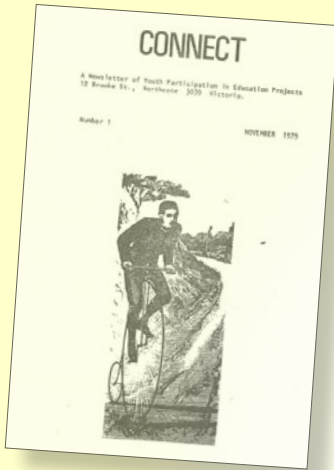


Connect

supporting student participation

Number 240
December 2019

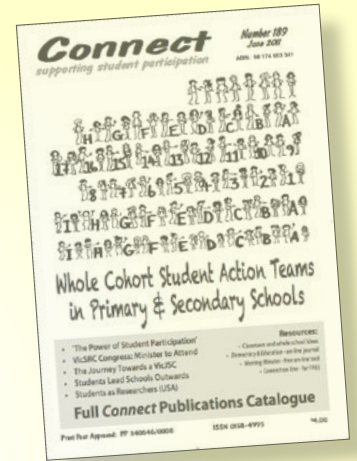
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connect

40

supporting student participation



4 decades of documentation

- **Connect turns 40: *some reflections* – 4 decades in 4 pages + background**
 - **'Take it to the Council'**
Democracy in action in early childhood settings, Vic
 - **Empowerment through voice**
St Pius X PS, Heidelberg West, Vic
 - **A snapshot of youth participation**
Gippsland, Vic
 - **Towards a voice inclusive school culture**
South East Queensland Secondary School, Qld
 - **Student voice in continental Europe**
 - **VicSRC: From baby bird to soaring eagle**
Student Voice Awards
What has the VicSRC done in 2019?
- Resources:**
- **International Conference: Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships Program**
 - **'Every Student Every Voice': NSW resources**
 - **Take action together on bullying**
 - **'Our Voices, Our Schools': resources from Ireland**
 - **Audits of Practice: available on-line here**
 - **SoundOut postings**
 - **Student Voice Research and Practice facebook group**
 - **Connect ... available on-line ... on facebook ... archived ... access to other on-line resources**

Connect

Number 240: December 2019

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A spotlight on *Connect*'s 40th Anniversary

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Why does *Connect* exist?

Connect is an independent practice journal,
published bimonthly since 1979!

It aims to:

- document student participation approaches and initiatives;
- support reflective practices;
- develop and share resources.

Connect:

ABN: 98 174 663 341

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Phone: (03) 9489 9052; Web: www.asprinworld.com/connect

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This Issue:

This 40th Anniversary issue of *Connect* is being published at the same time as the **Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference** in Melbourne on 9th-11th December.



It has been exciting to highlight local and international practices, both at the Conference and in *Connect*, to see where we're at and where we're going. We aim to strike a balance between celebrating those achievements and critically analysing them. In looking back over issues of *Connect* from the past four decades, and hoping to summarise major trends (*a hopeless and doomed task!*) I was struck both by the large steps we have taken in our understanding and practices, but also by the continuation and recurrence of themes across those years.

There's a tendency to forget previous initiatives and achievements and think we are inventing things anew (this year, this decade, this government, this policy) ... but looking back, we can see important work in the 1970s and 1980s that laid the ground for current approaches - and in some cases the 'current ways' have retreated from the 'old ways'. For example, when we look at the role of students in shared decision-making in schools and systems (in Student Councils, as representatives on School Councils, advocating to Departments, sitting on Consultative Committees and so on) we can see that an enormous amount of work was done ages ago in thinking and planning around how students' work and learning can be recognised with **credit**. There is currently very little attention paid to this - and, as we realised 'back in the day', failure to address this heavily restricts students' participation - and privileges participation by those students who are already succeeding.

So, let's not forget the paths we have walked on. If there are giants on whose shoulders current students (and their allies) stand, there are also practices (and resources and policies) that remain important.

So this issue of *Connect* asks again:

What has been your journey? Why have you joined us? What have been the major advances in the areas of student voice, agency and participation over the past 40 years? What has been lost? What are the next challenges?

Next Issue ...

Have a great holiday break - if you are doing that. *Connect* will be back in February for a new Australian school year - and perhaps the start of our next four decades!

But that will only happen with your active support. We're promised articles about Brisbane Catholic Education's *Festival of Ideas*. And of course we'll have the summary of and material from this December's International Conference. (If you're not there, you'll need to wait on that.)

But we'd also like your contributions. How about spending some holiday time reflecting - and writing for *Connect*?

Roger Holdsworth

Next Issue: #241: February 2020

Deadline for material: end of January, 2020

BC (Before Connect): The pre-years

Connect didn't spring from 'no-where'. It was the direct result of many years of active involvement in student participatory practices.

Because the production of *Connect* has been very much a one-person (supported by many others of course) operation, the story is directly tied up in a personal journey.

Reflecting recently about what initially drove me, I realised that, on the one hand, I already had an involvement in community action against the threat of nuclear war, apartheid, the war in Vietnam, conscription and in other issues (such as *Migrant Education Action*); and on the other, my early experiences in teaching – where I recognised that students in my class knew more than I did ... and where I was disturbed to be spending so much time as a teacher fighting to 'interest' students – led me towards working collaboratively *with* students, trusting them, providing opportunities for them to exercise greater control over their schooling and broader lives.

So I was part of the *Carlton Free Coaching Service*, involved in the *Inner Suburban Group* of the union: *Victorian Secondary Teachers Association* and so on.

But my period of time teaching at Brunswick Girls' High School in the mid 1970s, as part of an *Educational Task Force* led by LaTrobe University's Leslie Claydon and Tony Knight – and through them, meeting Art Pearl – was really formative. Out of those years came a



Cross Age Tutoring Program (where we paid students to tutor others); the *Ascolta* five-language community newspaper (started with **Prue Gill** and published by primary and secondary school students from Brunswick for 10 years); the *Ascolta Radio Group* (that extended this to community radio); *STC* (the alternative Year 12 course, with no competitive assessment and negotiated content); and the establishment of *Lynall Hall Community School* as a 'democratic' small school.

Internationally, *Ascolta* led to contacts with the *Foxfire* program in the USA, and similar initiatives around 'cultural journalism'. And that led directly, in 1979, to a decision (while teaching at Lynall Hall) to start a small publication that would share some practical information about these initiatives. It started with no money (*and has never made any!*) and a limited mailing, but grew steadily. Others – including students – began to write for it to share their experiences, and to help others learn from reflection on practices. I've resisted the idea that it should be seen as a teacher magazine, or a student magazine; rather, it is a magazine accessible to all interested and active in these areas.

With issue 200, I made a decision to move it into an on-line format rather than print and mail copies – and here we are: 40 years on! Still going strong, with close



to 2000 on-line subscribers. In these first pages of *Connect* 240, I try to summarise the major trends of each decade – an almost impossible task.

The language has moved, and perhaps our understanding has improved but I think the ideas remain firm: **voice, agency, participation**. What will the next 40 bring?

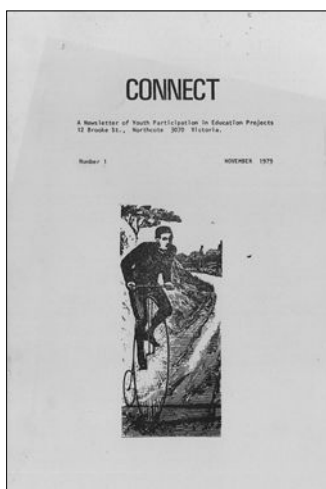
Roger Holdsworth

1980-1989: Issues 1-60



The first decade of **Connect** built on the momentum of the 1970s. The initial themes of its project-based articles – **student-produced newspapers/books** (with links to cultural journalism and later to radio production) and **cross-age tutoring**, were soon joined by stories about student participation in **school governance** and school-based **work education**. The strong link was around authentic roles for students as part of their learning – supported and referenced by conceptual articles from Art Pearl, Tony Knight, Gary Coventry and Peter Cole.

Right from the first issue of **Connect** in December 1979, we floated the idea of a **National Conference or Workshop** of related projects and approaches. The first of these occurred in Melbourne in August 1980 and was followed by another in Adelaide in August 1981 – and then by a specific **Schools in Radio Conference** in Melbourne in December 1981.



However, it took a few years for attention to shift from this largely adult-led networking of projects, to interest in broader student-led networking either at the local or national level. In Victoria, New South Wales, the Northern Territory and South Australia (at least), regional or statewide student conferences were held in 1985 (*International Year of Youth*), and an **Australian Network of Secondary Students (ANSS)** was formed with support from the Youth Affairs Council of Australia. However, without continuing networks in all states and territories, its representative basis was always under challenge and ANSS didn't outlive its support funding.

In Victoria and in New South Wales, moves to establish continuing statewide networks of students were spasmodic, with the Western Region's **Regional Association of Student Government (RASG)** laying the basis in NSW for a state organisation; and the **State Council of Students (SCoS)** in South Australia being funded for some years.

In parallel with these networking initiatives, there was much attention paid to the role of students on local, regional

and state committees. This included production of guidelines for committees that are still highly relevant. The ideas developed then around providing students with credit for that work have never really been rivalled.

While increasing attention was paid to questions of curriculum, including negotiation of content and pedagogy (eg a student conference

on '*Who Owns the Curriculum*'; the role of the **STC Group**; co-conferences with the **Australian Curriculum Studies Association** etc) there was not yet much detail or attention paid to 'normal' classroom approaches. However, project-based orientations – students as researchers, work creation, enterprise learning, oral histories etc – continued to be documented.

Nationally, the Schools Commission produced a report on '*Student Participation and the Participation and Equity Program (PEP)*' and PEP provided some avenues for support for these ideas and practices. In Victoria, the **Ministerial Working Party on Student Participation** brought consultants, teachers, policy

makers and students together to officially research, deliberate and recommend around student participation; however its report was never fully released nor endorsed, despite garnering some public reportage. The **Student Action Project** in the west of Melbourne became one of the first initiatives to provide specific staffing and training for developments in this area, particular around governance.

Other notable advances reflected in **Connect** during this decade include explicit attention to student participation in primary schools (in both classrooms and in governance); TAFE initiatives (mainly around governance); and increased attention to the learning principles that underpinned the US **Foxfire** approaches.

Yet the decade concluded with ominous signs. An article in **Connect** in October 1988 lamented a loss of support – in particular it pointed to restructures and loss of specific support positions – and predicted that student participation would '*Wither/Whither on the Vine*'.

There's a useful summary of the first decade of **Connect** in issue 60 in December 1989, which concludes more optimistically:

"I also remain defiantly convinced that we must develop curriculum directions along the paths pioneered by the schools and classrooms

documented in Connect in the past ten years. If education is to make sense ... if the world is to make sense ... and if we are all to learn to exercise control over our lives, then a curriculum that acknowledges the value of students, that affirms that all students can contribute – now – to our society, and that challenges students to learn through a process of shaping their world – then, a participatory curriculum is essential."



1990-1999: Issues 61-120



In retrospect, the 1990s can be seen as difficult years, with cuts to education funding and support, particularly in Victoria. School Councils were restructured there, and student representatives vanished as required members of these bodies in 1993.

Almost in response, *Connect* developed and highlighted many training and networking initiatives and resources for student organisations, both in secondary and primary schools (where the language of 'Junior School Councils' became widespread). The first *Connect* publication, *Democracy Starts Here*, was a compilation of stories of such initiatives.

Local teacher and student networks continued to develop, with some support from systems, but more often as grassroots developments. Based in New South Wales, the Professional Association of SRC Teacher Advisers (PASTA) was established and contributed a lift-out to *Connect* for most of the decade. It also organised several student trips to the USA around student representation.

Various curriculum approaches were also reported: student-produced media extended into community television; cross-age tutoring led to student-student mediation and to student-led curriculum expos; work-related education developed into student enterprises (particularly in Tasmania); local research was reported around environment, river health and homelessness. The contacts with *Foxfire* strengthened at the start of the decade with a visit to Australia, and similar oral history approaches were initiated in several locations. Processes of curriculum negotiation became more explicit.

Conceptually, ideas about 'participation' were explored internationally by Roger Hart in 1992, and a new language of 'student voice' emerged – evident as early as 1994 in an article from Tony Knight, and in a paper talking about 'Beyond Voice' in 1998. This was also, to

some extent, reflected in discussions about young people and students as 'citizens', with national attention to **Civics and Citizenship Education**. This area started with deficit notions of young people's knowledge and (later) values, but this was able to be transformed into more 'maximalist' approaches around **active citizenship**. In the same area, however, research already highlighted the cynicism that many young people expressed about their ability to 'make a difference', particularly in respect to formal political processes.

Some attention was paid by systems to formal policies in this area, with South Australia adopted a **Student Participation Policy** early in the decade, and New South Wales and Tasmania exploring ways to provide **credit** for representation, including some form of school-based curriculum about representation.

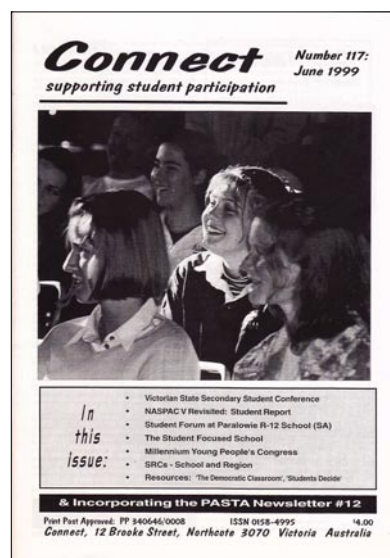
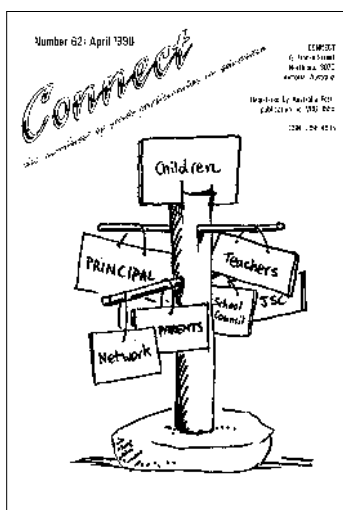
This, in turn, raised questions of diversity and inclusion, with different forms of student groups suggested. The initial work around **Student Action Teams**, later seen to be a way to enable participation of students who would seldom get elected to representative bodies, appeared at

the end of the decade. And possibilities for international student networking around curriculum research and community action eg on environment or racism issues, was heralded through emergent **new technologies**, which would enable students to be connected around such approaches. A whole issue of *Connect* in 1995 tried to make some predictions about what might become possible – in curriculum and governance.

Local, state and even national student conferencing also continued, with a series of **National Student Participation Conferences (NASPACs)** in Melbourne (1995), Sydney (1997) and Hobart (1999). Regular state student conferences were sponsored by the Department of Education in New South Wales; State Student Forums were held in South Australia in 1996 and 1997. In Victoria, late in the decade, two 'streams' appeared: a Department-sponsored **Student Leadership Council** initiative, and a grassroots student-led **Student Representative Council** network; these began discussions that were to culminate at the start of the next decade in the 'Paving the Way' Conference that led eventually to the VicSRC.

The struggles of a 'difficult decade' are reflected in the number of reprinted international articles in *Connect* in these years, as time and support to document local initiatives became more scarce. But we also recognise that this was an important time for *Connect*, as it kept ideas about student participation alive and positive, when there was little system support or recognition for this work.

There are useful reflections on this decade in issues **90** (December 1994), **100** (August 1996) and **120** (December 1999).



2000-2009: Issues 121-180



The new millennium brought fresh optimism. The NSW-based PASTA group initiated an *'International SRC Conference'* in Sydney in conjunction with the Sydney Olympics in 2000, with students and teachers attending from several countries. A follow-up conference was held in Canada in 2004, but the 'tradition' didn't continue beyond that. PASTA itself ceased operation in 2007.

Councils from 2005 to 2009, 10 *'Big Ideas'* in 2008 etc). Democratic processes in classroom meetings and initiatives in the early years (R-2) of primary schools were documented.

State-based networking continued in New South Wales through the Department of Education's **State SRC**, which developed a *Charter for SRCs* in 2006. In Victoria, at the three-day *Paving the Way Conference* in 2001, 300 students decided to set up the **Victorian Secondary Students Network (VSSN)** and this led, after some support issues, to the establishment of an independent **VicSRC** (auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) with its first Congress in 2005. The VicSRC continued to grow steadily throughout the rest of the decade.

A further national conference (**NASPAC 6**) was held in Melbourne in 2002, but the planned follow-up in Canberra in 2004 was postponed and never convened.

Two major curriculum approaches around student agency developed in these years: **Student Action Teams (SATs)** had originally been supported as a statewide program of student action on community safety, but broadened to be a curriculum approach that was adaptable to many issues: environment, traffic safety, bullying, transition and so on. In particular, the SAT work in primary and secondary schools in Melbourne was supported by a 'manual' from the Department, and documented in a *Connect* publication. These teams enabled students who may never have been chosen for representative groups, to play important roles in researching and acting for school and community change.

In the later years of the decade, *Connect* also published a cartoon report from teams in two primary schools who had focused on student engagement with learning. Other notable teams had looked at racism (an **Aboriginal Student**

Action Team) and **Values Education** - and parallels drawn with the **Public Achievement** model that was operating in Turkey and elsewhere.

In parallel with this, the **RuMaD (Are You Making a Difference)** program was developed, with very similar values and processes. This focused on *MaD Days*, and also, as a by-product, on moving student charitable fundraising from a limited

SRC pre-occupation through to formation of values-based **Student Philanthropic Foundations**.

Civics and Citizenship Education continued to have a focus through the national *'Discovering Democracy'* program, and *Connect* provided a critique about the difference

between learning *about* democracy and learning *to do* democracy. On-going work around primary and secondary school **Student Councils** was seen to be part of this, and *Connect* both supported and critiqued this.

Issues of *Connect* challenged traditional and limited Student Council roles, suggested different ways of structuring representation, and also developed and compiled resources (*Connect's Student Councils and Beyond* in 2003; information about planning and tackling issues in 2008; inventories and audits of Student

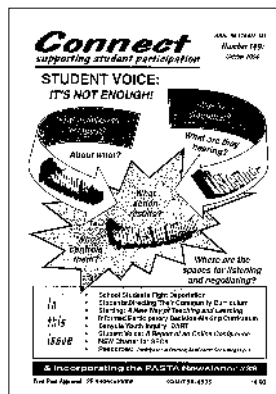
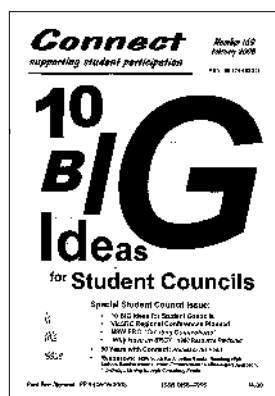
Within classrooms and whole schools, processes of curriculum negotiation became more explicit. They also highlighted *'students as researchers'* approaches in which students investigated learning and teaching either across the school, or in specific subject areas. And a similar orientation was developed to the pre-service training of teachers and doctors, through **Learning Partnerships** with primary and secondary school students. Several issues of

Connect invited beginning teachers to reflect on ideas about *'student voice'* as they entered the profession.

Project-based approaches with student-led initiatives around **River Health** (students teaching students conferences), **Mental Health** (student supporting students) and **Literacy Camps** (eg *Connect's Reaching High* publication of 2006) continued to be featured to inspire us.

This language of 'partnerships' was appearing more substantially in both conceptual work (eg **Michael Fielding** in the UK) and in school practices. The major UK study of *'Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning'* led to important understandings of why, what and how, laying a strong evidence-based foundation for work in student voice, agency and participation. In Victoria, the Department of Education commissioned and published a *Research Review of 'Student Voice'* in 2007.

Again, there are useful summaries of this decade in *Connect* 150 (December 2004) and 180 (December 2009).



2010-2019: Issues 181-240



The most recent decade of *Connect* is perhaps the hardest to sum up. It may be too soon to evaluate continuing trends. However the immediate impression is of a decade of growth and recognition of student voice, agency and participation in policy and practices.

There were many international connections over the decade: articles from and about practices in Italy, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, USA and UK, as well as convening of relevant conferences and seminars in Brisbane, Cambridge, Vermont and Pittsburgh - and the decade closes with such an international event in Melbourne.

These international collaborations also led to the formation of the *Student Voice Research and Practice* facebook community, and the *International Journal of Student Voice*. A *Student Voice Handbook* was published in 2012, and valuable conceptual work done around typologies, especially by Michael Fielding in the UK. In this work, and in the initiatives in Vermont, the primacy of ideas about **partnerships** between students and adults in educational decision-making, practice and policy has been emphasised.

We also note that we lost important people over this decade. **Jean Rudduck** from Cambridge had already passed away in the previous decade and **Rebecca Coyle** (Australia), **Jane McGregor** (UK), **Art Pearl** (USA) and **Tony Knight** (Australia) were vitally important leaders in this work - who are not longer with us.

Classroom participatory practices were developed further. There was attention to **negotiation** and **co-construction** (the latter emerging as a powerful though often misunderstood term); **Student Action Teams** continued to be heavily documented around issues such as safety, transition and engagement; **Students as Researchers** approaches were used particularly around child safety. Many of these approaches now focused on 'whole cohorts' or entire classes, rather than removing a few students from classes.



Stories about formal governance continued: **Student Councils**; student representation on **School Councils (Governance Boards)**, with Victoria re-mandated such representation in Government secondary schools, following lobbying and research from the VicSRC.

Networks of students operated at various times in NSW, the ACT, South Australia and Queensland, with varying levels of system support - though the **NSW State SRC** finished in 2012. *Connect* carried regular segments from the **Victorian Institute of SRC Teacher Advisers (VISTA)** for a while, and continues to do so for the **VicSRC**.

System support for student voice, agency and participation became more explicit and stronger. South Australia's policy statements in 2014 supported voice and agency. In Victoria, the **Education State** initiatives included explicit commitments

to student voice and agency, supported by the **Amplify** document and initiatives in 2018. Catholic Education Melbourne issued a strong **Student Voice Statement**; NSW research around **Participation and Wellbeing** in 2018 underpinned that state's initiatives; Brisbane Catholic Education developed resources and networking; the ACT's **'Ask Us'** forums fed into policy-making.

At the 2011 VicSRC Congress, a decision was made to initiate a **'teach the teacher'** approach of student-led professional development for teachers, and this expanded rapidly with funding support

from the Department and international attention. The VicSRC also published a comprehensive kit called **Represent!**, and more recently *Connect* has added **Audits** and other tools to the suite of resources available.

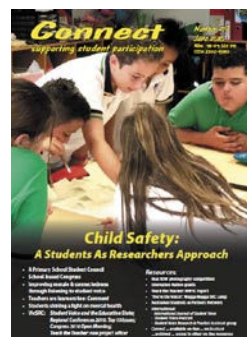
Other important initiatives over the decade included the **Learning Partnerships** approach in which students helped train beginning teachers and GPs; students on staff selection panels; passion-based curriculum; and attention to diversity and inclusion in all areas of student voice, agency and participation. The latter work was particularly highlighted with documentation of initiatives in special education settings - where students often have been denied recognition for their voice and action.

The biggest change for *Connect* was the move from a print format to an on-line format after issue 200 in 2013. This enabled wider access - and we have about 2000 subscribers at the end of the decade (with more accessing copies through other networking platforms) - as well as enabling us to produce larger and more colourful issues. In partnership with the ACER Library, all back issues of *Connect* were scanned and made available there - and this continues to be the 'base' for all issues.

In the final print issue, we asked for some projections to 2030 - and it is interesting to read and reflect on these. Some were pessimistic, some optimistic - and interestingly, some projections have already become reality.

The other strong reflection as the decade ends, has been about the increased initiatives being taken by students around existential issues: climate change, gun control, safety, democracy and so on. This marks a strengthening of young people as active citizens in an uncertain world.

How will schools respond? Many curriculum and organisational challenges face us into the next 40 years!



In admiring solidarity.

Thunderous applause for the visionary commitment, the hard work and the inspirational contributions over 40 years.

Connect is a journal of international significance, read and admired all over the world.

A truly remarkable achievement.

Michael Fielding

*Emeritus Professor of Education,
UCL Institute of Education, London, England, UK*

Congratulations! Connect and your educational support and guidance, Roger, were pivotal to the success of the student participatory programs that resulted in the *Times Have Changed* book (1991) and the *Reaching High* program (1992-2012) and book (2006) that were developed at Nathalia Secondary College. Connect - an invaluable resource, an invaluable avenue for national/global educational voice, for both students and teachers.

Lyn Loger

Nathalia, Victoria

I have been receiving copies of Connect for the last 17 years and it has been a constant source of inspiration for this daunting time. The evolving nature of connect, consistent, thought provoking and innovative approaches have been an inspiration to our student leaders.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Tony Mahar

*Student Wellbeing Leader and
Facilitator of Student Leadership,
Brighton Secondary School, South Australia*

Connect is the definitive publication representing student voice, particularly but not exclusively in public schools. Congratulations to Roger and Connect!

Jerry Mintz

AERO, New York, USA

At MoAD we're all about Democracy and we work to inspire students to be active citizens in our society. We want them to have their voices heard and to be empowered to make positive change. For us, Connect aligns perfectly with what we do! We're so excited that it exists to help promote student voice and agency. Thank-you Connect!

Deborah Sulway

Manager Learning, MoAD, ACT

Connect reminds us it's worth remembering that Student Voice is not just new: it's been on the agenda for decades.

More than 'voice'! Students participate in decisions that affect them, participating in school and state governance of education.

You/we won't be around in 40 year's time: who will keep this going for the next 20/30/40?

Thanks for keeping me and my colleagues honest and ensuring young people are resourced with links to others trying to support participation.

Marie Brennan

*Extraordinary Professor, Stellenbosch University,
South Africa; Honorary Professor of Education,
Victoria University and Adjunct Professor,
University of South Australia*



'Student voice' cannot merely be a safe mantra for those who run schools and education systems, it has to be a genuine opportunity for young people to speak their minds on issues of contemporary importance, like climate change, lowering the voting age or personal freedom from the state.

Darcy Moore

Deputy Principal, Dapto High School, New South Wales

Connect Journal evokes a time for celebration! Connect communicates (spontaneously, elaborately and in informative ways) post-modern stories of schools using the voices of those who matter the most in education: the students. With readers from basic school students to researchers, Connect transform words into actions and actions into words.

The topics and vocal grammar cross frontiers of time, space and geography, including experiences from many parts of the world. Stories inspire and teach those who want to listen to student voices. Brazil and our group from the State University of Rio de Janeiro thank Roger who includes us so beautifully and significantly in this important journal.

Carmen de Mattos

*Professor of Education,
State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

Connect is invaluable to us for its presentation of best practice and new ideas. There's nothing else quite like it for stimulating conversations and innovating student voice.

Sam Champion

*Participation & Development Coordinator,
Youth Affairs Council Victoria*

Best wishes for your 40th anniversary of Connect! It is a marvellous achievement.

Peter Cole

Consultant, Victoria



Student voice work flourishes when we are carried forward by 'hope'. As Emily Dickinson wrote: "Hope is a thing with feathers..."

The poem reminds us that we can always be optimistic about young people's capacity to tell it like it is.

Susan Groundwater-Smith AM

*Honorary Professor, Sydney School of
Education and Social Work,
University of Sydney, New South Wales*

Connect has been a great resource to always look back on and read about, when wanting to show off to my friends and family about the power of youth and student voice! It's always uplifting to stay up to date with the powerful work of students across the state!

Ryan Wijaya

Ex-VicSRC Executive, Victoria





SVC

STUDENT VOICE AGENCY AND
PARTNERSHIPS INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE
www.svcmelbourne.com



Social Education Victoria

The **Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference** is about to happen in Melbourne as this issue of *Connect* is published. Tickets for the Conference, hosted by Social Education Victoria, sold out about a month before its deadline!

So that you know what you're missing (!), but also as a continuing record of the information and discussions planned for the Conference, here's a summary of the program: the sessions and presentations. Full details, including abstracts and biographies of the presenters will remain on the Conference website for a while: www.svcmelbourne.com

Connect will bring you some reflections from the Conference in 2020 – and plans for the next steps.

OPENING NIGHT PROGRAM Monday 9 December, 2020

- 4.30 pm **Registration Opens** (Main Theatre)
- 5.00 pm **Opening:** Welcome to Country
- 5.15 pm **Formal Opening:** The Hon. James Merlino MP, Minister for Education and Deputy Premier
- 5.30 pm **Focus:**
Definitions matter; intentions matter:
Roger Holdsworth
- 5.35 pm *'The Challenges That Face Us':*
Panel featuring various stakeholders
- 6.00 pm *Break – Opportunities for networking*
- 6.45 pm **Re-focus:** Video from Bourke High School, NSW
- 6.50 pm *'Why student voices, agency and partnerships matter: their impact on classrooms, schools and policy':*
Keynote by Professor Dana Mitra
- 7.25 pm **Q&A Session**

WELCOME

Welcome to the **Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference**. This brings together people interested and active in these areas: researchers, school students, teachers and school leaders, policy makers and support organisations. Over the next two days and two hours, we'll hear about local, national and international initiatives, we'll discuss perspectives about meaning and our current work, we'll debate future directions.

There is growing interest in and commitment to students' voices, views and actions being central to education goals, processes, assessment and evaluation – and that interest and commitment is international. This Conference builds upon work done at seminars in Europe, the UK, and the USA over the last decade, and initiatives in policy and practice at all levels of education systems. We are particularly proud of the commitment of the Victorian State Government and its Department of Education and Training, to listen to students, to respond to their voices, and to include them in decision-making in schools and in systems. We are pleased to bring this International Conference to Melbourne, and to welcome participants from around the world.

But this Conference also will highlight the challenges that we face, and the exciting possibilities for building on this work. We need to be clearer about our intentions; we need to be reflective on what works; we need to be committed to listening to **all** voices, to building the agency of **all** students, and to including **all** students in our decisions.



DAY 1 PROGRAM

Tuesday 10 December 2020

- 8.00 am **Registrations open:** Level 1, Arts West, The University of Melbourne
- 8.45 am **Welcome and housekeeping:** Forum Theatre
- 9.00 am **Plenary:** Structure of program – objectives of Day 1
- 9.25 am **Role groups:**
(students, teachers, researchers, policy, supporters):
What is happening in our focus area?
- 10.00 am **Featured Presentation 1 including Q&A:**
'Student voice in the secondary school context'
Hayley Dureau and students: Mathematics Teacher and Leading Teacher: Head of Student Voice, Mount Waverley Secondary College, Vic
- 10.30 am Morning tea
- 10.55 am **Mixed discussion groups – as allocated**
- 11.25 am **Presentation Sessions 1:**
- 1A: Curriculum negotiation 1: (Forum Theatre)
How do students and teachers co-plan curriculum?
- Nadine Crane: 'Negotiating the curriculum with Grade 5/6 students'
 - Rebecca and David Wells: 'Student voice in learning design'
- 1B: Feedback and teacher change: (Room 356)
How do schools use student feedback to create change?
- Bradley Taylor: 'Student voice in an ethnically diverse school community'
 - Maria Dacre: 'Teachers' responses to student voice in school contexts'
- 1C: Well-being and Civics and Citizenship Education: (Room 456)
How do systems support student input?
- Kevin Perry: 'Student perspectives on learning, a sense of belonging and classroom well-being'
 - Darcy Moore: 'Nurturing democracy'
- 1D: Inclusion and Re-engagement: (Room 354)
How do students' voices enable re-engagement?
- Martina Bateson and Marilyn Casley: 'Using narrative inquiry to give voice to young people in flexible and inclusive education'
 - Fiona Longmuir: 'Leadership to bring students back to learning by enhancing voice and agency'
- 1E: Resource videos: (Room 355)
What resources are available to support student voice and agency?
- Screening of videos eg from Victorian DET, NSW DoE and Brisbane Catholic Education



- 12.25 pm Lunch
- 1.10 pm **'Un-conference':** emerging topics and dilemmas - pitches: proposals for discussion groups
- 1.20 pm **Dilemma groups:** informal groups around issues identified by participants
- 1.55 pm **Presentation Sessions 2:**
- 2A: Curriculum negotiation 2: (Forum Theatre)
How do students and teachers co-plan curriculum?
- Marc Warwick and Amanda Hawkins: 'Activating agency in all learners: a story of an Inquiry School'
 - Kerry Smith, Marilyn Casley and Jennifer Cartmel: 'Talking circles'
- 2B: Voices in Research: (Room 354)
How do students' voices inform research?
- Emily Wong: 'Student voice, shared ownership for learning and school engagement among minority students in Malaysian secondary schools'
 - Roseanna Bourke: 'Children's conceptions of informal learning in everyday settings'
- 2C: Community Research/Activism: (Room 356)
How are students participating as community activists?
- Mark Brennan: 'Youth as researchers and ensuring youth voice: A case study from North Philadelphia'
 - Libby Tudball: 'Young people activating their voice and agency through climate strikes: pushing the boundaries of inter-generational justice?'
- 2D: System support: (Room 355)
How do systems support student democracy and participation?
- James Fiford and Amy Carpenter: 'Evolving the VEC's Passport to Democracy program to enhance authentic active citizenship opportunities for young people'
 - Ellie Jones, Joe Collins, Xavier Healy and Caitlin Britten (CEP): 'Rural Inspire'
- 2E: Agency: (Room 456)
What do we mean by agency? How do we build it?
- Benjamin Zonca: 'How might the conditions of the learning environment promote 'good' agency and what happens when it doesn't?'
 - Nigel Coutts: 'Teaching for student agency: Constructing a school culture of student agency'
- 2.55 pm Refreshments on the run
- 3.15 pm **Featured Presentation 2 including Q&A:**
'Improving wellbeing through student participation at school'
Professor Anne Graham, Director, and Catharine Simmons, Research Associate: Centre for Children and Young People, School of Art and Social Science, Southern Cross University, NSW
- 3.50 pm **Mixed discussion groups – as allocated**
- 4.25 pm **Plenary**
- 4.45 pm **Wrap up and 'tomorrow'**

DAY 2 PROGRAM

Wednesday 11 December 2020

8.45 am	Welcome back and housekeeping (Main Theatre)	12.55 pm	Lunch
9.00 am	Plenary: Objectives of Day 2	1.40 pm	Presentation Sessions 4:
9.30 am	Featured Presentation 3 including Q&A: 'Building agency by defining learning protocols' Jeff Jackson, Rebecca French and Abbie, Peter and Tianah: Rosanna Primary JSC Executives, Vic		4A: Culture and Gender: (Room 354) How can the agency of young women be supported?
10.10 am	Mixed discussion groups – as allocated		• Katherine Mansfield and Rachel McNae: 'The critical role of safe space and student voice for developing girls as leaders and activists'
10.40 am	Morning tea		4B: Negotiating Assessment: (Room 456) How can students and teachers negotiate assessment?
11.05 am	Presentation Sessions 3:		• Brodie Andersen: 'Co-designing assessment and student-led classroom observations'
	3A: Avoiding Tokenism (Roundtable): (Room 356) How can we avoid tokenism in classrooms, schools, conferences etc?		• Domnall Fleming: 'Student voice policy, practice and enactment in Irish schools: there be demons!'
	• Daniel Vo: 'What are the problems in the current school system, and how can it be improved?'		4C: Community Action: (Forum Theatre) How can students take part in community action as part of their curriculum?
	• Mitchell Sprague: 'Effective representation'		• Low Zipin and Marie Brennan: 'Students researching 'problems that matter' in and with their communities'
	• David Mould: 'How well-intentioned events fail at student voice'		• Simon Taylor: 'Using local problems to promote student voice and agency'
	3B: Use of Feedback: (Forum Theatre) How can student feedback improve school practices?		4D: Student-led Networking: (Room 356) How can student-led networks achieve change at state/regional level?
	• Murray Cronin: 'AMPLIFY: Building practice excellence through student voice'		• Nina Laitala and others, VicSRC: 'The opportunities for and challenges of an authentic student led organisation'
	• Ilana Finefter-Rosenbluh: 'Using feedback surveys in schools: does it even matter?'		4E: Technology (Roundtable): (Room 355) How can technology support students' voices, agency and partnerships?
	3C: External Agencies (Roundtable): (Room 354) How can external agencies support student agency in schools?		• Ben Barnett: 'Using technology to expand possibilities of student voice'
	• Amy Forward: 'The role of Local Government in supporting student voice'		• Trang Hoang: 'Digitally mediated agency of international learners in Australian schools'
	• Brigid Little: 'Student voice and leadership in community resilience and climate adaptation'		• Laura Wong and Sarah Seymour: 'Communication strategy within a digital school context'
	• Fiona Bowen: 'Museum of Australian Democracy'	2.45 pm	Role groups: (students, teachers, researchers, policy, supporters): Future directions for our area
	3D: Policy Initiatives (Roundtable): (Room 456) How can education systems initiate and support approaches to voice, agency etc?	3.10 pm	Refreshments on the run
	• Doug Sandiford: 'Catholic Education Melbourne framework for wellbeing, eXcel, supports purposeful teaching that will motivate and engage young people as active agents in their learning and wellbeing'	3.30 pm	Featured Presentation 4 including Q&A: 'Teach the Teacher: preliminary findings' Eve Mayes, Senior Lecturer (Pedagogy and Curriculum), Rosalyn Black, Senior Lecturer (Pedagogy and Curriculum), and Rachel Finneran, PhD candidate: Deakin University, Vic
	• Stephanie Condon: 'Amplify and Victoria's integrated approach to empowering students through voice, agency and leadership'	4.05 pm	Mixed discussion groups – as allocated: What shall I do next?; evaluation
	• Gillian Newall and Tracey Cronley: 'System-level approaches in NSW'	4.30 pm	Final Plenary
	• Carolyn De Witt-Ryall and Renee Devereaux: 'Reflections on Engaging Children and Young People's Participation in an Educational Context'	4.50 pm	Wrap up and thanks
	3E: Inclusion: (Room 355) How can schools and systems be inclusive of the voices of students with specific needs?		
	• Jemima Hutton: 'Young people having a REAL and EQUAL voice in their future'		
	• Nina-rae Smith: 'Autistic adolescent girls and subjective wellbeing'		
12.10 pm	Unconference: emerging topics and dilemmas - pitches: proposals for discussion groups		
12.25 pm	Dilemma groups: informal groups around issues identified by participants		



'Take it to the council': *Democracy in action in early childhood settings*

In April 2017, I sat in a lecture hall at the Loris Mallaguzzi International Centre in Reggio Emilia at an international conference. An idea was bubbling to the surface: a community of educators and children who could engage in robust debate, exchange sophisticated ideas, and a space where children's rights became the lens through which all decisions for children and by children were made.

Two years ago, inspired by the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach to education, I found the right community that was in the right place for this type of work. I called it **Children's Council**. Members of the Council, with an average age of four, have a say in a range of issues pertaining to the running of the Guardian's **Blyth Street Early Learning Centre** in Brunswick, Victoria – from listening to and enacting children's wishes to be hugged, or not hugged, to whether people have the right to choose what to eat. What has come out of this Children's Council has influenced the entire body of educators, children (right down to the babies) and out to families and our wider community. We have started the process of becoming a more democratic Centre, more aware of citizenship, participation and student activism.

I introduced the idea to the staff of the Centre roughly six months after I took on the role of Centre Manager, after I had conceived the notion almost six months or more beforehand. I had to wait for the right time, the right cultural climate, for this community to have a shift in thinking about the capabilities and the image of children, and to know that the children and educators and families in our community would support this idea.

I have a very high image of early childhood education and children, and once this was understood by the community, they could see it in action. When the whole team of educators was aligned, then we could engage wider. I often get asked if it is dangerous to give children too much power or control, and to that I say that children rarely have an agenda of power or control – they do however often hold idealistic or utopian

views about how the world should work, and adults are privileged to be invited into this world.

From the families' perspectives, there was no push back or concern; if anything, there was encouragement for us to probe deeper, and pride in their children being on the Council. I really wanted to highlight that children have a voice and can make decisions for themselves, and that they know the impact of making a decision for someone else. For families with younger children, there has been acknowledgement that this type of learning has filtered on through the community, with educators of babies and young toddlers using the language of rights with young children, and older children often speaking up on behalf of young toddlers and babies.

"It is radical thinking to set up a forum for debate that promotes the discussion of rights; it is even more radical to respect, listen to, and enact the outcome of the discussion. That's when we enter a real dialogue and practice of enacting children's rights in early childhood settings."

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* states that 'the views of the child... (shall be) given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (article 12, S1). However, I have found in our work with children, the question of 'age and maturity' for early childhood practitioners is more about **how** a child's voice should be heard, not **whether** they shall be heard. Children's voices and views about matters affecting them, no matter how large (consent, privacy) or small (the size of vegetables in their meals) should be a considered and supported democratic and ethical process. It is radical thinking to set up a forum for debate that promotes the discussion of rights; it is even more radical to respect, listen to, and enact the outcome of the discussion. That's when we enter a real dialogue and practice of enacting children's rights in early childhood settings.

Through these processes, we can begin to explore themes of humanity with students – whether that theme is changing the world, relationships or practice; understanding that babies have rights and we must consult with a wide audience when making decisions; understanding that people with perceived 'small' voices can actually stand up to an adult voice and speak about rights of children, no matter how big or small. We stand tall for these changes, and this is where real influence occurs.

At its heart, the Children's Council is about respecting the way children think, and the way children and adults can think together. It is about being rigorous in our practice and our work with children, while at the same time being open to how children think and contribute to the construction of the world, themselves, and society. Influence for this project comes from the Reggio Emilia context, where the schools demonstrate what is possible when society values human potential, relationships, and the power of imagination of children of all ages, and considers these pillars as the foundation

of education. Children who have access to an early exposure of collectivity is a societal shift that is changing our future generations – we are making children and all their splendour visible. All children are considered citizens, social capital, the resources to creating a better, more culturally active, and respectful society.



Council members reflect on work they have done so far. Photo: Guardian's Blyth Street Early Learning Centre

The logistics of democracy

Originally when we set up the Children's Council, I approached the educators across three classrooms. I explained the idea and the reasons for doing it, and they offered several candidates ranging from 3 to 5.5 years. We did it this way to start, looking for children who we knew to have a confident voice, strong opinions, children who were reflective, and children who had in the past been vocal about decision-making processes. Not all children had to have all these qualities, but these were what we initially believed would be the skills that were needed to get the project off the ground. And in hindsight, they were the skills that **we** needed in order to communicate with children in this way.

It took several weeks to 'get it right'. I realised very quickly that adults don't always know the right questions to ask children, and I had to deeply reflect after every session, which I recorded and listened back to after the Council session. This not only helped me to accurately record and document children's voices, but also forced me to face some truths (through the cringing) and change the way that I ask questions of children and remove the desire to take a list of what children were saying, and truly listen.

I worked with this group of children for roughly four months, when one child decided to resign from the Council. This was met with genuine shock, concern, and alarm from the rest of the children in the Council. Once the dust settled, they quickly realised there was an opportunity here, a chance to get their friend in the Council.

I spoke to the children about the possibility of an election and voting someone new in. I explained the process over several meetings until I was confident that the children understood what was happening. The next step was to engage the teachers in the classrooms to speak with the groups of children about their desire to be on the Children's Council. We had several children volunteer and, with support

from educators and families, they wrote a speech as to why they would be the best candidate. Then the whole Blyth Street community voted: parents, educators, and, of course, children. Voting was not compulsory, and we saw many beautiful moments with parents and children together reading the campaigns and explaining what the candidates were all about and then voting together. When the winner was announced, this was followed by an induction into the Council by the other Council members, and many discussions about grace in defeat and humility in victory!

This year, with many of the original candidates going off to school, we held another election, where children from last year could put themselves up for nomination, teachers could elect children, and children who knew about the Council but who hadn't participated can now join in. We had ten nominees, and seven children decided to join.

We really wanted the children to experience the whole process of being on a decision-making Council. We take this very seriously at Blyth Street, with many educators and adults often debating a topic, decision, or change in the Centre, saying, **'Take it to the Council.'** The elections, debates, and meetings that we have are all documented, and we reflect upon our previous meeting each time we meet, through video, voice recordings, and text.

"We also have been very interested in exploring what it means for one person to make a decision for another person – the consequences, thinking outside one's ego and personal desires, and creating knowledge of what it is like living in a community as an active citizen."

The democracy of it is also important as we want children to know what it means to make a decision; it is not just a yes or no scenario for us. We also have been very interested in exploring what it means for one person to make a decision for another person: the consequences, thinking outside one's ego and personal desires, and creating knowledge of what it is like living in a community as an active citizen.

How it works in an early childhood setting

Each week, the children meet in my office and we sit together at a round table and reflect upon our last meeting. Often, we take a long time working through one idea. As the children are young, their way of expressing an idea can often take time, and the delivery of the message is sometimes hidden. For example, at a recent meeting, a child was telling me a story that was taking some time to get out; I wasn't sure where it was heading, until she started to talk very seriously about a close call on the back of her dad's bike coming into the driveway at the Centre. This story struck a chord with the group, and they all fervently told similar stories. This issue – traffic safety on Blyth Street – was a genuine community issue, that came directly from the people of the community. So we began a journey of finding out who would help us with this problem, comparing and translating the levels of government back to our practice in the Children's Council, inviting the mayor to the Centre, and finally

visiting a Council meeting to submit our proposal of how to address this concern.

“We began a journey of finding out who would help us with this problem [of traffic safety concerns], comparing and translating the levels of government back to our practice in the Children’s Council, inviting the mayor to the centre, and finally visiting a council meeting to submit our proposal of how to address this concern.”

While we do take this work very seriously, and deeply reflect on it, education is a social event, and largely, this is how the children approach Children’s Council: they are thrilled by the opportunity to come together and engage in a social learning discourse. Education is a huge part of children’s lives; we don’t want to censor life and keep parts out; rather we are inspired to create a service that offers itself up to opening up to different ways of knowing. Welcoming this creates an awareness, a higher level of protagonism and questioning, and of defining cultural spaces that children live in and authentically contribute to.

Differences of opinion, debate and disappointment are welcomed in to the Children’s Council conversations. As I mentioned earlier, with an aim of creating a democratic classroom, we could not always make it fair for every individual, but rather we discussed how we could come to one decision that could hopefully make everyone feel included and valued in our community. We have explored several avenues of gathering information from the community when it comes to differences of opinion, and we really take a step back when this comes up, as we want it to be about the children and how they share their perspectives. Often the adult in this space becomes the mediator – explaining the argument in a way that everyone understands.

In saying this, when we look at the Children’s Council as a democratic process, it is not always viable to document and consider everything that is said in a group meeting. It is not a space to take a list of everyone’s comments or answers to a question; participation has been heavily reflected upon in the context of the Children’s Council. Taking on everyone’s individual opinion is not conducive to creating a community decision. There are always details or threads in the conversation that will lead you to the main idea, the shared idea; documenting and reacting to the ambiguity will lead you nowhere. We are critical and reflective when reviewing the children’s meetings,

and we spend time gathering together the ideas that have the most generative potential, the ideas that have transdisciplinary aspects.

We lean heavily on the UNCRC – and this document also guides how adults should work with children and how to go about decision-making for children. As I mentioned previously, the children take this seriously, and their maturity is certainly heightened when they are engaged in Council business, and also back in the classroom and at home.

Children’s questions, issues, and concerns raised at Children’s Council are often in line with those of the adults. We always try and make time for all of the questions that are asked, or we keep record of these questions and when a common theme is stirring, we will re-open and unpack it with the children. Once you have that common thread and a question is being formed, it will be explored with the whole community. For example, we have surveyed children, observed children and educators in practice, surveyed families, reflected on past decisions and changed our minds – we do all the things that an adult would do when engaged in community participation.

Recently we have re-opened an early debate and discussion around **consent**, this time consent through photography of children. This has been an important discussion for educators as it has raised questions of adults wrongly misinterpreting children’s feelings or work, feelings of jealousy when children cannot see their image in documentation and a lengthy discussion about body language and how to include babies and young toddlers in discussions around permission and consent, and refusal to participate in photography.

I feel that the children do understand that they represent all children at Blyth Street, and will often offer up the suggestion to go and seek the opinions and thoughts about their ideas from younger children, and from these involved in working with younger children. They are compassionate and aware of the entire community.



Changes in practice

We have seen many changes in all aspects of our practice, engagement and teaching. I can honestly say that, in our work together, the children are beginning to truly understand that they have a voice, they have rights, and they know what those rights are ... and that when they express an opinion or exercise their rights, adults have to listen and act. We are everyday making rights real.

The biggest change that has come out of this has been in the teaching practices: the way that adults work with children has changed. It is one thing to say that children have rights, a voice, but it is another thing to listen to that voice and make changes and open discussions when a child shares that voice, or idea, or challenges an adult’s perception of a child’s right.

“The children are beginning to truly understand that they have a voice, they have rights, and they know what those rights are ... and that when they express an opinion or exercise their rights, adults have to listen and act.”

We do have days when it doesn't go so well. A challenge at the beginning, and it comes up every now and then, is that children do not always want to open up and expose their internal thinking and ideas. It is a huge act of vulnerability to explore the internal. Perhaps they feel that adults have the expectation that children should have an answer or a working concept. The role of the adult here is to acknowledge, listen, tease out the idea, not to question or look for a 'real' answer, and any attempt is welcomed and supported. Anything a child can offer in the context of debate, dialogue, or exploring community contexts is important to listen to and consider.

This year the children in the Council are not as vocal or as articulate as they have been in the past, so we have had to offer alternative ways for them to communicate and express their language. The biggest success for this group was after we introduced markers, textas, paper – an ever-changing selection of writing implements – to the meeting table. Giving children means to express themselves through the language of drawing helped the children to add a more sophisticated layer to the idea that they were trying to communicate. It took several weeks to figure this out!

If children are to be taken seriously as active participants and decision makers, equal to those of adults, they need to have their voice heard in the context of community life. Not only should they have access to a forum for free speech (freedom of assembly, freedom of expression), but they also need opportunities for many mediums in which to explore, form, and express their opinions. Our role is to help them articulate their views, and provide them with a safe forum that protects a vulnerable voice from harm when they speak about something that might be perceived as beyond their knowledge (consent) or that could disagree or conflict with other voices in the community (children in detention).

“Our role is to help them articulate their views, and provide them with a safe forum that protects a vulnerable voice from harm when they speak about something that might be perceived as beyond their knowledge (consent) or that could disagree or conflict with other voices in the community (children in detention).”

It has never been about giving too much power, and we haven't experienced anyone having a knowledge of 'power' in the group, and certainly not using it to push an agenda. Children are idealists, romantics: they like to see the world in what an adult may view as a utopia. They want everyone to feel that they have had their voice heard and will often make sure everyone is included in the conversation. That is not to say that there are never disagreements, or that no-one ever gets upset about an outcome ... but it is our role to explain how it works and that, in life, not everyone gets their way. We discuss how what is important for us is understanding the needs of the community, and working towards common values, and how we can take everyone with us.

How to start

I often get asked how to start, where to start, what is the first thing you did, and this is my advice: be open to what the children have to say, throw out your agenda and be prepared to face some truths you may be avoiding about your ideas about yourself. Reflect upon this question: ***do you really listen to what children are saying, or do you hear what children are saying?***

Some of the work that has come out of the Children's Council has made adults uncomfortable and have to change their perception and image of themselves an educator, and to deeply reflect on their own teaching practices and pedagogy. If you start this journey down the rabbit hole, be prepared to make changes. The children will hold you accountable.

The other aspect of this that has been a huge shift for us is the role of the adult as the leader. Often we can say that we work alongside children, or that we create opportunities for them to lead their own learning, but for the adult to become an instrument in leadership for children, a role model of a different sort – someone who truly advocates for children – they can lead change in a much more authentic way.

Sometimes the meetings go for a long time and sometimes they fizzle out after five minutes, but it is important to honour the process and turn up every time, because the children's image of us as leaders is now changing too. There was also a lot of work on determining our values and underlying frameworks for the Children's Council to be successful, also to align many people to work within the same framework:

- ***Strong relationships with children embedded in to practice***
- ***Whole community approach***
- ***Building a foundation of rights***
- ***Creating a movement: lobbying and children as active citizens***
- ***Image of the child***
- ***Pedagogy of listening***
- ***Rights education***

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*An earlier version of this article was originally published as an interview with Simone, in **Ethos**, the magazine of Social Education Victoria, Term 3, 2019. It is adapted and reprinted here with permission.*

Towards a voice inclusive school culture: *Multi-stakeholder reflections*

In 2018 and 2019, a large secondary school in south east Queensland committed to placing students, their views and perspectives, at the centre of wellbeing provision. They did this by participating in the **Wellbeing Matters** project, led by **Dr Jenna Gillett-Swan** and **Professor Linda Graham** from QUT's Faculty of Education, and funded by the Queensland Government's **Education Horizon Grant Scheme**.

In this project, students were positioned as being at the centre of wellbeing decision-making processes.

*The project used novel methodologies to identify and understand the wellbeing perspectives of students in the middle years of high school (Grades 7–10) to inform the collaborative design and implementation of a **School Wellbeing Framework for Action**. Some methods used included surveys, focus groups, student and staff inquiry, and collaborative forums.*

*As the project draws to a close, students, school staff, and the university research team have taken a moment to reflect for this **Connect** article, on some of the questions, challenges, and possibilities involved with moving forward, both for their school and for other schools considering similar student voice initiatives.*

*These reflections are heard through the voices of **student contributors from Grades 9, 10 and 11 (S)**; from **school staff (Wellbeing Coordinator, Year Level Heads of Department, School Guidance Counsellor/Life Coach) (T)**; and from the **QUT Project Team (Q)**.*

S: At our school we aim to achieve a high standing of mental and physical wellbeing through providing options to recover from stressors. These stressors can come from family issues, bullying, assessment and the school environment. By QUT co-ordinating a survey conducted by students from Grades 7 to 10 in 2018, it showed the average student wellbeing rating was 67%. Our research was to find a solution to increase this statistic

to 100%. A way this solution could be found and improved was by **listening to student feelings, opinions and suggestions**.

Q: We interrogated the findings from the survey with students initially via focus groups and then formed two parallel working groups.

Q: Students formed smaller project **Inquiry Groups** and each focused on a different aspect affecting their wellbeing at school. Staff were involved in a **Staff Working Party** to review the findings and work with the QUT research team and students to co-develop a **School Wellbeing Framework for Action** with strategies to support the wellbeing of students at the school.

S: After our data was found [from our inquiry projects] we set about finding a method to suggest the identified needs of the students into their daily school lives. After, the school **incorporated these suggestions into the students' daily lives**.

Q: This occurred through the implementation of the **Wellbeing Framework for Action**.

S: QUT readministered an improved survey; the average student wellbeing rating was now 65%.

Q: Even though there was no significant difference between the ratings of how students rated their wellbeing 'today', we know there have been some positive changes. For example, 41.3% of students in the 2019 survey said their wellbeing was better this year than last year, with many directly referencing specific actions occurring as a result of the project inquiry.

A game-changer

T: As an active member of the **QUT Wellbeing Matters Project**, I found this project to be a game changer in the movement of student voice in our school.



S: As a student who has taken part in a task that has brought noteworthy changes and remarkable outcomes, it was obvious that student perspectives and association has a significant contribution and commitment to the improvement of the wellbeing of a school.

Q: Students offer a unique and often different perspective on their experiences at school than may be provided by staff or parent perspectives alone.

S: Students will often understand the environment and wellbeing of the school better than the specialists who execute the strategies and techniques that can affect school wellbeing. This is one of the reasons the QUT project puts student perspectives as the focal point of basic leadership for schools' wellbeing.

T: I enjoyed the opportunity to work on this collaborative project with admin, students and outside stakeholders such as QUT.

Key success factors

S: It is important for schools to **embrace Student Voice**, because it gives the school the perspectives of students that are needed in making decisions relating to their wellbeing. Students can voice their concerns, opinions and ideas to help their fellow students learn and grow in a positive wellbeing environment. Having dedicated representatives to research and survey students of all categories and year levels helps to understand the needs and wants of a diverse body of students.

T: It was also great to be involved with community members outside of the school walls to ideate and challenge the 'normal' process. Jenna facilitated us to **look at things differently**, engaging in evidence-based research that looks at trends outside your community and thinking about how it applies to your own context.

Q: One of the things that we spoke about in the **Student Inquiry** and **Staff Working Party** sessions was how different things may impact on an individual's wellbeing.

T: We had regular, ongoing scheduled meetings and initiatives that had purpose and clear objectives. It was great to stop, reflect and **think about**



the young people first and what they want.

Q: As outsiders to the school, we were able to see the importance of obtaining and maintaining buy-in from the staff and students directly involved, but also the wider school community. Intentionality in the pre-work associated with moving towards a voice-inclusive school culture may aid in fostering greater adult **readiness to work with students** and meaningfully engage with them on matters that affect them as part of everyday school life and not just as part of a special initiative or external project

T: Professionally, the project allowed me to undertake purposeful work, with an **impact far greater than what I could achieve working in isolation**.

Challenges

T: The use of student voice to inform a school-wide change was quite daunting to begin with. How do you capture the voices of all students in such a large school, to ensure that their needs are all met? What if there were too many issues identified, conflicting opinions, outrageous views? How does a school ensure then that they've shown all these students that you've listened to them, respected and valued their opinions and then willing to do something about it?

Initially it seemed like one of those 'good in theory' practices but easier to file in the 'too hard basket'. I'm glad that my **perception changed** over the course of the project through my involvement in both elements,

the Student Inquiry group and Staff Working Party.

S: While we haven't yet reached our 100%, we have made progress in a number of areas. Our goal is still yet to be reached but it will happen in the future - it might be tomorrow or two years from now, but the time will come when our hard work shows and we can truly be a successful school where teachers and students can be truly equal with a positive rapport between them. At our school we aim to achieve, and so we will.

T: One initial challenge was being the voice for the group who was not represented in specific meetings; advocating for and voicing the students' perspective in the **Staff Working Party** meetings and then representing the staff perspective during the **Student Inquiry** group sessions. Over time, the processes of feeding back and forward between these groups and the level of **transparency in communications**, made this easier.

T: Barriers would be linking up this initiative with other school improvement plans and focus areas. Some schools don't have a particular person that looks after wellbeing and some schools are very slow with change. Our school is a very welcoming school that looks outside the normal. It would be useful to start with similar schools or could target particular job titles with a wellbeing related portfolio such as Guidance Officers or Student Support Heads of Department (HODs).

T: Another challenge was in receiving some very critical and harsh feedback from students; in not so much what

they were saying, but more so how they were voicing their opinions on the issues that affected them. It was pleasing to see however, that over the duration of the project, this became easier, as like anything you do with students, you need to guide, support and develop the skills that you want them to demonstrate. For a large number of them, they have never had an adult ask them their thoughts on issues that impact them and their learning in the school, or if they had, they may have had negative experiences where they felt their voices weren't valued, respected or actioned. This was a learning experience for not only the students (in how to have their voice heard and give their opinion), but also us as staff and leaders in the school, on **how to listen effectively, non-judgementally and then work with the students to create actions together for improvement.**

- T: In terms of some of the challenges associated with some of the specific initiatives we implemented, it's disappointing that the **MMM** initiative has slowed down as this was a big part of the wellbeing project. The **MMM** initiative ultimately aims to give students an opportunity to build a positive and supportive relationship with a teacher/mentor through social and emotional learning and development of 21st century skills.
- T: Another challenge is to consider how you can get an appropriate **representation** of the student body

to ensure all demographics are being represented in this collection of data.

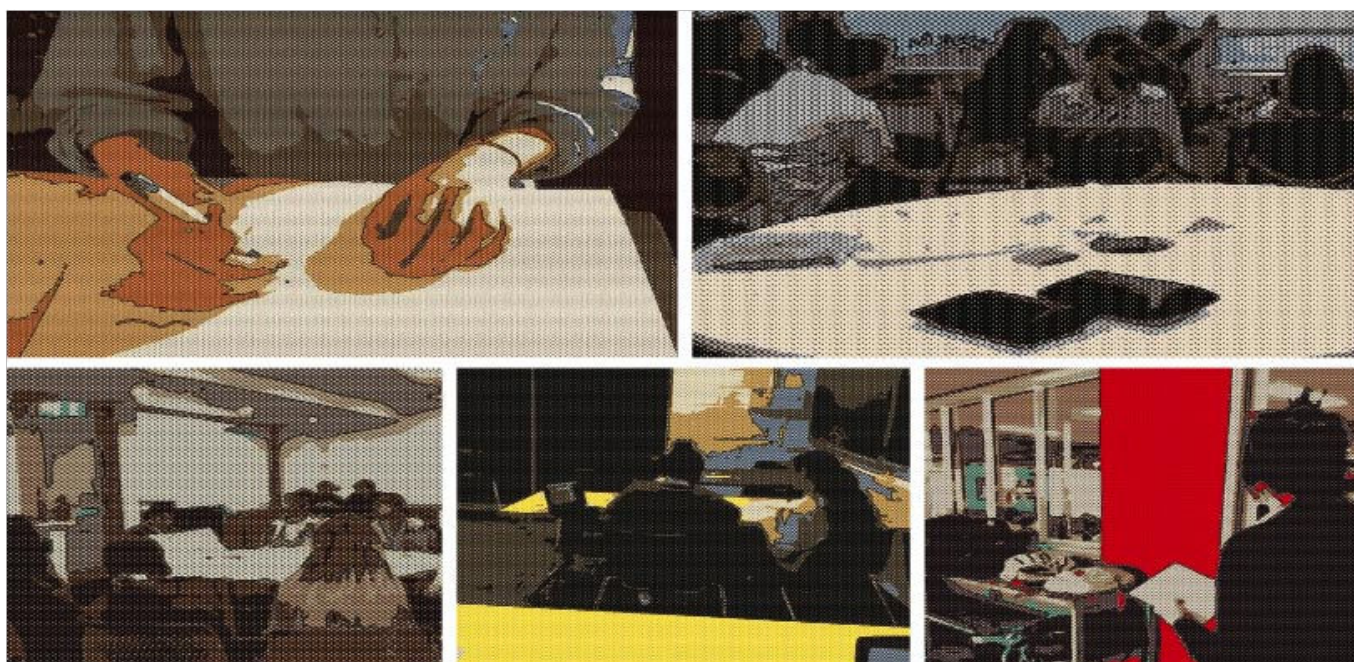
- Q: This, as well as seeking to provide **multiple spaces and places to engage meaningfully with students** on matters that affect them, are important to remember.

Possibilities and final reflections

- Q: Something to consider in moving forward is how to ensure that initiatives that are put in place maintain their momentum if key staff involved in their development and implementation leave the school. Essentially this relates to how to better assure the **sustainability** of initiatives commenced as part of what some may consider '*special project consultations*' when the project ends or particularly motivated staff and students driving the initiatives leave or graduate.
- T: The **QUT Wellbeing Matters Project** was positive for both the school and students, as it created a sense of ownership and I believe sparked a passion within the students around wellbeing, a topic that is so important in today's society.
- Q: The school would still like to work on improving student wellbeing day-to-day.
- S: So, as the average rating was not 100%, we set about finding a way to keep improving the method until it **was** a 100%. It was at this point we

found that if we incorporated the teachers' voice with the students, it would have a **more impactful message** as this was not just the students but the teachers *and* students.

- T: Student voice is a tool that I would encourage schools to use in all aspects of change and innovation to inform decisions being made. The partnership with QUT has been significant in making **evidence informed decisions** through their expert use of the wide range of data utilised. Our school has **wellbeing on the agenda** and this is a positive for our staff, community and most importantly students.
- Q: It's also important to focus on **school culture**, for example, in the extent to which there is wider staff willingness and readiness to engage with student perspectives.
- T: The overall staff perception of student voice is also something that needs to be worked on I believe. Some staff are very much set in their ways. Maybe a student voice initiative/program that is focused around student voice, and within that roll out, we work on staff perception and mindsets prior or alongside, would also aid in maintaining the sustainability of the initiatives.
- S: The after effects of placing students' views at the centre at the school gives clear proof of the significance of student inclusion in school-wide decision making has.



T: The **Wellbeing Matters Project** was **inclusive** and students were actively involved in the process. Students were taught how to contribute to discourse with educators and led inquiry-based projects. These **lifelong skills** are priceless in our current economy and the future world of work. Our students should be extremely proud of their contribution towards well-being awareness at our school and the legacy this framework leaves for future students and our community.

T: The project has continued to lead the way in changes at the school and I believe this will continue for years to come.

T: It has been a pleasure to be involved in the **QUT Wellbeing Matters** initiative at our school. This research project has seen an innovative way of working utilised, and the use of student voice has been a powerful tool.

T: QUT is leading the way in student voice in schools through this project and I would highly recommend other schools getting involved in these projects in the future.

Q: This project has emphasised a few key elements in engaging with students on matters affecting them;

- 1) The importance of **ongoing and meaningful engagement** with all students, including seeking ways to ensure **diverse representation** and **multiple opportunities** for input;
- 2) Allowing **time**: for students and staff to think, respond, contribute, interrogate, question, reflect and act;
- 3) Engaging in **genuine collaboration** between multiple stakeholders in the school environment on issues that are driven by students and/or staff;
- 4) Ensuring that student involvement results in actual change – that it is sought, listened to, and heard by those within the school with the ability to instigate, support, and result in **action**.
- 5) **Respecting the views and contributions of all** who contribute, even if the views expressed may be different to the personal or majority view, or hard to address.
- 6) Finding ways to **embed genuine student involvement in everyday school life** – not just for certain issues or topics.

7) Maintaining **open, transparent and ongoing communication** with all members of the school community. This is particularly important when resulting actions may not be evident straight away, or happening initially 'behind the scenes'.

8) **Persistence**, even when things may not go as planned, or things may be challenging, or input confronting. Reflect, critique, and strategise with the students and work together on determining a subsequent course of action.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many staff, students, and university team members who contributed to this project, but have not been named in this article.

For more information about the project, including videos associated resources, and other relevant publications, please visit: <https://research.qut.edu.au/wbmatters/>

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A snapshot of youth participation in Gippsland

There is a growing international movement that is focused on ensuring that young people master the skills they will need to navigate an increasingly interconnected, interdependent and globalised world.

The **Broadening Horizons** program in Gippsland, Victoria is a local manifestation of this international movement. It has been designed to equip students with the skills and dispositions needed for a changing twenty-first century (C21) economy. It commenced in 2014 and, in 2016, my colleagues Graeme Jane, Dahle Suggett, Chris Wardlaw and I were engaged to evaluate the program's progress and outcomes.

The **Broadening Horizons (BH)** program's core activity involves teams of students working over an extended period of time with their teachers and community/industry partners on projects that identify and provide solutions to authentic problem-solving tasks of importance to their community.

Most of the ten **BH** schools targeted their program at either Year 8 or Year 9 students. Some programs were compulsory for all students and some were offered as an elective. Some were timetabled as subjects for the whole year, some for a semester (16- 20 weeks) and some for a term (7-10 weeks).

The program's learning model was designed to enable students to experience a range of workplaces, engage in real life applications of the curriculum, and demonstrate their capacity to work independently and as part of a team. The learning model also included the concepts of growth mindset and character strengths.

Our evaluation methodology was largely based on online questionnaires for **Broadening Horizons** students and teachers and for non-**Broadening Horizons** students; and structured interviews with students, teachers and community/industry partners. Perceptions of students and teachers in the **BH** program were contrasted with perceptions of Years 8 and 9 students and teachers not involved in the program.

Findings on the program's impact, design and implementation provided compelling evidence for **Broadening Horizons'** continuation and expansion.

Compared to other students at the same year level, **BH** students:

- were more positive and motivated about their schooling, particularly when they made decisions about their learning;
- were more positive about their acquisition of C21 skills; this particularly applied to opportunities for higher order thinking;
- considered the work they were doing was relevant to their interests, important and worthwhile; and
- were more aware of school to work options.

BH students also

- strongly endorsed a curriculum based on project work and focused on real world problems;

- valued working in teams;
- valued the opportunity to exercise choice in relation to their learning and believed the **BH** curriculum provided them with more opportunities to do so;
- valued participating in learning situations where higher-order thinking and decision-making is encouraged and expected;
- valued the opportunities the **BH** curriculum presented for regularly getting and giving feedback on their learning
- considered that the learning model supported them to develop their resilience and aspirations.

The Victorian Government's long-term education targets include more students developing strong critical and creative thinking skills, demonstrating resilience and remaining in education. It is committed to ensuring that all Victorians have the ability to shape their future regardless of how the world changes around them.

We concluded that **Broadening Horizons** is a highly effective example of this commitment in practice.

For more information go to:

<https://bit.ly/33JCxccc>

This Trafalgar High School website contains a 10 page information brochure on the **Broadening Horizons** program.

<https://bit.ly/2NOMHTr>

This Sale College website briefly describes the school's **Broadening Horizons** program for 2018.

<https://bit.ly/373ZYPg>

This *Latrobe Valley Express* website has a brief 2017 news story on the launch of the Gippsland **Broadening Horizons** program.

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‘Every student, every voice’ resources available

In August, the NSW Department of Education celebrated the theme of *‘every student, every voice’* during Education Week.

Following on from this focus on student voice, the Department has released a **free suite of evidence-based resources** to support educators and students in actively promoting the voice of our students in classrooms, schools and communities.

These resources are based on the findings of the 2018 *“Improving wellbeing through student participation at school”*¹ research, showing engaged student participation is reliant on students having voice, choice, influence and opportunities to work with staff.

These new resources were developed in collaboration with students and teachers from across NSW, and are designed to help schools find the right

balance between teacher-centred and student-led teaching approaches. They are customisable and public-facing and include:

- early stage 1 to stage 6 teaching and learning programs and units of work,
- student leadership activities,
- a fact sheet for parents
- classroom strategies and mapping tools
- case studies and videos showcasing student voice across the State.

Teaching and learning programs:

<https://bit.ly/34btGjs>

Primary and secondary units of work and lesson plans incorporating student voice and social-emotional learning are available for teachers to download and customise if required.

Primary programs are designed to be delivered throughout the year, while the Year 7 unit could be delivered as part of English studies or any project-based learning activity.

Other secondary programs encourage and broaden student voice and enhance students’ personal and social capabilities.

Student leadership activities: <https://bit.ly/2QHRHc>

There are 11 activities, each with accompanying resources, to support the collaboration and leadership skills of individual students as well as student leadership teams in schools, including Student Representative Councils, interest groups and committees. These activities were developed with students and can be adapted to any school context, and each takes approximately 30 minutes to complete, and can be facilitated by student leaders.

¹ Graham & Gardon (2018). Australian Research Council Linkage Project: ‘Improving Wellbeing through Student Participation at School.’ Southern Cross University

“If you are having trouble, speak up.
If you have a different opinion, express it.
If you have a suggestion, say it.
Express your feelings”

(by Chloe, Year 6 school captain)

The eleven topics are:

- Team building
- Making team decisions
- Team values and visions
- Inspirations from other student teams
- Exploring team strengths
- Design thinking
- Project planning
- Running successful meetings
- Communicating with school staff and students
- Pitching an idea
- Reflecting and evaluating.

Classroom strategies

Resources are also available to help students and teachers map student voice in their classrooms. These resources can help provide a balance between teacher directed and student led activities to support students to be partners in their own learning.

These resources are freely available from the NSW Department of Education.

Visit its website at: <https://bit.ly/2XD3zzO>



[education.nsw.gov.au](https://www.education.nsw.gov.au)

Contact: **Karen-Maia Jackaman**
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The following tool is from the resource, available at: <https://bit.ly/2QliMxQ> :

Reflecting and evaluating

Activity 2: Evaluating the group

Effective practice	Where are we now?	What can we do to improve?
We organise a variety of wellbeing activities for students such as speakers or events		
We are involved in school events such as Year 7 orientation or sports activities		
We are involved in the running of school assemblies		
We are accessible and known to the school community		
We work with school staff to achieve our planned projects		

Activity 3: Self reflection

My roles in the team are.....

I enjoyed.....

I had difficulties with.....

I learnt.....

I wish I had.....

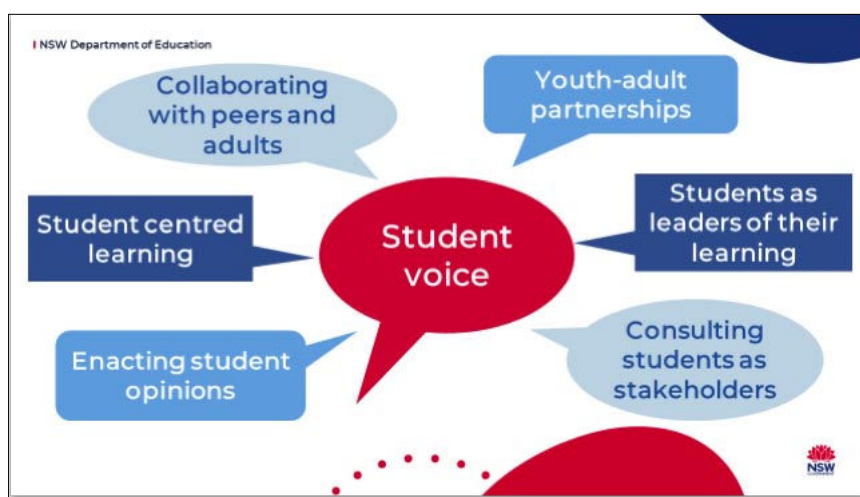
A project I worked on was.....

Something I am proud of is.....

Supporting student leadership: **Reflecting and Evaluating**

Student voice, participation and leadership in our classrooms

Classrooms can provide a positive learning environment that encourages student voice and develops skills and competence that moves from participation to leadership. A balance between teacher directed and student led, developmentally appropriate activities support authenticity and develop students' agency to own and drive their learning. Teachers and students can work together to develop partnerships, build confidence, self-awareness, and support meaningful learning outcomes.



The following checklists can help teachers assess how much student voice is happening in their classroom and whether their students perceive it as occurring meaningfully. Whilst all the statements are examples of student voice, as the lists progress, they become more student-centred and

students go from being recipients of learning to leaders of their own learning.

The checklists can also form the basis for classroom conversation about student voice.

Student feedback about learning

This is a tool high school teachers can use to capture student perspectives on voice, participation and leadership in the classroom.

<i>Student statements</i>	<i>Once a week</i>	<i>Once a term</i>	<i>Once a year</i>	<i>Not yet</i>
I can ask questions to clarify or to consolidate my learning.				
My teacher pre-assesses us before starting a new topic.				
My teachers use class results to plan future lessons or reteach concepts if necessary.				
My teacher gives us exit-slips and surveys to get feedback on our learning.				
I provide feedback to my teacher whether lessons were appropriately challenging and engaging.				
I can choose where I sit in the classroom to meet my learning needs.				
I usually know what we are learning in class (the learning intentions are clear).				
I work with my teachers to work out my learning goals.				
I can use my interests to further my learning.				
I collaborate with peers to create group presentations or inquiry based learning.				
I can decide how I present my learning.				
I can negotiate aspects of assessments with my teacher.				
I can choose how my learning is assessed.				
We do peer and self-assessment.				
I often reflect and self-assess my learning experience.				
I write my own reflection on my school report or assessments.				
I work with my teachers to create resources.				
I design learning experiences for myself or the class based on learning goals, interests and/or talents.				


Teacher reflection on student voice

This is a tool high school teachers can use to reflect on their classroom practice regarding student voice, participation and leadership.

Teacher statements	<i>I don't do this</i>	<i>I do this some-times</i>	<i>This is embedded in my practice</i>	<i>I would like to do more of this</i>
I encourage students to ask questions to clarify or to consolidate their learning.				
I encourage students to choose where they sit in the classroom to meet their learning needs.				
I use students' results to inform my planning and programs.				
I give students exit-slips and surveys (formative assessment) to measure learning.				
I survey students to get feedback on my teaching.				
I negotiate learning goals with my students.				
I give students explicit learning intentions.				
I encourage students to use their interests to further their learning.				
I negotiate aspects of assessments with my students.				
I give students a range of options for assessment modes.				
I facilitate inquiry based learning in my classrooms.				
My students do student-generated inquiry based learning.				
I support students to self-assess and self-reflect on their learning.				
I work with my students to co-create resources or lesson plans.				
My students write a reflection on their school reports or assessments.				
My students design learning experiences for myself or the class based on learning goals, interests and/or talents.				

Mapping student voice activities

Using the checklists, map what kinds of student voice activities you are currently using in your classroom. You can also use the tool to plan for future directions.

<i>Student voice continuum</i>	<i>Student actions</i>	<i>Teacher actions</i>	<i>Examples of practice: K - 12</i>
<i>Passive student voice: Teacher-led activities</i>	Complete assigned tasks, individually or in groups and contribute thoughts and opinions about the tasks.	Provide appropriate tasks and listen to student contributions but have limited formal processes to act on these opinions.	Students do activities as organised by teachers and have class discussions.
	Work individually or in groups and provide feedback on topics provided by the teacher.	Request contribution and seek feedback that is considered in planning and reflecting on student progress and engagement.	Surveying students or formative assessment results inform teaching and learning programs. Teachers questions elicit student views.
	Students have input into classroom decisions, collaborate with peers and / or have multiple ways they can demonstrate their understanding and provide insights, or feedback.	Plan and scaffold activities that provide choice and opportunity for collaboration, then acts as a facilitator using student feedback to inform future lessons or direction.	Students work with teachers to develop learning goals or future learning.
	Students have a formalised role in decision making. Students and staff decide on a joint course of action together (co-planning).	Provide flexibility for students to choose methods to demonstrate understanding and facilitate or co-design solutions to problems with students.	Students and staff co-construct materials or assessment modes to meet learning goals.
<i>Active student voice: Student-led activities</i>	Students design challenging learning experiences based on learning goals, interests, talents and/or passions. Students make decisions, communicate ideas and take responsibility for outcomes.	Refocuses or challenges student thinking, without providing solutions. Students initiate and organise an learning event and staff have an advisory role.	Project or problem based learning and design thinking such as student initiated coding activity or personal inquiry project.

The Teeter-Totter Effect:

How to avoid a common pitfall of learner-centred transformation

The personalisation of learning requires the relationship between youth and educators to shift from a traditional, adult-dominated structure to one of partnership and shared responsibility. As states and districts seek to change practices within their local systems, the opportunity to make this pivotal shift is arising all over the country. I am personally witnessing this in Vermont, USA—where personalised learning is the statewide goal—including offering ‘flexible pathways’ to graduation and shifting to proficiency-based learning. This vision is now policy in the state.

Imbued with purpose and hope, youth-adult partnership brings out our “best selves.”

This has opened the door to unprecedented opportunities for young people to be at the centre of our change efforts, rather than their common role as passive recipients. However, we can't simply will this mindset into existence. We must take intentional, guided action in shifting our mental models and practices to this partnership-based approach.

UP for Learning has been taking on the challenge of forming authentic, equitable youth-adult partnerships in schools over the past 12 years. I want to share a particular hurdle—the **Teeter-Totter Effect**—we have seen in our work, with the hope that naming and exploring this potential pitfall will expedite the journey for others on the road to fully expressed youth-adult partnerships.

The Teeter-Totter Effect

The journey from an adult-dominated teacher-student relationship model to a youth-adult partnership model requires a recalibration of norms, including mental models, power structures, communication, collaboration, decision making, and shared responsibility. As with any change in beliefs and practices, the calibration process is anything but simple and linear. We can often find ourselves so adamant about making a shift that we move from one extreme to the other—creating yet another imbalanced system.

If we imagine a teeter-totter with an adult on one side and a young person on the other, a well-functioning youth-adult partnership allows both the

adult and young person to have both feet on the ground—perfectly balancing each other out through their shared partnership along the learning journey. To get there, we must first examine where we're starting—the adult-dominated system.

Adult-Dominated

In our dominant cultural norm, adults are grounded with the power and responsibility to shape most aspects of educational decisions, essentially ‘doing’ education **to** and **for** youth. Young people are ‘along for the ride’ in a largely passive role. Being suspended in air can feel delightfully unburdened or frustratingly out of control. The response of youth ranges from acceptance and comfort (e.g. playing the game of school) to anger and withdrawal (e.g. dropping out). Adults are firmly grounded in a comfortable and known role, often unaware they are missing an invaluable perspective in their decision-making process.

*When the teeter-totter is in this position, the wisdom, knowledge, passion, commitment, and ownership of one of the major stakeholder groups in education—**young people**—will be missing in the process of learning and school change.*



What happens if we shift everything over to the youth?

Youth-Dominated

When a culture begins to shift to youth-adult partnership, it seeks to rectify the long-standing imbalance of power and omission of youth in decision-making. Adults step back to make space for youth voice and power, but in this way, adults can overcorrect by largely removing their own voice and input.

Now adults are passively 'along for the ride', believing their role is to defer all responsibility and decision making to youth. They fear any attempt to share their knowledge or opinions will ruin the new partnership. Youth often find joy in this new role of responsibility and sense of power. They can believe that the correction of the power imbalance requires this youth-only shift—it is their turn! But, those feelings can be offset by feelings of uncertainty or confusion due to lack of support, structure, or guidance from adults, as they confront inevitable challenges.

Adults appreciate witnessing youth leadership and the expansion of their learning capacity in such a system. But, they often feel helpless and frustrated when they have knowledge or insight that can contribute to navigating the barriers mentioned above. They have convinced themselves everything must be in the young person's hands.



*When the teeter-totter swings to this position, the wisdom, knowledge, passion, commitment, and ownership of one of the major stakeholder groups in education—**educators**—will be missing in the process of learning and school change.*

Both scenarios leave one group feeling inactive and the other overconfident and unexposed to the many possibilities that would be available to them if they were supported by their youth or adult counterpart.

Youth-Adult Partnership

Youth-adult partnership in its authentic, equitable form allows both youth and adults to be firmly grounded in shared power and responsibility — readily sharing their wisdom, knowledge, passion, and commitment. Learners and educators know they are invaluable partners with a relationship rooted in respect, trust, and equity. All feel the joy and weight of shared responsibility, and continually build their capacity as change agents in their own lives and in shaping their school community.

Both learning and school change efforts are orchestrated 'with' youth in contrast to everything being done 'to and for them'. Decision-making is flexible, with youth sometimes in the lead and, at other times, adults. A trusting and mutually respectful relationship makes this both comfortable and empowering.



Realising the full potential of both stakeholder groups results in an unprecedented capacity to co-create an engaging and equitable learning environment, seeding lifelong civic capacity.

How can we create the best of both worlds where adults and youth alike feel empowered and open to receiving support from everyone in their learning community, regardless of age?

How can I expedite my school's shift to youth-adult partnership?

UP for Learning has been working for years to help youth-adult teams hone their partnerships and stabilise the teeter-totter effect. We know it takes time and intention to get 'four feet on the ground'—the balanced sharing of responsibility and power that makes youth-adult partnerships most effective. And, we've learned three key lessons along the way, as well as developing some powerful tools to make this outcome a reality.

1. Help both youth and adults understand the WHY of the change to youth-adult partnership, creating a shared vision for this destination.

Shifting mental models of roles and responsibilities is key to implementing youth-adult partnerships in learning and decision-making. Yet, we have observed that many young people, and educators, feel this is simply a new method being imposed on them. They don't see how shifting relationship norms can help realise the full potential of more learner-centred practices.

This is a reasonable response. When people hear education jargon such as 'youth voice and choice,' or 'student-centred learning,' the youth-dominated model is often what they assume is being proposed. 'Youth voice and choice' is believed to be absent any adult input, and 'student-centred learning' is too often viewed as something uninformed by negotiated or co-created learning methods and goals. Our job is to offer new mental models for this paradigm shift and unpack (or avoid) the jargon whenever possible. By illuminating these misconceptions for what they are, we can lessen resistance to change.

UP for Learning's *"What's the Deal with Proficiency-Based Learning?"* video is one example of a helpful tool for

communities to use in introducing and seeding conversation about the 'why' of this shift. Linking these new practices to brain-based research has proven to be one effective approach to explaining the rationale for change. Having this information provided by a young person (as done in this video) only increases the impact of this strategy.

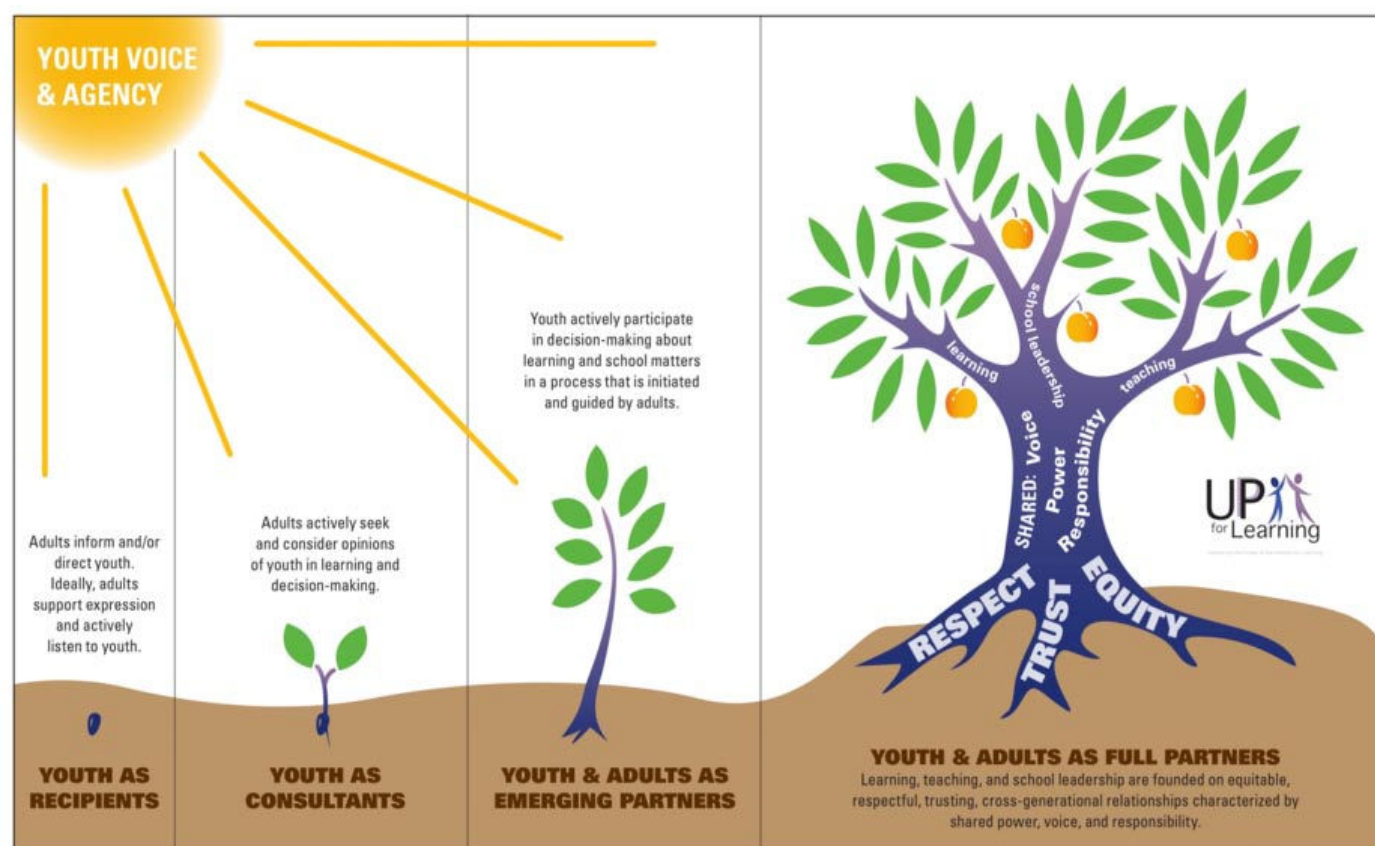
2. Help people understand the destination and the incremental steps to that end.

As groups explore the youth-adult partnership concept, we suggest providing a roadmap to introduce the broad concepts of the journey. The framework of moving from youth as 'recipients,' to 'consultants,' to 'emerging partners' *en route* to a full youth-adult partnership are helpful benchmarks. These can be effectively shared through a tree metaphor (below).

Next, explore the core variables that must shift along the way: mental models, power dynamics, communication/collaboration, and decision-making/shared responsibilities. UP for Learning has created the *Youth-Adult Partnership Roadmap* rubric specifically for this purpose.

The roadmap helps affirm the strengths of current practices and creates dialogue about the forthcoming changes in roles and responsibilities within the learning community. Educators and young people alike are given the opportunity to openly explore the pros and cons of each proposed shift and define the next steps toward this goal. Additionally, the *"Taking the Pulse of Partnership"* rubric is a tool to help teams monitor the meeting and task management process, including communications, decision making, and roles and responsibilities.

This shared understanding and language that grounds youth-adult partnership can serve as an ongoing touchstone to expedite the paradigm shift.



3. Create community commitments or norms that reflect partnership, and then embed these norms into the fabric of the team's relationships.

The easiest way to expedite the teeter-totter recalibration process is to establish a safe environment in which to co-create norms that support partnership—beginning with trust, respect, and equity of voice. Once these norms have been created and agreed upon by both youth and adults, they must be referenced regularly.

There must also be an allowance for inadvertently reverting back to old patterns and an agreed-upon means of 'gentle reminders' to put the group back on track. As previously noted, this is anything but a linear or simple process. Mistakes are often a catalyst for the most poignant moments of growth, as new norms take root. **UP for Learning** frequently weaves in Margaret Wheatley's poem "*Turning to One Another*" as an entry point in deciding upon these new inclusive and empowering principles and practices because, "*There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.*"

Four Feet on the Ground: Balancing the Teeter-Totter

The **Teeter-Totter Effect** can slow or completely halt the personalisation of learning if left unchecked. But, if these five 'whys' for shifting from an adult-dominated model to a youth-adult partnership model are kept in the hearts and minds of everyone in the learning community, you will be well on your way to a transformed learning model:

1. Young people understand the importance of their role in learning and decision-making, sparking ownership and engagement.
2. Educators can focus more on facilitating learning and less on behaviour management; time previously consumed by a power dynamic (eg. 'make me learn') is replaced by learning itself.
3. Increased academic performance brings with it a cascade of positive ripples.
4. There is renewed hope when both adults and youth know that they matter to each other, to learning, and to the school change process itself.
5. There is equity in access to engaging learning, where each and every young person believes in their capacity and agency in the world.

Imbued with purpose and hope, youth-adult partnership brings out our 'best selves'. All parties are fully empowered to work in community toward a shared goal. How will you create this future in your community?

Helen Beattie



Helen is the Executive Director and Founder of Vermont-based UP for Learning (Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning) and co-founder of Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST). As a licensed School Psychologist and Educational Consultant, she has specialised in strategies to build school cultures in which youth are both engaged and empowered as learners and change agents.

This article first appeared on the **Education Reimagined** website: <https://education-reimagined.org/teeter-totter-effect/> and is reprinted here with Helen's permission.

Empowerment through voice

No longer do teachers plan the curriculum in isolation. Co-designing is the key to empowering the voice of students, parents and community.

The co-designing process at **St Pius X Primary School** invites conversations to imagine all possibilities and to create learning pathways to actively engage in building a strong, healthy and connected community together. The main task of teachers is to build the capabilities of students to enable and empower them to be active agents of change.

Why are we building Student Capabilities?

Young people feel they are not being listened to and do not have a voice in their local community. In a recent survey for Children's Week, young people were asked: *Why should adults listen to you?* The most common reply was: *'We have good ideas and are creative. We see things differently and think in a way adults can no longer see or think.'*

'We want to work with our communities to make a difference and be a better place for everyone.'

St Pius X students work closely with the City of Banyule Council: Child, Youth and Family Committee, focusing on listening to children and encouraging participation in decision making. The school recently became a signatory of the **Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter**, along with several other services in the local area.

Empowerment through Voice is key to student wellbeing and learning. The responsibility is therefore for school leaders, teachers and community partners to provide opportunities for young people to come together to discuss their ideas, and to create pathways for action.

In 2020, St Pius X aims to further empower Student Voice by establishing a regular meeting place and time for young people with the **City of Banyule Council** and **Banyule Community Health**, so their voice is directly at the table when decisions are being made.

Listen to children: you will be surprised at what they can offer!

Barbara Gomez, Principal
St Pius X Primary School, Heidelberg West, Vic
bgomez@spxhw.catholic.edu.au



VicSRC Incorporates

From baby bird to soaring eagle

In 2007, the VicSRC had one volunteer staff member and big dreams. After receiving initial funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (now known as the Department of Education and Training), the VicSRC approached the **Youth Affairs Council Victoria** for some support, and they generously provided the VicSRC in its fledgling stage with auspicing for the funding as well as management advice and office space. This partnership strengthened through the years until the VicSRC grew to a point where it was clear that becoming an **independent organisation** was the obvious next step.

With pro-bono support from **Russell Kennedy** law firm, the VicSRC embarked on the exciting (and daunting) journey to incorporation in early 2019.

As a student-led organisation, a key consideration was that the governance structure of the VicSRC ensured students remained decision makers of the

strategic direction and operations of the organisation.

To counter the short term and loss of knowledge that was a challenge within the student board, six adults will act as a **board of trustees** to provide support for the student **Executive Advisory Committee** as well as retain

the legal obligations of running an organisation. A new constitution was created to capture the crucial elements of the VicSRC's governance structure and at a **Special General Meeting on Thursday 21 November**, the VicSRC formally passed a motion to become a **charitable company limited by guarantee** and approved the inaugural **VicSRC Board of Directors**.

The VicSRC will be fully independent by July 2020 and is looking forward to the next exciting chapter in student voice, agency and participation in Victoria!

Nina Laitala
Executive Officer, VicSRC
eo@vicsrc.org.au



Board of Trustees

Since Congress 2018...

What has the VicSRC done?

For the VicSRC, 2018-2019 has been an enormous year.

We've moved office three times before settling into our forever home in North Melbourne on the eve of Congress 2019. We're taking our first steps to becoming an independent organisation after more than a decade of wonderful care and guidance from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. We've grown again with two new staff roles and a whole bundle of new ways for students to get involved.

We've run programs, attended meetings, sat on reference groups and presented on panels. (For just how many check the page opposite!) We've grown the Student Voice Hub to over four hundred members and used it to get student feedback that goes directly back into our work.

We've relished the swell of student voice that started in 2018 and has only grown in the twelve months since. We're excited for what the future will bring but for now we're taking a moment to reflect on what we've achieved - we think you'll be impressed; we certainly are.

The VicSRC Team
(from 2019 Congress Report)

VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Skills First Regional Forum Victorian Council of Social Services Education Equity Coalition Video Conference Call with Brisbane Catholic Education Connect the Dots Rural Youth Sector Conference Australian Council for Educational Leaders VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Respectful Relationships workshop City of Melbourne Training in Event Planning and Promotion School Strike 4 Climate Action Training Day School Leaders For Gender Equality and Respect Parents Victoria Annual Conference Dinner The Art of Positive Change VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Ngaga-Diji (hear me) Launch School Council Forum Respectful Relationships Panel Education State Guiding Coalition Plenary Meeting with Mary Jean Gallagher Working Group for the International Directions and Networking in Student Voice Agency Leadership and Participation VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Judging Panel for the Student Voice Awards Marrung Ministerial Roundtable Victorian Anti Bullying and Mental Health Initiative VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Rural Youth Awards DET Regional Service Group about Students on School Council Your Voice Fitzroy High School Feminist Collective Conference Skills First Regional Forum Congress Volunteer and VicSRC Executive Committee Meet and Greet VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Assistant Principals Meeting for Student Voice Respectful Relationships Advisory Group Skype Meeting with the School Student Union of Norway Complaints Management Reference Group Three Day Executive Camp Victorian Commercial Teachers Association Student Voice Professional Learning Program School Council Forum Panel for National Gallery of Victoria Melbourne Design Week Archipitch School Governance Network School Council Forums VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Victorian Council of Social Services Education Equity Coalition Skills First Regional Forum Embedding Student Voice in Respectful Relationships by Domestic Violence Resource Centre VicSRC Executive Committee meeting DET Regional Services Group about Students on School Council Skills First Regional Forum Q&A Interview with Mary Jean Gallagher VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Student Voice Resource Development Workshop School Strike 4 Climate National Young Leaders Day by Halogen Meeting with the Minister for Education Honourable James Merino MP VicSRC Executive Committee meeting University of Melbourne Graduate Education Society End of Year Conference Respectful Relationships Advisory Group Department of Education and Training meetings on School Surveys Victorian Certificate of Education Leadership Award Ceremony Three Day Executive Camp Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Annual General Meeting 2019 Melbourne Declaration Ministerial Forum School Leaders For Gender Equality and Respect Forest Hill College Student Leadership Conference Forum VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Power to Youth Forum Marrung Central Governance Committee Department of Education and Training Students on School Council VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Skills First Regional Forum Victorian Council of Social Services Education Equity Coalition Meeting with the Minister for Education Honourable James Merino MP Opportunities and Access for Regional and Remote Communities working group School Council Forum VicSRC Executive Committee meeting VicSRC Executive Committee Facilitation Training Skills First Regional Forum 2019 Department of Education-Victorian Community Sector Education Forum VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Knox City Council Short Film "Masked" School Strike 4 Climate Action Training Day Centre for Multicultural Youth My Education Awards VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Recognise and Celebrate the Benefits of Education Marrung Central Governance Committee Meeting with Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority CEO David Howes Treasurer's Victorian Council of Social Services Budget Breakfast VicSRC Ambassadors meeting DET Regional Services Group about Students on School Council Victorian Institute of Teaching Professional Boundaries Workshop Skills First Regional Forum National Youth Commission Public Hearing Meeting with Secretary of the Department of Education and Training Jenny Atta VicSRC Executive Committee meeting VicSRC Student Voice Awards School Strike 4 Climate Respectful Relationships Advisory Group Department of Education and Training Statewide Leadership Conference VicSRC Executive Committee meeting Congress Volunteer and VicSRC Executive Committee Training Day Marrung Central Governance Committee Progress Conference 2019 Panel Discussion VicSRC Ambassadors meeting Victorian Budget Lock Up ResourceSmart Schools Award 2019 Public Accounts Estimate Committee Victorian Budget Education Department of Education and Training Funded Projects Advisory Meeting with Petrina

Vic SRC Student COMMUNITY

**Are you
a school
student in
Victoria?**

**Become a member of the
VicSRC Student Community!**

FREE for school students!

As a member of the VicSRC Student Community, you get discounts and links to news and resources. You belong to a statewide network, and vote to choose the VicSRC Executive

Join @ <https://bit.ly/2FDrg5m>

VicSRC STUDENT VOICE AWARDS

Newsboys Foundation Youth Leadership Award

The **Newsboys Foundation Youth Leadership Award** is part of the annual **VicSRC Student Voice Awards** that recognise and celebrate best practice initiatives, schools and people in student voice. This award recognises a Year 12 student who has championed student voice in their school or community and has brought about positive change through their leadership and advocacy on behalf of young people. The three finalists each receive a grant to further their leadership skills.

Winner: Olivia Sutherland

"I stay conscious of the strong, powerful and creative student voices and young leaders constantly surrounding me in order to ensure that I am always striving to be better."

"I would love to champion the concept of student voice in independent schools in Victoria as a public speaker, having seen the enthusiastic and inspired reception that these campaigns brought about in my own school."

Olivia Sutherland is Senior Prefect at Peninsula Grammar, a 2019 VicSRC Ambassador and Frankston Youth Councillor. She is dedicated to working at grassroots and systemic levels to empower the voices of others and is devoted to encouraging passion and confidence.

Olivia has championed student voice by passionately advocating for student contributions on community service, student wellbeing, peer support, and environmental fields from Prep to Year 12 in order to gain the best possible understanding of students' voices and key concerns. As a result, Olivia has advocated on behalf of the student body, banning plastic cutlery and straws in the cafeteria, changing uniform policy to allow girls to wear trousers, and establishing an International-Local Student Partnership to support students who may feel isolated or silenced. Olivia has normalised and empowered student voice through assembly presentations, fun mental health activities such as a petting zoo, and multiple student-led fairs, in order to create a welcoming and energising environment. She has also attempted to reconnect leadership with all year levels, spending homeroom classes with different year



levels to welcome student voice in a less formal environment, while maintaining a dialogue with teachers and the Principal.

In the wider community Olivia has helped contribute to the normalisation of student voice, working at local, state, federal and international levels to represent and further empower student voice in others. Olivia worked with her local Council to keep students in school by advocating for \$10,000 in youth grants to go towards funding alternative VCE programs, ensuring the most vulnerable voices are protected and heard.

After Year 12, Olivia hopes to continue with her youth leadership positions in her local government, as a facilitator of the School Captains Syndicate and member of Youth Council, as well as looking at applying for the position of Youth Mayor.

Finalist: Cohen Saunders

"I believe that the most important consideration as an SRC is what the student body wants."

Cohen Saunders has been on his SRC for four years. In this time, he has helped introduce a democratic model for deciding SRC priorities and has worked to bring the three-bin system to his school, Castlemaine Secondary College. He also instigated a feedback process that brought more student voice into subject selection, and as a result Castlemaine Secondary College are running VCE Global Politics in 2020.

Cohen has worked to bring his SRC's focus away from token speech-making and school-representation and towards more authentic and diverse student representation.

Cohen's most significant achievement has been the recent implementation of his SRC's priorities selection process, which is based on VicSRC's Congress model and uses democratic student voice to form the SRC's advocacy priorities. This process works by first asking all students to submit complaints about the school before working with students to develop solutions. The SRC then presents these at a whole school assembly, where every student votes on the issue most important to them.

He is the student representative on school council and through this, he recently drafted and helped pass a letter in support of the School Strikes for Climate Action to go out to the school community.



Cohen successfully applied for a grant from the local council to improve two of the school's basketball courts. Cohen was a member of the 2017-2018 VicSRC Executive, working primarily on the Student Voice Hub and the Education State Guiding Coalition and is currently a VicSRC Ambassador.

Cohen wants to work more closely with his school upon graduation to establish more of a culture of sustainability. He hopes to create edible gardens for students to grow food in, believing that agriculture is something that draws people and the environment together. The establishment of an edible garden space at school, along with the implementation of its upkeep into the curriculum, would allow students to contribute to a more sustainable future, and foster a connection to land in students.

Finalist: Aardra Kuniyil

"...it is difficult to have staff or principal teams understand the student perspective around an issue, even if we understand theirs. [It's important that we] make sure they understand why some issues are important to us [and that we are] collaborating with them to create change."

Aardra Kuniyil is a Year 12 student at Suzanne Cory High School. She has been on the SRC for the last four years and is the Chair this year, working on many school-wide projects and meeting with principal staff. She actively engages in many extra-curricular activities and has a passion for student voice.

Aardra has been involved in implementing many of the suggestions that come from students in her school's Open Forums, which serve the purpose of being a direct way to talk to peers at school. Aardra has seen the implementation of an annual whole school homegroup picnic, which serves to welcome the year nines into the vertical homegroup system recently introduced at the school. She has been part of creating working relationships between other schools through planning days where students from different schools can get to know other SRCs and the inner workings of other schools.

Aardra also wrote an open letter on behalf of the students to school council about getting another counsellor at the school, which has been successful. She has also brought smaller maintenance issues to the Principal, on behalf of the students, and worked through them all to see that they are attended to.

For the future, Aardra hopes to continue her leadership endeavours through external organisations, such as the Victorian Youth Congress, to work with other young people and create change on a larger scale. She also wants to give back to her community and school by running workshops for the future leaders at the school, taking what she has learnt over the last few years and making sure that the leaders of the future are well-equipped.



Student Voice Ally Award

The Student Voice Ally Award is part of the annual VicSRC Student Voice Awards which recognise and celebrate best practice initiatives, schools and people in student voice. This award recognises an adult who has supported and amplified student voice in a school or community. The Student Voice Ally is someone who has been integral to empowering students to make change, always puts students front and centre, and constantly seeks to learn from students. The three finalists receive a cash prize for their schools.

Winner: Justin Esler

Principal, Diamond Valley Special Developmental School

Nominated by Bronte Graham, Speech Pathologist, and the students of Diamond Valley SDS

"Justin consistently refers to the fact that we have a lot to learn from the students and we think this is another important attribute that others can take away from him."

"...put the students at the front and centre of their learning as Justin does and ensure that you are always being student-centred in your approach."

Justin Esler is the Principal of Diamond Valley Special Developmental School. Over the last twelve months he has led a talented team of teachers, therapists and education support staff to embark on the 'More to Say' campaign which has supported many non-verbal students for the first time to have a voice.

Justin has made significant contributions to strengthen the culture of student voice at Diamond Valley SDS since his arrival. All students at Diamond Valley have complex communication needs and are non-verbal or have limited speech. Prior to Justin's arrival, many of the students at Diamond Valley had their own communication systems that they were learning to use and although some staff were confident



supporting students to learn to use their communication systems, this was not happening consistently throughout the school.

Justin strongly believes in supporting each student to have a voice and to be autonomous communicators. For students to learn to use their communication systems they need to see those in their environment using them with them. In order to inspire and upskill staff to learn to use students' systems, Justin put several initiatives and projects in place, including:

- The creation of a professional learning community who met on a weekly basis to talk about how staff can promote students' voices
- Regular school-wide training
- Student-led events

Through Justin's implementation of initiatives, Diamond Valley SDS have seen incredible results. Students who have complex communication needs can communicate for a variety of reasons – commenting, requesting, expressing opinions, telling stories, sharing jokes etc.

Staff feel inspired by Justin and are using their own time to make the resources they need to better support their students to become autonomous communicators.

Diamond Valley SDS hope that other people can learn to have the same belief and expectations that Justin has in all students. He expects that each and every student's voice is heard, and that staff are giving them the best opportunities to learn to use their communication systems.

Finalist: Simone Brown

Student Empowerment Coordinator, Kilmore Primary School

Nominated by the Kilmore Primary School Student Action Team

"Without her passion, we don't think that we could achieve what we can."

"Be prepared to say 'I don't know, let's find out together'"

Simone Brown is the Student Empowerment Coordinator at Kilmore Primary School (KPS). She has established the Student Voice, Agency and Leadership work at her school. Simone organises and runs staff PD on what each of the student voice aspects are and works closely with the KPS Student Action Team to achieve their goals.

Since 2017, Simone has run the Student Representative Council but this year, she introduced the AMPLIFY document to Kilmore Primary School and completely re-established a Student Action Team (SAT) and re-designed the entire selection process to ensure fair selection.

Simone is always there for the SAT. And she is super busy! When they have meetings, Simone takes minutes while the students run the meeting. She has helped the SAT to figure out how to run a good meeting. This is important because it means that the SAT can actually change things that they are passionate about.

Simone coaches other teachers and shows them ways they can include student voice in classrooms and introduced a four year plan for student voice, agency and leadership at KPS.



Finalist: Allirra Scott

Student Voice Coordinator

Melba College

Nominated by Melba College students

"Allirra's way of supporting and increasing student voice is to treat students as adults, taking their opinions seriously and working with them to set and achieve goals."

Since becoming the Student Voice Coordinator at Melba College in 2019,

Allirra Scott has worked with student representatives to bring a much greater focus to student voice and agency at the school. She has provided students with the training, resources and encouragement to overhaul the way the SRC meet and make decisions and has been instrumental in assisting with events and projects planned by students. Allirra has advocated for more student voice and agency in classrooms, insisting that students attend staff meetings and workshops in order to

get perspective on decisions regarding learning.

Melba College has seen an outstanding change in attitude around student voice that would not have been possible without Allirra's hard work. Under her guidance and encouragement, the SRC was reshaped to be more effective and impactful than it has ever been. Student representatives have gained recognition from their peers as well as from staff members for the programs and initiatives they have implemented, made possible through Allirra's support. She has tirelessly supported students in the planning and implementation of various student voice initiatives to promote leadership and agency within the school community.

Allirra teaches students that their opinions are valued and makes sure every voice is heard. Others could learn from her enthusiasm to see students thrive and have their voices heard and her ability to interact with students on a more personal level in order to build mutual trust and respect.



Meet some current VicSRC Executive members



Emily

I saw becoming an Executive member for the Victorian Student Representative Council as a real opportunity to have a voice for other students who feared to speak themselves.

I knew I had a voice that I could make people listen to, having a lot of experience through my school. It has become pretty clear that a favourite phrase of mine about why I love VicSRC is because it is student-led and student run, and it honestly just sums up my love for this organisation. I couldn't emphasise the fact more: it is vital for students to have a position in the education sector, because at the end of the day, students are the ones who policies affect. Students can give any member of the Department far more information about the education system than any parent, principal or faculty ever could. It's time that people actually started listening to the power behind our voices. No one I've come across has done this better than VicSRC.

I became a part of this organisation because it's a fantastic opportunity to utilise the resources and communication networks they have built for students and to work collectively with other like-minded students, all in unity, to push for a student position in any possible scenario that needs a student presence, as well as to advocate for the issues that students prioritise as being most urgent.



My previous experience

My experience with student voice and advocacy has been a very rocky one in all honesty. From the start of primary school, when captain positions came into play, it was evident that selections were based on the most athletic or the students selected solely because of how much their parents contributed financially. Then at the beginning of secondary school, I was faced with similar circumstances. But in a way, I'm grateful I had to face these experiences because it gave me an opportunity to prove myself and my desire for a seat in student leadership and I fell in love with everything to do with student advocacy: the overwhelming feeling of creating such an impact in school and community, where students look to you for advice or to give them the voice they want, which in turn affects the adults needing the student involvement to actually fulfil their job requirements.

To have a position to actually effect change and knowing that it's for the benefit of students, is what I love most about my position as a student leader. I feel that, although parents, teachers and principals say they have students' best interests at heart, they don't know what that best interest actually is, because they're looking at the situation and circumstances from a personal and single sided perspective. It's not until the conversation spreads to include students, that the needs and priorities actually become evident.

Issues I care about

It's difficult for me to fine-tune the issues I care most about, especially now having this position in the VicSRC. To me, the issues I care about personally are no longer the ones I care most about as a representative, because that position has to change to a concern for achieving the priority needs of students across all of Victoria, aka the priority goals decided at Congress 2019.

But personally, I have a few things I am particularly passionate about. Besides the obvious ones of student voice and advocacy, one is creating a school environment that is accepting of all diversities, ethnicities, cultures, genders, sexual orientations and anything else that needs to become more socially accepted, especially from the adolescent's age and in a school environment.



Joe

I'm Joe, one of your 2019-2020 Executive members. This year I decided to run for Executive because of my two younger sisters. They're about to enter school, and I just wanted to make school life, not only better for them, but for every student state-wide. Besides, when I heard that the format to run for Executive had changed, it incentivised me to throw myself off the deep end, as I'm quite the quiet type and big crowds intimidate me; so the traditional way of running would have absolutely been frightening. But that wouldn't have kept me from standing in front of all of you!

My experience in student voice has been quite fun, if I do say so myself. Those once dreadful, weekly meetings, I've come to learn to enjoy with several other amazing like-minded individuals. We often plan, run and organise charity events and don't really get any fancier than that. I'm hoping that in the next few years we can shift the focus to more elaborate, student centred movements that can positively influence our education system and schooling environment. Our meetings are run by students, where the agenda is decided amongst office bearer roles who come together to create a mini 'executive team'.

I don't really know if this counts as a student voice achievement, but it's fairly uncharted territory for my student voice as we recently have been getting students to sit on panels to help decide incoming staff. For example I once sat on an interviewing panel of four students, and we absolutely grilled our new potential Assistant Principals. Ah, good times, good times.

Last year I attended Congress, on the lucky chance of another student from my school dropping out at the last minute, and have been stuck with the VicSRC ever since. Sigh. Just kidding! I was overwhelmed with the number of young, inspiring, passionate individuals striving for transformative, positive change and have been around ever since. It was truly nothing like I'd ever seen before.

This year's Congress priorities are definitely the most unique I've seen; you guys really went all out. I'm excited to see what we can achieve in a twelve month time frame in regards to **Politics 101**, **FUNDamental Equity**, **Climate Crisis**, **Real World Skills** and **Sustainability Education**, to create a strong foundation in which it can grow and transform our education system. It's hard to pick a favourite.

I look forward to seeing you all (hopefully) at Congress this upcoming July, or at any VicSRC events so we can get to know each other, share thoughts and ideas and have a great time!



Sonany

I am currently a Year 9 student from Melbourne's west and am one of the new Executive for the 2019-2020.

I ran for the VicSRC Executive Committee because I am really passionate about education, leadership, student voice, seeking new opportunities, and also, I have a strong desire to positively influence other students in Victoria. In addition, the nurturing staff and teachers at my school suggested that I took this new opportunity and experience to open new doors, learn new skills and meet new people!

At my school

Our student voice is strongly and happily supported by the principal, staff, parents and most importantly, the students. It is also often practised by many at school!

Student voice *"acknowledges that students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, and should have the opportunity to actively shape their own education. Student voice involves students actively participating in their schools, communities and the education system, contributing to decision making processes and collectively influencing outcomes by putting forward their views, concerns and ideas"*.

We have two groups for student voice; one is known as **'Student Leaders'** and the other group is called **'Social Justice'**. The Student Leaders group consists of two school captains, two vice-captains, eight house (sport) captains and twelve SRC members, whereas, the Social Justice group consists of two Year 10 Social Justice captains and six other students (two from Year 7, two from Year 8 and two from Year 9).

Student leaders mainly ensure students have a say and focus on student needs, as well as plan events, encourage students and develop the school. The Social Justice team also makes sure students have a say, however they also focus on the needs of the broader community and how our school can assist. Though the Student Leaders and the Social Justice are separate groups, they do work closely together to ensure students at school have a say and they try to implement it.

Over the past few years, I've been heavily involved within the student voice groups within my schools, either as SRC student leader or as a captain, trying to strive for change! I am part of the Student Leaders and am part of the Student Representative Council.

With our strong desire and ambition to positively impact and influence others, the Student Leaders, along with the Social Justice, have reached out to other schools, our local community, our broader community and several parliament members.

Vic SRC Partner SCHOOLS

All schools in the state of Victoria that have primary, secondary or some mix of students can become **VicSRC Partner Schools**.

Partner Schools get:

- The VicSRC as your *constant companion* on the road to student voice super powers!
- Advice and referral for student voice at our e-mail address: info@vicsrc.org.au
- Eligibility to enter the *Student Voice Awards*!
- Discount codes for all *Student Voice Workshops* and *Student Voice Awards* tickets
- Access to bookings for *Teach the Teacher* and *Congress* tickets
- A monthly *Partner Bulletin* featuring resource highlights and best practice student voice
- A subscription to *Connect*
- A school membership of the *Student Voice Hub* with ten teacher accounts, access to restricted resources, private forums and more!
- Eligibility to *feature in VicSRC work* including blogs, videos and spotlights
- A sweet *VicSRC Partner School logo* for all your newsletter, website and email signature needs!

Become a Partner School at:

<https://bit.ly/2TL848K>

Partner Schools can join for \$150 + GST for a full year of partnership (discount or cluster partnership options may be available).

Once you sign up, you'll receive an invoice to your nominated email address. This is an automated process and the invoices will come out yearly on this date to make maintaining your partnership easier.

At the start of the school year you'll receive a quick survey prompting you to update your details. This is to make sure we've got the best and most up to date contacts for all your student voice needs!

Information at:

<https://bit.ly/2OvidGa>

Are you a VicSRC Partner School?

Partnership discounts

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

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

<https://bit.ly/2OvidGa>



To sign up to the VicSRC online e-newsletter ... visit:

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



The **VicSRC** receives funding support from the **Victorian Department of Education and Training** and **Catholic Education Melbourne**.

It is auspiced by the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)**.

It can be reached on **0436 476 612** or by email: info@vicsrc.org.au

News and Reviews



National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence

Friday 20 March 2020

Take Action Together on Bullying

The National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence will take place on Friday 20 March 2020 - and mark the 10th anniversary of the Day. The theme for 2020 is *'Take Action Together'*.

BULLYING. NO WAY!

Information from the Education Council encourages communities to highlight student ideas about the issue. *"We need to listen to the views of our young people to generate a powerful roadmap to preventing bullying for the future."*

A poster series: **Student Voices - Take Action Together**, will be released to elevate student messages into the national conversation. Action is being coordinated through the **Bullying. No Way!** website, which offers resources to support schools and communities in preventing and responding to bullying: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Our Voices Our Schools

The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and Minister Katherine Zappone of the Republic of Ireland's Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) launched resources to support young people's voice in school on Wednesday, 4th December. The launch included a workshop about voice in schools.

<https://www.facebook.com/ComhairleNaNog1/>



Audits of Practice

The Audits and Tools that have been developed over the last year or so, and published in **Connect**, are now available on-line as PDFs from the **Connect** website: <https://bit.ly/2XVfjh1>

You can download these to use with teacher or student groups.

Student Voice, Agency, Participation:

<https://bit.ly/2DhMpht>

The original document that outlined concepts of 'voice', 'agency' and 'participation' was originally published in **Connect** 229, February 2018.

Listening Tool:

<https://bit.ly/2rwBnTe>

This reflective tool is about being aware of, listening to, responding to and acting on students' voices. It can be used by teachers or by student representatives. It was originally published in **Connect** 235, February 2019.

Audit of School Practices:

<https://bit.ly/2KWjnYZ>

The **Audit** provides a comprehensive and structured overview of practices around voice, agency and participation at classroom and whole-school levels. It can be used to discuss what you are already doing and what further possibilities exist - and to determine your priorities. It was originally published in **Connect** 236, April 2019.

Student Council Audit:

<https://bit.ly/2DhMjX9>

A similar **Audit** looks specifically at how well your Student Council is operating. It is based on an earlier Audit in the VicSRC's **Represent!** kit, and this version was originally published in **Connect** 237, June 2019.





Adam Fletcher posts daily about student voice, student engagement and meaningful student involvement on the *SoundOut* facebook page at <https://facebook.com/SoundOut/>

Resources Include *SoundOut*'s as well as those from around the world, including schools, academia and advocacy orgs!

All about Student Action Teams, including some hyper-linked mini-case studies, at:

www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams

'Student Councils and Beyond' On-Line! FREE!

We've almost run out of print copies of the first *Connect* publication: ***Student Councils and Beyond*** (from 2005). And many of the ideas have subsequently been reflected in the *Represent!* kit from the VicSRC (see: www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent).

So we have made all of ***Student Councils and Beyond*** (a compilation of articles and resources from many earlier issues of *Connect*) available on-line for **FREE**. It can be downloaded (as one document or in sections) as PDFs from the *Connect* website. Find it at:

www.asprinworld.com/connect



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.

Donate to support *Connect*

Connect now has no income except donations and sales of literature (see page 42). By supporting *Connect* with donations, you keep us going. Even though we are now solely on-line, there are still

costs associated with publication. To make a donation to the work of *Connect*, use the form in this issue or contact us for bank account details in order to make an electronic transfer of funds.

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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:

Ethos (Social Education Victoria, Brunswick, Vic) Vol 27 No 4; Term 4, 2019

Student Voice Awards (VicSRC, North Melbourne, Vic) *Program*; 2019

TLN Journal (Teacher Learning Network, Abbotsford, Vic) *Leadership as Narrative*; Vol 26, Issue No 1; Winter 2019

Whose vision and whose voice? Setting the school improvement agenda with students, not for students (Rebecca Wells, Assistant Principal, Camberwell Primary School, Vic) *AEL Articles* 41 Issue 3, 2019

International:

Stepping Back from 'The Ladder': Reflections on a Model of Participatory Work with Children (Roger A Hart) Chapter 2 pp 19-31: A Reid et al. (eds) *Participation and Learning*; Springer, 2008

Update (UP for Learning, Vermont, USA) Fall 2019



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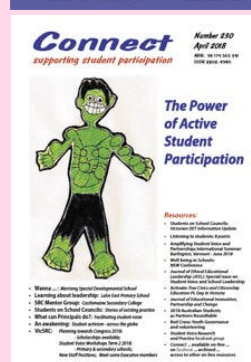
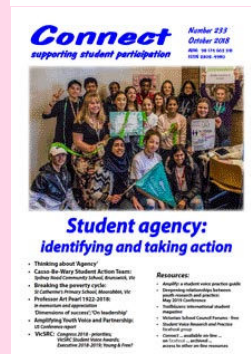
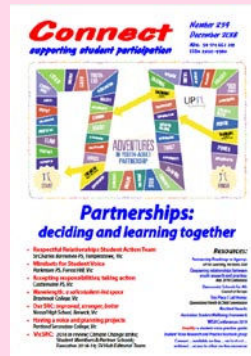
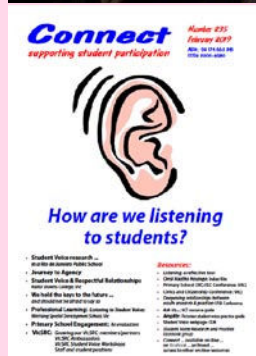
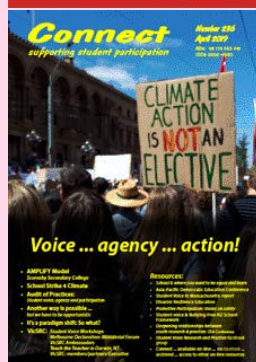
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