STUDENT COUNCILS AND BEYOND

Students as Effective Participants in Educational Decision-Making

Articles from ***Connect*** 1990-2005

Compiled by Roger Holdsworth
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Credits and acknowledgements

These articles are collected and reprinted from issues of **Connect,** in most cases from between 1990 and 2005. They have been written by teachers and students in primary and secondary schools throughout Australia.

Many of the approaches and programs described here continue to exist and flourish, but others have changed or vanished, as those involved have reflected on and learned from their experiences, or have simply moved on to other schools or interests.

At the end of each article I have included information about the original date of publication of that account, so you might both chase up the original issue, and also judge how current the account is. If you are interested to follow up stories with the writer, some information from the original publication in **Connect** has been included, but this should be used with caution for the above reasons.

The commitment of all these writers to documenting their practices and to sharing that with others is highly appreciated. I remain constantly in awe of the dedication, initiative and innovation of students and teachers throughout Australia. This book would, of course, not exist without their everyday work, thought and commitment.

Roger Holdsworth

Connect

Connect is a small magazine dedicated to sharing practical information about active student participation in Australian primary and secondary schools. It has been published bi-monthly since late 1979.

Connect started as an attempt to consolidate and share practical information about some curriculum initiatives in which I was involved in the late 1970s: cross-age tutoring programs, student-produced community media, alternative and community schools and so on.

Rapidly other teachers and students involved with similar or different initiatives began writing about and sharing their own experiences and resources, and **Connect** continued and grew.

Connect has maintained a commitment to three main ideas:

- the documentation of and support for the active participation of primary and secondary school students in decision-making and action about and in their education;
- reflection on and sharing of practices in order to make these more effective and widespread;
- the development and sharing of practical resources to support, challenge and extend practices.

Connect only exists because individuals write the stories, and because they and their organisations (including schools) continue to subscribe to the journal. Information is included at the end of this book about how **you** can subscribe and continue to read about these initiatives.

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Introduction: Purpose

Over many years, **Connect** has documented and shared stories about Student Councils * in primary and secondary schools. **Connect** has been strongly committed to the idea and practice of students organising to share in education decision-making. Increasingly however, there has been concern that practices in this area have become restricted and tokenistic. Several recent articles in **Connect** have developed such critiques, analysed the restrictions and suggested alternative approaches and strategies.

However, many of these articles and the resources that were associated with them, have appeared in various issues over 15 or more years. Some people have these back issues; others don't. Prompted by the strong interest in some training days around issues of 'Taking the Next Step', these articles have been drawn together and organised so that they challenge and resource reflective practice.

If you are looking for a simple manual on how to organise a Student Council, this is not it! If you are looking for unqualified answers, you won't find them here!

What you will find are descriptions of practices that are presented with pride, but also with doubts.

The book also concentrates on **'Student Councils and Beyond...'**. Though it argues for active student participation as a whole of curriculum approach and provides some leads in this direction, it doesn't set out to document the range of participatory curriculum initiatives that have also been published in **Connect**.

In the mid 1980s, four collections of articles from the first five years of **Connect** were published by the Victorian Participation and Equity Program (PEP). They had various curriculum foci: in areas of ***Tutoring***, ***Students and Radio***, ***Students Publishing*** and ***Students and Work***. Apart from the latter (which is still available from **Connect**) these are now out of print. It was intended that a fifth volume around ***Student Organisations*** would be produced, but this never eventuated.

Twenty years later, it has... but perhaps with a more challenging and strategic focus.

Structure of this book

In collecting articles for this book, it was useful to start with some foundational ideas. **Part 1: The Context** therefore presents some conceptual articles about what we mean by¡ 'student participation', 'student voice' and so on.

The core of the book is **Part 2: ReThinking Student Councils**, which starts with a challenge. This material first appeared in **Connect** 145-146 (February-April, 2004), and the structure of this section follows the extended set of articles in that issue in responding to the challenge. There are several sub-sections here (around élitism, structures, tokenism, curriculum links, partnerships with others, effective organisation, and networking with others) that outline possible strategies. Examples from primary and secondary schools show practices that try to 'go beyond' current restrictions.

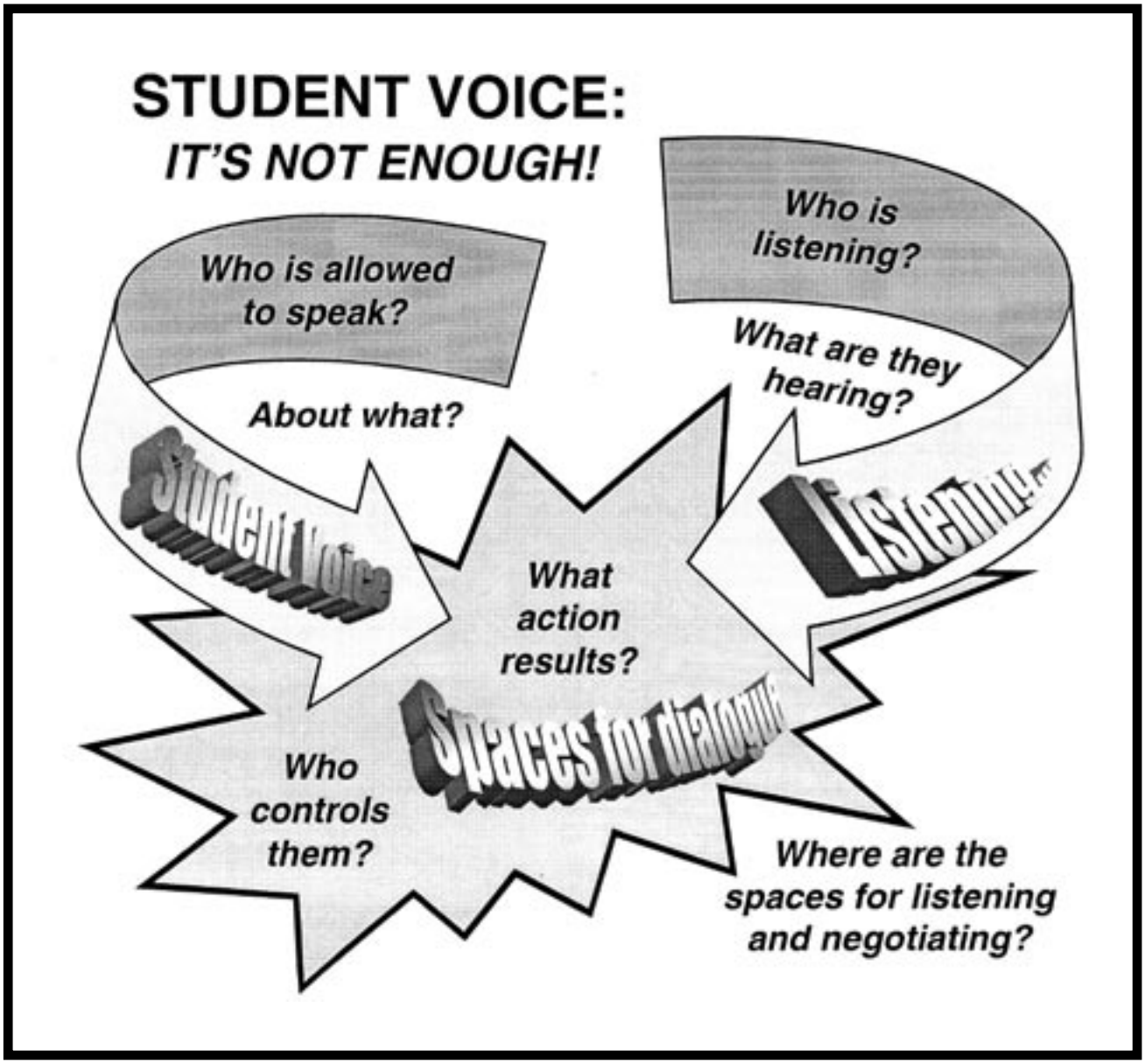
Part 3: Starting Up then addresses the needs of those who are in the position of starting some form of student organisation, either after a period of non-existence, or at the start of a new year. This section also draws on some of the possibilities, structures and challenges in Part 2.

While this book is not a training manual for Student Councils, it was useful to share some of the ideas for activities that support effective student groups and that have been developed and shared through **Connect**. Therefore, in **Part 4: Training the Student Council**, some resources for training sessions in both primary and secondary schools are included. Here are some worksheets and checklists for your use.

Finally, two **Appendices** include further associated materials from **Connect** - around effective **classroom meetings** (particularly in primary schools), and around **curriculum negotiation**.

* A Footnote About Terms:

Sometimes the student groups described in this book have been called SRCs (Student Representative Councils) or JSCs (Junior School Councils - most often used in primary schools). But other terms have been used as well. So the term 'Student Council' has generally been used here to describe some form of school organisation run by and for students.



Originally from cover, **Connect** 149, October 2004;
based on ideas and questions from Michael Fielding:
'Beyond the rhetoric of student voice' in ***Forum*** 43 (2), 2001

Part 1:
The Context

Some Terms:
Voice, Participation, Representation, Leadership...

Over the years, a number of terms have been used to describe work in the area covered by **Connect** and this book. We have talked of 'student participation', 'representation', 'leadership' and, more recently, 'student voice'. These are not simply neutral or alternative terms, for each conveys a message about how we view young people and their capacities, and how we believe institutions such as schools should respond.

For example, I have been concerned that the dominant language has shifted over the years from 'participation' to 'representation' to 'leadership' and that each shift has marked a narrowing of concepts and of increasingly élite ideas. To me, ideas of participation are broad and inclusive and specifically need to raise questions of how we work to ensure that all students experience access and success.

The following articles attempt to explore some of these definitional issues. Are we all on the same page? Are we intending different outcomes and hence reading these articles in different ways?

There have similarly been very different program responses within the area, and terms such as 'Student Action Teams', 'Students as Researchers', 'Community Groups' and 'Student Councils' have been used to describe these. How do all of these fit together?

The first article in this section is a recent attempt to puzzle out connections between some of the initiatives and to 'mind-map' those relationships. Here I am also looking for the consistencies and differences in the underlying ideas.

Roger Holdsworth, 2005

Navigating Student Voice and Beyond

As a lead-up to working with the South Australian Inclusive Student Voice initiative in 2004, I was thinking about the range of examples we include under the title 'student voice'. Despite the title, these weren't all just about 'voice', as some had also to do with student action within communities. And then, as Michael Fielding and Sara Bragg (2003) point out, there are issues to do with 'voice about what?', about who is allowed to speak, about who is listening, and about the spaces that are created for dialogue. And, as a teacher on the day pointed out, about what it is that adults actually hear when young people 'speak'.

I wondered if a map would help us navigate this somewhat complex and diverse terrain. So the diagram (on page 10) is a first attempt to draw such a map. The clear area at the left is relatively known (familiar practices in classrooms and student councils) but, as we move into the grey area on the right, we may be moving off-shore into less charted waters. Here be unknowns; here be uncertainties. But here be possibilities and excitement!

Now, I'm not sure that I've got this right, or that everything is there yet. Things might be in the wrong place, incomplete, inaccurate. The map needs input from other voyagers to fill out the vague and blank parts and possibly to show some of the monsters to be encountered.

And then on the next two pages I've tried to show this picture in another way, with a grid describing and comparing various aspects of the places on the map. The two can be read together ... and again this grid should be updated and improved.

I'm still wondering if this helps us to see what is possible and what the links are. Any feedback would be gratefully received. Any discoveries of new continents, shoals and reefs would be valuable!

Roger Holdsworth

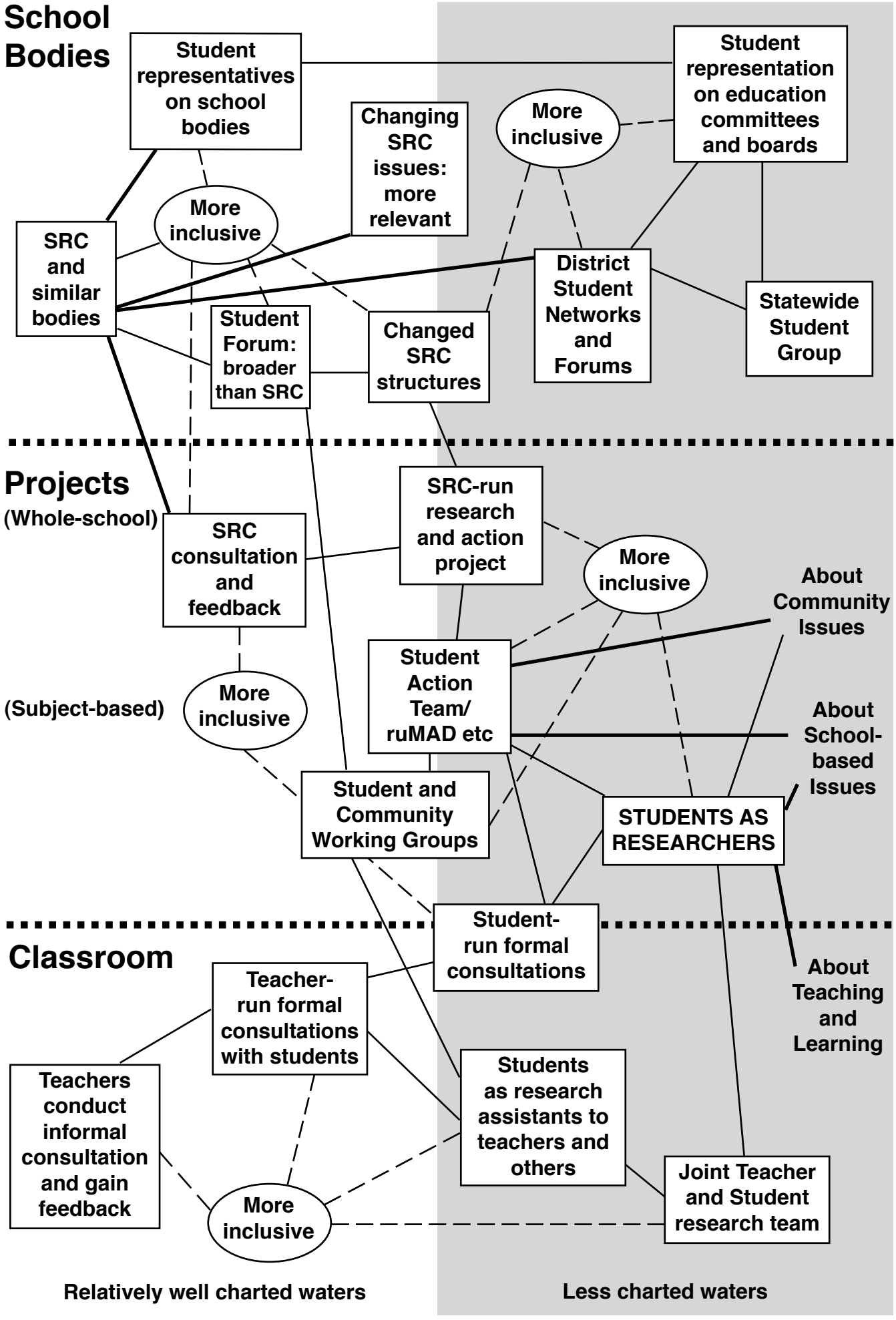
(*Ref:* Michael Fielding and Sara Bragg (2003) **Students as Researchers: Making a Difference**, Pearson Publishing: Cambridge)

Towards a 'Student Voice

Approach	About	Initiation	Teacher role
Students as source of information	Teachers gain normal feedback from students while teaching	Classroom issues inc. understanding, approaches etc	Teachers	Ask questions, consider results
Students as source of information	**Teachers** carry out specific and extra consultations with students	Various classroom or school-level issues but mainly curriculum -based; student satisfaction etc	Teachers	Decide on issues, structure and administer surveys etc
Students as source of information	**Students** carry out specific consulta-tions with students for teachers	(As above) Various but mainly curriculum -based; student satisfaction etc	Teachers	Decide on issues, structure and supervise approaches
Students as Researchers - in school	Students **define** and gather information about school practices	Various school-based issues including satisfaction, curriculum issues, school structures etc	Students with or without teacher input	Support, guide, train, provide skills and advice
Students as Researchers – outside school	Students define and gather information about community	Local or wider social and community issues of interest	Students with community input	Support, guide, train etc; provide class time?
Research and Action	Students define an issue, research it and propose and/or take action	School and/or community issues including health, environment, safety, peace, jobs etc	Students with support	As above: support, advise; provide skill training and time
Student-teacher research collaboration	Joint teacher-student approaches to research and action	Shared issues of concern: school and/ or community issues	Students or teachers or others	Co-researcher - but also support and advise and teach
Formal student organisation	SRC or similar body (Student Council)	Consideration of issues raised by students	Student body	Assist and advise; skill training; advocate
Other student organisations	Student forums	Broader structures for more inclusive student decision-making	Students and others	Assist and advise; co-workers on specific issues
Formal representation in decision-making	Student representation on school committees and councils	Participation in whole school decision-making	School	Co-members of committees, but also support; skill training
Networking outside school	Inter-school student networks for discussion or action	Discussion of a range of issues – either school or community based; training	Students	Transport, assist, advise; offer training activities
Formal representation at district, region, state	Representation of students within District and State structures	Participation in decision-making or advice on a range of issues of specific interest to bodies	System – sometimes student demand/request	Transport, support, advise; some training and advocacy

and Beyond' Typology

Student role	Methods	Space for listening	Outcomes and Action	
Give responses	Questioning in class; looking at student assessments	Classroom; teachers' own private space	Improved teacher practice: trans-mission, teaching etc	**Students as source of information**
As above inc. completing surveys, participation in focus groups, interviews	Various consultation methods: surveys, interviews, focus groups etc	During the process; perhaps also reported formally at staff and other meetings	Input to teacher and school decision-making	**Students as source of information**
Research assistant - conduct surveys etc; provide responses; advise on analysis	As above	Staff and other meetings, as well as one-to-one reports	Input to teacher decision-making; some student skills	**Students as source of information**
Decide on topic, structure and conduct research; analyse; contribute responses	Range: surveys, interviews, focus groups, observation etc	Created spaces for presentation of outcomes at meetings or personally	Ask others for action and change; input to teacher decision-making; some student skills	**Students as Researchers - in school**
As above	As above	Spaces created within research: school/community	Ask others for action and change; input to community decisions	**Students as Researchers – outside school**
As above; decide on and implement action	As above; also development of an action component	Forced consideration through and within action proposals	School or community change; skills	**Research and Action**
Co-researcher and co-activist	As above	As above, plus shared space and shared consideration	School or community change; skills; connectedness	**Student-teacher research collaboration**
Gain and consider input from other students – represent	Range of relatively formal meeting procedures	SRC meeting – presentation of student 'demands'	Representation of student views – action by others	**Formal student organisation**
Gain and consider and act on input from other students – represent	Range of meeting and action procedures – more likely more informal	Own sub-structures but also some student co-ordination group?	Direct impact on areas of interest; rep-resentation of student views to others	**Other student organisations**
Represent student views; share in delegated decision-making	Range of relatively formal meeting procedures	Meetings of the bodies	School decision making	**Formal representation in decision-making**
Run meetings and networks; share information and some decisions	Range of meetings and links (inc virtual); training days	Created events at district, regional, state etc; internal to SRCs etc	Support and training; impact on broader issues; representa-tion of views; skills	**Networking outside school**
Represent student views on committees; sometimes share in decision-making	Range of relatively formal meeting procedures	Committee meetings – sometimes direct access to individuals	Advice through to shared system decision-making	**Formal representation at district, region, state**



Originally from *Connect* 148, August 2004

STUDENT PARTICIPATION
What Do We Mean?

In education, the word 'participation' has been used in various ways. For example, it can mean 'being there' *(as in participation or retention rates)*; it can mean 'taking part' *(as in doing activities over which students may have no say)*; it can mean 'having a say' *(students speaking out about issues)*. All these are important, but we mean much more than these definitions when we talk of 'student participation' in primary and secondary schools.

We mean: **an active role for students in decisions about, and implementation of, education policies and practices, and of the key issues that determine the nature of the world in which they live.**

This implies that participation must value the contribution that students make, meet genuine needs (ie be about real things), have an impact or consequence that extends beyond the participants (ie outside the classroom), be challenging to participants, and provide the opportunity for planning, acting and reflecting.

Another way of saying that is to see that student participation must involve activities that are valuable and make sense in three ways:

a) **to the participants**: students are working on issues they choose, that make sense to them, and which they value;

b) **to the community**: the community sees the issues as valuable ones to be worked on, and in which students can add something of value to that community;

c) **academically**: the participation meets the academic or curriculum goals that schools are required to achieve.

These principles then provide an essential checklist by which we can determine whether a particular proposal is of worth. Is it driven by student choice and enthusiasm? Does it produce something of real value to the community? Does it meet the learning goals of the school or the subject?

Arenas of Student Participation

There are three major **arenas** in which we must see student participation developing. The existence of participation in **all** these arenas is important and complementary. The absence of active participation in any one of these arenas weakens student participation across the whole school:

a) in student-run organisations:

This involves students in Student Representative Councils (SRCs), Junior School Councils (JSCs) and so on, where students can discuss, debate and decide their position on issues facing them.

b) in school governance:

This involves students, either directly or through representatives, in participation in school decision making. This might occur through students taking part in committees eg School Council, Curriculum Committee, Regional Board and so on.

c) in curriculum decision-making and action:

This involves students in decision-making and action through classroom learning partnerships, and through specific 'student participation' projects or approaches. Curriculum negotiation is basic to all such approaches and can occur at all levels (though it has often been spelled out most coherently in senior school curriculum).

There are long lists of practical examples in all these areas. The next pages deal with each of these areas in turn and raise some issues to be considered. But there are many more ideas and issues that need consideration.

It is important that documentation and sharing of practical initiatives in both primary and secondary education continues to occur. The national newsletter, **Connect**, has provided a means for this to happen for over 25 years.

Roger Holdsworth

Some Issues:

- Participation is a 'doing' word: an approach, not a noun. You cannot 'do' student participation. Nor is it something that has been 'done' or 'tried'. It is a way of relating between students and others; a way of bringing students into partnership in education.
- Who gets to participate? We need to be wary of approaches that encourage or allow **some** students to be active participants while excluding others. The most valuable forms of participation are those which are **inclusive** - and those which specifically aim to include students who have been marginalised and excluded by other educational approaches.

Student Organisations

Many schools now have some form of student organisation - and these have recently developed most rapidly in primary schools. While these Student Councils have traditionally been seen as having limited or token functions (fund-raising and the organisation of social activities in many cases), schools that are serious about supporting student participation continue to discover ways to extend the role of student organisations so they are a vital part of the school's overall decision-making structure.

What do they do? What can they do?

These student organisations enable students to meet and discuss, debate and decide on issues of importance to them. The sorts of issues that Student Councils consider are:

- fund-raising for school or community concerns;
- organisation of student social activities;
- school rules, including issues about uniforms;
- school (and related) facilities;
- environmental issues in the school and community;
- advocacy: representing students eg considering and 'taking up' others' complaints and concerns;
- curriculum (teaching and learning, subjects, time-table, assessment and so on);
- community development and action.

Schools that are **serious** about student participation encourage and support Student Councils to work on all these issues - and more. Student Councils that seriously want to be part of a school's decision-making **never** say: "That's something we couldn't be involved in."

Student Councils often approach these issues in three ways: in some cases, they **do** things themselves (eg organising activities) - but these are often relatively limited or trivial things; in other cases, they **ask** others to do things (eg they approach the Principal) - but this strongly limits the effectiveness of the Council, and leaves the final decision and action to someone else; or thirdly, they **share** the decision-making with others (eg on a school committee) and participate in suggesting and deciding about the approaches and in implementing solutions.

*(For more details on these, see **Connect** 116, April 1999, p 22)*

Who?

Who gets to be on a Student Council? Some schools are now concerned that such groups only involve a small number of students - the ones who love meetings, or are popular, or can make good speeches. They are trying to invent new types of Student Councils, or Forums, or broader structures that can involve more students in different ways. For example, some schools are developing many different groups – task committees, action groups, peer support groups and so on – with students elected, or volunteering from different parts of the school. The 'traditional' Student Council then might be an executive or coordinating committee run by students. This way, more students can participate; this way, different students can take action and have their voices heard.

These arrangements are also influenced by some simple but difficult decisions: When does the Student Council meet – at lunchtime, or as part of the curriculum? Who is elected – the 'dags' or a variety of students representative of interests of the student body? How does the election procedure influence or limit who gets elected (eg if people have to make speeches, do only the already confident students get elected)?

Credit

If participation in decision-making is an important learning activity within a school, how do schools recognise and credit students' Council and other participation as part of the school's curriculum? This could also provide some **time** for students to carry out this work. Schools have considered ways of incorporating Student Council work as a subject, or as part of the work requirements (through subject or work/task substitution). This means that students have to negotiate ways of showing what they are learning when they are on a Student Council.

Training and Networking

Student Councils also need time to develop as a group and to increase their skills. It is important to make regular time to meet, to include some training days or camps, and to network with other Student Councils.

Some Issues:

- Who gets to participate on Student Councils? Is there only one form of participation possible – a form that continues to favour those students who are already succeeding?
- A constant issue is that of the support that students provide for a Student Council. It has generally been discovered that when a Student Council listens seriously to students, works on their issues, reports back, and involves other students (instead of just doing things **for** them), they get strong support from other students. Time is needed within home-groups or classes for such discussions.

Students as Part of School Decision-Making Bodies

Student participation also means representation within the broader decision-making structure of the school, on the School Council and on various committees and working parties that make decisions and recommendations on policies and programs.

These councils and committees are at the core of school decision making. They deal with issues of whole school governance: finances, curriculum, welfare, facilities and so on. As noted opposite, if students are to do anything other than **ask** others for change, or act on less important matters, they need to be sharing in these decisions, as partners in the operation of the school.

Understanding School Structures

Many students, even those on school committees, will need to develop their understanding of how decisions are made in a school. What are the structures that exist?

A useful exercise for a Student Council is to research how decisions are made. Draw up a 'decision-making' map of the school. Ask: What are the committees, who is on them, what do they deal with, who do they report to? Are students already represented on these bodies? (Do they want to be?)

Connecting School and Student Councils

The ways in which schools connect Student Councils into the broader school decision-making, so that student concerns and views are heard, can assist all students to have greater participation in the real decisions of a school, and can support the Student Council to grapple with significant (rather than trivial) concerns.

It is, for example, possible that the Student Council can 'mirror' the school committees (on which students are represented) with student advisory groups – where the representatives can raise issues and obtain student perspectives and advice for their work.

These structural matters raise further issues for representatives; reporting back and seeking direction from other students through the Student Council and then through discussion at home group or sub-school levels becomes important for all students' development and learning.

In all these areas, students are regarded as having valuable perspectives, information and skills to contribute to the school's decision making. Student views are taken seriously, and students are supported in developing democratic structures that ensure the views of **all** students are represented. Students learn democracy by doing democracy.

Networking

There remain larger issues that influence and constrain school decision making. If students are to participate fully as partners in education, they also need to be represented where those issues are considered: on Regional Boards, on Departmental Committees and so on. In turn, this implies opportunities for student representatives to meet and discuss these issues with other students – and not just those from their own school.

Supporting Students on Committees

When students are on school and other committees, they frequently need support to ensure they understand proceedings and are able to have their voices heard. These committees may have to re-consider their procedures, pausing for informal discussion, appointing 'mentors' to brief and advise students and so on. (They may find that such processes assist all members to be more effective.)

*(For more details, see **Connect** 116, April 1999, p 10)*

Some Issues:

- Who gets to represent students? Again, how do we ensure that there is diversity in representation on decision-making bodies?
- What sort of training is needed for student representatives? Whose responsibility is this?
- Are student representatives taken seriously? It is suggested that there should be at least two students on each body, to provide mutual support. No student should be there alone.
- What support is there for student networking to deal with the 'bigger issues'? Whose responsibility is this?
- How do representatives balance the needs for confidentiality and for consultation?

Students Deciding About and Implementing Curriculum

The curriculum - the teaching and learning that occurs in a school - is at the centre of what schools do. If we are to talk seriously about student participation, the role of students in the classroom and in their learningmust also demonstrate participatory principles.

That means two things: first, that students should be partners in decisions about and implementation of the curriculum (ie some form of curriculum **negotiation** should occur); secondly, that the way teaching and learning occurs should have students as active participants and include **real and valued learning activities**.

Negotiation

Even within centrally determined curriculum, schools have discovered and developed opportunities for negotiation of **learning methods**; in other less constrained courses, the curriculum partnerships between teachers and students have involved joint responsibility for **setting goals**, canvassing **needs** and **background**, **identifying appropriate content**, devising **learning methods** and putting appropriate collaborative **assessment and evaluation** measures in place.

*(For a discussion of some schools' approaches to curriculum negotiation, see **Connect** 105, June 1997 and **Connect** 124-125, August-October 2000.)*

Roles of Value

It is important that curriculum activities themselves are also characterised by active student participation. These need to acknowledge that students have valuable skills, and can do useful and valued things while they learn. They place students in **roles of value** in their school and in their community. These activities are valued by the participants (ie based on student choice and decision), valued by the community (with an audience and purpose beyond the teacher/classroom), and valued in terms of learning and the mandated curriculum.

Curriculum Projects

Extensive examples of student participation are seen in the wide range of curriculum projects that have been developed within Australian primary and secondary schools. These can be:

- ***community development projects in which students create resources and services of value to their communities.***

  Examples of these projects have included:

  * **cross-age tutoring** in which students teach other students either within the school, or within neighbouring schools or community facilities (eg child care centres);
  * **media productions** where students have produced community newspapers (some multilingual) and directories, books of oral histories, or radio and television programs;
  * **job creation**: through forms of enterprise education.

- ***community research and action projects in which students investigate and act on issues facing their community.***

  Examples of these projects have included:

  * student **research** initiatives on topics such as youth homelessness, community safety, irrigation methods etc, in which they write reports and/or propose or organise community action;
  * students' **environmental** studies and reports;
  * students working as **evaluators** - of health projects, curriculum and so on.

  *(For a larger list of possible projects and approaches, see **Connect** 116, April 1999, pp 6-9)*

Some of these examples might be discrete 'projects' while others might be on-going approaches that characterise how a class goes about its learning.

Some Issues:

- Who gets to negotiate curriculum and to participate in real and valued learning? For example, there has been a tendency to select the 'best' students to be tutors (or the ones who will 'represent the school' best), thereby perpetuating existing inequities and being self-defeating.
- The identification of real, purposeful and valued community-based learning requires schools to reconsider their relationship with their community. There is no shortage of important things that students can do, through which schools are able to meet (or exceed) their learning goals. How schools organise to enable this to happen becomes the important issue.

This overview first appeared in ***Connect*** 126, December 2000

Part 2:
ReThinking Student Councils

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

What's Wrong with SRCs and JSCs?

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

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

We need to hear stories about SRCs and JSCs that:

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

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

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

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

What are you doing about it?

Are you ready to take the next steps?

Angela's Story

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No answer from me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gael Little

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

2.1 Student Council Structures

The Challenge:

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

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

Possible Strategy 1:

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

Possible Strategy 2:

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

Possible Strategy 3:

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

Possible Strategy 4:

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

Possible Strategy 5:

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

Possible Strategy 6:

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

Possible Strategy 7:

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

DART = Discussion Action Representation Thought

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

David Mould
SRC Support, DART Project & Second Strike
david.mould@second-strike.com

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

Involving Younger Students

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

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

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

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

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

Organising for Success

Structures for Student Councils

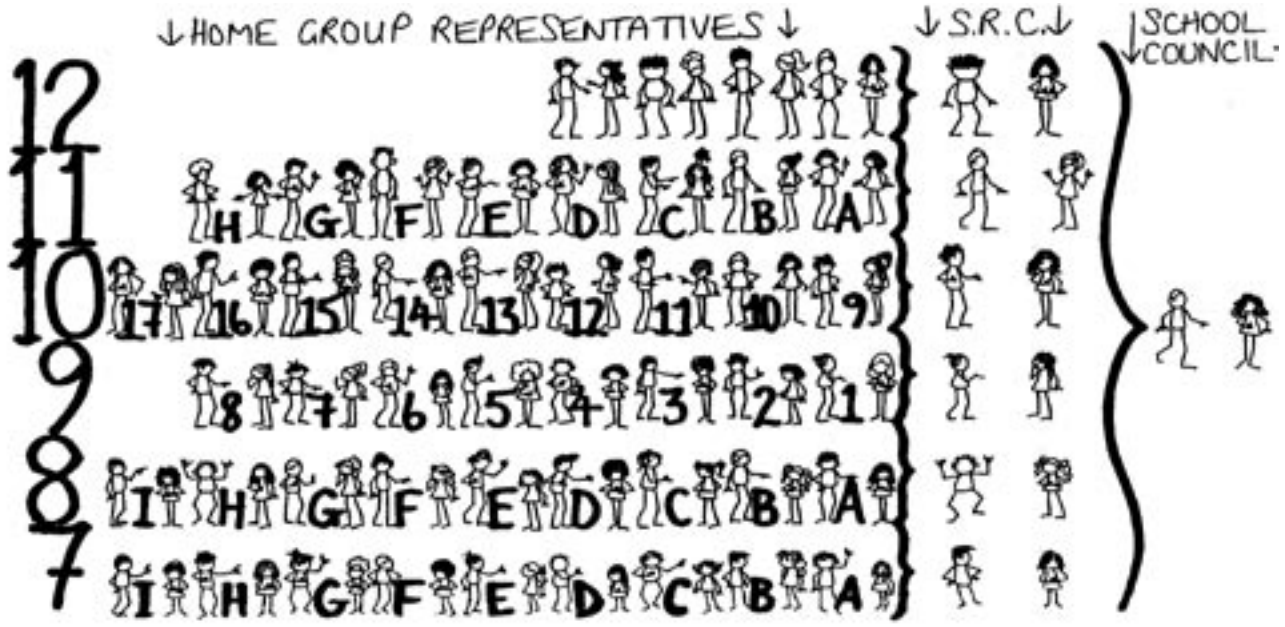
What's the ideal structure for an effective Student Council?

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

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

- The Student Council is a **student** organisation, and thus must be 'owned' by students and driven by their needs and wants. The structure must make sense to them, be one they have 'invented' and serve their needs.
- Issues of **equity** must be considered: the Student Council cannot be 'captured' by one particular group in the school and lock other students out of participation. It cannot be a small, isolated and separated group; this is also a practical question if it is to be able to operate with student support.
- The Council must be **practical** and able to do things. This means that attention to functions and structures are essential – it must be able to get on with its work; it also means that structures must pay attention to issues such as the amount of student and teacher time available.
- The Council must be **supported**: one or more staff advisors who are interested, accepted by the Student Council, and recognised by the school administration, need to be provided and resourced; students also need to be provided with time and resources (space, funds, training etc).

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



How do you get to be on the Student Council?

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

a) students are **elected** by students;

b) students **apply** and are chosen (eg by a selection panel);

c) students **volunteer**;

d) students are persuaded to join or are **co-opted** because of their skills or interests.

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

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

Election:

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

Positives

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

Negatives

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

Application and appointment:

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

Positives

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

Negatives

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

Volunteers:

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

Positives

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

Negatives

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

Co-option:

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

Positives

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

Negatives

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

Possible Student Council Structures

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

Home-Group Based Model (Traditional)

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

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

Positives

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

Negatives:

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

Sub-School Model

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

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

Positives

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

Negatives:

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

Working Groups Model

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

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

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

Positives:

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

Negatives:

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

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

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

Interest Group Model

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

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

Positives:

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

Negatives:

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

Multi-Level Model

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

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

Positives:

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

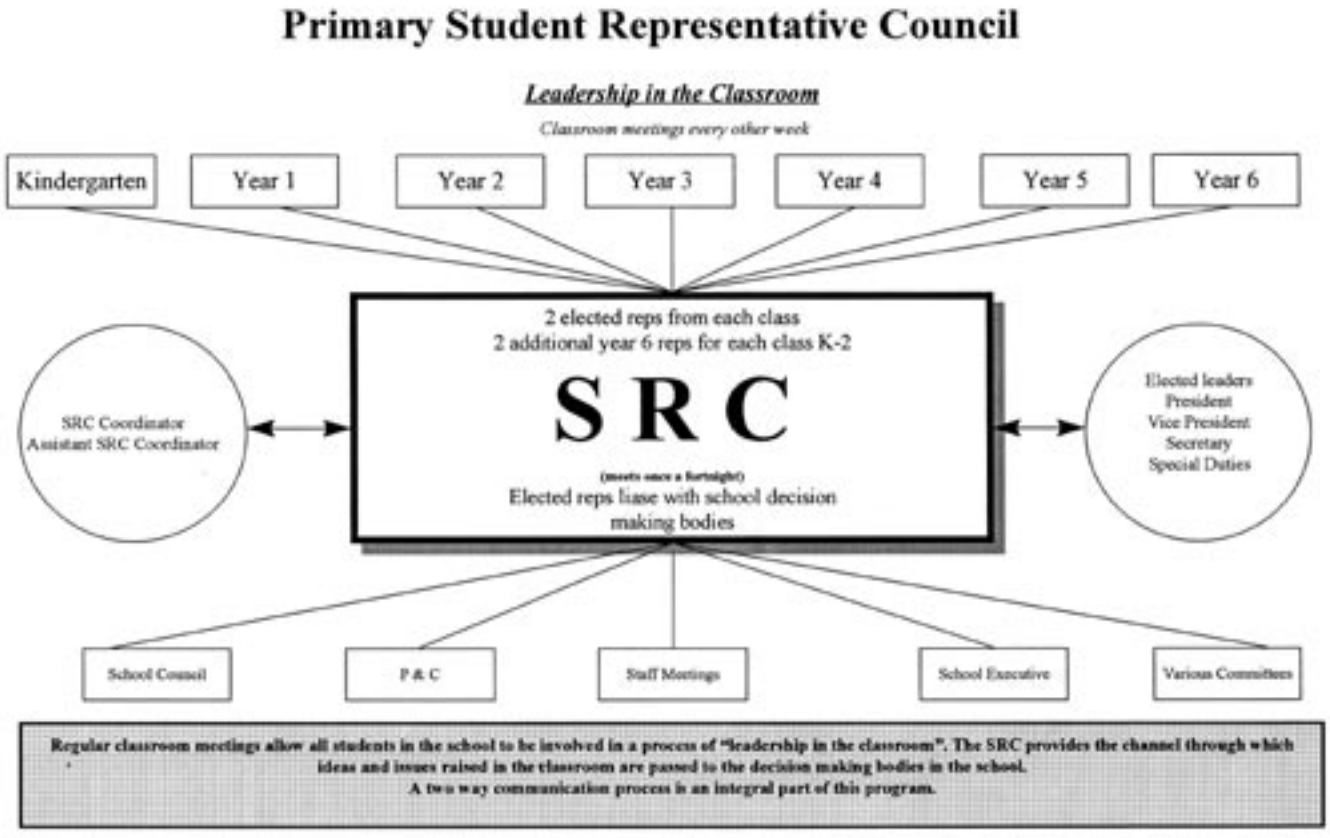
Negatives:

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

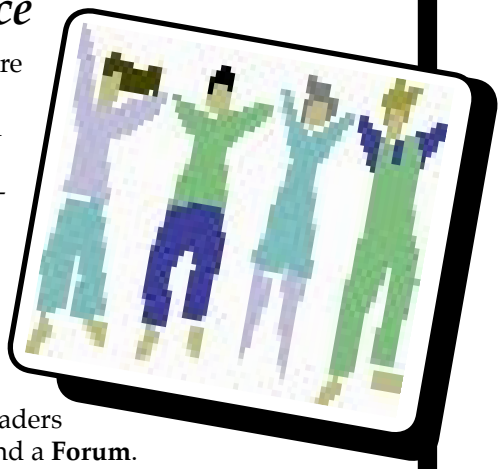
These are just some possible ways of building a Student Council. I think they could apply to both primary and secondary schools - with variations. The best Councils look at the range of options and put together a structure that suits the size, conditions and needs of their school. **Connect** would be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

Roger Holdsworth, February 2002

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



Berwick Secondary College Student Voice



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

Forum

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

Studios

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

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

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

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

Berwick Secondary College Student Voice Induction Camp booklet, Vic

Gladstone Park Secondary College

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

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

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

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

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

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

Paul Tresidder
ex-SRC President, Gladstone Park Secondary College, Vic

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

Community Groups at Melaleuca Park Schools

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

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

Background: Values Education

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

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

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

Community Groups Program

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

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

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

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

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

How did it develop?

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

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

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

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

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

Following the meetings, the Student Executive report back to their Community Group. The first half hour of Community Groups is a meeting time run by the Student Executive member for the purpose of information giving and discussion. The other members of the Community Group have an opportunity to voice their opinions and bring new information or issues to the Student Executive. The Student Executive can also bring issues for discussion to Staff and Governing Council.

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

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

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

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SRC at Asquith Girls High School, NSW

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

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

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

What do the SRC do?

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

What happens next?

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

How are meetings prepared?

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

Are there any special roles?

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

Special Roles include:

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

Are the SRC representatives involved in other events?

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

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

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

Rana Saleh

Year 11 SRC member
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Originally from ***Connect*** 145-146, February-April 2004

'Tuning In' to Distant Voices at Open Access College

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

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

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

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

Gabe and The Honorable Christopher Pyne

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

"…But, I'm not the sort of person who would ever be chosen to be part of the SRC..."

(Daniel, Year 10)

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

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

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

Michael talking to The Honorable Christopher Pyne

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

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

Strategies involving Student Voice initiatives now feature predominantly in OAC action plans and students will collaborate with educators to help achieve the objectives of the Strategic Directions of the school (*Well Being, Social Inclusion, Curriculum Renewal and Community Partnerships*). To better facilitate the plans, decision-making teams within the school will be devising strategies to enable purposeful involvement from student representatives on appropriate committees. Another initiative for 2004 will be the formation of a second Student Voice group for students in years 1-5.

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

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

Discovering Democracy Week Forum

Annette Bulling
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<abulling@oac.sa.edu.au>

Being Inclusive

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

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

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

Freya Hunter
Publicity Officer, James Fallon High School SRC, Albury NSW 2640

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

2.2 What do Student Councils do?

Getting Out of the Fundraising Trap

The Challenge:

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

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

See pages 30-32 ...

Possible Strategy 1:

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

Possible Strategy 2:

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

Possible Strategy 3:

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

Possible Strategy 4:

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

See pages 33-36 ...

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED?

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

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

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

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

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

How?

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

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

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

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

What?

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

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

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

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

Evaluating

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

Look at the picture this reveals:

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

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

In taking a student group through this exercise, I usually finish by pointing out that there's nothing wrong with working on fund-raising and social issues (which usually dominate the reports), but that there's a concern if a group only works on these and if they work on them in isolation from other areas (that is: if fund-raising becomes the dominant first issue, rather than being a means to achieve other ends).

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

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

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

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

Roger Holdsworth

Activity Ideas:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Creating a Student Foundation

'Change, not Charity'

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

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

Educational Focus

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

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

Establishing a Student Foundation

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

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

> *"We are the Grange College Student Action Team. We are concerned about youth issues, particularly in the area of education and human rights. Through supporting the values of everyone's right to a good education, freedom, respect and equality, we hope to assist community projects and organisations by the donation of our Time, Talent and Treasure."*
>
> *The Grange College Student Foundation Mission Statement, 2002*

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

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

Examples

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

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

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

http://www.rumad.org.au
http://www.rumad.org.au/home.htm
http://www.rumad.org.au/resources.htm

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

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

r.u.MAD?
(03) 9650 4277

Education Foundation
http://www.rumad.org.au

Student Foundations

Making A Difference (MAD) Foundations have been set up in three Melbourne schools.

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

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

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

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

Whitfield Primary School

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

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

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

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

Student Foundation

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

Through The Education Foundation, which administers the **ruMAD?** Program, we were extremely privileged to have David Zyngier and Claire Brunner spend an entire day with us, going through various workshops and activities to assist us in forming a foundation. We learnt about other foundations, and about each other. We discovered that we shared common values and developed a greater understanding of global, national and local issues. We were then left with an enormous task of writing up our very own mission statement. After several meetings, long discussions and at times disagreements this is what we came up with (box below).

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

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

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

The Grange College Student Foundation Mission Statement, November 2002

For more information regarding our student foundation, please contact Mr Frank Vetere, our Student Leadership and Participation Co-ordinator at the Grange on: (03) 9748 9166

or on e-mail:
vetere.frank.v@edumail.vic.gov.au

Frank Vetere
and the
Grange Student Action Team

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

ruMaD?

a toolkit for change not charity

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

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

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

There are many other 'case studies' mentioned on the website. One example is Melbourne Girls College which formed an actual philanthropic foundation to raise money, invest the capital, call for applications and then make grants to local community groups. In July they made their first such grant, $750 to the Brosnan Centre's "Cook'ns Cool" program which helps young offenders re-integrate into society. The photo shows the foundation's executive handing over the cheque, outside the Centre in Brunswick. This is "enterprise education" in action.

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

John Davidson
r.u.MAD? Schools Coordinator, 2002

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

2.3 Participation as Curriculum

The Challenge:

...not recognised as learning

...the curriculum is the same old same old...

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

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

Possible Strategy 1:

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

Possible Strategy 2:

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

Possible Strategy 3:

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

Possible Strategy 4:

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

Possible Strategy 5:

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

See pages 38-48 ...

Student Action Teams

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

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

Student Action Team Principles

Student Action Teams are characterised by:

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

Local Student Action Teams

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

Student Action Teams and Student Councils

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

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

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

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

Roger Holdsworth

Student Action Teams Resources

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

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

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

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

Victorian Primary and Secondary Student Councils Unite to Form Student Action Teams to Tackle Traffic Safety

Traffic Safety Student Action Teams

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

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

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

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

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

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

Background

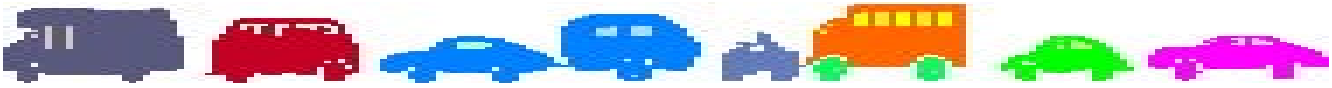
There has been an active network of primary schools in the Preston-Reservoir area for over 14 years. Their Junior School Councils (JSCs) provide the focus for shared training and support. Each year, this Network organises opportunities for students to meet together to talk and plan around areas of common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

In 2002, the group began discussions about a possible larger project for 2003. The schools had been approached to incorporate traffic safety education into their curriculum. "Rather," the schools proposed, "let's work together and use a Student Action Team approach to traffic safety - where students **investigate** the safety issues around their school, and propose and take action to improve safety." It was proposed that this would be a shared curriculum initiative, to be supported by the availability of Departmental materials and lessons.

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

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

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



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

Student Forum 1

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

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

It was invaluable to have consultants from the Department of Education and Training and VicRoads working with the project, and these people were available to visit individual schools with resources, advice and questions. The small grants from Darebin City Council's Road Safety Strategy also enabled teachers to spend time with their teams, and develop their resources.

Student Forum 2

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

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

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

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

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

Student Forum 3

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

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

orientation to the bigger question: 'What now?'

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

There were some highly significant reports: of heightened awareness by parents about dangers associated with parking near schools and with picking up or dropping off students, of student focus on correct road-crossing procedures, on the need for controlled traffic flow around schools, of the achievement and importance of restricted speed zones near the schools.

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

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

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

Where to now?

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

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

Some Resources

Student Action Teams:

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

www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/engagement/studentactionteams.htm

Road Safety:

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

www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

This Project:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thérèse West
Principal
Preston South Primary School

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

Junior Primary Action

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

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

Action Teams

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

There are seven groups which are called buddy groups.

The Action Teams are important to our school.

Thomas Nunn

Helpful Peer Mediators

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

Anthony Markey

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

Niel Renna

Who Wants to Hear About AFL?

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

David Huynh

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

Jordan Leovic

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

Evea Noble

Choir

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

Lara Seymour

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

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

Mariam Mehn

Buddy Groups

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

Daniel Hvasanov

Busy People in the Library

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

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

Lilly Hay

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

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

Mitchell Fehlandt

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

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

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

Logan White

Magill Junior Primary School

Magill J.P. Messenger

Quotes of the day!

Come along to AFL it's fun!!

Sort out sports equipment and have fun.

Action Teams

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

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The Action Teams are important to our school.

BUSY PEOPLE IN THE LIBRARY

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

a report by Lilly Hay

Environment Team

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

Callum Horan

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

Lawrence *(interviewed by Callum Horan)*

For more information, contact:

Susanne Rogers

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

School Image

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

Benjamin Krieg

Student Council

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

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

Grace Anderson

Originally from ***Connect*** 151, February 2005

Students' Voices

Strategies for promoting student participation in Primary Schools

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

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

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

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

The third problem, which was perhaps the most fundamental, was the lack of student engagement with the SRC. Although each class had a representative, the process for selecting these students determined the candidates. Younger students were threatened by the required formality of candidates presenting speeches prior to a secret ballot. Because of the resulting lack of candidates, many classes had their representative nominated by the teacher. Older students excluded themselves from the process knowing, from their previous experience, which of the more popular students was likely to be elected. Further, the organisation of SRC was hierarchical; it operated with an executive of older students under the nominal leadership of male and female presidents.

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

New forms of participation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Problems and possible pitfalls

It has taken three years of strategic action to introduce a culture of staff collaboration and participation in decision-making, to redirect the school's focus onto student welfare and learning, and to initiate methods of enabling authentic student participation. However, the retelling of the tactics that have enabled us to progress this far has several inherent dangers.

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

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

Students who were academically able, popular with their peers and in their last year of primary school had looked forward to becoming the executive members of the SRC. Many of them had ambitions of being the presidents of this exclusive group and felt that they were not valued in the new processes.

Future possibilities for student participation at Woodville

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

Resourcing

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

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

- How could the involvement of several teachers be maintained?

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

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

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

Congruence of school's structures and systems

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

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

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

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

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

Staff commitment to student voice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Originally from ***Connect*** 152, April 2005

2.4 Student Councils: Partners in School Decision-Making

The Challenge:

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

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

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

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

Possible Strategy 1:

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

See page 50 ...

Possible Strategy 2:

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

Possible Strategy 3:

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

Possible Strategy 4:

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

See page 51 ...

Possible Strategy 5:

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

Mapping the School

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

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

Who makes the decisions in our school?
What bodies and committees exist?
What do they have power over?
Who else is involved in making decisions?
How does it link together?

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

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

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

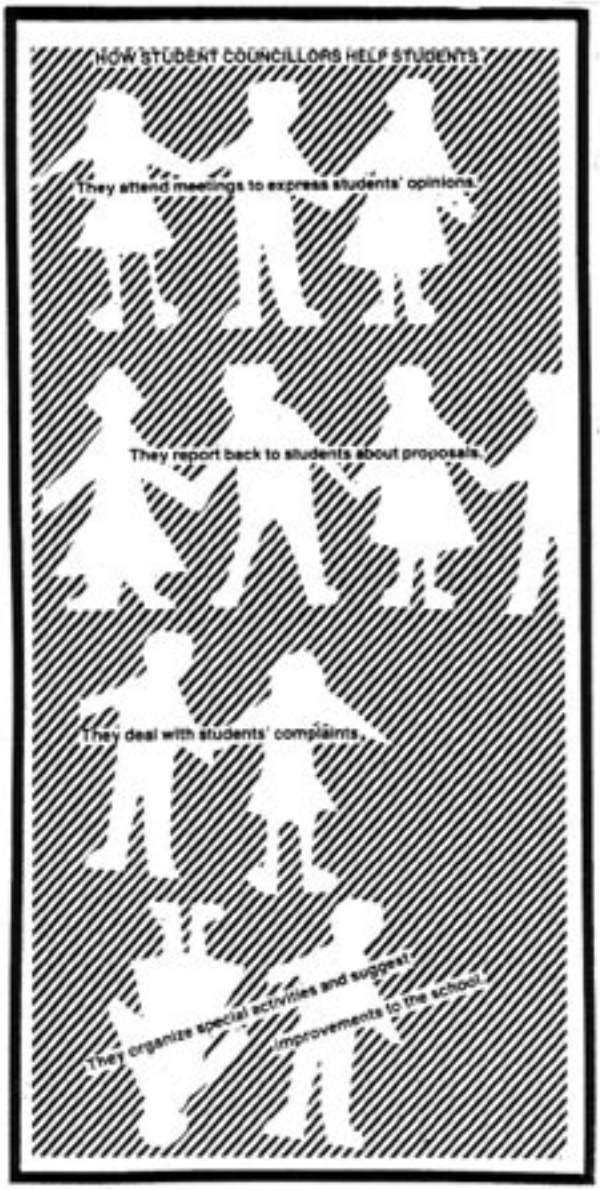
Ask students to look at the diagram and identify the gaps: what bodies exist, meeting times, powers. Mark these in a different colour or write these up on the map as research tasks. Then ask: "Who can help us fill in the gaps?" Identify available 'sources' in the school who could provide information.

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

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

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

Roger Holdsworth



Keeping All Informed

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

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

Freya Hunter
Publicity Officer, James Fallon HS SRC, Albury NSW

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

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

Inclusive Committee Procedures

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

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

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

Before the Meeting

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

At the Start of the Meeting

1. An experienced committee member should be nominated as 'mentor' to each student member for each meeting. This role could rotate between members, with attention paid to positive gender role models.
2. All members should be introduced and identified, for example, with a place name. This should show both the name and the organisation/role represented.
3. All documents should have a face sheet summarising the main ideas and recommendations.

Procedure of the Meeting

1. The meeting should stop before decisions are made, to allow time for students to:
   - talk with each other;
   - talk with committee tutors/mentors;
   - talk with any support persons present;

   to make sure they understand the issues involved.
2. Motions should be written out and, where possible, copied for and circulated to all members of the Committee.
3. There should be a clear statement about the **style** of each part of the meeting, identifying 'brainstorming' and 'formal' times.
4. Arguments and discussion from subcommittee meetings should not be repeated in committee meetings.
5. At the end of each item of business, the chairperson should summarise the decisions on action to be taken and clearly indicate responsibility for action.

Language

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

After the Meeting

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

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

SRCs: Getting the Active Support of the Principal

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

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

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

Stage 1: The run-around

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

Stage 2: Indecision

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

Stage 3: Logistics

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

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

So what if you get a flat 'No'?

Stage 4: Accountability to School Council

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

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

Paul Tresidder

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

2.5 An Effective, Relevant and Supported Student Council

The Challenge:

... irrelevant ... ineffective

"The sorts of discussions and decisions made by Student Councils are peripheral to real decision-making in the school. Sometimes the Student Councils appears to make some decisions - but they have been allowed to make these because they really change little at all - only the details. When important decisions are to be made, the Student Council is absent or not consulted or ignored. Therefore students regard the Student Council as irrelevant to their needs. When students do raise issues through the Council that they regard as really important, either members of the Council 'censor' these: "Oh, that wouldn't be achievable" or, if they take them up for action, they're usually or always knocked back by school decision-makers, sometimes with no explanation."

Possible Strategy 1:

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

Possible Strategy 2:

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

Possible Strategy 3:

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

Possible Strategy 4:

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

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

Students Taking the SRC Seriously

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

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

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

Overcoming Elitism

All SRCs face this problem, whether it is that all the 'cool kids' only get in the SRC, or the SRC is only for 'geeks and teachers' pets'. Some schools overcome this by allowing the teachers to vote in elections because they will pick the right people for the job. Personally I disagree with this because it takes the 'student representative' out of SRC. Let the students elect their own representatives. Often kids don't even know about the elections or what they are voting for/ about and sometimes that's why one elite group is always being elected. Make a big deal about elections: get up on assemblies, write in school newsletters, just make sure everyone knows. Self-nomination is good coz then kids who otherwise wouldn't stand for election, then go and nominate. Promote how rewarding it is and all the awesome stuff you do because then students have a better idea what SRC is about and they will be more interested.

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

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

Reject Trivia

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

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

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

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

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

Being Connected

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

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

Another good idea is to make sure you have student representatives on all decision-making and influencing committees in the school – that includes P&C, School Council, welfare, uniform etc. The student voice must be heard.

Part of the Curriculum and Effective

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

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

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

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

Best of luck!

Melissa Haberfield
Year 12 student
James Fallon High School
Albury, NSW

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

How to Elect an SRC

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

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

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

I've come to realize that there are a variety of student leaders, all who have a magnificent potential as an SRC Representative. The problem is getting these students elected. Yes, I've written above that students will vote for the best candidate, but it's how these candidates are presented that will ensure their successful selection.

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

Though this process may seem fair and doing justice to the belief of a 'representative election', there is one flaw. Many of the candidates aren't confident public speakers and hence don't perform well enough in the presentations to get elected. This is a big problem.

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

Chris Varney
craskoo@hotmail.com

Originally from ***Connect*** 143-144, December 2003

Mooroopna Park PS JSC, Vic

How We Elect Our JSC

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

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

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

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

Emily
Mooroopna Park Primary School
MacIsaac Road, Mooroopna 3629

Originally from ***Connect*** 131, October 2001

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

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

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

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

Getting your SRC or student leadership group started!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lauren Ross

Originally from ***Connect*** 139, February 2003

Being Effective: James Fallon High School, NSW

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

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

- We raised the issue to revamp the senior girls' dress. We came up with new designs and one was picked and now the dress is more attractive and practical.
- We organised the new bell times, deciding whether we have two recesses or a long lunch etc. Now the bell times are more appropriate to how the school operates.
- We got more healthy things available in our school canteen.
- We also got EFTPOS at the front office so paying fees, excursions etc is easier.
- We made a very professional school promotional video. Due to difficulties with the media profile legislation, it was hard to show it to the public, but anyone who did see it said it was funny and very professional, but at the same time promoted the school very well.
- We always helped and discussed many working bees, putting the student body's opinions forward in advising the organisers of the project.
- We also attended a seminar with four other schools to promote and make students aware of the facilities that our local health centre provides. We attended numerous meetings over a six-month period - all in our own time. This was a very big development for us.

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

Freya Hunter
Publicity Officer, James Fallon HS SRC, Albury, NSW

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

What every Student Council needs ...

Originally from ***Connect*** 131, October 2001

2.6 Student Council Linked and Networked with Others

The Challenge:

... isolated from others ...

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

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

Possible Strategy 1:

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

Possible Strategy 2:

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

Possible Strategy 3:

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

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

student networking

What is a Student Network?

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

Why is networking important?

Here are some ideas suggested by students and others:

Sharing Resources

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

Learning How

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

Reflecting Together

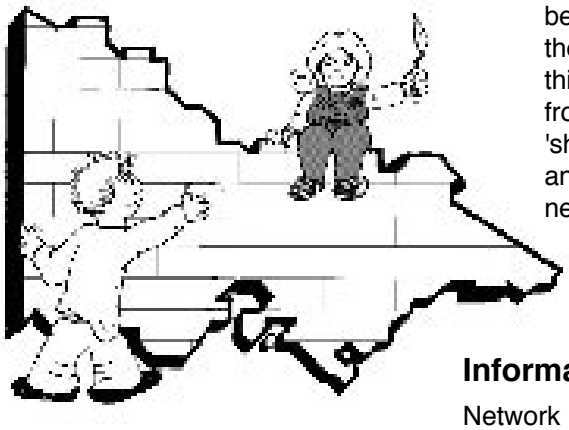
Students learn about making their Student Councils better by reflecting on and thinking about what they have done. Talking about a Student Council to other students is a useful way of thinking about what's working, what's not, and why. Other students can help this process: 'we are not alone'; 'we found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

Supporting Each Other

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

Influencing Policy

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



Efficient Training

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

Partnerships in Decision-Making

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

Learning About What's Possible

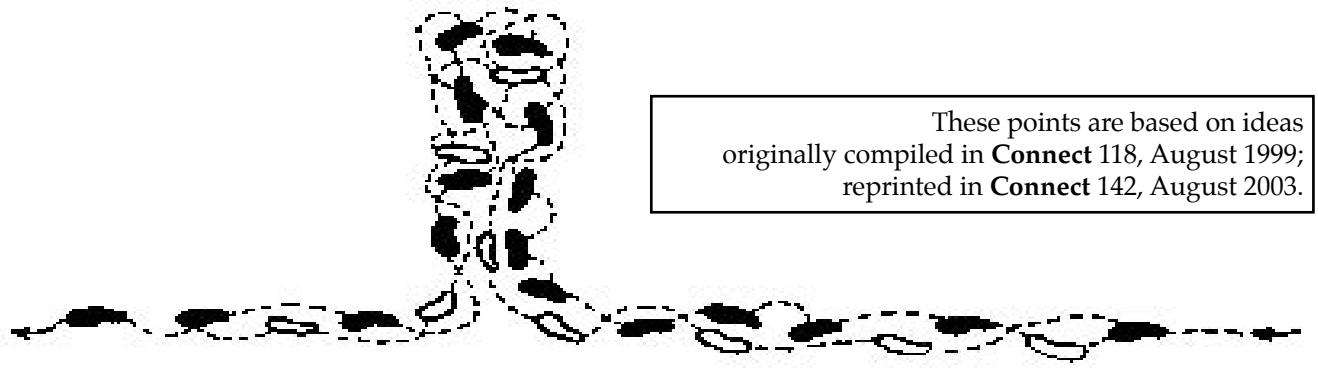
Student groups can 'get in a rut' and be limited by what they've done or thought about in the past. In particular, some Student Councils get trapped into thinking that they can only be involved in fund-raising or social events. They might dismiss some other possible actions as 'impossible' because they've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

Information Paths

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

Contributing

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



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

student networking

20 Steps to set up a Student Network

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

1. Propose an idea to your Student Council/SRC: that you hold a local meeting and training day for local SRCs. Get agreement from the Student Council that it will sponsor this. Set up a small organising committee. (Make sure you report back regularly to your Student Council.)
2. Clear the proposal with the school administration and negotiate a suitable date and spaces. Book rooms; if it is to be very big, you might want to book a hall or look for a community venue.
3. Draw up a list of the local schools you want involved. You should include **all** relevant schools. Decide if it will be primary or secondary Student Councils or both. (If both, you might need separate sessions for primary and secondary students.)
4. Send out invitations well in advance - at least one month before the day. You will need to have made some decisions: How many people from each school? Will there be a charge to cover lunch etc? How long? (Remember to allow for travel time.)
5. Work out a program: what do you want to cover on the day? Do you want 'experts' to lead groups? Or students to share experiences and information? (See the box - next page - for a sample program.)
6. Who can you get to help you? Contact your local Council, the district or regional Education Department, community groups etc for speakers, workshop leaders and so on.
7. Send out the program with a reminder notice approximately two weeks before the date.
8. Organise the details of the day. You will need to think about: catering (lunch, tea/coffee/juices, biscuits), name-tags, information material/booklets, group facilitators, equipment, people to greet and guide visitors, recording outcomes etc.
9. **Enjoy the day.**
10. Make sure there is a large group session to consider any action proposals from workshop groups. (Perhaps these are reported, not voted on, but referred to an on-going group ... see below.)
11. Ask the key questions:

    What will we do with the outcomes of the day?

    How will we follow these up?

    Do we need to set up some on-going group of students on the proposals, to keep these ideas going?

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

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

Roger Holdsworth
with ***Chris Varney*** *and* ***Teigan Leonard***

Network Day: A Possible Program Outline

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

Student Network Stories

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

Western Region Student Network

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

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

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

SOS

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

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

Originally from ***Connect*** 142, August 2003

Part 3:
Starting Up

In this section, we present some ideas about starting up ... starting a Student Council ... starting more participatory approaches ...

Starting from Scratch

Not had a Student Council before? There's no neat recipe for establishing a Council - so much depends on the size, nature, structure, culture of your school. And the way you set it up depends on what you see it doing, who is interested to be included, and any past history. But here are some general ideas for teachers and students. You should read these in conjunction with the following general article on **Getting the Student Council Going**.

You're going to have to make some decisions ... after talking with others.

Why?

- Why do you think the school should have a Student Council? What could it do?
- Whose idea is it? (What's in it for you/ them?)
- What scope is there for setting up a Student Council? What restrictions?

You'll need to get the reasons worked out in order to convince other people and answer their concerns.

What do students think?

Consult with students across the school. Do they want a Student Council? What's their idea of what a Council might look like or do? You might find that reasons and ideas either add to yours, or challenge them. There might also be a history of Student Councils in the school which affect these views - for example, if there's been a hopeless or inactive Council or one that was ignored, students might be cynical about any attempt to start again. But you'll need an enthusiastic **group** of students if you are to proceed.

What support is there?

Talk with the Principal and other members of the Administration, with (other) teachers, with parents and their committees and with the School Council. How much support and cooperation can the Student Council expect from these groups? What support do you want? It will be much easier to develop the Student Council with their support - very difficult with their opposition or if you ignore them! Don't try to do it alone! What happens when you leave or when you get exhausted? Find support!

A Starting Group

OK - you've identified an enthusiastic group of students, who have some similar ideas of what a Student Council could look like and what it could do. Build on this group and this enthusiasm - but they'll want to see action soon. They'll also be the group to collect opinions and ideas, make decisions about a structure, and set it in motion ... and eventually they'll have to seek approval, or a mandate, or even election from students generally.

Get Away

You'll need time for these decisions to be made. If possible take a day - away from the school's distractions - to argue, discuss, plan and decide. Have objectives for this day: eg by the end of the day, to have the basics of a constitution drafted or a description of how the Student Council will work; and to have timelines prepared to set up the Council.

Name

What do you all want to call the organisation? Examples in the past have been Student Council, Student Representative Council, Student Forum, Parliament, Student Leadership Council, Student Voice, Junior School Council ... (What's in a name?) These names can represent what you see the group doing or how it is formed or how it is structured. But these names also exist in a context of past structures and a new name might be chosen to represent a new start.

Connections

In thinking about the structure, how do you see the Council linking with:

- classes and grade meetings?
- overall school decision making?
- other student structures (houses, teams, pastoral care)?
- curriculum programs in the school (Civics and Citizenship Education, Youth Development Programs, Student Action Teams)?

Most importantly here, how will decisions of the Student Council be heard within and influence the whole school? Will it have representatives on the School Council and its sub-committees, and on other working bodies in the school?

Discussion within classes

Ask every class in the school to talk about the role of a Student Council in some way. This might involve members of the Starting Group briefing staff at a staff meeting, then visiting all classes to talk and answer questions. It could be part of the school's Civics and Citizenship curriculum: "Why do we have representative groups?", "How do they work?", "Are there other ways?" The aim is to get a broad understanding of the nature and possibility for a Student Council, but - more importantly - to increase the understanding of how everyone, every day, can be part of the decision making in the school. It could also lead to discussion about the qualities of a representative, and why some people could be elected - in order to get away from student elections as 'popularity contests'.

Structure

Decide with the Starting Group on a Student Council structure appropriate to your school. Four possible dimensions to consider are:

- membership: volunteers?; elected (eg two per class)?; multiple roles (many committees)?; etc
- levels: a single whole-school Student Council?; year level forums and an executive?; inter-level working committees coordinated by an executive?; etc
- size: a small activist group?; a large forum?; many separate smaller groups?; etc
- when: meeting during class time?; at lunchtime?; as a class?; etc

Training

Once the Student Council is in place, you will need to set time aside for training and planning. Several short sessions, or a longer time might be appropriate. Some Councils immediately go away on a 2-3 day camp to get to know each other, to understand their responsibilities, and to plan their objectives and actions. It's valuable for such an activity to be away from the school.

Network

Search out other Student Councils eg in your region. What are they doing? How can they help you? Perhaps even think about organising some joint activities and shared training.

Roger Holdsworth

(with thanks to **Erica McCalman** and **Charles Kingston**)

Originally from *Connect* 127, February 2001

OFF TO A GOOD START!

Getting Your Student Council Going

Ideally ... you've made all the arrangements at the end of last year, elected / selected the members of the Student Council, already had the first meeting to set objectives for the year, selected office bearers etc. You're probably well under way. But, just in case ...

Here's a brief checklist of some of the steps you'll need to take to get going fast! After all, the longer it takes for the Student Council to get going, the more decisions that have already been made - without formal student input.

It's assumed here that you've had a Student Council before (there's another short article here for those starting for the first time), and need to kick it off ... into action! ... for a new year. Each school will be different, so adapt and develop and extend this list (and tell us what happens!).

Many of the following steps should or will likely happen sort of all at once - certainly within a few weeks. Think of them holistically. Don't just wait until one step is finished before starting on the next. Plan and look ahead to all the steps. Do them when it's convenient and necessary for those involved – including yourselves.

An Activity to Use These Steps

Print out these pages larger, then cut out the individual cards. As a group, decide which ones are relevant to you and which ones are less relevant or not relevant at all.

Then sort the relevant cards into a time-line. Which steps come before other steps? Work out who will do what. Make an action poster to remind you all.

❑ **The outgoing executive meets with the support teacher to steer the process.**

This is a **student** council, so it's important that students are driving it along. But it's realistic that every student council needs supportive committed adults working to support them. Start here: call a meeting to set down a timeline for getting the Student Council going.

❑ **Principal/ Administration briefing meeting.**

Similarly, keep the Principal and other key Administration members up-to-date with plans.

❑ **Staff briefing meeting.**

If staff are to support the process of appointing a new Student Council, and of its operation, they need to know what is happening and what is expected of them. Staff and/or students should address a staff meeting or prepare a hand-out.

❑ **Set up opportunities for students to give reasons for their selection.**

Students should want to be on a Student Council for some reasons. There should be opportunities for them to publicly state these reasons - in talks, in writing, on posters, in conversations. Be careful that these opportunities do not exclude some students - those with lower literacy levels, those who are less confident in public speaking etc. The 'best' students (in traditional terms) may **not** be the best representatives.

❑ **Class discussion.**

Where possible: encourage, support, resource discussions in every class about the Student Council. These discussions should cover: why we have a Student Council, what it could do, what structure it has, what we expect from representatives, what the characteristics of a good representative are and so on.

❑ **Decide on and publicise how people get to be on the Student Council.**

Students might volunteer, or be nominated and selected, or be elected from home groups, class groups or in other ways.

❑ **Call publicly for nominees/volunteers.**

This launches the process of forming the Student Council. Everyone needs to know what is happening and have a chance to be involved. The form of this invitation depends on the structure and process you've adopted - people might nominate or volunteer themselves, or they may require others to nominate them.

❑ **Decide on and publicise the Student Council structure** *(it might be different this year from the past; it might adapt to school changes).*

Everyone needs to be clear about how students join the Council, what they are joining (and what its powers and responsibilities are), different levels and areas within the Council, such as:

[ ] a year level or sub-school forum;

[ ] a whole-school Student Council (coordinating/ executive);

[ ] Student Council Working Groups, sub-committees, action teams etc;

[ ] other appropriate structures.

Provide chances for new students to the school (eg years 7 or 8).

These students may not know each other, or know who might be a good representative. Introductory school processes should assist them to meet each other, and aid the selection process. Perhaps an 'interim' representative is appointed for a few months.

Hold the election or interviews or ....

From each group as decided, appoint representatives and deputies. Having all teachers involved in assisting this process can also get them involved in understanding and supporting the Student Council.

Carry business over from last year.

Look at any business still unfinished from last year's Student Council work. You should also have a statement from last year about finances that the Student Council was left with - so you know where you can start. Bring this information to the first meeting.

Advertise the first meetings.

These meetings need to be advertised widely. Personal congratulations and invitations to all representatives makes them feel special and also lets them know when and where meetings are held. Send all representatives information on the structure, powers, operations and responsibilities of the Student Council - and of individual members. Give them the constitution.

Celebrate at the first meeting.

Have lunch together. Welcome, congratulate, thank, challenge all members.

Hold the first meetings.

Important tasks to include are:

[ ] check the structure:

does everyone understand it? is everyone happy to continue with it?

[ ] set the meeting timetable:

when? where? how will reminders happen? is this OK with everyone?

[ ] set the objectives for the year:

what does the Student Council want to achieve? This might take more time to discuss, so ...

Organise a Planning/ Training Day.

The Student Council will need time to meet each other, get training for their tasks, and plan what they want to do, and how they will do it. Such a day might include reviewing the Council structure (sub-groups etc), appointing an executive, brainstorming possibilities, drawing up plans, setting timelines, allocating responsibilities ... This could be one day, or a three-day camp. Try to have it away from the school to avoid distractions.

Get a space.

The Student Council needs a home - a small room, or at least a filing cabinet. Get a notice-board set aside for the Student Council. Get a mail box in the front office.

Appoint students to important positions.

You will need to think about chairing meetings, keeping records of what happens, writing letters, looking after funds, publicising, liaising with various people (including the Principal), networking with other schools ...

Appoint students to school positions.

Students may need to be appointed to the School Council, sub-committees, working groups etc within the school. If these positions don't currently exist, ask for student representation.

Appoint bank account signatories.

These may need to be changed over from last year, so that current students from the Council control its funds.

Review and Reflect.

Build time into meetings to check how the larger things (structures, processes etc) are going.

Have a 'hand over' event.

Last year's Student Council congratulates the incoming Student Councils and tells them what they learnt - how they **should** have done things.

Roger Holdsworth
(with thanks also to Charles Kingston)

Originally from *Connect* 127, February 2001

Kicking Off The Year
with a Primary School Student Council

Many of the issues discussed in the other articles in this section also apply to Primary Schools - so read and adapt those suggestions to your situation. But there are some particular issues that need to be considered in establishing or re-starting a primary school Student Council (or Junior School Council).

• Teacher responsibility

While students will be very enthusiastic about forming a Student Council, and may have considerable knowledge about what to do and how it can be done, primary school Student Councils generally need more support from staff and other adults than is the case in secondary schools. The support teacher, however, needs even more sensitivity about when and how to 'step back' and let students run the Council, make mistakes, solve problems, and own solutions.

• Who has time and responsibility?

Because of the relationship between teachers and grades, and because of the large classroom-based teaching commitment, it is particularly important to think about who has time to support and 'drive' the Student Council. As well as needing someone with the appropriate personal characteristics and commitment to student participation, the location of the teacher within the school is critical. How will any time release be managed? Several schools have located such support with a Deputy Principal, or have arranged that two or three teachers share the role.

• Involve last year's Council

Students who have 'done it' are a valuable resource to advise new Student Council members. You can set up formal 'buddying' arrangements both within the Council and to involve ex-members in a new role.

• Staff briefings

Because the role of the grade teacher is so critical in supporting representatives and in making sure that the Student Council approach connects with other curriculum initiatives, make sure that staff are fully briefed at a staff meeting. Set aside time there, or at a curriculum day, to discuss the whole school's approach to 'representation', 'decision making', 'democracy' and so on. These issues are very naturally part of discussions about the school's Civics and Citizenship curriculum program - see below.

• Class meetings

The basis of the Student Council is in the classroom - and it should connect with ways of teaching in each grade. Do teachers hold classroom meetings to discuss the work of the grade? Are important decisions made here? How can such meetings link with that grade's representation on a Student Council? It might be valuable to provide reading material to teachers, or to hold a professional development activity around these approaches - the Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra has booklets and videos discussing various examples and ideas here.

The Civics and Citizenship curriculum in the classroom in primary schools could (and should, and perhaps even must) cover rules and the need for them, how decisions are made in small groups (families etc), how decisions are made in larger groups (representatives) - and these issues can be linked to the role of the Student Council both in the school, and in its community.

Within this, grades can discuss the characteristics and requirements of a good representative, as well as processes for reporting back and to enable participation by all in decisions.

• Structural issues

The smaller size of many primary schools has implications for the size and structure of Student Councils. Many of these Councils are smaller, working bodies, where students can feel empowered to cooperate and work as a group, rather than have to deal with the organisational issues of 'class sized' bodies.

But there are other critical questions that emerge here:

- **For how long should students be appointed?**

Some schools believe that there should be a regular 'turn-over' of representatives (eg once a term), to give more students experience in these roles; others feel that continuity and an understanding at a greater depth require whole-year appointments.

- **What levels?**

Some schools specify Student Council membership for senior (eg grade 5 and 6) students, with some 'representing' younger grades; others define membership from across the whole school.

- **When to meet?**

The issues are similar to those in secondary schools - there are dilemmas both with meeting during class-time (often more of an issue for teachers), or at lunch-time (more of an issue for students).

• Appointment

Once decisions have been made about structures and membership, students can be invited to apply or be nominated. Some schools do this very formally, insisting on formal nominations and then having speeches and elections; others invite students to self-nominate and then talk more casually with their grades; others set up staff-student interview panels. In all cases, students should be considering why they want to be on the Council, and what they want to achieve.

• Training and Networking

Opportunities to share information with other Student Councils are invaluable. If you can, build the same training opportunities into your new Student Council as those outlined in the other articles, but also contact other nearby primary schools (and secondary schools) to see if they would be interested in sharing approaches, training and advice.

For more detail on many of these issues, see the booklet written by teachers from the Gresswell Cluster in Melbourne's northern suburbs: **Democracy Starts Here: JSCs at Work** - available through **Connect**.

Roger Holdsworth

Originally from ***Connect*** 127, February 2001

Find out how your Student Council is doing from the people who count

Student Council Survey

This is a survey intended for Student Council representatives to find out from other students and staff about what they should be doing.

Guidance

- This survey can be done in any of three ways:
  1. Face-to-face questioning during breaks and lunchtimes. Researchers will need clipboards!
  2. Handed out to students to fill in and put in ballot boxes (like an election).
  3. Given out in classes to be completed during lessons (possibly Social Education or Citizenship).
- It can be done by students **and** staff – you may like to compare their answers.
- Make sure students know that it is **anonymous** so you will not need to record their name. However it is useful to know which year group they are in so that answers for different years can be compared.
- To get a good idea of people's opinions you should try and get at least 10% of the students in the school to complete the survey. These should be spread equally across year groups.
- The following introduction can be printed or spoken: *We would be very grateful if you could answer a few questions for our Student Council Survey. Your answers will help us to find out how our Student Council is doing and how we can improve. The survey should take around 5 minutes and your name will not be written down.*
- Space has been left for **comments** after each section. People might have other suggestions or opinions, which may be useful.
- When all the surveys have been completed, you will need to choose a small group of Student Council members to analyse the results.
- Use the Analysis Table to find the totals. If you have carried out face-to-face research, then each researcher could add up their totals on a separate table.
- For parts 1 and 2, you will have 3 totals for each question. These can be converted into **percentages** to give better results (maths experts required!).
- For parts 3 and 4 the answers can be arranged by **rank** with the one with the highest score as number 1.

What to do with the results?

The results from the survey should first of all be **published** around the school. You could put them up on a noticeboard or send copies to classes for display. You could make a special edition **newsletter** or **TV news report** – don't forget to quote some of the **comments.** Teachers, School Council members and local council officials may be interested in the results.

More importantly, the results give you a much clearer view of how the Student Council is doing, and where it should be going. Discuss the results in a meeting – maybe go into smaller groups to talk about each section and share your views. You must work out how these results will influence the work of the council.

Now you know what students want done, you can start **making a real difference.**

Tips for success

Why not encourage people to complete the survey by entering them into a **prize draw?** Each person completing the survey would receive a raffle ticket and you could try and get a prize donated from a local business.

This survey is adapated, with permission, from one designed and circulated by **School Councils UK** in Britain. Further details can be found at: **http://www.schoolcouncils.org** *Note: in England, Student Councils are referred to as 'School Councils'.*

Originally from ***Connect*** 139, February 2003

Student Council Survey

Researcher's Initials _____ Year Group of Student _____ Survey number _____

Part 1: **What do you know about the Student Council?** (Circle answers)

1. Did you know that there is a Student Council at this school?	No		Yes
2. Do you know what the Student Council is for?	No	Sort of	Yes
3. Do you know the names of your class/form representatives?	No	Sort of	Yes
4. Do you know how you could make a suggestion to the Student Council?	No	Sort of	Yes

Comments _____

Part 2: **How effective is our Student Council?**

5. Do you feel well informed about what the Student Council is doing?	No	Sort of	Yes
6. Do you think the Student Council listens to other students?	No	Sort of	Yes
7. Do you think the Student Council is helping to make the school better?	No	Sort of	Yes

Comments _____

Part 3: **What should our Student Council be doing?**

The following are things that our Student Council *could* be doing. Please give each one a mark of between 1 and 5 depending on how important you think they are: 1 = not important, 5 = very important

a) Improve communication between students and teachers	1	2	3	4	5
b) Improve facilities outside school for young people (eg transport, leisure)	1	2	3	4	5
c) Improve school discipline and behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
d) Improve school facilities eg playground	1	2	3	4	5
e) Improve choice and value of school food	1	2	3	4	5
f) Improve teaching and lessons	1	2	3	4	5
g) Manage services for students (eg canteen)	1	2	3	4	5
h) Organise extra-curricular activities (sport, discos, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
i) Raise awareness of social issues (eg racism, drugs, environment)	1	2	3	4	5
j) Raise money for charities	1	2	3	4	5
k) Raise money for school equipment	1	2	3	4	5

Comments _____

Part 4: **How can the Student Council improve?**

We want students to find out about what the Student Council is doing. Please give each of the following ideas a mark of between 1 and 5: 1 = very bad idea *to* 5 = very good idea

a) Weekly class meetings for all students to discuss issues	1	2	3	4	5
b) Announcements in assembly about the Student Council	1	2	3	4	5
c) Student Council newsletter	1	2	3	4	5
d) Student Council Website and email updates	1	2	3	4	5
e) Noticeboard with news about the Student Council	1	2	3	4	5

Comments _____

Part 5: **Any other comments?**

Is there anything you would like to say about the Student Council or the school in general? Your comments will be anonymous.

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your time!

Student Council Survey: Analysis Table

Part 1: What do you know about the Student Council?	Total answers for each question		
	No	Sort Of	Yes
Did you know that there is a Student Council at this school?			
Do you know what the Student Council is for?			
Do you know the names of your class/form representatives?			
Do you know how you could make a suggestion to the Student Council?			

Convert totals to percentages

Part 2: How effective is our Student Council?	Total answers for each question		
	No	Sort Of	Yes
Do you feel well informed about what the Student Council is doing?			
Do you think the Student Council listens to other students ?			
Do you think the Student Council is helping to make the school better?			

Convert totals to percentages

Part 3: What should our Student Council be doing?	Total Score	Ranking
a) Improve communication between students and teachers		
b) Improve facilities outside school for young people (eg transport, leisure)		
c) Improve school discipline and behaviour		
d) Improve school facilities eg playground		
e) Improve choice and value of school food		
f) Improve teaching and lessons		
g) Manage services for students (eg canteen)		
h) Organise extra-curricular activities (sport, discos, etc.)		
i) Raise awareness of social issues (eg racism, drugs, environment)		
j) Raise money for charities		
k) Raise money for school equipment		

Part 4: How can the Student Council improve?	Total Score	Ranking
a) Weekly class meetings for all students to discuss issues		
b) Announcements in assembly about the Student Council		
c) Student Council newsletter		
d) Student Council Website and email updates		
e) Noticeboard with news about the Student Council		

Originally from *Connect* 139, February 2003

Doing the Student Participation Two-Step

Do we share a clear idea about what we mean when we talk of 'student participation'? Without that clarity, limited and (at times) counter-productive practices can masquerade under an empty slogan of 'extending participation'. By identifying at least some of these limitations, it is may be possible to suggest ways in which limited practice may be improved.

Scope

Is student participation equated solely with the SRC or JSC? The very idea of student participation can be limited in scope. It is, unfortunately, still common to find both students and teachers who simply think that some form of student body is 'what student participation is all about'. This can be accompanied by a token participation of students in 'safe issues' and, particularly, the exclusion of student participation from what is central to the school - the learning and teaching that occurs there.

Even relatively forward-looking approaches to Civics and Citizenship Education have talked as if 'representative democracy' defines the total scope of what being an 'active citizen' is, rather than acknowledging that having and exercising a valuable role within communities is at the core of our citizenship. So, school-based approaches have stressed the need to build on existing examples of 'student democracy' and 'leadership', to the exclusion of curriculum initiatives. Learning about active citizenship in schools will **include** support for active student voice and participation through Student Councils and within various areas of school governance, but it must also includes fundamental changes to the ways in which we structure the teaching and learning in classrooms - particularly towards rethinking how we share purpose and demonstrate authentic outcomes.

Exclusion

Secondly, student participation approaches originally and correctly stressed ways to **include** students; it attempted to provide pathways to success for those previously excluded. These basic ideas about student participation are constantly under threat from practices that target advantages to those already successful (eg choosing only the 'best students' to be tutors; setting up SRC elections that reward the already articulate and 'in the know'). For some schools, caught in situations where every action is thought of as 'selling' the image of the school, educational outcomes have become secondary to those of public relations; for others, the forms and activities of participation hide a commitment to the selection of the few for continued success.

A continued attention to selective ideas of 'leadership' or 'participation' will finally be self-defeating. Where governance or curriculum activities have **excluded** the broad range of students and have by-passed their interests, concerns and abilities, these students have grown increasingly cynical and angry at what they see as another form of coercion and deflection. Such initiatives fail.

Student-Centred Learning

Thirdly, ideas of student participation can be limited by being seen as merely 'student-centred education', 'active learning' or 'creative teaching'. It is thought that, by having a 'hands-on' curriculum, in which students are 'doing things', or conducting simulation activities, that they are active participants.

Student participation involves more than that. Active learning may be only the first step of the dance - and when we talk about student participation we actually mean doing the two-step.

The Dance

Step 1: Moving from passive instruction to active engagement

Inquiry-based learning approaches are characterised by an active role for young people in investigation and presentation. This is the **first step** in which we move from presentation of information by the teacher, and relatively passive responses from students. It is characterised by teachers asking: 'how can I organise for the students to do it instead of me doing it?'.

For example, in a lesson about the nature and range of local mental health services, a teacher-centred approach would involve providing students with a list of the appropriate organisations; classroom activities might then be focused on answering worksheet questions about this information. **The first step towards participation** would be to change this approach by organising for students to carry out the local investigation. They might, as a group or in small teams, compile the list of services (asking and answering questions about where to find information) and perhaps interview a range of these services to write descriptive paragraphs about what they do. This information would then be disseminated within the class and discussed.

The teacher role has moved from presenter of information to one of organiser of learning. The student role has moved from recipient of facts to active searcher for information and meaning.

But this is just the first step.

Step 2: Moving from activity to real learning of value

When we talk meaningfully of developing student participation, we really need to be thinking of approaches that go beyond this. These approaches also involve creating **real and recognised roles of community value** for the students and for their learning. Each example of active learning can be 'pushed' a step further to create engagement with meaningful outcomes.

To pursue the curriculum example above, we could start by asking questions about the collection of information about the services: 'why do we want to find this out?' and 'what are we going to do with the information?' What might then emerge from class discussion are several possible outcomes: the students could publish the information they have discovered in a school newspaper, in a community forum or newspaper, or through a small booklet or pamphlet which is distributed in the area.

Students are now learning for a direct purpose. They are adding something of community value to their learning, and are being seen as valuable community members, doing valuable things. These are all direct indicators of enhanced mental health.

The challenges for teachers in doing the student participation two-step, are to be:

- **inventive:** we must always be seeking ways for real and valuable outcomes (authentic assessment) of learning - and that might mean recognising and seizing local opportunities as they arise; and
- **bold:** willing to leave 'safe' or meticulously pre-planned territory and embark on exciting uncertainty - a dance of learning **with** the students.

Roger Holdsworth

Originally from *Connect* 113, October 1998

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.

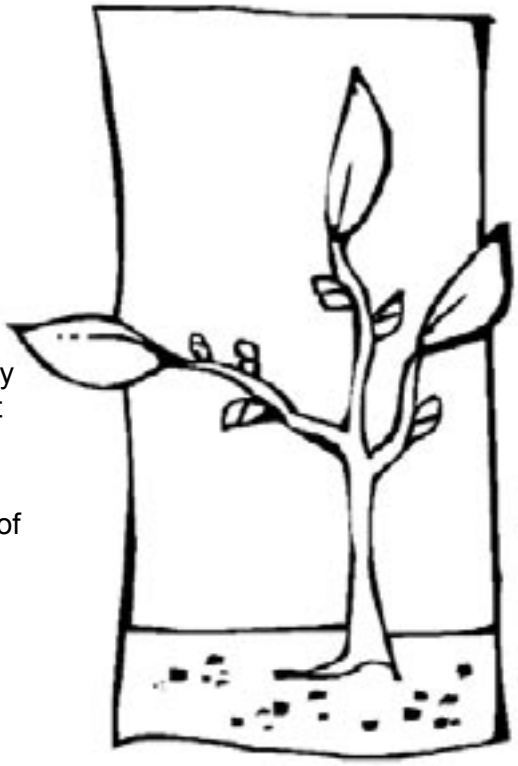
TASK (either on your own or as part of a team)	No thanks!	I'll give it a go	Easy!
Put chairs out for a meeting			
Talk in front of other students			
Talk in front of adults			
Chair a meeting			
Prepare an agenda			
Take minutes and write them up			
Write a letter from the Student Council			
Find a phone 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?

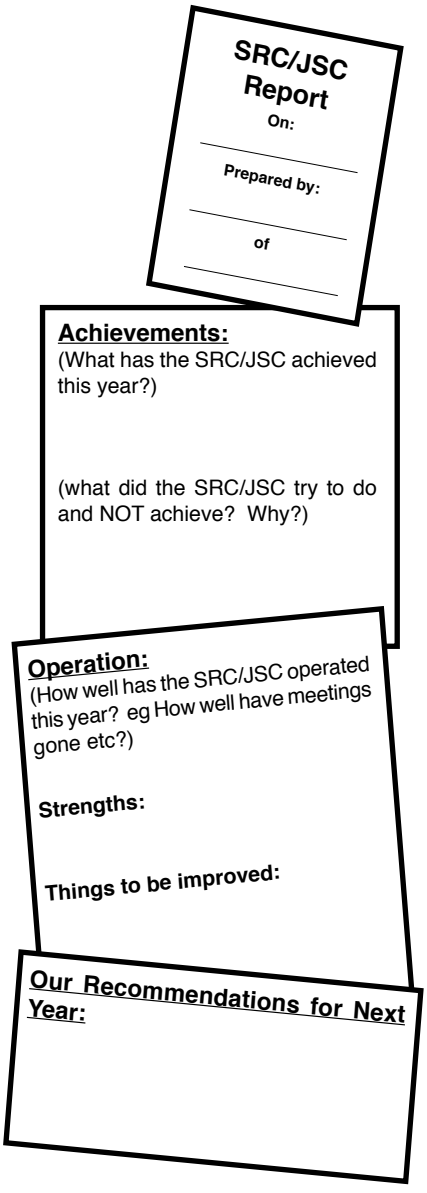
New ideas for your JSC:
- Make a list of important projects you might tackle.
- Which ones will you tackle first?
- Do you need any money? Where will it come from?
- If you don't have a JSC, how can you get one started?

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.

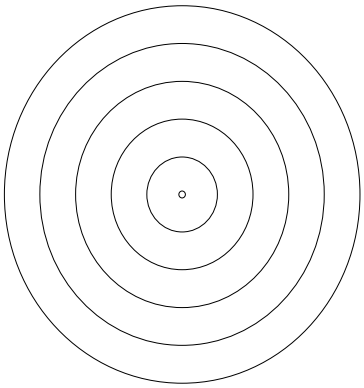
Write a Report

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.

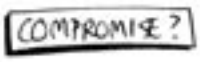
What does the JSC do about it?

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

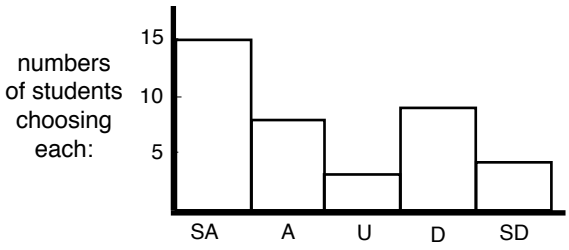
   This can show where each group is along a line.

   c) as a percentage:

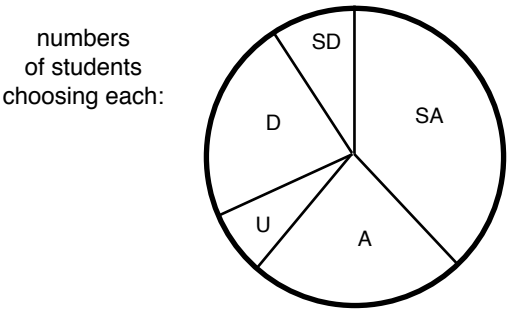
	SA	A	U	D	SD
students	38%	21%	8%	23%	10%
parents	26%	39%	29%	3%	3%
teachers	9%	9%	39%	9%	35%

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

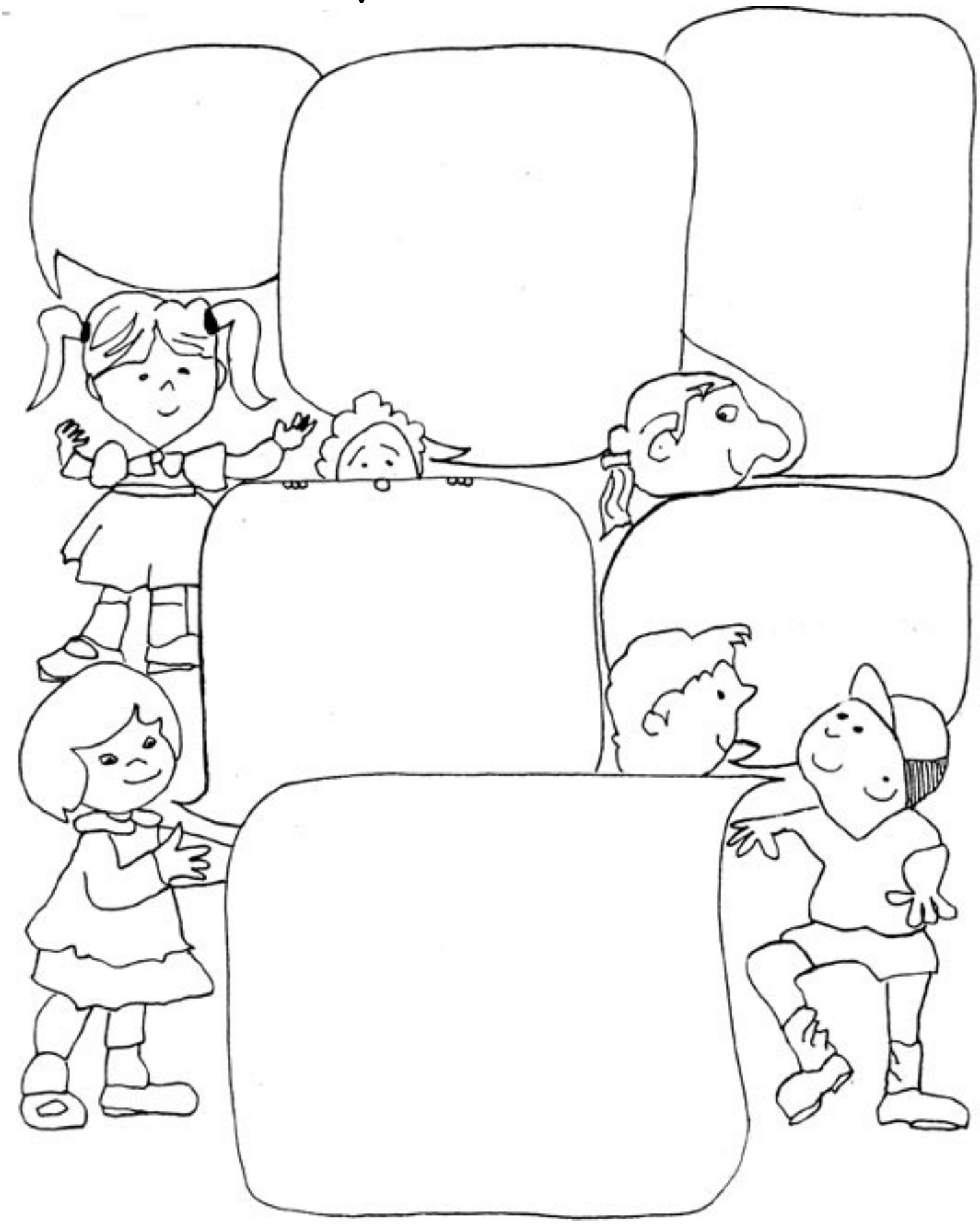
The following pages present some of the worksheets used in these activities. They are particularly directed towards primary school students and their JSCs, however the ideas and words can be adapted for your own specific circumstances. They may be reproduced by schools for non-profit use in student training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

Adapted from
Connect 62, April 1990

Why Have Student Councils?

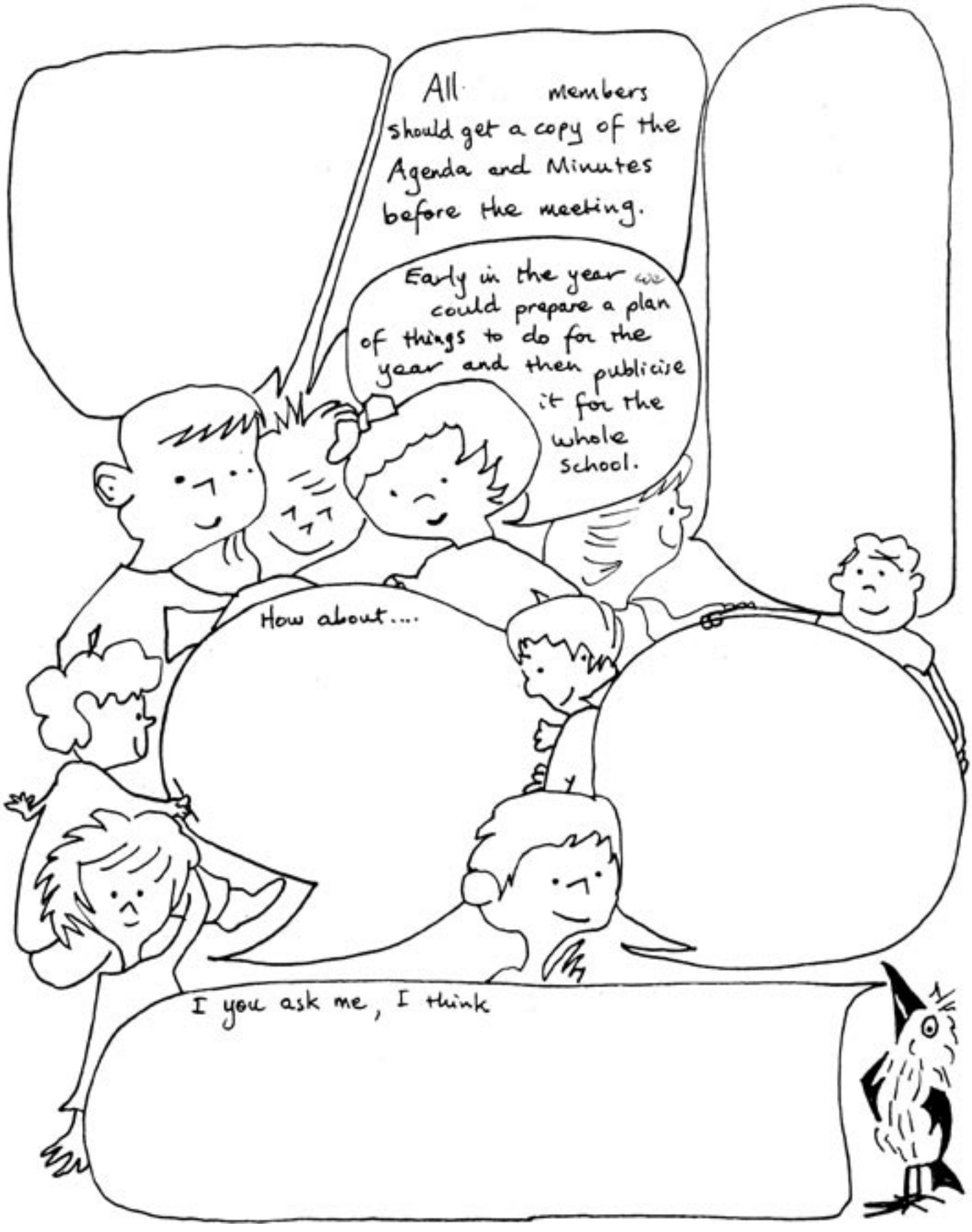
Structures of Student Councils
Butchers Paper
BUILD A MODEL
Small Page Drawings
BLOCK
Remember, we haven't got long to do this! Use this string...
We should mention our office bearers like....
Let's draw it and start with Senior School Council at the top.
But how do we show where we fit into the school? 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



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!

An 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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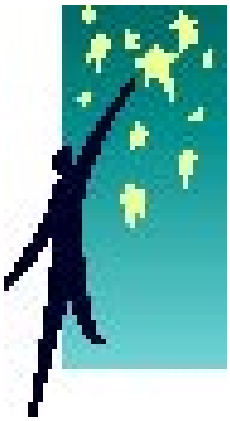

bright ideas or ways to do it better/ quicker/smarter

Positives

ISSUES

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.
  - **SRC report**: 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.

Mercy Woodman
Miles Franklin Primary School
Evatt, ACT

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 on 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
RED HAT (emotions)	**How are you feeling today?**	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.
YELLOW HAT (positive)	**What good things have happened to you or have you achieved this week?**	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.
BLACK HAT (negative)	**Are there any issues/ problems/concerns that you have this week?**	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.
GREEN HAT (creative)	**Can you offer any solutions/ suggestions for the problems mentioned during black hat?** **Does anyone have any suggestions about ways we could improve things at school/in the classroom?**	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.
WHITE HAT (facts/ information)	**Would you like to nominate anyone for student of the week?**	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.
BLUE HAT (thinking about thinking)		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!

At 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:

Agenda: **Issues we need to discuss**	**Who?**	**Minutes:** **What we talked about and the decisions we made**
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 originally from ***Connect*** 142, August 2003

Appendices:
2: Curriculum: Negotiated, Real

While this compilation is principally about challenging the operation of Student Councils - in order to make student participation in educational decision-making more effective, ***Connect*** *has always argued that such decision-making must be seen as* ***curricular*** *rather than* ***co-*** *or* ***extra-curricular****. Curriculum approaches that are based on active student participation mean curriculum negotiation, or specific initiatives or projects in which students have real roles of recognised value. This article deals directly with those challenges.*

Making a Difference in Keilor Downs:
Taking Action in Our Community

Mary MacKillop is a Catholic primary school in the outer north western suburbs of Melbourne. There are 663 students currently attending the school. Most students were born in Australia from second-generation migrant families.

The school had some existing practice of negotiation of curriculum with students and of inquiry learning which included a 'taking action' perspective. This was particularly evident in the upper school and connected to some staff members' understandings around relevance and engagement in the Middle Years of Schooling. The school in 2001 established whole of school committees with the aim of creating whole school responsibility and ownership for a variety of areas. These teams were also charged with raising the profile of their area within the school and its community. One such committee was the Community Links Team.

The school community in 2002 had a number of new staff members joining the teaching team and has taken time to develop shared understandings of concepts such as democracy, negotiation, citizenship, community links and active student participation.

Negotiated Curriculum

The practices of classroom negotiation of curriculum are most developed in the Year 5-6 area. The processes used here follow the ideas developed by James Beane, in which students brainstorm the significant questions they have about themselves and about their society. Agreement on these questions then defines the focus of studies within the curriculum.

In 2002, this negotiated approach formed the basis of our work in the area of Civics and Citizenship. For example, an important unit of work was developed by Year 6 teachers (using the middle primary materials within the *Discovering Democracy* program) around 'Events and People that Shaped Australia'. This topic was negotiated with students, who identified issues of war, poverty, immigration, culture and identity for development within the topic. As well as bringing the staff to an understanding of the *Discovering Democracy* materials, the school now recognises that, in line with a fully negotiated approach, it would have been better to include the students in consideration of the materials from the start.

The school will continue to value and use a negotiated approach to curriculum and this is seen to be totally in line with ideas of active citizenship. It may be appropriate, in order to find more opportunities to use the *Discovering Democracy* materials, to introduce the materials to students in the negotiation process so that they themselves will identify possible links.

Community Action Curriculum

The other major initiative in 2002 occurred in Years 3 and 4. After a professional development session at the beginning of 2002 school year, teachers were motivated to try to include 'taking action' projects within their classrooms. The practical examples that were developed, extended teachers' understanding of student action, participation and community links.

Two year levels implemented 'taking action' projects with the local community: in Year 4: "Health and Safety in Our Community" and in Year 3: "Landcare in Our Community".

The process began with allocation of planning time within the teaching teams. They worked with the SOSE coordinator to explore opportunities for taking action in and with the local community. This extended planning also provided time for teachers to contact and make links with local community groups.

"After the initial planning," said one teacher, "the responsibility was placed on the children, and my role became that of facilitator. The initial planning session was not only essential but productive. It was great having a practical, time-conscious SOSE coordinator to lead the planning and to act as a sounding board throughout the unit."

Over 7-9 weeks, the Year 4 classes went through a process that involved phases of 'tuning in' (orientation to the topic), 'finding out' (in which they investigated their community and their concerns about its health and safety), 'sorting out' (in which they made decisions about an issue to pursue) and 'going further' (in which they planned and implemented their action). Within their investigations and actions, the students had access to the school's learning technologies ie fax, e-mail, phones, word-processors to communicate with members of the community.

The teachers described the work they saw their students completing. One commented: "I learnt that our students work well in groups and pairs. Children were able to work independently and knowing that they could make a difference gave them a sense of ownership, responsibility and leadership qualities. I saw that the students enjoyed what they were doing and were enthusiastic about everything from the word go, when choosing to take both actions: writing a Letter to Council and creating a Booklet for the School."

Another wrote: "Time was also a main factor in that it took a lot longer to go through the negotiating process when choosing an action plan. Therefore, to make everyone happy, we decided on two plans."

"All our students are capable of a lot more than we give them credit for. They were able to use a number of skills to achieve certain tasks. Their enthusiasm was at times overwhelming," said a third teacher. "Our students bring their own knowledge and experiences to the unit, which has enriched our understandings of the health and safety aspects of our community. They have displayed a keenness for taking action about their concerns, and have also shown responsibility in taking appropriate steps to make a difference."

The classes developed plans for what they would do, and these planning charts – 'process or series lines' (page 106) - were put up prominently in the classrooms so that students could keep track of what they'd done and where they were going. An example is shown here, with the teachers recognising and filling in the formal statements of skills, concepts and values (boxed section on opposite page).

The school has a booklet available that illustrates this process and includes photographs of the group at work.

The children learned that they can make a difference in the world, that they have responsibilities and rights in their community, that health and safety are important issues in the community, that there are health and safety facilities in the community, and how to identify high risk areas. "It is so important to implement a unit like this," wrote one teacher, "as it hopefully fosters life-long commitment and action."

The teachers also saw themselves as learners in the process, both about how to implement such an approach (see the chart following this article) and also about the content of the topics. "Our community is not as safe as it appears to be," said one. "It is actually quite unsafe for the children to be riding their bikes, walking and also playing on playground equipment." Another observed, "Being new to this area, I was able to learn from the students about the community and its facilities, therefore it was reciprocal learning."

It wasn't all easy. Both teachers and students found certain aspects frustrating – such as not receiving replies to their letters. "Sometimes it was frustrating, waiting for some form of communication from the wider community – there was a need to continue with tasks and realise things were out of our hands and control." "Next time we will invite Council members to come to the school to explain their role and to see what we are studying."

Reflections

A question remains about the time it takes to plan for effective learning that includes taking action. How do we rethink our use of time for planning so that we can make the effectiveness of this work sustainable? Locating appropriate contacts in the local community is very time consuming and can be a barrier to realistic planning for taking action. Teachers' work and the constraints in terms of when they are available to contact and be contacted by community organisations sometimes gets in the way of efficient development of links.

We will continue to look closely at SOSE, Science and Health as the most likely KLAs for us to develop action orientated curriculum projects. However, it may be helpful to include active participation here at school at the same time as taking the young people out into the community. For example, the rubbish around the school is a big issue, so how could we link this issue to the whole of school environment and community links teams and to class meetings? Where it is appropriate, the formation of a whole of school student committee may be considered.

In a wider context within the school, it is vital to establish this sort of approach at the beginning of the year when teachers work with the development of their class – how we will work and learn together. It may be appropriate to include a whole school "beginning the year" topic which includes rights and responsibilities and rules, developing understanding of democratic principles for relationships in our classroom and the whole school establishment of class meeting structures.

Safety and Health in Our Community

Year level 4: a 7-week unit in SOSE/Health

Understandings:

We can make a difference in our community to make it a healthier and safer place to be.

- there are services in our community that help to keep us safe and healthy;
- the things that keep us healthy and safe are access to health services, good relationships, law enforcement, rules;
- when services are unavailable, it can make people feel unhealthy and unsafe.

Focus Questions:

- What do you need in a community to maintain good health and safety?
- What are the characteristics of a safe and healthy community?
- Is our community safe and healthy?
- What could make our community a healthier and safer place?
- Where are the services in our local community?
- Who are the people in our local community that help us to keep healthy and safe?

Skills:

- Observe
- Locate
- Identify
- Compare (auditing)
- Classifying
- Labelling
- Sorting
- Constructing and using a key

Key concepts:

- Community
- Health
- Safety
- Services
- Rules and laws
- Facilities
- Characteristics
- Relationships
- Recreation

Values:

- Positive: being able to make a difference
- Appreciate and care for what we do have in our local community
- Respecting roles of those in services

Resources:

- **Are U Making a Difference** website
- **Discovering Democracy** – middle primary teachers' text
- Brimbank Council

For more detail, contact Michelle Buckley or Carmel Esler at
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Originally from *Connect* 138, December 2002

Community Health and Safety: Series Line

Stages	Focus	Activity	Tools and Strategies	Thinking Skills
A: Tuning In	What is a community?	• define • read information text • how are we part of the community? • what are the different groups in our community?	Concept map	Discussion Brainstorm
	Community Services	• list and identify community services we use in a 24 hour timeframe	24 Hour Time Table	Interpreting Reflecting Reinforcing
B: Finding Out	Locating Health Services in our Local Community	• **community walk** • guest speakers (police, leisure centre)	Map of local area Data collection sheet	Observing Note taking Identifying
	Identifying health and safety concerns	• list positive and negative aspects • devise ideas to fix problems	P.M.I.	Responding Questioning Reflecting
	Collating knowledge	• share ideas of what students now know about community health and safety issues	Donut	Listening Expressing
	Differences of formal and informal ways of communicating	• look at structures and features of formal and informal letters	Group work	Identifying Discussing Reinforcing
	Other ways of communicating	• look at structures and features of faxes, e-mails and phone calls	Role Play Expert Groups	Listening Discussing
C: Sorting Out	Re-examine ideas from PMI	• sort into: What can we do? What can others do? Whose job is it? • Contact by 4 communications	3 T Chart Rubric	Discussing Questioning Classifying
	Decision making	• **choose an issue that the class can use as a project**	Spend-a-buck	Prioritising Discussing
D: Going Further	Action plan	• what do we want to do? • who can help us with this? • how can we contact them? • when will we do it? • what resources will we need?	Cross Classification Chart Planning Sheet	Questioning Discussing

Connect

the journal supporting student participation

Student participation is central to curriculum practices throughout Australia - student participation in primary and secondary school classrooms, in curriculum decision making, in specific projects, in school governance. It's not easy keeping up-to-date with what's happening around Australia (and internationally) in such areas.

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"... a bi-monthly newsletter that provides a continuing support and resource network for youth participation in

Supporting student participation

... by documentation, resource development, training ...

In some previous issues of Connect:

Special Issues on:

- Junior School Councils in primary schools
- Student Representative Councils
- the US-based Foxfire program
- School Community Development
- radio in schools

Articles on:

- SRC training days
- student effectiveness on School Councils
- ideas for organising youth consultations
- environmental action in a primary school
- students publishing local oral histories
- students and public television
- student research on local youth homelessness
- student research in the local cemetery
- science and technology
- student-organised literacy camps
- State and Regional SRC Networks
- work education
- curriculum evaluation by students
- student cynicism about political processes

Resource Listings of:

- publications for supporting SRCs
- videos for sale and loan
- training plans and ideas for JSCs and SRCs
- games for training and group work
- forms for reporting to grades and collecting ideas

Connect

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