Tommas*

'I love white hat. I love voting and nominating. I love to see who is student of the week.' *Mikaila*

'In red hat, if you feel angry, bring it up in black hat and you can then fix up your problem in green hat.' *Tim*

'People are telling us about what they like doing in class. I think that every school should have them.' *Ellie*

'... you solve problems straight away.' *Maddison*

'... you can figure out problems.' *Lisa*

'We are allowed to tell our problems about things that we are uncomfortable with, so that the rest of the grade can suggest solutions for our problem.' *Menq Jiun*

'You can also make suggestions to change the classroom and make it better!' *Saara*

'I think that class meetings are worthwhile because you get to find out how other people feel.' *Xanthe-Ella*

'... you can help people out with their problems.' *Janelle*

## Class Meeting Format

Class Meeting Process	Questions to ask during each step	Classroom operation	Do's and don'ts; Other issues
<b>RED HAT (emotions)</b>	<b>How are you feeling today?</b>	Moving around the circle everyone tells how he/she is feeling.	I allow students the opportunity if they wish to explain their feelings. I have found this very useful and I have found children to be extremely open and honest.
<b>YELLOW HAT (positive)</b>	<b>What good things have happened to you or have you achieved this week?</b>	Students raise their hands if they have something to share.	I usually keep this to a school focus. This is a great way to celebrate learning.
<b>BLACK HAT (negative)</b>	<b>Are there any issues/problems/concerns that you have this week?</b>	Students raise their hand if they have an issue.	Need to emphasise to students that this is a session for issues that have not been resolved and issues you would like the class to know about and help you with.
<b>GREEN HAT (creative)</b>	<b>Can you offer any solutions/suggestions for the problems mentioned during black hat?</b> <b>Does anyone have any suggestions about ways we could improve things at school/in the classroom?</b>	As each black hat issue is mentioned students are given the opportunity to give advice or suggestions for improving each issue or ideas.  During this time, our student council representative may be asked to take an issue or idea we have discussed to the next student council meeting.	This is a discussion time allowing students the opportunity to talk about various issues and areas for improvement.  During this time we often come to a group decision about how issues will be resolved.  This is also a time to suggest new ideas and areas that can be improved on at school and in the classroom.
<b>WHITE HAT (facts/information)</b>	<b>Would you like to nominate anyone for student of the week?</b>	Students raise their hand if they would like to nominate someone for the student of the week.  Once a number of students have been nominated we then have a anonymous vote (heads down, hands up to vote for ... etc)	This process has the following guidelines:  The students are nominated to the teacher's discretion.  If you nominate someone you must offer a reason why they should be the student of the week.
<b>BLUE HAT (thinking about thinking)</b>			This hat is somewhat ambiguous during class meetings but can be used to put on when unsure what thinking we should be doing.

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# Let them make a difference!

**A**t Wednesday's Prep-Year 2 assembly I say: "Just a reminder to the teachers and JSC reps: please have your class meetings before Friday".

"By Friday! How on earth am I supposed to fit that in?" I sense from a large majority of the classroom teachers around me.

Sound familiar? I bet it does, even to myself - a classroom teacher and Prep-Year 2 Junior School Council (JSC) leader. But my advice is simple: make time! After all, class meetings are essential in providing a forum for students to participate in decision-making. This in turn contributes to their sense of belonging and self-confidence, underpinning many student welfare programs at our schools.

## The JSC

The JSC at Princes Hill Primary School (Victoria) empowers all students to make a difference. Here, the JSC is divided into three meeting groups – Years 5/6, Years 3/4 and Years P - 2. Each 1/2 class has two representatives from each year level. Each Prep class has two representatives who are changed mid year. This ensures that even the younger children have 'a voice' and access to decision making at our school. Every three weeks, representatives from each JSC group are chosen to discuss and reflect on decision-making and progress with the three teacher leaders and JSC office bearers.

Before students elect Junior School Councillors, we ask them to think about what makes a successful leader. The Prep-Year 2 children, for example, learn about the importance of good speaking and listening skills. They are taught about 'assertion'. These experiences then ensure that, when voting in the private ballot, the children are seriously tuned into the idea of a 'successful leader' and that representatives are not solely elected because of their 'popularity'.

At the beginning of the year the representatives take part in a 'Training Junior Student Leaders' course run by their teacher leader. They participate in various activities and further discuss and investigate the qualities needed to achieve good leadership. They become skilled at reporting back to their classmates and generating purposeful discussions.

## Class Meetings

Class meetings, in my classroom, are held every week on a Thursday afternoon at 3:00 pm. And this day and time is non-negotiable! I act as the facilitator, mediator and recorder. The representatives are the leaders of the meetings. I encourage the representatives to lure all children into the discussion and decision-making process, even those who are quiet, by asking questions: "Natasha, do you agree? What do you think?" The children are encouraged to take turns and to use their best manners at all times. The meeting is not over until the representatives announce: "The meeting is now closed". It does not commence until all children are paying full attention to the representatives and the representatives declare the meeting open.

The children in Prep S have 'a voice' and feel valued because I ensure that I let them.

Let the children talk. Let them feel empowered. Let them make a difference!

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*The following chart is an example of the recording process for every class meeting at Princes Hill Primary School:*

## **Junior School Councils Class Meetings 2003**

### **AGENDA and MINUTES**

Meeting date:

Leader of meeting:

Recorder of meeting:

<b>Agenda: Issues we need to discuss</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>Minutes: What we talked about and the decisions we made</b>
1. JSC Report		
2. Pats on the back for... (Relate to You Can Do It!)		
3. Making a difference		
4. How can we improve?		
5. Other ...		

#### **Junior School Council Agenda Items:**

1

2



This series of articles on Classroom Meetings  
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