Looking Forward to 2017

- 'Formation': Empowering Female Leaders
- SRCs @ Primary , Secondary & Special Schools
- NSW Regional Student Conference: *Review*
- Ground Floor Feedback: Planning of Workshops
- VicSRC: *2017 Student Voice Workshops*
  Project Updates
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Resources:

- **Terms and Intentions** - *Unpacked*
- **ADEC Conference 2016**
- **Student engagement report**
- **International:**
  - Student Voice Podcast
  - *Student Voice Research & Practice* facebook group
- *Connect ... available on-line ... on* facebook
  ... archived ... access to other on-line resources

Connect

Number 223: February 2017

Cover:
The JSC at Swan Hill PS, Vic
- see article pages 7-8

Why does *Connect* exist?

Connect has been
published bi-monthly since 1979!

It aims to:
- **document student participation approaches and initiatives;**
- **support reflective practices;**
- **develop and share resources.**

Connect:

ABN: 98 174 663 341

This Issue:

In the short article on page 22 of this issue, **Kate Wilde** describes a process by which SRC students trialled some workshop activities, contributing to their co-construction and refinement for the forth-coming *Student Voice Workshops* (see page 24).

As part of that process, the SRC students were asked to look at *"who do we listen to?"* within schools. They were provided with some 'ladders' (physical and on paper) and some *lego* pieces to symbolise various people: the higher on the ladder, the more someone was listened to.

When they reported back on their discussion, it was interesting to note that two very different interpretations of the exercise emerged. Half the groups took a very personal point of view: the 'we' was individual young people. Perhaps not surprisingly, friends were at the top of the ladder, followed by other students ... and teachers at the bottom. The other half of the groups took the point of view either of the school or of the SRC: the 'we' was institutional. Again, not surprisingly, the Principal or leadership team at the school was at the top (perhaps with the School Council), followed by teachers ... and students were at the bottom. That was also true, more surprisingly, when the 'we' was the SRC.

What was noticeable was the almost exact inversion between the two interpretations. It caught us a little by surprise; it could and should (and may) be a 'learnable moment', asking 'what do we notice?' and 'why is that so?' What causes us to listen more to some, less to others?

The intention of the activity was to raise awareness of whose voices are heard within schools - not just by the school leadership, but also by the SRC. Which voices are **'convenient'** (because they're ones with whom we agree, or they're expressed agreeably), and which are **'inconvenient'** (because they're saying contentious or uncomfortable things, or because they're expressed confrontingly)? *(Ref: Adam Fletcher)*

Students, both individually and through their student organisations, need to confront and question this, as much as teachers and school administrations do. Are there students who are **never** heard, or whose voices are **dismissed**? Are there students who **never** get involved or do things - who are **disengaged**? Are there students who **never** get to **participate** in the decisions that are made?

These questions also connect strongly with the recent report from the *Grattan Institute* (see page 32 of this issue) about classroom disengagement. While we can agree with the symptoms reported there, just portraying 'engagement' as something solely requiring better teacher technique is of concern. The report pays little attention to the need to **ask or listen to students** about their engagement (and more importantly, to ask and listen to 'disengaged students' about their disengagement - see the primary school students' report: *Switched On To Learning* - about the **Student Initiatives in School Engagement** project 2007-2009, available from *Connect* - order form page 34), or to develop purposeful and productive curriculum and pedagogies, or to engage students in shared decision-making about the nature, purposes and means of education. These are the learning from many decades of initiatives - some of which have been, and continue to be, documented in these pages.

Next Issue ...

Already we have a couple of contributions in hand for the April issue of *Connect*. These come from Victorian schools, where we're located - which enables us to hear about these, and contact and nag contributors. We'd welcome you *all* to share your reflections and your learnings - and increase our geographic and topic diversity.

Roger Holdsworth

Next Issue: #224: April 2017
Deadline for material: end of March, 2017

Formation: Empowering Female Leaders

In a world where sexism is the norm, leadership for girls can be incredibly overwhelming and intimidating at times. We sometimes face additional obstacles that our male counterparts do not. As a group of female leaders, we believed that we should not have to navigate through this world of inequality and leadership alone. When we realised these problems were common amongst all female leaders, **Formation** was born.

Formation is a group dedicated to empowering female leaders. It was established by eleven passionate female leaders: Charis, Yathusa, Dilini, Colleen, Baneen, Jessie, Christine, Aria, Sam, Emily, and Victoria. In founding **Formation**, we received unbelievable support from many of our teachers who motivated us and often gave us words of encouragement, solidifying our passion for the work that we would set out to do. The essence of **Formation** was inspired by the lyrics of Beyoncé: *"I dream it, I work hard, I grind till I own it"* (Beyoncé, 2016: 'Formation' from *Lemonade*) and is thus named after the song encouraging girls to *"get in formation"* and *"slay"*. It is a platform through which girls can feel safe in sharing their experiences, asking for advice and lifting each other up to become the best versions of themselves.

Aims

Our initial aim in our inaugural year was to inspire female leaders at Nossal High School to be able to overcome the invisible wall of inequality that came alongside being a girl in leadership. We found that we were often not given the same level of respect as our male equivalents were given and were often called *"bossy"* and *"annoying"*. Although we understood that this was often done subconsciously and without the intention to degrade us, we still found that it made many girls feel inadequate in their role as a leader.

Since our initial focus on girls and leadership, we have now expanded to include all girls, not just those who hold official leadership positions. We aim to continually help equip all girls with the skills necessary to overcome sexism, both unintentional and intentional. It is not only our desire to act as an empowering group to other girls, but also as a support network. We wish to be a resilient group focused on helping each other overcome sexism in our daily lives so that together we can conquer negative female stereotypes and make sexism a thing of the past.

Projects

We began by organising a *Kickstart* which was then followed by topic discussions led by our leaders and alumni over a series of lunchtimes. Our topic discussions dealt with issues such as embracing our femininity, ways to feel empowered, and overcoming internalised sexism.

To conclude the year, we held an inter-school summit with girls from Nossal, Suzanne Cory and Mac.Rob. We discussed issues and concerns from girls regarding gender inequality and the struggles of females in leadership, as well as sharing encouraging personal stories regarding leadership. We heard from a panel of guests who shared their viewpoints and stories, and distributed pamphlets that recapped our topic discussions.

We also have a *Facebook* group that has enabled girls to share articles and videos of inspiring leaders who they believe embody the traits that we aspire to possess. It allows us to share our personal experiences regarding sexism and have other girls give advice, support, and encouragement through it.

Achievements

Formation was nominated as a finalist for the ***VicSRC Group Action Award***, receiving the First Runner Up Prize. The prize included a $1000 grant as well as other resources, which we will utilise to further our cause and start future projects. We look forward to working on more projects so that sexism, intentional or unintentional, can be eradicated at our school.

Our **Formation** leadership team also had the opportunity to meet with the Governor of Victoria, the Honourable Linda Dessau. We spoke to her and asked her questions and this enabled us to gain an immense amount of encouragement from the experiences she shared. Through meeting the Governor, we felt reassured to know that we were not alone in our struggles and that they were alike between all females.

We are so proud of how far we have come in the short time that **Formation** has existed and are incredibly proud of all the girls who have been involved whether it be online or at our topic discussions. We've all exhibited tremendous amounts of growth and have bettered ourselves as leaders and as people. Our greatest achievement by far has been our ability to come together as girls for a common cause and support each other. The solidarity between all the girls at our school has been amazing and it has been incredibly uplifting to watch the continuous support from the girls regardless of whether they knew each other beforehand! We are a group of girls here for you!

Future Goals

Formation has big dreams and aspirations for the future as well as great passion and dedication that will enable us in achieving these dreams. We understand that achieving our goals will take a lot of hard work, however that doesn't scare us. We plan to recruit more girls from our school to be a part of the **Formation** leadership team this year and with them, as well as the rest of the girls within our school, we will work towards our goals and projects.

We are currently working with *Feel Think Flow* to hold a summit comparing the rights of females in different countries. Our hope for this is that it will help educate people on the prevalence of gender inequality and help us better establish an understanding about feminism on a global scale.

We also wish to reach other schools and encourage them in implementing a similar program; we want all girls to have a support system that makes them feel empowered and confident

to speak up. Through spreading our work and passion, we hope that we can play a part in breaking down the invisible wall of sexism.

Furthermore, we wish to reach out to boys as they are an integral part in our mission of eradicating gender inequality. We want for them to understand that gender inequality, undoubtedly, affects both girls and boys and that it is something that is ultimately damaging to us all. This is something we wish to fight against together because only together can we completely dissolve gender inequality. Hence, we would love to involve boys in our program in the future. We are here to stand alongside boys, not against them.

Formation looks forward to doing more in 2017 with our leaders Christine, Jessie, Aria, Melania, Victoria, Emily and Sam. We hope you will hear more from us soon!

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By-laws: Explaining our SRC

The students at Braybrook College, in Melbourne's western suburbs, are proud of the achievements reached by the school's **Student Representative Council (SRC)**. Braybrook College's SRC always ensures that all students have their say; we strive to ensure that students feel comfortable in speaking out about their ideas and opinions. Moreover, we work hard, alongside the teachers and principal, to meet the needs of all of our students.

The SRC came third at the 2016 **VicSRC Recognition Awards**, and this was a validation of our hard work and an absolute highlight of our SRC's year.

Defining the SRC

Our SRC is now based on a system of specific **portfolios** in the areas of *Education and Maintenance, Environment, Fundraising, Social Events* and *Wellbeing*. We have implemented new bylaws, in the form of a booklet created by our Student President, to describe the system of the Student Council that has changed drastically.

This booklet explains in clear detail the roles of each portfolio, what their members have to do, the results they should expect to see and what they should look forward to. With this bylaw, students are able to grasp the concept of what the SRC should really be like, making it easier for them to contribute to the school's community.

Additionally, the booklet gives suggestions for events that the portfolio could come up with. This is ideal as the students are encouraged to speak up and communicate with one another during the weekly meetings.

Additionally, portfolio heads are encouraged to play games with their members to ensure a friendly and fun environment in which all students can be at ease and enjoy.

Despite having these bylaws, there would always be a few students who misinterpret the rules, possibly causing the Student Council problems. However, these problems are overcome by simply not ignoring them: having engaging and friendly conversations with students who bend the rules is beneficial for them to learn and understand what it truly is to be part of the Council.

Meetings are held for each portfolio on Wednesdays. It is important that it is a day when most students are free and are able to attend these meetings. General Meetings are held every couple of weeks to ensure that the Council is informed of upcoming events and what each portfolio is doing, and this is also an opportunity for students to vote on decisions affecting the school.

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One of our student members now describes how one portfolio works:

Education and Maintenance

As a member of the Student Representative Council, under the **Education and Maintenance portfolio**, *each student learns a certain target about what we were trying to achieve.*

As a member, I developed a deeper understanding of the Council and key ideas, and brought it out to the portfolio. One of the leaders gave a great positive attitude towards the portfolio and made us laugh throughout the mini session and the other leader was nice and very chill.

I invited my friends to develop new skills and give out ideas, and for them it was helpful and fun. However, since the group was small, containing at most nine students in a portfolio, there was not much communication at all, but we still managed to talk about our ideas.

The SRC meetings for each portfolio were short and didn't take much time off our lunch times. There was an event we held, as a team, where we gave ideas what to do for the SRC;

Education & Maintenance Portfolio   Environment Portfolio   Fundraising Portfolio   Social Events Portfolio   Wellbeing Portfolio

we gave so many ideas that it was overloaded. Of course, we can only do one of them, which was just giving the students a survey form, and that survey form talks about how comfortable they are in the school, whether we should get new air-conditioning for each classrooms etc.

Under the Education and Maintenance portfolio team, we then held two competitions: a Writing Competition and a Photography Competition. These competitions were run by the Education and Maintenance members and the outcome of these competitions was a great one. People from different year levels participated and most of them gave their best.

Before the SRC ended for the rest of the years, a couple of general meetings were held which included a celebration for each student on their achievements on becoming a team member of their own Portfolio. We had different guest speakers who gave us inspirational words and words of motivation. It was just memorable.

At the end of the year, the Student Representative Council also ended, with no meetings or events held because of the exams.

I think that, by far, the SRC was my greatest achievement and by far the most memorable event for me to take part in and get the best information out of. Looking up to the leaders was super nice, just seeing them smile and giving their hundred percent effort was just amazing. Wearing the SRC badges proudly gave me high smiles and motivation to keep the school in its safest environment. I recommend people to join for this year's new SRC portfolios. I am sure that we will learn a lot from this.

Research Project: Students on School Governance Councils

In July 2016, I was contacted by the VicSRC about an opportunity to be a **Research Intern** on the research project titled *Student Representation on School Governance Councils* which was a collaboration between the VicSRC and Deakin University.

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria. This research was an action undertaken by the VicSRC as a consequence of it being presented and voted in as a priority for the VicSRC at the annual Congress which I attended in 2015.

The Research process began with the Principal Research, Dr Eve Mayes, teaching the student Research Interns about research ethics. Together we collaborated to choose which research methods would best allow us to gain an understanding about student participation in School Councils according to both students and principals. This later culminated in several regional workshops; I ran the metropolitan workshop with another Research Intern. This included the facilitation of focus group discussions as well as running

interactive activities which explored the views of student participants on this issue.

Finally, the research team designed a survey that was taken by over 200 students across Victoria so that our suggestions for the Department of Education and Teaching would be the most representative of the views of students across Victoria as possible.

Further details about this process are found in the article we wrote for *Connect* 222 - December 2016.

As a result of my involvement in this research, I was invited and presented at a workshop at Victoria University for teachers about research rejuvenating curriculum.

I further was extremely fortunate to be able to present this research and our subsequent recommendations to

the Minister for Education and Deputy Premier, Hon James Merlino, where we discussed the importance of this issue and the research we had undertaken. The VicSRC and Minister Merlino continue to discuss this issue and seek to make progress in Victorian schools regarding this.

The Executive Summary of the report can be found at: **http://ow.ly/Ohpe308ytKI**

Sarah Goh
Balwyn High School

Changing perceptions of the JSC

When I was asked by my Principal, Janet Barnard, if I would be in charge of the **Junior School Council (JSC)** three years ago I was happy, if not a bit apprehensive, to take on this role. The school had run a JSC since before I began at the school in 2002. However, I told her that I wanted to make a few changes. She was on board with my ideas and so the journey began.

My first step was to insist that the school captains had to be a part of the JSC. I felt that it was important that we had strong student leaders within our group. The rest of the representatives were to be chosen from our four Grade 5 classes and our three Grade 6 Classes. These representatives were voted in by their peers: students nominated themselves, speeches were prepared and presented to their classes and, at the end, two Grade 6 students and one Grade 5 student from each class were chosen. That gave me 14 students to work with in my first year in the JSC. These 14 students were to be the voice for the other 560 students who attended our school.

At our first meeting I explained to the students what my own vision for the JSC was. I didn't want us to be seen as a fundraising group (which is what it had been seen as in the past). **I wanted to see us as the voice of the school … the decision makers … the people that evoked changes.** They were definitely on board with these ideas. And so we began to take little steps towards reprogramming the school community's thinking about our role as well.

I was lucky that during this first year I had **some real go-getters amongst the students … the enthusiastic representatives who had so many great ideas … who went out and got things done … who made being in the JSC seem like the best job in the school.** They raised the profile of the JSC amongst the students, staff and parents. And it is their legacy that makes the JSC appealing for the next year's students.

The representatives introduced themselves at assembly. They shared with the whole school what our vision was and explained their role. They encouraged students to come and see them about ideas and suggestions for what they would like to see happen at the school. And, through assembly and our school newsletter, we continued to share with the whole school community the things we were achieving. We received many letters from students across the year levels with suggestions for activities they would like to see run, dress up days and playground ideas. By the end of this year we had run a book stall, introduced music to replace the school bell, attempted to introduce new foods into the canteen, run some fun activities in the playground, as well as continuing to raise money for charities and support our sponsor child, Saverianus, from Indonesia.

But our job still wasn't done. Each year we have come up with new ideas and new plans to make our school a better place and continue to see the changes we want to see.

Changed Perceptions

It was the School Council themselves who approached the JSC in 2015 to see if they would be prepared to **attend the School Council meetings** to report back on what the JSC has been up to. The representatives jumped at this chance, and each month two members from the JSC attend the School Council meetings, sharing their meeting minutes and answering questions. This shows the value that is placed on the JSC at our school.

The whole perception of the JSC has changed within the school as well. They are now seen as **an integral part of the decision making process within our school.** When wanting to make changes to the Grade 6 end of year student gift, the Parents Club contacted the JSC for ideas. Teachers will now come and approach the JSC to see if they would like to be involved in activities around the school, including a wall mural and a new garden.

Last year our focus changed once again to wanting to put lots of our time towards improving **school pride**. We brainstormed a list of ideas on what we wanted to achieve for the year. *What did we want to see changed? What did we want to keep the same? What was possible for us to achieve? What were our priorities?*

By the end of the year we had achieved many of these things plus many more, including raising money for two local charities (Swan Hill Fire Brigade and Swan Hill Legacy), painting and introducing friendship chairs into our playground, organising a talent show and a paper plane competition, holding lunchtime workshops, organising footy colours day and providing face paint, voting on the design for our new school uniforms, working with a dietician to develop a new school menu, attending school working bees to improve our school gardens and, for the first time, holding **a whole school meeting** with representatives from each year level from Prep to Grade 6 where ideas for a new school playground were brainstormed and discussed. **This meeting was so successful that these whole school meetings are something we wish to continue in 2017.** We will be looking to introduce a representative from each of the 24 classes from Prep to Grade 6, who will attend a meeting each term. This way, for the first time, each year level will have a chance to make suggestions and decisions that affect the school.

Addressing Limitations

The hardest part of being in the JSC is having all the students understand the limitations. Everyone has such wonderful ideas and things that they are passionate about. But with time and money constraints, we have had to realise that we can't always do everything. We have had to prioritise and change those things that we can and let go of some of the ideas that are not achievable. One of these challenges has been the painting of our school toilet blocks with fun and bright designs as a way of deterring graffiti and damage to the toilets. Back in 2015 the JSC came up with the designs, organised an artist who would come and do the outlines and volunteered their time to do the painting. Due to costs, expertise and time, as yet we haven't been able to get this project started, but it continues to be an important issue to the JSC and one that they are not prepared to give up on.

Whole school meeting

Each year I have taken a step back. While I'm still there to guide and assist, I leave it up to the representatives to take on more and more responsibility. Our president runs the meetings, while our secretary takes the meeting minutes. In the minutes it is decided who is going to follow up on ideas or jobs. It is the students who will visit the Principal or different teachers to discuss ideas. They are the ones who report back to the students we have received letters from. They speak at assemblies, Parents Club and School Council meetings, do the write ups for the newsletters and speak to members of the community. They do as much of the organisation of events and activities as they are able to. The leadership skills and confidence that these children develop through this is wonderful to see. They show a maturity beyond their years.

For three years running we have been finalists in the *VicSRC Recognition Awards*. It makes me feel so proud for the students that they have been recognised for their hard work and dedication towards improving our school.

Each year we get bigger and better. Who knows what may happen this year in 2017!

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VicSRC Awards

Our first active SRC

2016 was the first year that **Kalianna Special School** had actively run a **Student Representative Council** to its full capacity. We believe that students have the right for their voices to be heard no matter their ability, background or circumstances.

At the beginning of last year we decided that our aim as a student body was to build a school culture in which student voice had a place. We had the vision that, if we could foster student voice in our school community, students would gain a sense of belonging and create supportive relationships with their peers and teachers. In doing this we hoped that this would encourage students to be more motivated and participate actively in the life of the classroom, school and even the wider school community. We have created a Student Representative Council that inspires students to speak up for what they believe in and that is supported to take action.

Structure

At the beginning of the school year we ran an election campaign which saw 15 students make speeches to gain leadership positions within our SRC. We now have a leadership team consisting of four students who oversee our Council which is made up of 32 students from both our senior and primary learning communities. We meet as a whole Student Council every fortnight with an agenda that the leadership team creates at their weekly meetings.

Impact

2016 saw the Kalianna SRC take action on many different issues and matters around our school that we have felt passionate about. As a new representative body at our school we are extremely proud of the impact we have made at our school in only a few months.

Our first goal was to increase student engagement at recess and lunchtimes after this came to our attention when we sent out student surveys about what could be improved in our school. We now run various lunchtime activities for students to participate in, such as sports, games and music.

We have peer mediators to support students outside at break times; we have organised sports equipment that can be borrowed; and we also created a games room where students are able to go to during break times to participate in quiet activities.

The Kalianna Student Representative Council has also organised fundraising days to raise money for organisations that we feel passionate about and inspired by. Some of these events have included a *My Hero Day*, which raised money for blood cancer research, supporting the variety 4WD bash and casual and dress up days.

We were so proud to be nominated for a **Victorian SRC Award** at the end of last year and were even more excited to receive both a highly commended and commended award for all our efforts throughout the year. It was a great experience to be able to travel down to the big smoke to receive our awards. We even had the chance to talk to the Education Minister whilst we were there. It was a great night to celebrate the achievements of all the Student Representatives Councils in Victoria.

Future Directions

The future direction for our SRC here at Kalianna will see us work with the School Council and Curriculum Committee to ensure that our students are being more involved in the decision making surrounding our education. We are working towards coming up with different ways that we can gain student feedback around their learning as well as from their teachers, which we can present to our Principal.

We believe that to create positive change you need to be open to different thoughts and ideas, believe whole heartedly in your cause, have passion and be committed to taking action and being open to change.

We are very excited to continue on the road for students having an even greater student voice at our school in 2017.

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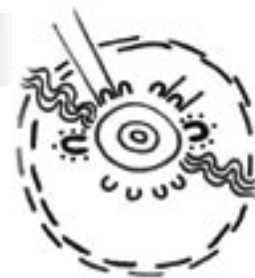
A review:
Regional SRC Conference: May 2016

Secondary students have come together annually at the **Illawarra South Coast/Wagga Wagga Directorate Student Representative Council (SRC) Conference** in this regional area of NSW for more than 25 years. One hundred and twenty four students attended the conference in May 2016. They came from 43 secondary schools across the Wagga Wagga Operational Directorate, which geographically occupies 83% of NSW.

An evaluation of the 2016 Conference was undertaken at the request of Mr Murray Walpole, Head Teacher: Positive Behaviour for Learning and SRC Conference Coordinator, for Educational Services: Wagga Wagga, Batemans Bay Office. The evaluation of the Conference was conducted over three days using student and teacher interviews, observation, an on-line survey and document analysis. **Dr Lorraine Beveridge** (Teacher Quality Advisor, Queanbeyan), who is a practising teacher in addition to a researcher, conducted the evaluation and the data was collaboratively analysed by **Dr Lorraine Beveridge** and **Roger Holdsworth**.

Forty six students were interviewed during the leadership conference (37% of the students who attended the conference), as well as five supervising teachers (three male and two female teachers from participating schools; 83% of teachers at the conference). It was collaboratively decided not to interview the conference coordinator due to a possible perceived conflict of interest, as he initiated the review. Fourteen students who had attended the conference the previous year (2015) completed an online survey, responding to the same questions asked of participants and teachers during the conference. Two additional interviewees were identified during interviews. One of these people is a Learning and Wellbeing Advisor who has supported the conference for a number of years, but did not attend in 2016, but responded to the interview questions via email. A previous retired organiser of SRC at a local, regional and state level, **Bob Ross**, also agreed to be interviewed and was identified by interviewees as having

an important historical perspective on SRCs at all levels.

Participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity, with the exception of the previous, retired SRC regional and state organiser, Bob Ross, who requested to own his comments. Additionally, school names have been removed to further protect the anonymity and privacy of students and staff.

The evaluation's findings are classified under four main focus areas. First, we identify the **benefits of the Conference to students**. Second, we consider **benefits to schools**, and third we investigate the **value to the wider education system**. Finally, the **benefits and challenges associated with the conference organisation** are addressed.

Context

The NSW Department of Education (DoE) describes effective student leadership practices as providing opportunities for students to:

- *feel in **control** of their learning. This means significant input to rules and procedures, establishing learning goals and tasks, deciding how to work.*
- *feel **competent**. This means investigating and responding to issues of survival and quality of life, solving real problems, creating real products.*
- *feel **connected** with others. This means cooperative and collaborative learning, peer support, community linkages, mutual respect.*

(www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/
studleadsrc/index.php)

Such practices have also been located within broader commitments to ideas variously described as 'student voice', 'student participation', 'student involvement' and so on. Fielding (2012) refers to 'student voice' as a 'portmanteau term', conveying several meanings and used to describe students having a genuine input to their education through feedback, participation, engagement and involvement.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by Australia in 1990, states that all children have the **right** to participate in decisions that affect their lives, including decisions that impact their education. In addition to participation being a right, it is recognised that students making informed decisions about their learning leads to more **effective outcomes** for teachers, students and systems. Student voice/participation has been seen to have three significant intentions:

a) to improve teacher quality and practice, through the provision of data and feedback from students;

b) to directly improve learning outcomes for participating students, through enhancing their engagement and commitment as active participants in classroom and whole school decision-making;

c) to improve and transform system approaches and student outcomes for all, through active partnerships between students and adults. (Holdsworth, 2017; Fielding, 2012)

Significant research has linked student voice/participation to increased student wellbeing: it leads to greater ownership, engagement and control

(Fielding, 2006; Holdsworth, 2013; Quinn & Owen, 2016). Positive associations have also been identified between students having a genuine voice at school, and wellbeing (Anderson & Graham, 2015).

Students should be provided with opportunities to become active participants in their education. Effective practice includes involving students in decisions about what and how they learn and how their learning is assessed.

www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studleadsrc/studentvoice/index.php

Forms of leadership that encourage the inclusion of authentic student voice through initiatives such as Student Representative Councils (SRC), take seriously the education of the whole person, "not solely through a lens of educational attainment" (Varnham, Evers, Booth & Avgoustinos, 2014, p. 23), seeing this as only one aspect of the educative process. Wellbeing is increasingly linked to improved academic outcomes, in addition to positive mental health and social outcomes within the learning environment (Hattie, 2009; Roffey, 2012; Fielding, 2006).

Approaches such as student councils and SRCs enable students, either directly or through their representatives, to have a genuine say in school decision-making. This can occur at a school or inter-school level, enabling students to advocate on behalf of the larger student body and to work in constructive partnership with teachers and other adults to improve educational provisions for all.

The NSW DoE endorses such approaches on its website:

The role of SRC members is to represent the views of all students. In general, an SRC tries to improve the quality of school life for all students.

Students can have their say on a wide variety of issues for example, school uniform and aspects of school life to participating in the development of school policies.

www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studleadsrc/studentvoice/slsrcfaqs.php

Although such organisations as SRCs in schools are commonplace, concern has been expressed that they may not always be used to their full capacity (Quinn & Owen, 2016; Varnham, Evers, Booth & Avgoustinos, 2014; Fielding, 2006). For example, a narrow focus in schools, where a teacher-led SRC is used as a forum for students to express their views but where their suggestions are not followed through by staff, limits their transformative capacity to elicit positive change and connect meaningfully with students (Roffey, 2012). Further, there have been substantial criticisms that many traditional SRCs engage only already successful (and advantaged) students, deal with carefully proscribed issues, are disconnected from school decision-making and curriculum, and are, in the larger sense, ineffective (Holdsworth, 2004; Holdsworth, 2005; Black, 2011).

However, the potential exists for all schools to develop from a traditional teacher-led and directed SRC to one that is characterised by student-run initiatives, where there is sincere commitment from teachers and school leaders to change the power structure in schools, by valuing and acting on students' views and opinions. Students making informed decisions about their learning through SRCs better address learning needs, facilitating students having increased ownership, influence and control of their education.

Such intentions are mirrored beyond individual schools. Because of the scale involved, intentions here focus more on school and system improvement, through enhancing the capacity of student representatives to inform and share decision-making.

Student leadership conferences, where typically students from varying types of schools from a wide geographic space come together to share perspectives, discuss and debate views on education, and decide on possible directions, also focus on developing the leadership capacity of the student representatives and enable them to be more effective partners in school and system improvement. Such opportunities have been associated with increased self-esteem, enhanced social relationships and improved interpersonal skills for participants. Student leadership conferences provide opportunities for interaction, collaboration and unification, skills that advance ownership of and engagement in the educative process (Dalgarn, 2001; Camp, 2013). Students value most the life skills and relationships that they develop during leadership conferences, many of which are kept alive through social media and future conferences, building social capital that benefit both students in their future lives and the schools that they attend. A growing body of evidence suggests that although non-classroom activities compete with academic learning for student time, academic achievement is enhanced by student participation in these types of extracurricular activities (Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek & Guillet, 2002; Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997).

The benefits of education systems promoting both formal and informal learning opportunities is well documented (Dalgarn, 2001). Researchers have identified a significant 'Pygmalion effect' (Eden, Shani & Abraham. 1982, Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968, Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek & Guillet. 2002) where the greater the expectations placed on students, the better that they perform – a self-fulfilling prophesy that leads to higher levels of self-efficacy, effort and motivation, potentially resulting in more creative organisations overall. When teachers expect high

performance from students and positive leadership behaviour, students deliver, demonstrating the causal interplay between expectancy, leadership and performance (Eden, 1992).

Similarly, the opportunities afforded students through such initiatives to meet and share experiences with other students, and to be consulted at school or system level, provides enhanced expectations and aspirations for students and their SRCs in individual schools. By seeing that the issues that students identify as important are being taken seriously and responded to at inter-school levels, the commitment to and outcomes from school SRCs are enhanced.

Review Findings

All participants interviewed – both students and teachers – were highly positive about the impact of the Conference. They considered the effort and cost to get there well worth the benefits.

The strongest general perception from this data is of a Conference responding positively to isolation. Schools largely work in isolation from others – and this is replicated and intensified for SRCs. Therefore students and teachers welcomed the opportunity to get together, share experiences, learn from each other and return to schools re-invigorated.

There are widely different views, even within this sample, of the role and possibility of SRCs. While some said about the conference:

We raise money from events like Harmony Day, colour run and have a say in how the money is spent. We try and fix broken things around the school, like broken projectors.

(Students: Owen, Ryan)

Others report:

Students gained a clear understanding that SRC is not about fundraising. It's about building student leadership, a much more significant concept, seeing student-led initiatives come to fruition through having in place, enablers that supported SRCs in schools in carrying out their important student leadership work.

(Teacher: Bob)

SRC is important because it gives students a voice in the school to make positive changes.

(Student: Lisa)

This 'norming' of SRCs, both from the perspective and experience of students and of teachers, is challenged as participants share ideas about what is possible and practicable. It was interesting and surprising to learn that of four teachers who were interviewed, three of them had been active in SRC throughout their school life; they remained passionate in relation to students having a genuine voice at school, and empowering them. However, these same teachers reported that they felt largely unsupported in their SRC role in their schools: *"I don't get much support for SRC in my school." (Teacher: Jo)*

Teachers reported at length on the importance of executive support to give credence to SRC activities and support student leadership development in the wider school community. Those principals held in highest esteem by students and staff were the ones who actively supported student-led initiatives and listened and acted on student voice, focusing on building quality relationships across the school. Those principals who attended SRC meetings showed that they cared and wanted to hear first-hand of the issues that were of highest concern to their student body, modelling distributed leadership for the students.

While the Conference had benefits for students, it also was important in providing the same networking and advice support to the teachers who accompanied them.

A. Benefits of the Conference to students

Students and teachers identified benefits of the Conference for all students. **Students** said that:

- it clarified their SRC roles: *[It] makes clear to us what SRC teams should be doing. (Students: Lorri, Lachie)*;

- enabled them to share practical ideas to take back to schools: *Giving us ideas, that brainstorming session, like 'we could do that'. I feel like I'm going back to school with great ideas, new friends, strategies that my school will benefit from. (Students: group of four female students)*;

- inspired and motivated them: *You definitely get a battery of inspiration that you can channel into your school. (Students: Olivia, Bridie)*; and

- increased their skills: *It gives us the leadership tools we need to make our SRCs back in our own schools as effective as possible. I think that we can all do it better, and the conference*

is great for opening our eyes to how to do it better. (Students: Pat, Con).

Teachers similarly pointed to the ways in which the Conference strengthened student voices, provided practical ideas, broadened perspectives, developed critical thinking, and re-energised students.

The Conference itself provided support to students in relatively isolated roles, but also facilitated peer support amongst students and teachers, and even allowed dedicated time for students and their support staff to discuss and plan together. The conference afforded a wider network for student leaders to come together and share processes and practices, learning with and from each other, in ways that will feed back and strengthen school SRCs. The conference assured students that they weren't alone: they met students with similar interests and challenges, and were able to share ideas and learn from each other. This provided both inspiration and focus.

While students identified personal benefits (skills, knowledge, opportunities) that they would take away, the core of their concern was the increased capacity that the Conference provided for them to play a role in improving schools and education for all students.

These benefits were also endorsed by the survey of **previous students**:

Confidence, determination, organisation skills. This has been an incredible experience that has improved my self-confidence and positively impacted on.

(Student survey)

Teachers identified very similar general benefits. In addition to those mentioned by students, they also highlighted the potential of the conference to re-energise an SRC, and to provide support for both students and teachers – who may be in a 'lonely' and unclear role within their schools.

I think a lot of students involved in SRC don't really have a clear idea of what they're meant to do. After coming to the Conference they go back to school with a clearer idea of what to do to make it more effective in their own schools, its goals, what it should look like. Giving students a voice and helping them to see their ideas

through to fruition. Student voice is increasingly important. The idea that we're meant to tailor our classes to suit our students' needs – the SRC potentially has a role to ensure that schools are catering to the needs of the student body and their collective wishes/ goals/ needs.

(Teacher: Rob)

The sessions when the schools could work on an idea that they wanted to take back to their school and implement was fantastic; some schools only had enough time to look at one aspect.

(Teacher: Cal)

Participants were then asked specific questions to investigate further the possible areas of benefit for students. Their comments expanded upon, clarified and exemplified the general points made above.

Student Leadership skills developed through the SRC Conference

In reflecting on the skills gained through participation in the Conference, students and teachers identified similar core aspects of participation, leadership and teamwork:

- **confidence** (the capacity to stand up and speak, form opinions, advocate),

- **communication** (with fellow students, teachers, leadership teams, community members),
- **teamwork roles and approaches** (understanding of different roles and styles of leadership),
- **process planning**, and
- **critical thinking**.

Increased skills for individual participants are important, but not enough. Unless those skills are used back at school, to build more effective SRCs, and to amplify student voices generally, they remain transitory to this particular (and small) group of students, who will exit their schools in the near future. However, student comments indicate a strong understanding that these skills are not acquired for personal gain, but for the enhancement of their school's SRC. They say they are learning skills and developing attitudes that must be practised and built upon within their schools. Hence communication is a vital aspect of this skill development, as is an increased understanding of leadership roles and styles.

Knowledge of current significant events attributable to students' participation in the SRC Conference

In addition to the stated leadership skills, the knowledge that student

representatives gain about issues facing them and other students was substantial. Students and teachers identified the role of the 'flexishops' at the Conference in providing this knowledge and information, both about the role of SRCs, but also more generally about issues that face them through their SRCs.

Students have strong grounded knowledge that is based in their experience, but this also needs to be stretched and challenged with factual information and broader perspectives. Issues such as mental health, suicide prevention, discrimination based on gender, race and sexual orientation are all key issues that contribute to students becoming productive future citizens and leaders in their communities. Students strongly identified with many issues to which they were exposed – for some, for the first time – at the Conference. The Conference structure enabled students to hear about, discuss and debate these issues in an open, non-judgemental forum. It provided them with information and resources, but also a safe space to explore and question. The issues of school and SRC isolation also came through most strongly in their comments here; the Conference provided a valuable space for many students to move 'outside their comfort zone'.

This benefit most directly accrued to participants: they increased their knowledge of significant issues. However it is clear from the comments that participants saw this knowledge as supporting and enabling them to be more effective leaders and representatives within their schools. That is, they saw the benefit of learning more about current issues that matter to them, as accruing to all students through their enhanced work within their SRCs.

Students specifically mentioned issues of domestic violence; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) rights; mental health; suicide prevention; social media; alternative lifestyles; and environmental issues. They welcomed the information and, in particular, ways in which to work on raising awareness of these current issues within their own schools.

> All students can gain a range of ideas that face students and get a range of ideas about them that they can take back to our own schools.
> *(Students: Horry, Jill)*

> We have access to experts who share best practice with us, how to live a healthy, ethical life that give us the best chance of success. These are really important issues that we already know about, and learn more about. We also value seeing things from different viewpoints.
> *(Students: Pat, Con)*

The **previous students** identified both SRC related issues such as:

> Working together to make the school better as opposed to working in isolation ...

> Ability to have student voice heard ...

> The flexishops taught me that many schools, including many different types of schools in various locations were facing similar issues ...

as well as broader issues:

> Bullying...

> Issues around student wellbeing...

> Mental health issues...

> Issues of body image...

> Youth mental health work.
> *(Previous students: survey)*

Enhanced leadership opportunities for Conference participants

The third area of benefit investigated is much more personal. While students (and

teachers) indicated they understood that skill and knowledge acquisition was primarily valuable in that it enhanced the SRC at the school (in addition to the individual), both students and teachers were more uncertain about a direct link between the Conference and the identification and training of future student leaders.

Participation in the Conference may be strongly linked with previous identification of 'student leaders' ie in choosing who attends the Conference, and the process by which this happens. Thus the identified attributes gained from the Conference are seen to improve existing skills, knowledge and attitudes of these students and make it more likely that they will continue in such positions.

Students were more likely than teachers to say (perhaps hopefully) that participation improves their capacity to take on leadership roles. Teachers are more ambivalent, but suggest that increased understanding of and vision for the role of students, as well as confidence and related skills, makes students likely to be more effective leaders.

> We've learned skills that a school captain needs, that impress people back at school.
> *(Students: Lorri, Lachie)*

B. Benefit of the conference to schools in the Directorate

In talking about the benefit of the Conference for themselves, students also consistently identified that such benefits accrued to their schools, and reflected on ways in which this happened. There were generalised benefits through enhanced capacity to work as a team, understand leadership, be aware of issues facing students and schools, and having re-energised students.

> People get ideas from different schools. They use these 'little big ideas' back in their own schools to identify student voice or recognise others achievements.
> *(Students: Owen, Ryan)*

> I imagine that every student would come away with different techniques and strategies that

have a gradual positive impact on the school. We always come home with new bright ideas and initiatives. The differing ideas and views from others have been put to good use in our school.
> *(Previous students: survey)*

In particular, the Conference expanded their shared knowledge of what students can do – it challenged them around possibilities:

> It gives students an idea of potentially what they can do to better their schools. I feel students are increasingly having an influence in schools and how they're run and this is a great thing.
> *(Student: Lisa)*

However, few talked more specifically of the ways in which student knowledge and views would enhance, improve and transform school processes and learning and teaching. One teacher spoke of engagement of students in authentic decision-making within the school, but many of the other comments reflect a separation of student initiatives from the core function of schools: learning. This connection may need to be explicitly addressed within future programs.

Finally, meeting students from different schools provided them with a heightened appreciation of the diversity of schools across the Wagga Wagga Directorate:

> It [the Conference] allows us to consider challenges faced by other schools. It's important to know what the other schools are like too... Other schools do things together but we tend not to, other schools tend not to ask us. We're not well-informed of what's happening in our region ...
> *(Students: Horry, Jill)*

Some teachers saw the potential for students to play a more authentic and significant role in their school's decision-making:

> I see staff take things to the SRC and ask, 'What do you think?', seeking a rubber stamp for a decision and think, 'No way... why can't the students be involved in the decision making from the start?' I'm talking about the authentic engagement of students in the decision making process at school. I'm working towards this. It's one step forward, two back. Last year we had the Principal come to every SRC meeting. That does not

happen anymore. If he didn't come, I'd send two reps to report on the meeting following, so he was aware of what was discussed. That hasn't happened either due to people in relieving positions, but now we have a permanent Principal I'm hoping to see a shift.

(Teacher: Ros)

C. Systems benefits of the Conference

This SRC Conference was supported by the Wagga Wagga Directorate of the NSW Department of Education (DoE). As well as recognising the benefits that accrue for participating students and schools, are there direct benefits for the DoE at various levels? This becomes an important issue, as historically, schools and regions supported student conferences that fed into a statewide conference of student representatives. This structure also enabled students to elect a state SRC Committee that was consulted by and advocated to the DoE and its programs.

Few teachers and fewer students had direct experience of students advocating to systems, or forming partnerships with other stakeholders to influence educational decisions. Based on their experience of this Conference, students (and teachers) clearly identified the value of networking to increase their understanding of issues and diversity. Those who commented extrapolated this to a state-wide level, recognising the broader benefits to them.

A couple of the teachers mentioned the key value of such Directorate/regional and statewide roles for students, in that these enable students to discuss and decide on issues that they wish to present to systems decision-makers. Students can offer expertise and insights within partnerships at this level. Similarly, one student commented that the contribution of student voice at a Directorate or State level can provide an assurance at a school and SRC level that all student voices are heard, listened to, and taken seriously. Without that, students may struggle to realise that they can be involved in anything other than relatively marginal initiatives, such as fundraising.

D. Benefits and challenges associated with the SRC Conference across the WWOD

In the final area of this review, students and teachers directly addressed issues associated with the Conference organisation. They highlighted both the importance of the Conference to them, and an awareness of the challenges involved with its organisation.

Students strongly endorsed the continued face-to-face organisation of the Conference. While recognising the role that social media may play in linking participants, they specifically pointed to the value of face-to-face inspiration and learning. In doing so, they again emphasised the cultural, geographical and educational diversity within the Directorate, and the importance of this to their development.

Definitely better to talk face to face than Facebook (FB). Many benefits of bringing people together. Things on FB are easily misinterpreted. Face to face you get confidence and grow bonds between people. Always better to talk face to face.

(Students: four female students)

Different school environments, meeting people from across the region. Schools are so different and people are really happy to share. People at the conference are so open and intelligent. It's a pleasure talking to them. We are a small, isolated school. We learn from what is happening in bigger schools and we can grow from this, as we have done due to our involvement in the camp.

(Students: Olivia, Bridie)

Greater diversity of backgrounds. I think it is important for everyone to 'walk a mile' in the shoes of others, and this sort of conference allows students to do that.

(Teacher: Val)

Both students and teachers recognised the challenges in organising such a Conference. As well as pointing to the distances involved in physically getting to the venue, they mentioned both financial costs involved and time commitment. However, schools that value this experience seem to be willing to fund participation either in part or in total. It is suggested that, if benefit is seen to accrue primarily to schools/communities rather than to individuals, it is appropriate that schools support attendance by meeting costs involved.

Some schools travelled up to 18 hours to attend the SRC.

(Students: Lou, James)

We are so isolated, our closest school is an hour away. Even just managing the distances is crazy.

(Teacher: Ros)

[Our school] had a 10 hour bus trip to the conference. The students from Broken Hill and [another school] students had another 5 hours plus for their travel.

(Teacher: Cal)

Conference timing was questioned: When in the year should it occur (to avoid assessment periods)? Would a weekend be more appropriate to encourage individual commitment? Other similar conferences have been held during school vacations, and this has focused responsibility on students who are particularly motivated to attend – which has both positive and negative aspects.

The process of Conference organisation, which involves students elected by their peers to co-organise the Conference for the following year with interested teachers and Departmental officers, was strongly supported by students as a means by which a student-focused and, where appropriate, student-led program could be developed. It is also recognised that such student participation in Conference organisation has its own challenges.

As students would draw up the program, we would ask them what they wanted included. We elected a committee at the conference each year, and they would come along to the next one as leaders. It was these students who largely planned and implemented the conferences, with guidance and support from staff. Similar logical, simple organisation that continues today I note. We would get together with the students two or three times throughout the year to support them in getting the conference going. They would come up with issues they wanted included in the conference, probably like they do now. Because issues were identified by students and they were discussed in an open forum, I think students were more willing to say what they really think.

(Teacher: Bob)

Finally, as the Conference is seen by schools in attendance to be of strong importance, it is likely that demand will increase. This will mean either that there will need to be restrictions on numbers attending from any school, or that a larger venue will be needed to accommodate it. Alternatively, the Directorate may consider two (or more) Conferences, geographically distributed through the area – though the strong commitment to learning from diversity would argue against a more 'local' event, or that a distribution of smaller and more local Conferences should reflect that cultural and geographical diversity.

It was suggested that the Conference and its schools should look at the *gender* make-up of who gets to participate:

Sometimes we have difficulty getting boys to come. Girls are usually more open, I find. Sometimes the boys are a bit shy. They definitely go back to school and talk it up. They love it.

(Teacher: Rob)

However, participants in 2016 strongly endorsed the importance of the Conference, and the possibility of its *growth* and development:

Seeing the growth of the camp from last year to this year I can definitely say that it is growing and as more and more schools in the WWOD hear about it they will be wanting to send their students. This will also mean finding a bigger venue to be able to host the numbers of SRC representatives wanting to attend the conference.

(Teacher: Cal)

Recommendations

The evaluation has presented several recommendations to the Directorate. These include the following areas:

The Conference and its program:

- That the Illawarra South Coast/Wagga Wagga Directorate SRC Conference continue to be organised and offered to schools in the Directorate.

- That the Conference program continue to include discussion and information on the purpose and roles of SRCs (and student voice more generally) within schools.

- That future Conference programs continue to place a strong emphasis on the development of skills, their application within school settings, and their acquisition through practical experience.

- That future Conferences continue to include information and issue-centred 'flexishops' (or other forms of workshops) that enable students to hear about and discuss current issues in education, with input from informed experts. In this way students are exposed to factual information, and students' questions in relation to current issues are answered by authoritative sources.

- That attention be maintained on creating a safe space at the Conference in which students can explore, discuss and debate significant issues.

- That future Conferences place a greater focus on discussions about the broader purpose of student participation, representation and leadership – particularly around core educational and curricular issues of learning and teaching.

- That future Conferences enable students to discuss how decision-making occurs within schools, and how students can have their voices heard, moving towards partnership in decision-making with other stakeholders.

- That Conferences include discussions of additional ways through which students can be active participants in education, including school decision-making.

- That future Conferences include discussion about the ways in which students can actively and increasingly participate in educational decision-making at all levels: school, Directorate and State.

The Conference and its organisation:

- That student leaders continue to plan and implement student focused workshops on issues that are important to them during the Conference.

- That the WWOD negotiate with schools and SRCs to determine the most appropriate time of the year and duration for future Conferences, possibly incorporating a weekend to reduce the amount of days that students are away from their studies.

- That future Conference and schools be asked to actively consider ways through which a greater diversity in participants is encouraged – along the lines of gender, ethnicity, ability etc.

- That equity funding (Government and private/philanthropic) be sought to support the attendance of students from remote schools and students whose financial circumstances would limit their attendance.

Systems responses:

- That Conferences provide opportunities for students to inform senior Department Officers and school executives of issues that were flagged during SRC flexishops at the Conference, in ways that value student voice and raise awareness of student concerns across the wider education network.

- That the DoE consider means of providing formalised state support for future Regional/ Directorate SRC Conferences.

School practices:

- That schools provide structured opportunities for students who attended the Conference to share what they learned - including leadership, team-building and relationship skills - with students in their schools through their SRC, so the learning is scaled up to the wider student body.

- That leadership activities shared at the Conference be fed back to school SRCs and, in turn, to students in schools. In this way all students benefit from the leadership opportunities afforded to students during the Conference.

- That information and discussion about both SRCs and other forms of active student voice and participation, pay attention to issues of inclusion i.e. ways in which students who are otherwise marginalised or excluded, may be supported to become active participants.

In addition, we make three broader suggestions, consistent with NSW Department of Education policy:

1. It would be advantageous for senior Department officers to formulate a structure so that students from regional SRC can **feed their ideas and concerns to higher levels in the Department**, as occurred organically during State SRC Conferences up to 2012 in NSW government schools. And vice-versa, that a clear communication channel is created so that relevant information and canvassing of student views can feed down directly to students through regional and school SRC structures.

2. It is timely that student voice be increasingly **privileged at all levels in school and system decision making**, in line with a plethora of research that links wellbeing and student learning. Students in the evaluation outlined that they don't always feel valued, or listened to, at school. Some students felt that their SRC was used as a 'rubber stamp' to validate school projects, and that SRC initiatives were not always supported by school leaders and staff. Juxtaposed to this, students outlined that, when Principals and school leaders are actively involved in the SRC, as evidenced by regular attendance at meetings, active support for student leadership initiatives, and valuing student input in decision-making, school culture is supportive, there exists collective efficacy and high engagement in learning.

3. It would be beneficial for schools if leadership opportunities afforded to Conference participants be **scaled up at the school level**, so all students benefit. Many of the schools that supported the conference are our most isolated. Clear personal benefits for students (skills, knowledge, opportunities) were identified in the data. These students can play a role in ensuring that all students are advantaged through their school's participation. Likewise, teachers who work with SRCs in schools usually do so in isolation and benefit from collaboration with teachers in similar roles, the results of which could possibly be shared with other schools, eliciting a flow-on systems benefit.

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Dr Lorraine Beveridge & Roger Holdsworth

Terms and Intentions

Terms

We often use terms such as *'student participation', 'student voice', 'student leadership'* and so on interchangeably. While we can choose words to mean what we want, they also come with a 'baggage' of meanings. And words and terms can be stretched to cover a range of ideas; it was also Lewis Carroll who used the term *'portmanteau'* to mean a word (or term) that fuses two (or more) meanings together.

I started writing this article to sort out my own thinking about how I understood these terms, and also because I saw some confusion in how the terms were being used - ideas were being run together in unhelpful ways. This is not intended as a very formal paper, but rather a reflection on how we use language and what that might mean.

Why is this important?

Our practice is shaped by our understanding of the terms we use. If there are conflicting ideas behind these terms, we may adopt practices that we are not happy with, and which conflict with other value positions we might hold.

Some terms and ideas have substantial histories and current debates; we should understand these, because these too shape what we do. These histories and debates also reflect broader ideas about the purpose of education and of schools.

The first part of this article will look at some of these definitional issues. This will then lead us to examine the **intentions** of work in this broad area, and here the differences will become more pronounced, with particular implications for practice.

Outcome terms & process terms

Terms can be used to define *processes* or possible *outcomes*. For example, the term *'student engagement'* seems to be more an outcome (like *'self-esteem', 'school pride', 'school spirit'* - which are even descriptions of 'symptoms' of outcomes) than a process. *'Student participation'* has

> *"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all." [1]*

come to be used more as a process term than an outcome term. But some terms can be used in both ways.

Here are some commonly used terms:

Student Voice

Ideas about **'student voice'** have been round for decades. In about 1998, I identified levels of 'student voice' as:

- *speaking out;*
- *being heard;*
- *being listened to;*
- *being listened to seriously and with respect;*
- *incorporating student views into action taken by others; and*
- *sharing decision-making, implementing action and reflecting on action, with young people.*[2]

Jean Rudduck *et al* in Cambridge, UK had a major research project about *'pupil voice'* in the early 2000s (which she distinguished from *'student participation'*); the Victorian Department of Education commissioned and published a paper on **Student Voice** in 2007[3]; currently there is the **Student Voice Research and Practice** *facebook* page and the *International Journal of Student Voice*.

While the term can have a literal (and limited) meaning as focusing on the processes by which students express opinions or where teachers seek student feedback and so on, recent discussions have 'stretched' this meaning to include broader participatory aspects eg Michael Fielding's **Six Partnerships** typology (see below) includes the voice of *'students as data sources'* (used by teachers to improve their practices), but locates this only at one end of range of partnerships that also include student

action about curriculum, and joint adult and student *'intergenerational initiatives around a shared democracy'* ie *'shared responsibility for the common good'.*

Similarly, the concept of 'voice' has not been restricted to verbal expression; initially work saw various forms of artistic expression as voice, and Adam Fletcher has challenged us to regard all sorts of **behaviour** as 'voice'. He writes about 'convenient' and 'inconvenient' student voice[4], and asks why we listen to one, but not the other. This then refocuses our attention away from **enabling** student voice (which is there all the time) to how adults and systems **hear and respond** to 'voice'.

Student Agency

The term **'student agency'** is now being used more widely, in order to focus on the **action** that students take, rather than simply on their expression of views. 'Agency' is a sociological term that has been defined as:

> *"The capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative—the opposite of helplessness. Young people with high levels of agency do not respond passively to their circumstances; they tend to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others' lives"*[5]
> or
> *"Student agency refers to the level of control, autonomy, and power that a student experiences in an educational situation. Student agency can be manifested in the choice of learning environment, subject matter, approach, and/or pace."*[6]

As such, it is closer to being an 'outcome' term, rather than a 'process' term – it is a quality to be achieved by students, rather than an approach.

However, ideas of agency are important as they extend us beyond the literal meaning of 'voice' (with its tendency to define students as powerless about action) to emphasise the action that students can take, either individually or collectively.

Student Participation

'Participation' has a strong conceptual history in areas of development, youth affairs, health and education. Hart's 'ladder of youth participation' in the early 1990s[7] presented distinctions between levels of participation, from manipulation and tokenism to shared decision-making. Reddy and Ratna[8] in the early 2000s pointed out that young people **are** participating all the time, and that forms of ladders and other typologies are, in fact, descriptions of adult perceptions, even containment, of that participation. In consequence, Harry Shier[9] specifically addressed ideas about organisational responses to and support for young people's participation.

Within educational contexts, it was necessary to initially draw distinctions between the more limited meanings of *'participation in'* (ie 'turning up'; ie participation rates or 'bums on seats' etc), and *'participation at'* (taking part in activities that others prescribe), and the 'deeper' meaning of *'participation through'* (making decisions about education and life, within schools etc)[10]. The first two were necessary, but much more limited than the intended use of the term 'student participation' – which was already being used by the early 1980s around classroom projects, student organisations and so on, and mainly as a process-oriented term (though it also has some elements of outcome within it). At times, the term has

been further qualified as 'active' student participation to mean more than simply being there or doing things.

One definition of 'participation' from the late 1990s, was: *"Participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change."*[11] This definition includes both the process of taking part in decision-making, and also the end of achieving change. Participation also has been used to encompass ideas about both partnerships (ie beyond individual action), and about sharing in decision-making (ie beyond voice or opinion).

Other terms in use:

Student Involvement

Adam Fletcher (USA youth and education sector writer and activist)[12] uses the term 'student involvement' for the broad area of work. Australian parent organisations resisted the term 'involvement' as implying a role that was limited and defined by others, preferring 'parent participation' over 'parent involvement'.

Fletcher also qualifies the term by referring to *'meaningful student involvement'*, but this raises further questions as to what determines that involvement as 'meaningful' and who makes such a judgement.

Student Representation

The most common traditional forms of student voice, agency or participation have been student councils, in which a few students, who volunteer or are chosen or elected within larger institutions to be **'representatives'**, speak and act on behalf of others. Thus 'representation' focuses on the processes involved in speaking up or acting for others.

There have been discussions around the nature of the representation, the links between representatives and the 'electorate', the gains (learning) achieved by representatives, and the conditions (time, support etc) under which representatives work. Such representation happens within schools (usually students appointed by a class or section of the school), but also at an inter-school level, with local, regional, state and national 'representative' bodies.

The nature of this work - whether it is directed towards representatives acting in their own right (ie having power 'delegated' to them) or within a broader participatory agenda (as consultative representatives) – reflects intentions that will be outlined in the second part of this essay. These arguments and tensions are not new; see the paper *'Putting the Participation Back Into Representation'* in early issues of **Connect**.[13]

Student Leadership

A further extension of the idea of representation then focuses on the notion of students as **leaders**. There is a larger debate about the idea of 'leadership'; while ideas about *'we are all leaders'* are put forward (perhaps linking to concepts of agency), 'leadership' remains largely anchored in the idea of the 'few' rather than the 'all'. There are leaders, and there are followers. There have been debates about forms of leadership in schools: 'servant leadership', 'leading from behind', 'distributed leadership' etc. Ideas about student leadership are located in this same landscape. More recently, there have been student seminars such as *'The Leader in Me'* and large-scale events that focus on inspiring students to be leaders.

The distinction between *'student representatives'* and *'student leaders'* appears in very practical terms: some schools have **Student Representative Councils (SRCs)** while others have **Student Leadership Councils (SLCs)**. The names (and distinctions) are not random or accidental; there are (or in some cases were) differences of intention – eg whether the role of the (relatively) few students chosen is primarily to 'represent' other students, or whether their role is to 'lead' them.

Student Empowerment

The term **'empowerment'** has been used both as an outcome and as a process. There is considerable debate about whether, as a process, others or institutions can 'empower' someone, or whether that is something one must do for one's self. Similarly there are debates about whether power is 'zero sum' ie if someone gains power, does someone else have to lose power? It's a tricky area.

Intentions

The terms we use for this work reflect its intentions. Michael Fielding asks:

> *"What is all this activity for? Whose interests does it serve? Is student voice a neutral technology or an inevitable expression of a set of values and assumptions, not just about teaching and learning, but about the kind of society we wish to live in?"* [14]

This question is actually part of a broader but similar discussion about the goals of schooling: *What is the purpose of education? Why does a society put money (from taxes) into schools?*

David Labaree[15] identifies three conflicting goals of an education system (*'democratic equality'*: a focus on preparing citizens; *'social efficiency'*: a focus on training workers; *'social mobility'*: a focus on preparing individuals to compete for social positions), but also draws attention to the ways in which these goals benefit or deliver outcomes for society as a whole (ie a **public good**), or for individuals (ie a **private good**). He argues that these goals compete, but also form temporary alliances, depending on broader economic and social needs. We are currently in a time in which the goal of 'social mobility' dominates, and education is then seen as a commodity that obtains advantage for one's self and family.

Similarly, we can look at the intentions behind the terms we use; are they for **'public good'** or for **'private good'**. This may be about the public good – about 'democratic equality' or about improving outcomes for all in our society; or it may be about private goods, with the primary intention of providing advantages (including skills) for the individuals involved. As distinct from Labaree's analysis, might it be possible for our work to have both forms of benefit?

I argue that, while there will be advantages for individuals (ie private goods – and it is interesting that much of the evaluation work about participation has focused on this: what individuals gain for themselves by being participants[16]), our work must be more centrally about the **public good** of enhancing outcomes for all ie creating educational change and transformation in order to build participation and citizenship for all. Such a focus on partnerships between students and adults in schools then reflects the nature of the society that we want to produce.

So, I think there are three broad **intentions** of our work:

- First, this work intends to **improve the capacity of professionals** to deliver student outcomes, through the 'amplification' of student voices (ie via feedback to teachers, use of students as data sources etc). Students have important knowledge and a 'voice' that is listened to, but decisions remain largely made by others; traditional roles, relationships and purposes in education remain unchanged;

- Secondly, this work intends to **improve the engagement and thus the capacity and outcomes (academic, wellbeing etc) of the individual students who are involved**. Students' agency and decision-making are increased, particularly in areas in which they can be active learners and make decisions about their own learning. Both student and teacher roles are changed, but traditional goals and structures remain unchanged;

- Thirdly, this work intends to **build partnerships between students and others (teachers, administrators, parents etc) to explore, challenge, co-construct**

and transform education – how learning happens, the purposes and outcomes of learning – in ways that benefit all. Students are active participants, alongside others, and sometimes as representatives, sharing decision-making and implementation to improve everyone's learning and teaching.

In practice, elements of these intentions usually co-exist and comple-ment each other. For example, the expression of student voices can influence teacher practices, but also builds the competence and efficacy of the students themselves, as well as establishing various forms of partnerships that change the educational landscape in ways that benefit all participants – students and teachers. So each of the terms can be used broadly and interchangeably, as well as narrowly and specifically.

The three intentions then have parallels in the terms we most commonly use. While each of the terms we've identified can be 'stretched' to cover all these intentions, they each have slightly different implications within these intentions:

- **'Student voice'** refers most directly to the processes by which students provide feedback and advice to increase the effectiveness of teaching practices;
- **'Student agency'** refers most directly to the actions taken by students to improve their educational outcomes (engagement, learning, wellbeing);
- **'Student participation'** refers most directly to the processes of partnerships in decision-making between students and others that improve outcomes for all.

Each of the terms can also be seen to encompass a continuum of practices – eg from 'minimalist' to 'maximalist', from passive to active, or from teacher-led to student-led.

In this way these three intentions are able to be mapped neatly onto the six 'patterns of partnerships' (*how adults listen to and learn with students in schools*) identified by Michael Fielding:

- **Students as data sources:**
  Staff utilise information about student progress and well-being;

- **Students as active respondents:**
  Staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/ professional decisions;

- **Students as co-enquirers:**
  Staff take lead role with high-profile active student support;

- **Students as knowledge creators:**
  Students take lead role with active staff support;

- **Students as joint authors:**
  Students and staff decide on a joint course of action together;

- **Intergenerational learning as lived democracy:**
  Shared commitment to/responsibiity for the common good.[17]

While each of the terms can be (and have been) stretched to cover all of this, they have also been used more narrowly in ways that might 'limit' understanding. Hence, to encompass the full range of what we do, and what we intend, it is suggested that we may need to adopt the more extended term of **'student voice, agency and participation'** in order to avoid initiatives being limited, trivialised and misinterpreted.

To concentrate on just one of these terms can lead to misunderstanding and restriction of what we do. To talk only of *'student voice',* risks limiting this work to processes of students speaking to others/adults (as informants or advisers); to talk only of *'student agency',* risks trivialising student initiatives to simple and directed actions (SRC fundraising or social events; students doing things at adult direction); to talk only of *'student participation'* risks misinterpreting this as just ways to get students to turn up or be involved in the activities that we/adults run. We must always be alert to these restrictions - and willing to challenge them, asserting the importance and breadth of all students' voice, agency and participation in decision-making.

Roger Holdsworth

1   Carroll, L. (Charles Dodgson) (1872) **Through the Looking-Glass**, chapter 6, p. 205 (edition of 1934)

2   Subsequently published at: Holdsworth, R. (2000) 'Schools that create real roles of value for young people'. *Prospects* 30, 3: 349-362

3   Manefield, J., Collins, R. & Moore, J.; with Mahar, S. & Warne, C. (2007) **Student Voice: A historical perspective and new directions.** Paper #10: Research and Innovation Division, Office of Learning and Teaching, Victorian Department of Education: Melbourne.
    Available at: www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/student_voice_report.pdf

4   Fletcher, A. (2013) **Convenient Student Voice or Inconvenient Student Voice?**
    Available at: https://adamfletcher.net/convenient-student-voice-or-inconvenient-student-voice/

5   www.gettingsmart.com/2015/12/201512tips-for-developing-student-agency/

6   https://www.knewton.com/resources/blog/ed-tech-101/student-agency/

7   Hart, R. (1992) **Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship.** Innocenti Essay No 4. UNICEF International Child Development Centre: Florence, Italy

8   Reddy, N. & Ratna, K. (2002) **Journey in Children's Participation**. The Concerned for Working Children: Bangalore, India.
    Available at: www.youthmetro.org/uploads/4/7/6/5/47654969/reddy-ratna-a-journey-in-childrens-participation.pdf

9   Shier, H. (2001) 'Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations'. *Children & Society* 15, 2: 107–117

10 Holdsworth, R. (ed) **Student Participation and the Participation and Equity Program.** PEP Discussion Paper No 2: Commonwealth Schools Commission: Canberra

11 Tresider, P. (1997) **Empowering Children and Young People,** Children's Rights Office/Save the Children

12 See: https://soundout.org/

13 Holdsworth, R. (1986) 'Putting the Participation Back Into Representation'. *Connect* 37-38, February-April: 3-5; and reprinted in *Connect* 174, December 2008: 12-13. Available at: http://research.acer.edu.au/connect/vol2008/iss174/

14 Fielding, M. (2012) 'Student voice: patterns of partnership and demands of deep democracy'. *Connect* 197: October: 10-15

15 Labaree, D. (1997) 'Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle over Educational Goals'. *American Educational Research Journal*, Spring: 34, 1: 39-81. Available at: https://web.stanford.edu/~dlabaree/publications/Public_Goods_Private_Goods.pdf

16 eg see Kirby, P. & Bryson, S. (2002) **Measuring the Magic?: Evaluating and Researching Young People's Participation in Public Decision Making**. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust: London. Available at:
    www.participationworks.org.uk/files/webfm/files/resources/k-items/carnegie/Measure%20the%20Magic/index.pdf

17 Fielding, M. (2012) cited above: *Connect* 197: 12-13

Connect on facebook

Connect has a presence on *facebook*. Find us at:

http://ow.ly/L6UvW

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

Ground Floor Feedback

I'm known for telling people that *"I'm good at what I do"*... which is working with young people. I know how this sounds (and I know there are people who would take umbrage), but I feel this way because young people have told me so. I also know I have further to go and more to learn.

I know I talk too much; I know I sometimes get off point and I know that I can be too loud... young people have told me this too! I am constantly (almost daily) giving young people I work with an opportunity to give me feedback about how useful (or not) my work with them really is.

Last year I realised I had missed a moment to get free, expert advice at the very first VicSRC Regional Conference. I had (in consultation with some other experienced adults) devised a 'model for action' that students could use in their SRCs to help them turn ideas into action and reflect on outcomes. Within five minutes of introducing the model I realised it wasn't great. It was too wordy, overly-complicated and (I now saw clearly, surrounded by 80+ participants) back-to-front...

But how could I have possibly known?? The answer was blindingly simple... get some young people to trial it, give feedback and suggest options **before** I rolled it out across the state.

Based on this moment, in 2017 the VicSRC has flipped the evaluation process on its head. We have always asked for input after conferences (and still will) but decided to **share decision-making power** with young people about what actual content to include in the conferences and how effective and engaging it is. To do this we trialled newly developed activities, resources and a new model with students from **Thornbury High School SRC** and two **VicSRC Student Executive** members – all of whom came in on their last day of school holidays to participate in the training and help us develop our product.

The result could not have been more helpful or saved us more time if we had engaged the highest level consultants in Victoria – and it was free! Moreover, student feedback reflected that they not only enjoyed the experience of being heard: *"It's important to have all voices listened to"* (Alexandra, Thornbury SRC Student), but also found the process of trialling the activities fun and engaging: *"It was awesome being able to experience all new games and activities"* (Tara, Thornbury SRC Student).

We ran four new activities and a new model past the group and asked for specific feedback about each element at the end of the day. The VicSRC Student Executive members also met with Roger Holdsworth and Nina Laitala (VicSRC Project Officer) immediately afterwards to give a qualitative overview, including suggestions for how and where changes could be made. The feedback from the Executive students was realistic, encouraging and balanced. *"Mondays session helped the VicSRC run an effective training workshop and to see what needs to be improved for future workshops."* (Roghayeh, VicSRC Executive Member).

There are a lot of reasons we don't let young people help us devise content. Some of the reasons are practical: finding time for one. Some is about a lack of trust: we worry we'll get back feedback forms signed 'Donald Trump' or with creative images of male phalluses scrawled all over the place. But some other reasons are a little more individual. I know from experience that it is personally challenging to have a twelve-year-old tell you: *"I couldn't really see the point"* of an activity you spent hours devising and thought was a real winner.

We encourage students to constantly engage in giving and receiving 'constructive criticism' with one another, but the process of letting students give constructive criticism (or even feedback) about content being developed by teachers, youth workers and other professionals in often absent.

The truth is that content created in partnership with students for students will inevitably be more effective and engaging. It will prove to be not only more enjoyable for students but also for teachers; we have all had the exhausting experience of running a tedious activity with an uninterested class! Inviting students to get involved and provide feedback on the 'ground floor' is good for everyone and reflects a genuine respect for the ability of students to work in meaningful and equal partnership with practitioners. Everyone benefitted from the trial *"It **helped the group** understand more about student voice and **helped the VicSRC** to know how to run better workshops on the future."* (Roghayeh, VicSRC Executive Member).

The outcome for us? Well, we learnt a lot: some of what we provided was great; others not so much. We have already made changes to the Conference content in some areas and left other areas as they were, albeit with a different mindset and emphasis on linking themes. Most importantly we go into this year's **VicSRC Student Voice Workshops** secure in the knowledge that there won't be a repeat of that moment in the very first hour when we get the revelation that what we are providing really isn't that useful – phew!

One other thing we also picked up? That the **Swamp Monster** activity is **really fun**…

Kate Wilde
k.wilde@theworkshop.id.au

*Kate Wilde is a contractor for the VicSRC. For information about VicSRC workshops/programs and events, please contact **info@vicsrc.org.au***

Thornbury High School SRC students workshopping conference content

2017 Student Voice Workshops

Student Voice Workshops (formerly called **Regional Conferences**) enable students, teachers and principals from schools in Victoria to work together on common issues and drive positive change in schools, communities and the education system.

Delivered by the VicSRC in partnership with *Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership*, this series of one-day conferences ensure students are consulted and heard on the issues that matter to their education, no matter their location.

We're bringing educational leaders – students, teachers and principals – together in this unique learning space to collaborate, co-create and spark practical strategies to transform their schools and learning environments.

Creating spaces for students and teachers to meet, co-create and realise how much they have in common is highly empowering for all involved. Students are more engaged in their school education when they are involved in shaping their experience. However, the reality is that students are often not given a say in what happens at school or in their education.

This is where VicSRC **Student Voice Workshops** come in. Students and teachers work collaboratively to tackle the *how* of student voice. Participants leave with new ideas, practical strategies, and the first clear steps to implement an action plan to take back to school.

These Workshops are suitable for all school leaders (students from years 5-12, teachers and principals) who want their voices heard. We encourage you to book early to ensure you get your preferred workshop date/location. Limited places are available.

Pre-workshop tasks

The Victorian Government recognises that student voice is a key component to their position as the Education State. The **Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)** initiatives encourage schools to create further opportunities and give more importance to student voice.

So what is your FISO initiative? As a pre-workshop task, government schools should come knowing the FISO initiative their school is focusing on and some idea of why they are focusing on that area.

Get together with your team and make a time to speak with the Principal about your school's FISO initiative. This knowledge will inform part of the workshop, and also ensure that all education leaders – students, teachers and principals – are involved from the get-go.

Further information is available at: **http://ow.ly/iaHp308yfiE** – including some pre-workshop reading to spark your ideas. There are some useful links to get you thinking about what you want to achieve as a team.

All workshops are offered from **8.45 am to 3.00 pm** (EST). See details of location on the next page, or check the above link for updated information.

Bookings close:

Term 1 Workshops: *Wednesday 1 March*

Term 2 Workshops: *Tuesday 18 April*

*Updated information
about the Student Voice
Workshops is available at:*
http://ow.ly/iaHp308yfiE

2017 Regional Student Voice Workshops:
Now booking! @ 13 Locations in Term 1 and Term 2

TERM 1

RSVPs for Term 1 Regional Conferences close on **Wednesday 1 March 2017**. Book now.

Inner Melbourne :
Tuesday 28 February
North Melbourne | *Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership*

Mallee :
Tuesday 7 March
Mildura | *Mildura Senior College*
Proudly supported by Mildura Rural City Council
This conference is **free** *for Mildura schools.*

Metro South/Bayside :
Friday 10 March
Frankston | *Location TBC*

Inner Gippsland :
Friday 24 March
Churchill | *Hosted by Kurnai College at Federation University*

Metro Outer East :
Thursday 30 March
Templestowe | *Templestowe College*

TERM 2

RSVP for Term 2 Regional Conferences closes on **Tuesday 18 April 2017**. Book now.

Metro West/Brimbank Melton :
Thursday 21 April
Sunshine | *Sunshine Convention Centre*

Ovens Murray (Benalla) :
Thursday 27 April
Benalla | *Benalla Town Hall*

Goulburn (Shepparton) :
Friday 28 April
Shepparton | *Location TBC*

Loddon Campaspe (Bendigo) :
Thursday 4 May
Bendigo | *Bendigo Town Hall*

Central Highlands (Ballarat) :
Friday 5 May
Ballarat | *Ballarat Mechanics Institute*

Outer Gippsland :
Friday 12 May
Lakes Entrance | *Lakes Entrance Secondary College*

Term 2 dates to be confirmed:
Barwon :
Geelong | *Geelong High School*
Western District :
Warrnambool | *Location TBC*

Are you a VicSRC Member School? .... *Membership discounts*

Did you know that you can receive discounted event prices if you have a VicSRC Membership?

If you are not a member school and would like to take advantage of discounted ticket prices to VicSRC events, simply select *'VicSRC Membership (Annual School Membership)'* at the start of your online registration. Or check about membership on-line at:

www.vicsrc.org.au/get-involved/school-membership

Need help? Unsure if you *are* a member? Contact **Kat Daymond**, *VicSRC Events Officer* on **03 9267 3744** or **events@vicsrc.org.au**

Project Updates: The VicSRC RAPs revisited ...

At the 2016 VicSRC Congress, issue groups discussed, developed and debated various ideas and initiatives that the VicSRC could take. These were called **Resolution Action Pitches (RAPs).** And then the delegates voted for their priority order for the work of the incoming Executive elected at Congress. Details at: **http://ow.ly/TaU8308yHxJ**

Executive members have been working on these project areas in 2016 and continue to develop ideas and plans. Here they provide interim reports on their progress:

Learning and Assessment

School is an institution with the main intent to teach and educate – a space for students to collaborate and learn. The focus idea of learning and assessment would then seem like it would be fairly well covered.

However, as a society and community we are constantly reaching new heights, breaking boundaries and continuing to out-grow our current world. As students, we are exploding through these boundaries every day, blowing the world away with what we are capable of. To keep up with such exponential growth, the resources available to us to help exceed that growth and how we access these resources need to evolve constantly as well.

Our group, being students ourselves, have delved deep into what it really means to be a student and how the way we learn and our understanding and control over the way we learn can have dramatic effects on our school lives – and ultimately, our futures. Currently we are working towards filling the gaps, pooling together the great resources that are already out there, waiting to help students navigate their way through life, but are spread cross such a broad network that may make them seem daunting and difficult to reach. We are aiming to highlight the resources already in existence that are aimed at helping students and hopefully work with some great organisations and educational authorities to bring about this project, even if we are merely the seed planters of student voice.

By the end of our project and possibly well into the future – the area of learning and assessment is ever-changing after all – we hope to see the way students view their role in their education is shifted, that they have the confidence to take the lead in how they learn, have a better understanding of how they can make these changes and also that teachers and parents are able to guide them through these milestones as well.

Phoebe Cody - with **Feyla Anja & Gerard Felipe**

Diversity & Peer-Peer Relationships

The Peer to Peer and Diversity project group of the VicSRC Executive began by recognising the connected issues within these two focus areas from Congress 2016. They are both about raising awareness of the importance of a diverse and harmonious school environment and making an effort to tackle discrimination – and in contrast, to introduce harmony.

Two proposals have arisen acting as umbrellas to support future ideas: the creation of a website and the making of multiple small videos. The team came up with the name 'Standout Together' to encapsulate both diversity (where people stand up)

and the notion of togetherness (to encourage a healthy peer to peer relationship). 'Standout Together' will become the main focus of a website; this aims to provide resources and attractive tools to raise awareness of the importance of the two topics, and also to deliver a clear training guide. This will enhance the capacity of students across Victoria – with the skills and tools – to help their own schools in fighting discrimination.

The trial website is already up and running as a free blog site but has the vision of becoming something much bigger. Videos will also build an accurate foundation for viewers to understand the importance of a diverse world with strong and healthy relationships – in order for every student to gain the most out of their schooling experience.

Ryan Wijaya - with **Roghayeh Sadeghi & Bryce Pace**

Student Wellbeing

At Congress, well-being was seen as one of the most important and undervalued aspects of a student's life at school, specifically the attention given to students going through 'mental health emergencies' (MHE) in a classroom.

Congress delegates highlighted how teachers may be under-skilled or inexperienced in working with students through these difficult times, and that helping a student through a MHE is just as important as ordinary first aid.

To represent this issue, a group of three executive members are working together to find out how teachers can be better trained to give mental health first aid to take care of students in an immediate situation, until a professional can help, making well-being easy and accessible for all. Currently the team is working on organising a gathering of high profile stakeholders in the space, who may have an interest in or be doing work towards the same goal. This forum would work on sharing resources as well as discussing the development of new resources like student-led collaborative professional development days.

More immediately work is going towards the creation of video consultations with students in schools so we can present a better understanding from a student's point of view as to what the issue is, when it comes to meeting with teachers and stakeholders. This is incredibly important work into a very valuable space and so any input from the world at large would be much appreciated. We can't wait to show you what work we create by this year's Congress.

Spencer Davis - with **Chelsea Hard & Chloe Laurel**

Student-Teacher Relationships

Our current issue is that there is seen to be lots of negative and unhealthy student-teacher relationships in schools, and that this gap can negatively affect the way in which students learn in class and communicate outside of school.

The reality now is that there seems to be a lack of respect and communication due to the associated stigma surrounding student-teacher relationships. A lot of students don't have positive relationships with their teachers, and therefore don't tend to feel valued or involved during class time.

Originally, our project group was aiming to create a new *Teach the Teacher* style program called *Heart to Heart* – used for keeping up with the individual wellbeing and health of students and teachers. However, due to the three currently existing *Teach the Teacher* programs (*Ignite, Empower* and *Sustain*), we've decided it would be too difficult to fund and manage a new program for multiple schools.

In place of this idea, we have decided to create a stop motion video to help schools and other stakeholders understand and distinguish between each type of *Teach the Teacher*, and learn the benefits of each. The short video will also describe how to get involved, how your school can get the most out of each session and how to find more information. Our group is now in the process of recording the stop motion frames and voice-overs. The video will be released onto social media and other VicSRC platforms as soon as possible.

Campbell McGown - with **Tobi Naylor & Sam Ilobuchi**

Student Voice in Decision-Making

Student voice should be an integral part of any school's decision-making process. This enables students to feel part of a school's present and future. Frameworks should exist to guide and enhance a two-way communication between students and the school.

Collaboration between schools and with the VicSRC allows these processes to be supported and enhanced, with resources and tips for best practices shared between schools. Students at the 2016 VicSRC Congress identified a need to improve this collaboration and communication; this was voted among Congress's top five issues.

Student Voice Hub

We are beginning the planning and consultation phase for an online platform to be called a **Student Voice Hub**. This will provide access to resources, share examples of successful best practice and so on.

VicSRC Student Ambassadors

The idea of VicSRC Student Ambassadors grew from these discussions and the work of the VicSRC Executive. The idea is simply that an Ambassador – a student member of a school's Student Representative Council, Student Leadership Council or Student Action Teams – is a direct point of contact between the school and the VicSRC.

VicSRC Ambassadors will receive exclusive news and resources from the VicSRC; they will be offered opportunities to share their school's achievements; they will help provide the VicSRC Executive with support and feedback; they will work with other local VicSRC Ambassadors. This aims to empower school SRCs and link them closer to the VicSRC.

Over the coming months, we will be working to provide details on our website and newsletters for new and existing VicSRC member schools on how to appoint their VicSRC Ambassadors. We will be developing dedicated resources for VicSRC Ambassadors, sending regular reports to them and hopefully strengthening our already highly dedicated network of Student Councils.

David Trevorrow - with
Jacob Baker & William Wilson

...to have an **equal say in decision-making** concerning how their schools are run, and what rules and sanctions, if any, are necessary.

European Democratic Education Community

New Year, New SRC: Tips for starting 2017 with a bang!

The first few weeks of the school year are very symbolic– they signal the beginning of what is hoped to be a year full of positive change within your school community. *But how do you make sure 2017 will be your SRC's best year?*

Here are some tasks SRCs should place at the top of their **to-do list** this February:

Get to know each other

Can you confidently say the name of every person in your SRC? Do you know which year level they represent?

Since you'll be working with these students for most of the year, it's always a good idea to dedicate time to bond with each other. This is particularly important for larger SRCs.

When all SRC members know each other, they will be comfortable enough to collaborate on projects effectively as well as fearlessly speak up in meetings on the issues that really matter to those they are representing.

Set SMART goals

What would your SRC like to achieve this year?

Encourage your SRC to think big and be bold with their ideas. Then, break up the bigger goals into smaller, more achievable SMART goals. Having these can help you stay on track as you progress throughout the year. It ensures that whatever work SRC members undertake, points towards a common aim.

Goals can also be a motivational tool, which is especially important in encouraging SRC members to keep persevering as the year rolls by.

Spread the word about your SRC

Does the wider school community know about your SRC? How will students be able to contact your SRC if they want to raise issues or make a comment?

As a representative council, it's extremely vital for your SRC to be widely known among those you represent.

Communication is a two-way lane; on one side, simple noticeboards and regular newsletters have faithfully served many SRCs for years in distributing news to the school community. On the other side, SRCs can connect with the student body through conducting focus groups and/or vox pops (informal interviews) with students on a regular basis. All these methods are powerful in ensuring that the voices of students are heard.

Establish/build upon an existing support network

The work SRCs do, while rewarding and essential to any school community, can be (and often is) very tiring. Barriers come up every now and then that are so imposing it can be frightening to even try tackling. Projects might hit dead ends again and again.

Delegate routine tasks to SRC members

Who will take minutes for SRC meetings? Who will chair them?

Such tasks are the bread-and-butter of effective and productive SRC meetings, so it's super important to clearly establish specific roles early on.

Whether you decide to have one specific person carry it out or rotate it between SRC members according to rosters, it is recommended that the method be agreed upon in the first or second meeting then have the selection process/rosters be finalised as early as possible.

In these situations, having a support network consisting of those outside your SRC can come in handy. They can include teachers and staff members supportive of student voice as well as members of SRCs from other schools. It's important to remember that there are people willing to help out in trying times, and that your SRC is never alone.

SRCs: let 2017 be your year to shine.

Feyla Anja
VicSRC Student Executive
Year 12, Mount Waverley SC

VicSRC Manager Krista Seddon is Moving On!

"It is with a heavy heart that I finish up my time as VicSRC Manager. The last four years at the VicSRC have been some of the best of my life. The VicSRC is an incredibly collaborative organisation and I am very proud of what we have achieved as a team in the area of student voice and agency."

Krista Seddon, *VicSRC Manager* has been with the organisation for just under four years.

During those years, many changes have occurred. As a case in point: in 2013/14, the VicSRC had a staff team of one person! In 2017, we have a staff team of five people. By working together with exceptional Student Executive teams over the years, the VicSRC has successfully executed its first strategic plan (2013–2017) and in doing so, has reached 49% of Victorian secondary schools and has a growing reach into Victorian primary schools. We've rebranded, we've built our media profile, social media has gone crazy and we've got a constitution.

During Krista's time with the VicSRC, we've grown in the policy and advocacy space. The organisation released its first Policy Platform, research into *Student Perspectives on Middle Years Transitions* and *Students on School Councils*, saw increased demand for students to be present at government stakeholder meetings and consultations, made multiple policy submissions to government on topics as wide as the Bracks review into school funding, through to students' views on homework and pre-service teacher training. During the last three years we have attended over 12 meetings with two Education Ministers, building successful relationships with two state governments.

We celebrated 10 years of VicSRC with a joyous 10th anniversary celebration. Krista attended four Congresses, each one with new twists and turns from including electronic voting, open morning, Congress scholarships, moving to Ormond College and, this year, an unCongress (stay tuned!). In 2014 we decided to host the Recognition Awards as a separate event for stakeholders and schools alike to celebrate the best examples of student-led action and student voice, and, since then, the event has gone from strength to strength.

Over the past three years we have expanded the delivery of the *Teach the Teacher* program, made it sustainable, and developed three different streams: *Ignite, Empower,* and *Sustain*. We've hosted over 37 Regional Conferences and this year will add 13 more, now delivered in partnership with **Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership** (rebranded as the *Student Voice Workshops*). We have successfully established teacher professional development as part-and-parcel of these workshops. And to support students and teachers, we've developed multiple resources such as *Student Voice and the Education State*.

Krista has had the pleasure of working with incredible groups of people for the last four years: *"I could not have achieved so much in my role without the support of three different Student Executive teams, an incredible and committed staff team (Fiona, Nina, Kat, Sophie, Emma and Pinchy), the support of the* **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)***, and our dedicated ex-executive alumni, supporters (Roger, David and Scott) and an army of dedicated volunteers. Thanks to the broader* **Connect** *readership for your ongoing support of VicSRC initiatives, events and advocacy."*

Krista will be starting a new role, as *Director of Prevention of Violence against Women* at the **Domestic Violence Resource Centre**.

We have a fantastic team here at VicSRC and we will do everything possible to ensure a smooth transition period.

Krista's final day will be **Friday 3rd March** and recruitment has begun for the role. You can find the position description and all details on the VicSRC website at:

www.vicsrc.org.au/aboutus/careers

We thank Krista for her tireless support, energy, vision and stewardship of the VicSRC in the last four years – and have no doubt that the next adventure will be an amazing one.

We look forward to introducing the incoming VicSRC Manager!

VicSRC Staff

Farewell to Sophie Moore

We've also said a sad farewell to our admin-and-Exec guru, **Sophie Moore**, who has taken on an exciting new role with Victoria University.

Sophie's been an integral part of VicSRC HQ and we can't wait to see where her adventures take her next!

Recruitment has begun for the role of **Administration and Student Executive Support**. You can also find this position description and all details on the VicSRC website at:

www.vicsrc.org.au/aboutus/careers

Meet our new VicSRC Events Officer: *Kat Daymond*

We're thrilled to introduce our new team member and **Events Officer**, **Kat Daymond**!

Kat comes to us with extensive experience within events, education and community sectors. She's hitting the ground running with **Student Voice Workshops**, **Congress 2017** and the **Recognition Awards**; it's shaping up to be a cracking year.

Kat currently works part time as a Youth Worker with the City of Glen Eira and volunteers with the *Reach Foundation*, and *WhiteLion* youth mentoring program. Prior to re-training as a youth worker, Kat worked in Event Management for over seven years, specialising in Education events.

Kat is passionate about advocating and empowering youth and being a positive role model and mentor to future generations. She has a Diploma in Events Management and a Diploma in Community Services and in her spare time loves having adventures with her husky, being an eco-warrior and drinking coffee.

Empower, Ignite, Sustain:
The new Teach the Teacher models

The VicSRC has launched the three new models of its **Teach the Teacher** program.

From 2017, schools can participate in these three models of **Teach the Teacher** - *Empower*, *Ignite* and *Sustain* - to suit your specific needs and contexts.

From a fledgling idea developed by students at Congress 2011, to a program championed through over 60 schools by 2016, Teach the Teacher is set to take flight with these three models of delivery. For details, see:

www.teachtheteacher.org.au/get-involved

Register your interest online

Teach the Teacher is now taking bookings for 2017!

Send an enquiry to **Nina Laitala**, VicSRC Project Officer: projects@vicsrc.org.au or call her: **03 9267 3714.**

Teach the Teacher is developed by the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) with funding from the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

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

Meet Some VicSRC Executive 2016-17 Members

Campbell McGown

G'day! My name's **Campbell**, and I'm the tall, blond kid. I'm 17 and I'm in Year 12 at Mount Waverley Secondary College. In my spare time, you can find me checking out car videos on *YouTube*, listening to Ty Dolla $ign and YG, and bouncing around the basketball court. I work part-time at *Bunnings*, and I race in car club events when I have time. Looking back on the achievements of the amazing Executive team of 2015-2016, I am inspired to continue their great work by creating a voice for Victorian students. In the words of Casey Neistat, let's *"do more"*!

Chloe Laurel

Hey! I'm **Chloe**, 16 and in Year 11 from Catholic Regional College, Melton. An individual submerged in an ocean of spontaneous decisions and I try to live without regrets. Albert Einstein said, *"Anyone who has never made a mistake, has never tried anything new"*. Like Einstein, I believe we need to take risks to achieve great things. Student voice to me is integral for the future of Victorian students and for the future of the whole world. Rather, it is our opinions, ideas and actions as young people that will shape our world, and to be a part of a team which promotes this is absolutely mind blowing. I'm so stoked to work alongside not only the execs but *all* students!

William Wilson

Why not take the opportunities presented to us? You only regret the opportunities you didn't take. My name's **Will** and I'm a Year 11 student currently studying at Gisborne Secondary College (*#Represent!*). My vision for the next year is not only to have heaps of fun and make lots of friends, but to make change! Positive change over the next positively amazing year. Can't wait to start working with the other 14 bubbly bright bunch of Executives; peace out!

ADEC Conference 2016

The 2016 **Australasian Democratic Education Community (ADEC) Conference** was hosted by **Koonwarra Village School** in Victoria last September. More than 40 participants from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory came together to share their experiences of democratic education.

We had participants from established schools such as Fitzroy Community School, Peregrine, Hurstbridge Learning Co-operative and Currambena, as well as newer schools such as Koonwarra Village School itself and its sister school, Phillip Island Village School. There were also several people who are at various stages in the process of starting schools, including the School of Cultural Creativity. The meeting was a great opportunity to connect with others who are going through this process and learn from the recent experiences of the newer schools and their communities.

On the first evening we shared dinner together in the coastal village of Inverloch and viewed the film *Most Likely to Succeed* about High Tech High in the USA. This documentary shows a way that education can be reinvented for a different world and every student can become an independent learner within a community that encourages initiative and creativity and caring relationships and preparedness for the challenges and opportunities of today and the future.

"What does democratic education look like to you?"

We asked people to reflect on what they respond to when the words 'democratic education' are used. The responses ranged from an emphasis on the creation of caring communities where all are active contributors and partners and those who highlighted the equality of the members of the school and learning community and their participation in the decisions about their learning and living.

There was a wide-ranging and informative discussion about processes of decision-making in the school communities. We heard about KVS's **Parliament** where the children are involved in deciding issues such as school rules, social issues, personal learning projects, menus etc. Decisions are made through discussion and consensus. Other schools spoke of the variations they have for the process, such as Parent Meetings which make all the decisions by consensus and School Meetings which are a mixture of voting and consensus and supported by whole school community commitment to the processes of conflict resolution. We also had some discussion about the sociocratic process, which was a strong theme at the recent **International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC)** and **Asia Pacific Democratic Education Conference (APDEC)** when, rather than attempt to get everyone's agreement, the decision point is reached when there are no objections and people agree that they can live with the decision. The extent of student, parental, staff, community participation was varied in the schools and we would benefit from further discussions about these processes.

Sarah and Brad Kijlstra-Shone shared KVS's *Kitchen Garden Curriculum* which is based on the very hands-on experience of setting up the gardens and using the produce in the meals that the community shares each day. They showed how they have linked this to the Victorian Curriculum. The kitchen garden curriculum along with outdoor adventures and nature journalling are part of the specific Koonwarra curricula, which the community has decided is important for learners to experience. This sparked some thoughts and initial discussion that our schools and ADEC could do some research about the possibility of creating a curriculum that could be presented to the governments and bureaucracies for approval to use in our schools.

Sarah also ran a session explaining how the KVS Learning Contracts support students to become 'effective learners'. An effective learner works collaboratively, knows when to seek help, can listen and respond to feedback, can identify barriers to learning, will discuss their learning with peers and mentors, can generate their own ideas and self direct their learning.

Conference members also discussed their links with similar initiatives at an international level: the **AERO** conference in the USA; **IDEC@EUDEC 2016** in Finland; and **APDEC 2016** in Taiwan.

More information about **ADEC** is available at: **www.adec.edu.au**

Cecelia Bradley
cecelia.b@bigpond.com

Photographs by Dylan Breninger and Cecelia Bradley

How to create classrooms that improve learning

Australia's education system needs comprehensive reform to tackle widespread student disengagement in the classroom, according to a new **Grattan Institute** report.

Engaging students: creating classrooms that improve learning reports that as many as 40 per cent of school students are unproductive in a given year. Unproductive students are on average one to two years behind their peers, and their disengagement also damages their classmates and teachers.

The main problem is not the sort of aggressive or even violent behaviour that attracts media headlines. More prevalent, and more stressful for teachers, are minor disruptions such as students talking back or simply switching off and avoiding work. What is taught and the way it is taught are crucial in engaging students. But creating a good learning environment in the classroom will also help.

The report calls for an integrated assault on the problem, requiring new approaches by governments, universities, school principals and teachers. The government and non-government systems should target more support to schools in poorer parts of Australia, where the problem is most severe. Universities need to change their courses to give trainee teachers more supervised time in classrooms, so they are better prepared for the challenge of engaging students. Teachers must be given better information about what strategies work best in the classroom, and they need more time to learn how to use those techniques in the heat of the moment.

The report finds that teachers are crying out for more guidance on classroom strategies. As many as 40 per cent of teachers say they have never had the chance to watch colleagues and learn from how they engage students in class. And only about one-third of the practices promoted in textbooks and training courses for new teachers have been shown to work well.

"Australian classrooms are not 'out of control', but student disengagement is a hidden problem in schools," says **Grattan Institute** *School Education Program Director* **Pete Goss**. "When a student switches off, there is the risk of a downward spiral. If the teacher responds badly, more students can become distracted and the momentum of the class can be lost.

"We owe it to future generations of Australian students to make these reforms now. If we get it right, we will help create a virtuous circle in which students are more engaged, teachers are less stressed, classes become more compelling and students learn more."

Download a broadcast quality recording of Pete Goss discussing the report from: http://ow.ly/O8du308H2gP or read the whole report at: http://ow.ly/tjAs308H2e1

Pete Goss
School Education Program Director
Grattan Institute
peter.goss@grattan.edu.au

GRATTAN Institute

Engaging students
Creating classrooms that improve learning

By Peter Goss and Julie Sonnemann

Student Voice Practitioners:
Blog & Podcast

A community for
young people and adults

http://studentvoicepractitioners.com/

The **Student Voice Practitioners** blog is a Canadian-based community of young people and adults who believe in the power of the student's voice and who have first-hand experience in initiating and implementing student voice projects or programs or in advising policy makers.

Launched in September 2015, posts have included:

- *Who represents student voice?*
- *Empowering Students to be the Change;*
- *Student Voice=Student Choice;*
- *Students as Researchers*

as well as a challenge to readers to prioritise the disengaged.

Student Voice Podcasts are a new option. Episodes will be available bi-weekly. Subscribe to the **Student Voice Podcast** series and, bi-weekly, young people will talk about their issues, share their advice on policy, programs, curriculum and much more.

Have a **Student Voice Practitioner** story to share? Would you like to be interviewed for a podcast? Please join our growing community of contributing authors. Email:
FeedbackSVP@gmail.com
for more information.

Student Voice Research and Practice *facebook group*

www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

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

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the Connect website!

www.asprinworld.com/connect

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www.informit.com.au

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www.asprinworld.com/connect
&
research.acer.edu.au/connect

Local and International Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us and we'll work something out.

Australian:

Annual Report 2016 (The Jack Brockhoff Child Health and Wellbeing Program, The University of Melbourne, Vic)

Engaging students: Creating classrooms that improve learning (Peter Goss, Julie Sonnemann & Kate Griffiths; The Grattan Institute, Carlton, Vic) February, 2017

Research Developments (ACER, Camberwell, Vic) February, 2017

TLN Journal (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) Issue 3, 2016: November, 2016 - *The Relationship Issue*

Yikes (YACVic, Melbourne, Vic) December, 2016

International:

Students' Experiences of Meaningful Situations in School (Ulrika Bergmark & Catrine Kostenius, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden) *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research,* 2017

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

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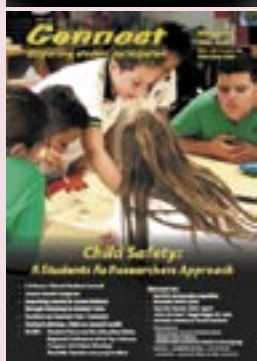
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