Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference Melbourne, Australia 9-11 December 2019

What is student voice?

- Opportunities for youth to share in the school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers
- Youth and adults collaboration together
- Mutual teaching and learning
- Pupil voice, youth-adult partnerships, youth participatory action research
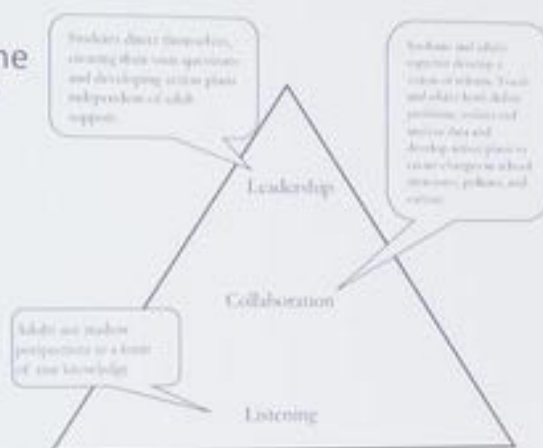
PennState

Student Voice Conference

- **The Imagination Declaration**
  Garma Youth Forum, NT
- **Hearing student voices**
  Festival of Ideas: Brisbane Catholic Education, Qld
- **Podcast of student voices**
  Piara Waters Primary School, WA
- **Student agency: two perspectives**
- **Danish students visit Australia**
- **Passcodes to Learning**
- **VicSRC:** *ALTER, Teach the Teacher*
  Executive members; new staff

Resources:

- **Melbourne Seminar with Helen Beattie: p 27**
- **64 Ways to Amplify Youth Voice and Agency through Partnerships:** *UP for Learning, Vermont, USA*
- **'Our Voices, Our Schools':** *Ireland*
- **Audits of Practice:** *available on-line here*
- *Conferences:* **Citizenship Education (Melbourne); WISA (Melbourne); Student Voice (USA)**
- *Amplify* **Toolkit on-line**
- *Student Voice Research and Practice facebook group*
- *Connect* ... available on-line ... on *facebook* ... archived ... access to other on-line resources

Cover:

Opening evening: Dana Mitra at Student Voice Conference
Photo by Casamento Photography

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.**

This Issue:

It has been a difficult start to 2020 - devastating fires, looming species extinctions and currently, threatening disease. What should be the response of education to these challenges?

In the face of official refusal to acknowledge threats, and resistance to long-term action for change – and of denigration of young people's lead in demanding action – it is very easy to feel overwhelmed and hopeless. We need to assert that adversity provides hope only through the **agency** of us all - young people and others: our collective participation in decisions that shape our world. And that starts in schools that really address such problems!

Students are demanding that we learn not just **about** climate change, but **how to address it and organise for action**. Schools need to be the forum and place to start such action, not simply a dispassionate observer. There are strong parallels with the continued assertion of Derry Hannam and others about the difference between learning **about** democracy, and learning to **do** democracy.

Many of these issues weaved through the Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference held in Melbourne last December. A first summary in this issue has a description of sessions, comments from participants, and photos. *(More are on the Conference website.)* We draw your attention to comments from Dana Mitra (keynote speaker), from student attendees and from a Sydney teacher who attended and presented. These specifically recognise the importance of **student agency** that goes beyond feedback; and the dilemma pitches argued about effective agency: what we (all) can do – *salads or climate change?*

It was clear that these questions are not ones just about **student** voice, agency and participation. These issues **affect** us all - and their solutions **involve** us all. Hence the Conference endorsed the central importance of **partnerships** – of alliances – where we also consider **teacher** voice and agency, and the **participation** of all, as citizens in decisions that affect us. Again democracy.

We're picking up on the theme of *partnerships* **with a seminar in Melbourne in early March with Helen Beattie from** *UP for Learning* **(Vermont, USA) - see page 25 for details.**

The role of schools in such matters goes directly to questions about the **purpose and nature of learning**. The development of curriculum approaches such as *'Problems that Matter' (*which was outlined at the Conference by students, teachers and academics from Footscray) provides great hope. We aim to include information about this in the next issue of *Connect*.

And in Victoria, **Civics and Citizenship Education** is under review – driven by strong concerns from students at last year's *VicSRC Congress*. Such education must authentically meet students' needs as active citizens, but also recognise profound dissatisfactions with the state of politics, of 'false news' and of corruption.

In this issue, we point to further hope emerging from young Indigenous people's *Imagination Declaration* and the strong networking supported by Brisbane Catholic Education.

Next Issue ...

What practices give you hope? What are the important participatory practices in your school, network, area, state? Will you share them with us in *Connect*?

Roger Holdsworth

The IMAGINATION DECLARATION

Following the *Uluru Statement From The Heart*, in 2019, a group of young Indigenous people gathered in East Arnhem Land for the **Youth Forum at Garma Festival** (hosted by the *Yothu Yindi Foundation*). The forum was facilitated by **AIME Mentoring** and resulted in a declaration for the Prime Minister and Education Ministers across Australia - **The Imagination Declaration**.

This message was read out by **Siena Stubbs**, pictured above, on August 5, 10:00 am, at the **2019 Garma Festival**:

To the Prime Minister and Education Ministers across Australia:
In 1967, we asked to be counted.

In 2017, we asked for a voice and treaty.

Today, we ask you to imagine what's possible.

The future of this country lies in all of our hands.

We do not want to inherit a world that is in pain. We do not want to stare down huge inequality feeling powerless to our fate. We do not want to be unarmed as we confront some of the biggest problems faced by the human race, from rising sea levels, which will lead to significant refugee challenges, to droughts and food shortages, and our own challenges around a cycle of perpetuated disadvantaged.

It's time to think differently.

With 60,000 years of genius and imagination in our hearts and minds, we can be one of the groups of people that transform the future of life on earth, for the good of us all.

We can design the solutions that lift islands up in the face of rising seas, we can work on creative agricultural solutions that are in sync with our natural habitat, we can re-engineer schooling, we can invent new jobs and technologies, and we can unite around kindness.

We are not the problem, we are the solution.

We don't want to be boxed.

We don't want ceilings.

We want freedom to be whatever a human mind can dream.

When you think of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kid, or in fact, any kid, imagine what's possible. Don't define us through the lens of disadvantage or label us as limited.

Test us.

Expect the best of us.

Expect the unexpected.

Expect us to continue carrying the custodianship of imagination, entrepreneurial spirit and genius.

Expect us to be complex.

And then let us spread our wings, and soar higher than ever before.

We call on you and the Education Ministers across the nation to establish an imagination agenda for our Indigenous kids and, in fact, for all Australian children.

We urge you to give us the freedom to write a new story.

We want to show the world Aboriginal genius.

We want to show the nation Aboriginal leadership and imagination.

Over the coming months we'll be sharing the declaration with thousands of Indigenous kids across our nation and together we'll stand to say, "set an imagination agenda for our classrooms, remove the limited thinking around our disadvantage, stop looking at us as a problem to fix, set us free to be the solution and give us the stage to light up the world."

We want the Imagination agenda in every school in the nation, from early childhood learning centres through to our most prominent universities.

To our Prime Minister and Education Ministers, we call on you to meet with us and to work on an imagination plan for our country's education system, for all of us.

We are not the problem, we are the solution.

Garma Youth Forum & the AIME team
5 August 2019

*AIME Mentoring are currently investing time in developing an **Imagination Curriculum** for every school in the world, to add weight and power to this movement.*

There will be different opportunities for people to get involved at all levels of the organisation. Contact:

ec@aimementoring.com

See:

https://aimementoring.com/
https://bit.ly/36Diq0v

Hearing student voices:
The Festival of Ideas

Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) has taken the lead in providing a platform for students to show proactive engagement in their education by holding their first annual *'Festival of Ideas'.*

Held at the Queensland State Library in October 2019, the *Festival of Ideas* brought together over 60 students from across 142 BCE schools, to discuss priority issues impacting on students' education experience and develop action plans to address them. The goal: *to pitch these solutions to students and executive leaders and for students to vote on the priority area of focus for Brisbane Catholic Education's Student Voice Consultants in 2020.*

Image of the Lightning Lobby, where Student Voice Consultants presented Action Plans to fellow delegates and executive leaders. Pictured: Shamili

BCE's Student Voice Initiative

BCE has made a commitment to consider and appreciate the unique perspective students have regarding their educational experience. Behind this commitment: the belief that giving students input into their schooling experience will provide benefits to not only individual students, but our entire system of schools.

Commencing in 2017, the **Student Voice Initiative** has focused on:

- listening to and learning from students to understand how schools connect with students, what authentic engagement looks like and the challenges students face at school
- activating student ideas on how to create safe and supportive school communities
- building opportunities for students to make a positive change in their school and across BCE.

In 2019, our theme was *"Changemakers in Action".* This involved moving into a more proactive space by recruiting a team of **Student Voice Consultants**, holding workshops and facilitating our inaugural *'Festival of Ideas'.*

21 October, 2019

Preparation for the 'Festival of Ideas'

The *Festival of Ideas* was an event run by students, for students. It was brought to fruition after six months of detailed planning, led by the **Student Voice Project** staff, **Renee Devereaux** and **Carolyn De-Witt Ryall**, and thirteen **Student Voice Consultants**. While the logistical planning all took place in 2019, the *Festival of Ideas* would not have been executed without the commitment and effort of the team over the previous two years.

Planning the event

Student Voice Consultants met online fortnightly and face-to-face during the holidays to plan the *Festival of Ideas*.

Planning focussed on:

- developing artwork and a marketing strategy to advertise the event to students across our system
- designing the overall process of the day
- exploring options for a keynote speaker
- writing scripts and learning facilitation skills
- considering how we would engage our fellow students at the festival.

As we had limited time on the day, we decided to pre-plan the areas of focus at the event. The topics were drawn from information gathered from students during *Conversation Cafes*, classroom discussions and surveys as well as data from a wider BCE student survey.

The four key topics were:

1. Safety and Belonging
2. Curriculum
3. Facilities
4. Student Voice.

Student Voice Consultants with Ms Pam Betts, Executive Director Brisbane Catholic Education. Left to right: Shamili, Courage, Pam Betts, Miriama and Dante.

Delegates were able to nominate the topic that they would most like to discuss, allocated their first or second preference and prepped beforehand so they knew which topic they would be discussing.

The 'Festival of Ideas'

The inaugural *'Festival of Ideas'* was held at the State Library of Queensland in October.

The day started with an impressive keynote speech from **Madison**, a *Youth Champion* with the **Queensland Child and Family Commission**. **Madison**, through her experience as a young person making a difference in youth engagement, inspired the audience, offering valuable advice on what it takes to be a changemaker.

The day continued with a *'Think Tank'* session, facilitated by the **Student Voice Consultants**. Delegates were allocated to four larger groups to focus on their nominated topic. The purpose was to discuss the topic in depth, explore student experiences and consider related student issues or concerns. By brainstorming these ideas, delegates were given the opportunity to narrow down specific student concerns surrounding each topic and the impact of these concerns on a range of students.

Delegates then moved to smaller groups called **Action Teams**. There were eight teams, each focusing on a specific issue related to their nominated topic. Each team developed an action plan to address their issue.

Action Plans Developed:

1. Creating opportunities for student voice in schools and the BCE system
2. Combating discrimination
3. Improving student access to support
4. Smashing the stigma of mental health
5. Classroom environment
6. Sustainable classrooms
7. Making curriculum relevant
8. Improving curriculum support

To develop their **Action Plans**, teams went through several steps:

1. Digging deeper into specific issues related to their topic
2. Considering what a perfect school would be like if the issue was solved
3. Developing specific actions that students, staff and BCE leaders could take to solve the issue.

Lightning Lobby

The *'Lightning Lobby'* was the conclusion to the Festival. It provided an opportunity for **Student Voice Consultants** to pitch their team's **Action Plan** to delegates and BCE leaders. The purposes of the *'Lightning Lobby'* were:

BCE Leadership team with student consultants after the 'Lightning Lobby'. Left to right: Catherine Thompson (Acting Director School Service Centre South), Pam Betts (Executive Director), Peter Hill (Director Employee Services), Imaan, Doug Ashleigh (Deputy Executive Director), Niamh

"It showed the students that adults in BCE were listening to them, respected what they had to say and valued their contributions to making BCE schools safe, inclusive and student-focused".

Miss **Pam Betts**, BCE Executive Director said that the event had exceeded her expectations, stating that:

"Giving students input into their schooling experience will provide benefits to not only individual students, but our entire system of schools."

She made a commitment to action the ideas presented by delegates, to make BCE schools a more welcoming and inclusive community. Ms Betts told delegates that:

- to assist BCE leaders to develop an understanding of issues impacting students and share ideas about how to improve students' school experiences
- for delegates to hear each *Action Plan* and vote for a priority issue for action in 2020.

The outcome of the vote was clear. Delegates wanted **BCE Student Voice Consultants** to focus on creating opportunities for student voice in schools and the BCE system.

Success from the 'Festival of Ideas'

On all accounts, the *'Festival of Ideas'* was a huge success. Delegates felt their voices were heard and felt hopeful that the priority issue they voted on will be actioned.

Carolyn De-Witt Ryall, the **Student Voice Project Manager**, summarised this sentiment saying:

"Your voice is absolutely critical to us and we commit to hearing that voice right across our system. We will hear you and we will do everything we can to take the ideas you raise and make them a reality so that our schools can be better places."

These statements show that **Brisbane Catholic Education** is committed to *Student Voice* and is ready to form partnerships with students to make BCE schools even better. While this is incredibly encouraging to the **BCE Student Voice Team**, the most exciting and fulfilling aspect of the festival would be each BCE school embracing student voice and building real partnerships with students.

Inspired by the *'Festival of Ideas,'* St Augustine's College, Augustine Heights planned and hosted their own mini *Festival of Ideas* with students, staff, the leadership team and board members. Students worked on strategic areas they felt needed improvement and pitched solutions to these issues. Student pitches included setting up a wellbeing centre, promoting diversity through a 'multifest' and connecting what students learnt with their lives beyond the school.

The **Brisbane Catholic Education Student Voice Team** is thrilled that **St Augustine's College** have taken inspiration from our work to motivate their students to *'unleash their voices.'*

Alysha Gray
Student Voice Consultant

For more information, contact:

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https://bit.ly/389ZLdC

St Augustine's College mini 'Festival of Ideas' participants inspired by the BCE Student Voice Program.

Primary school podcast provides student voice

The podcast team hard at work. Photos: Ben Smith.

Piara Waters Primary School has given its students a voice in the form of a collaborative podcast.

The *Piara Voices* podcast, which is available on *Spotify*, is produced, presented and recorded by students from Years 1-5 who have near-total control over the content.

Students write scripts, decide topics, organise music, conduct interviews and host and record the shows themselves, with teachers' involvement limited to supervision and editing.

Deputy principal Sian Bakewell said the idea came off the back of an innovation project designed to increase the student voice.

"We surveyed our students and asked them what they were interested in, what they wanted to learn about and how they wanted to share their ideas," she said.

"The main thing that came across was they wanted to talk to people about their ideas."

Students spent two lunch breaks a week putting the podcast together, producing episodes of between 15-20 minutes that explored topics such as animals, cultures and health.

Producer Evie Stanley said they had all gained new skills from working on the project and although it was hard work, it had been a fruitful experience.

"I'm most enjoying just the fun of being with the other hosts and producers and just being able to learn new things with devices and having a lot of opportunities," she said. "The producers will discuss for about an hour and we do three records for each podcast script and then we sit and listen to them for about 10-20 minutes."

Her sentiments were echoed by her fellow producer Mehela Ram, who said the teamwork and time management skills they had learnt were invaluable.

"One thing I've learnt is about how you can work collaboratively to have a good end product," she said.

"It takes about 90 minutes for the script, 90 minutes for the recording, and then we'll have to spend a couple of days also researching before the script writing about the content."

Ben Smith
Cockburn Gazette: https://bit.ly/3a5J0S3

(L-R) Piara Voices podcast team:
Delilah Rodriguez, Hamish Watson, Samantha Mazorodze, Evie Stanley, Mehela Ram with deputy principal Sian Bakewell.

"Meaningful and memorable"

Over 170 people gathered in Melbourne in early December 2019 for the **Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference** - two days and an evening of intense discussion around issues and themes of students' active participation in schools.

School students, teachers and school leaders, researchers and academics, policy makers and representatives of support organisations came together to review practices, policy and progress in these areas, and to plan possibilities for future developments. While most people came from Victoria, there was also representation from across Australia (Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT) and internationally - from Greenland, Ireland, Malaysia, Vietnam, New Zealand and the USA.

The Conference built on similar gatherings held in Cambridge, UK, Burlington, Vermont and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA since 2011. Deliberately, it brought together people active and involved - and interested to 'learn across the lines' - in the areas of student voice, agency, participation and partnerships.

Opening Evening

The **Conference Opening** on Monday evening coincided with a fiendishly hot day - and the early threat of fires had an impact on the 225 people who had registered. This session was opened up to this larger audience, to include those interested to hear about the ideas and practices. After an opening welcome from **Mr Tim Richardson**, Victorian Parliamentary Secretary for Schools, the Conference heard some initial 'provocations': **challenges** for our work - from **Dr Jenna Gillett-Swan** (Senior Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology), **Scott Duncan** (Assistant Principal, Lalor East Primary School), **Kaden Litzinger** (senior student, Delta High School, Pennsylvania, USA), **Demitri Kaminis** (senior student, Mount Waverley Secondary College, Vic), **Nina Laitala** (Executive Officer, VicSRC) and **Dr David Howes** (Deputy Secretary, Schools and Regional Services, Victorian Department of Education and Training). This set the scene for informal networking and discussions over refreshments.

The Conference **keynote** was then presented by **Dr Dana Mitra**, Professor of Education – Policy Studies, Pennsylvania State University, USA, who provided an overview of directions in the areas of student voice, agency and partnerships, and pointed to several critical and important emerging issues, particularly based in the work of US local and regional organisations.

Conference Days

The two full days of the Conference included many different types of sessions. The aim was principally to facilitate discussion between participants; everyone was allocated to a mixed *'home group'* that met twice a day. In addition, there were *'role groups,'* in which students, for example, met with other students, researchers met with other researchers and so on. This provided a space to meet with, recognise and learn from those working actively within the field.

There were also many opportunities for participants to present about their work in *formal presentations* and in *roundtables*. Over 40 of these presentations were scheduled across the two days (posing a dilemma for many participants about what to choose to attend). Some sessions outlined research; some talked about practice; some explored policy; the roundtables briefly presented ideas and then opened up topics for discussion. On each of the days, two *'featured presentations'* were provided for the whole conference, and these led directly into the discussion groups. Notes and ideas from these groups were recorded and displayed throughout the Conference (and will be written up in the near future).

Topics included: *(Day 1): "How do students and teachers co-plan curriculum?", "How do schools use student feedback to create change?", "How do students' voices enable re-engagement?", "How do students' voices inform research?", "How are students participating as community activists?", "How do systems support student input, democracy and participation?",* **and** *"What do we mean by 'agency'? How do we build it?"*

(Day 2): *"How can we avoid tokenism in classrooms, schools, conferences etc?", "How can student feedback improve school practices?", "How can external organisations support student agency in schools?", "How can education systems initiate and support approaches to voice, agency etc?", "How can schools and systems be inclusive of the voices of students with special needs?", "How can the agency of young women be supported?", "How can students and teachers negotiate assessment?", "How can students take part in community action as part of their curriculum?", "How can student-led networks achieve change?"* **and** *"How can technology support students' voices, agency and partnerships?"*

More detail on each of these sessions is available on the **Conference website** (www.svcmelbourne.com) and the content of presentations and other resources are being steadily added to this site.

In addition, an *'un-conference'* aspect was included on each of the days: participants were invited to propose a *'dilemma'* that they wished to address. They then led a less formal discussion on that topic. These included: *'Language as a barrier'; 'Empowerment versus Duty of Care'; 'Teacher agency, student agency'; 'Curriculum that leads to student voice'; 'Students on School Councils'; 'Students with learning difficulties'; 'Student feedback surveys'; 'Salads vs climate change'; 'Diversifying the educational workforce'; 'The phone ban'/'2020 Phone Ban, is it necessary?'; 'Critiquing Growth Mindsets'; 'How do we maintain morale?';* and *'How to embrace student voice and agency but still get through the VCE study design'.*

Finally, there were *plenary sessions* at the beginning and end of each of the days, with the optimistic attempt of addressing questions: *'Where are we at?'* (Day 1) and *'Where are we going?'* (Day 2). These were rather loosely used to organise approaches, rather than with any serious belief that we would come up with definitive answers!

Organisation

The Conference had an intensely busy and complex schedule, with many activities and often limited time. Its smooth operation was due to the work and organisation through much of 2019 of the voluntary **Conference Steering Committee** and the **Student Advisory Group**. The efficient and competent facilitators and MCs throughout the Conference (students and adults) were members of these

A selection of unsolicited participant comments:

Tracey Cronley (NSW): "Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed and learnt from the conference this week. I am really looking forward to working with renewed focus, inspiration and enthusiasm in this most important area of our work. We met some really wonderful people with whom I hope we will be able to collaborate, build and share our ideas and work. I really think the format of the conference was so much to do with this as it offered so many opportunities to connect with fellow participants and build relationships."

Kevin Perry (Greenland): "Thanks for a meaningful and memorable conference in Melbourne!"

Domnall Fleming (Ireland): "Great privilege to attend, present and to learn at such a great conference. Much to bring back to Cork and Ireland. Contributions of the students and their ability to articulate relating to their thoughts and actions was one of many standouts... The obvious involvement of young students was really impressive and such an obvious omission from other conferences. I got great value and learning from the experience and hope my contributions also added something."

Vincent Berraud (Vic): "It was the best conference I have ever attended!"

Jo O'Malley (Vic): "Our team really enjoyed the conference and felt reassured that we are on the right path at St Kilda Primary School."

Roseanna Bourke (New Zealand): "I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the first two days. The sessions were very well planned, and thoroughly enjoyable. A great mix of people, and so much energy for the area. Congratulations on such a wonderful symposium!"

Fiona Longmuir (Monash, Vic): "It was a terrific few days and I really enjoyed the connections with others that the format enabled. Great to meet you and I was sorry not to get an opportunity to chat with you again. I hope to get the opportunity to stay connected with the student voice community in the future."

Linsey Hart (WISA, SA): "Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend. It was such a valuable insight to me as an event organiser (after 13 Conferences) to be a delegate. I got to sit back a bit and appreciate all the 'back of house' stuff that goes into coordinating an event and yours was extraordinary. What timing precision and thought went into it. Well done to all the steering Committee, Victor and the team, the venue, the VicSRC students, the caterers and all the attendees who managed to get to where they were meant to be over all those levels and mostly on time and in the right room! It was truly a master in precision.

The content...! We needed a week! So many interesting people. I loved the discussion groups. Such an interesting opportunity to connect with a variety of people. Also really enjoyed the 'un-conferencing' topics and dilemmas. A very thought provoking way to be inclusive of the 'emerging topics' throughout the Conference and give voice to so many people."

Jenna Gillett-Swan (QUT, Qld): "**Thank you** for inviting me to be part of the panel and for putting together such an excellent event. Since my return I have already been engaging in many conversations with some of our partner schools as part of our 2020 agenda."

Eve Mayes (Deakin, Vic): "Congratulations on an excellent conference! It all went really well - thanks to the great planning of the steering committee and the support of JT. My particular highlight was the unconference sessions."

Renee Devereaux (Qld): "It was an amazing few days and provided a lot of opportunity to discuss a range of ideas and contextualise them to your situation. Thank you for creating the opportunity for all of us to build connections within the community."

Catharine Simmons (SCU, NSW): "Thank you **so** much for the recent SVC experience...it was incredible. I learnt heaps, and the conference had such a lovely community feel. Loved the structure too with the discussion groups and un-conference sessions. Can't wait for the next one."

groups and other bodies, and were vital to the discussion and processes. In particular, huge thanks go to **Manaia Chou-Lee** who was responsible for program development, and **Mitchell Sprague** who, as *Communications Director*, defined the 'look' of the Conference and its website.

Further thanks to **Social Education Victoria (SEV)** for being the host organisation and ensuring that the Conference had a 'home'; and to our *Major Sponsors*: **The University of Melbourne** (through the Melbourne Graduate School of Education) for provision of the Arts West building complex, and the **Victorian Department of Education and Training**; to the *Sponsors:* the **Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)** and *Connect* magazine; and to the *Supporters:* the **Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)**, the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)** and **Wellbeing in Schools Australia (WISA)**.

And many thanks also to the detailed and efficient planning and implementation of the **Conference Organisers** who worked alongside the Steering Committee to put it all into operation: **JT.Production Management**.

Reflections

Formal evaluation responses are being collected and analysed. These already indicate a strong positive response to the Conference., with 77% rating the **pre-Conference information** *Excellent* or *Very Good* (on a 5-point scale), 89% rating the **venue** *Excellent* or *Very Good*, and 89% rating the **overall Conference** *Excellent* or *Very Good*.

In addition, many participants immediately wrote to the organisers with their appreciations - and some of these comments are included in this report.

Themes

From the reflections, several themes are already emerging that could guide further development and any subsequent similar events:

- *The value of mixed participants*
  Many participants commented positively on the value of having students, teachers, academics, policy makers and others involved together in the conversations. They spoke of the insights, as well as the energy, that this enabled.

- *Including a range of understanding and needs*
  Such a mix also had its challenges: the Conference started with the idea of involving a small group of people who were well-versed in their understanding of the issues, but evolved to include a larger number of people who wanted an introduction to the ideas. The Conference attempted to 'straddle' both aims - not always successfully.

- *Building a focus on learning as well as wellbeing*
  While there was an important focus on wellbeing and relationships, many participants recognised the need for a stronger emphasis on student voice, agency and partnerships around **learning**, **assessment** and so on. It is important that this is at the forefront of our work.

- *The need for inclusion - both as a topic and also in our approaches*
  There was strong recognition that many of the students at the Conference were already those who were confident and articulate. The Conference needed to include ways in which the voices and agency of a broader range of students could be included. This continued to be highlighted as a vital part of work in the area: *how do we enable and support the voices and action of students who are currently marginalised and excluded?*

Where to now?

Further and follow-up Conferences in Australia around these topics are being strongly suggested - perhaps as soon as June (or maybe December) 2020; there's another planned in the USA in July (see page 33 of this issue). *Connect* will keep you informed as plans develop.

We would love your continued feedback as to action and outcomes from this Conference - and your participation in events that build on it.

Roger Holdsworth

Demitri Kaminis (Vic): "It was an absolute pleasure to present on both opening night and the following days, and an absolute delight to attend the conference and hear other people's insights in general."

Doug Sandiford (Vic): "On behalf of our Wellbeing team and colleagues that were able to attend thanks for all your work and commitment to get the Student Voice Conference, not only off the ground, but to soar sky high.

It was a pleasure to be there and make connections, both new and old. Among the various jurisdictions present there is wide spread support to keep the conversation going."

Cleo Westhorpe (Pivot, Vic): "Amanda and I wanted to thank you and your team once more for creating such a marvellous opportunity for collaboration and conversation last week. To be honest, I'm still buzzing with ideas and the many connections we made in workshops, presentations and morning/afternoon tea."

Carolyn De Witt-Ryall (Qld): "The conference was great. So much to think about now..."

Rachel McNae (New Zealand): "Greetings from New Zealand. I just wanted to touch base with you and thank you for the conference I had the privilege to attend last year. It had such a fantastic vibe and was an invigorating format to contribute to and learn alongside others."

Larissa Raymond (Education Partnerships, Vic): "Thank you for a terrific conference."

Young people and adult allies

The Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships Conference featured a fast paced agenda that combined keynote presentations by young people and their adult allies, researchers, and policy makers. Some planned sessions at the meeting included elementary students sharing their inquiry rubric, and adult researcher sessions that shared evaluations of statewide student voice programs and analyses of what types of student voice programming impact student well being.

The conference offered a balance of pre-planned programming with opportunities for people at the meeting to share dilemmas and seek spaces for discussion as they arose. Dilemmas included issues such as *"how do we move beyond school-level policy to worldwide activism?"* and how do we balance *"student voice"* with pressures to perform on high stakes tests and *"what does agency really look like in practice?"*

Mark Brennan, UNESCO Chair Professor at Penn State University, called the meeting *"the most meaningful conference I ever attended."* The meeting served as inspiration for future programs, plans, and research.

The conference builds out of a series of meetings held around the world that focus on ways to deepen and share student voice processes. The first five meetings occurred in Cambridge, England, in honour of the scholar **Jean Rudduck**. The next four took place in the United States in partnership with *Up for Learning* in Vermont and Penn State University. This meeting in Melbourne was the first affiliated meeting to take place in Australia.

The location of the conference was particularly significant because of the ground-breaking work happening in the state of Victoria – a worldwide model for student engagement in policy at the state level through the 15 years of work of the VicSRC as well as the recent state policy positions including the *Amplify* resources and program.

Dana Mitra

Inspired by passion

As the Presidents of our SRC for 2020, we both attended the **Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships Conference** last December, and Sharon also went to the 2019 **VicSRC Congress**. We were both so inspired by the passion to foster amazing environments in schools that really enable student voice, agency and participation.

We strive to do the same at our school. We truly believe in the power of students and SRCs in creating a school community that supports students with their learning and helps them feel their best.

Our vision for our SRC in 2020 is to encourage greater **TEAA**: *transparency, engagement, action* and *accountability* in our school. This year, we really want to improve communication within our SRC family, as well as with the wider student body and staff to ensure that all SRC initiatives, open forums, events and more incite maximum participation. Through this participation we will be able to better gauge a larger number of students' opinions to take more tangible action, as well as improve student wellbeing and engagement through fun events and fun ways of presenting and collecting data. We also want our students to keep our SRC accountable throughout the year if they feel we are not representing them the way they want, and feel comfortable in approaching us with any new ideas or suggestions.

We realise that this may seem like a lot, and not everybody may fully understand or know exactly how to take action towards **TEAA**. This is where our **Planning Day** comes in.

Every year, we have a **Planning Day** where our entire SRC, comprised of the *cabinet* (us, our SAT [SRC Action Team] leaders, Treasurer and Secretary), *SAT members* and *Engagement team* (Execs and Reps) meet to realistically unpack and break down the year's vision, think about what we want to achieve and essentially plan for the year ahead. It's a day full of discussion and team-bonding, goal-setting and new ideas.

We both found the conference so eye-opening and gained so much insight on student voice, agency and partnerships from an array of perspectives, from primary school students to high schoolers and teachers to policy makers. It was truly phenomenal.

Meghana Jonnalagadda, Sharon Taing
SRC Presidents
The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School

Student voice, choice, agency, partnerships and participation

This week I joined with teachers, students, researchers and policy writers at The University of Melbourne to discuss student voice. This conference was hosted by **Social Education Victoria** and made possible by the conference partners, **The University of Melbourne**, the **Victorian Department of Education and Training**, the **Foundation for Young Australians** and *Connect*, and supported by the **VicSRC**, **YACVic** and **WISA**. Over three days, participants engaged in rigorous dialogue about the significance of student voice and what is required to ensure its benefits are maximised for all.

The conference was dedicated to a broad discussion of student voice, choice, agency, partnerships and participation. Each term carries its own meaning and is interpreted in a range of ways. There are degrees of overlap for some people and for others there are clear distinctions. Some are happy to speak of **student voice** as an umbrella term while others prefer *student or learner agency*. Some will argue that student voice does not guarantee any form of **partnership** or **participation**. They will point to programs which give students a voice but where there is little follow up on this. Others will argue that participation and partnerships are at one end of a continuum and that the ideal scenario is a partnership between students, teachers and policymakers as equals with a common goal. For the sake of brevity, I refer to **student voice** in most instances unless making a particular distinction.

As is typical of issues in education, there are no simple answers. While it might be generally acknowledged that student voice, choice and agency are important, what this looks like in practical terms is debated. Various models exist that aim to give students a voice, but they vary in significant ways. The most common model is to offer some form of **student representative organisation**. It seems this is a popular model but one that can easily become a tokenistic gesture. Students meet somewhat routinely to discuss relatively safe matters. Typical topics for discussion include bathroom cleanliness, litter patrols, new drink fountains and shaded play spaces. At the other extreme, we see students participating as equals in the planning of curriculum and the setting of school policy. At this more inclusive

end, students have a genuine impact on the core business of the school, and this impact is likely to be extended into the wider community. Schools that are most active in engaging students as full participants are also more likely to have active connections with their community, and thus student voice extends outwards.

At any level there are challenges, and these can be framed as questions or dilemmas that schools are struggling with.

If we value student voice, how do we ensure that we hear and make heard the voice of every student? It was commonly noted that the students elected to most Student Representative Councils fit within a particular niche. They are well-spoken, well behaved, non-disruptive students who represent the dominant culture of the school community. To the students, they are seen as the teacher pleasers. They most likely don't struggle with oral language skills, are probably in enrichment programs, and it is unlikely that they

require learning support. **The question is, do these students truly represent the students?**

We can't have student voice in anything like a genuine manner if we expect that voice to be polite, quiet and only heard when it is invited. Our young people have to make some noise and scream against the entrenched power of our patriarchal society and the media conglomerates that maintain the status quo.

Can agency be genuinely experienced if it requires that voices are given permission to be heard? Can agency be granted?

Student voice needs to occur in a culture that also honours teacher voice. This was a clear conclusion across multiple sessions. **If we want a culture that engages student voice in a meaningful way, we also need to support teacher voice.** Indeed the ideal culture is one that respects and empowers agency of all community members.

When should we give students a voice? Are some students too young? Are parts of the education for older students necessarily controlled by external forces?

The conversation went both ways on this topic. There was a sense from some that young students required or were capable of less input on important matters. Some indicated that student voice and choice are essential ingredients to early learning and that it is only when students enter a formalised curriculum in

kindergarten that this begins to decline. The wondering was: why is this the case? Why do we move from an emergent play-based curriculum to one where choice is minimised and students follow a lock step progression based upon age? With this came a wondering of what it might take to change this and what shape the curriculum might take if it was more inclusive of student voice? Would such a curriculum be more engaging, increase participation and could it still ensure all students achieve essential skills?

What fresh possibilities for student voice and choice would emerge from a capabilities based curriculum? What fresh possibility for student voice comes if we adopt a curriculum where content is less prescriptive, and we taught capabilities through negotiated content?

One advantage of a capabilities-driven curriculum is that we can generally agree on a broad set of capabilities, but it is much harder to agree on content, and we must always select what content is covered as there is always more than we have time for. If we move towards a capabilities-driven curriculum, we can allow the content of the curriculum to be adjusted to the needs of local contexts and can be inclusive of student voice. The capabilities, such as creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking are adaptable and have utility for engagement with almost all knowledge that might be reasonable to explore in schools. If we wish to move away from a content-driven curriculum where all students engage with the same content at the same time in their learning journey, allowing capabilities to take on the central role is perhaps the best way forward.

There was general agreement that student voice, choice, agency and partnerships should be a part of senior school. The difficulty here is in creating space for this to occur in meaningful ways. With so much pressure to cover content and prepare students for examinations, student voice is often seen as an unnecessary extra. The time that is required to run meaningful programs centred around student voice is seen as time that could be better spent on examination preparation.

Learning should not be a means to an end; it should not be merely about an entrance ranking. Education must be about preparation for a life of learning and the empowerment of agentic individuals and collectives.

One question touched upon frequently but not directly answered was how do we assess the benefits of programmes for student voice. When we evaluate the impact of student voice, choice and agency, what measures might this be seen in? How do we best capture this? What impact might we hope student voice has? Are there potential impacts which might not matter or whose inclusion in evaluations are not relevant or informative? For example, does it matter if student voice does not impact literacy or numeracy achievement even though literacy and numeracy matter?

There is a sense in schools, particularly this close to the release of PISA data, that all programs should have an impact upon test scores. Most people at this conference would argue that, while engaged and agentic students might gain broadly from their increased participation in their educational life, we should not evaluate the success of a student voice program by its impact on test scores.

What was very clear from the conference is that our young people have a great deal to contribute. Many schools are looking for unique ways to capture the voice of their student body. Surveys and questionnaires are common, and there are numerous tools designed to make capturing student voice in this manner easy.

What seems more powerful is to ensure that our young people are given a seat at the table and invited to contribute.

A highlight of this conference was that it provided many opportunities for round table discussions. In each instance, the students contributed to the discussion as equals, and they all had much to contribute. If we truly value student voice, then we need to include students in the conversation. In many ways, what is most required is listening. Instead of always talking at students, we can learn much and teach more if we stop and listen.

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Conference photos: *Monday:* **Casamento Photography;** *Tuesday/Wednesday:* **Ana Maria Ngo**

Perspectives on 'Student Agency'

1. Assessment and Student Agency - better together

As with many things in education, the outcome achieved will be a result of all that we do. Efforts to promote and empower student agency, voice and choice certainly falls into this category. We might have the best of intentions but, unless each of our messaging systems align, we are unlikely to achieve success. So where do our efforts go wrong and what else might we change so that student agency is genuinely a part of our learning environment?

It can be argued that student agency has numerous benefits for learners and communities of learners, and there is evidence to support such claims. When students are given choice in their learning and are able to see that their strategic actions help them to achieve goals significant to them, engagement increases.

Research by Ryan and Deci shows that three factors play a role in allowing learners to become self-determined or self-regulated towards motivation. Self-determination combines two key dispositions: **intrinsic motivation** and **self-regulation** towards an activity or goal. Ryan and Deci describe a triad of factors, which each play their part in the process of motivating the individual: **autonomy**, **competence** and **relatedness**.

Central to these in regards to student agency is **autonomy**: *"choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy."* (Ryan & Deci, 2000) The importance of engagement with and self-motivation towards the learning process is central to quality learning. In self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the role of autonomy in this process is placed in equal importance to **competence** and feelings of safety and positive relations to educators. If our goal is intrinsic motivation for our students, autonomy and ownership of the process are essential ingredients. Without ownership, the best we can hope for is 'integrated regulation' in which students agree with the externally set goals.

"The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated. At their best, they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents responsibly" (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

There is a real advantage in including curiosity-inducing learning and this might be best achieved through learning that incorporates choice. Our curiosity levels are likely to be much higher when we are permitted to explore ideas that we are curious about. Research by Gruber, Gelman and Ranganath reveals the power of curiosity for learning in the moment and its benefits to learning in other contexts. As reported by Jackie Gerstein of *"User Generated Education"*:

The study revealed three major findings. First, as expected, when people were highly curious to find out the answer to a question, they were better at learning that information. More surprising, however, was that once their curiosity was aroused, they showed better learning of entirely unrelated information that they encountered but were not necessarily curious about. Curiosity may put the brain in a state that allows it to learn and retain any kind of information, like a vortex that sucks in what you are motivated to learn, and also everything around it. Second, the investigators found that when curiosity is stimulated, there is increased activity in the brain circuit related to reward. Third, when curiosity motivated learning, there was increased activity in the hippocampus, a brain region that is important for forming new memories, as well as increased interactions between the hippocampus and the reward circuit.

For education the challenge of postnormal times is immense, and yet now is not the time to advocate despair. In imagining what education might offer our students as preparation for the lives they are likely to live, by seeking an understanding of lifeworthy learning (Perkins, 2014), we see immense opportunity. Our perception of what matters in education must change. Mere factual knowledge, mimicry of methods, solving already solved problems, learning in isolation and a belief that education is a phase of our lives that terminates with graduation, are ideas we must move beyond. Our children will need a sense

of **agency** empowered by capacities required to activate or perform their intentions (Clapp et al, 2017). *"This entails thinking about the world not as something that unfolds separate and apart from us but as a field of action that we can potentially direct and influence"* [Ritchhart, 2014: 77]

So we understand the value of **student agency**, but are we willing to commit to it? Many schools are making strong efforts to do so.

Typical approaches to this include forums that bring student voice into the decision-making process through the development of **student representative councils** with related opportunities for student leadership. When more than a tokenistic nod to student agency, such student-led groups can have a significant impact. This is best achieved when the scope of discussion is not limited to matters peripheral to the core business of schools and education.

Many schools are looking for unique ways to capture the voice of their student body. Surveys and questionnaires are common, and there are numerous tools designed to make capturing student voice in this manner easy. What seems more powerful is to ensure that our young people are given a seat at the table and invited to contribute.

Another common strategy is the inclusion of opportunities for student choice in regards to curriculum or the manner by which the curriculum is engaged. Students might be given the opportunity to design a personal passion project or engage in a *Google* inspired *"Twenty percent project"* where some of their time is given to learning that they design with their teachers.

In some cases, students are required to engage with a particular set of concepts but are given freedom as to how they will do so. As an example, students studying rights and responsibilities might choose to respond through writing, film, music, art or poetry and may choose to do so individually or in collaboration with their peers. Alternatively, students might be developing a particular skill, such as how to plan and deliver an oral presentation to an audience but are permitted to select the topic.

Assessment

Such strategies are nice and can be valuable, but the good work they do is quickly undone by our failure to include student voice in what is perhaps the most powerful messaging system: assessment.

It is much less common for student voices to be included in the assessment of learning that matters most. High-stakes testing, standardised assessments and end of year evaluations are, in almost all cases, tightly controlled by schools or educational systems. Student voice, choice and agency have little part to play here. These assessments send to our students very clear messages about what learning matters most. Students learn that success is about knowing the correct answer and being able to provide this information correctly formatted, is ultimately what opens doors for continued success. We may want our students to be problem finders, we may want them to be innovative and creative, but ultimately we expect them to provide the right answer on demand.

If we are serious about student voice, choice and agency, then we need to consider how these things become a part of our assessment strategy. Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis and Chappuis (2006) report that students learn best when they monitor and take responsibility for their own learning and when mechanisms are in place for students to track their own progress on learning targets and communicate their status to others. Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam describe the important place that self and peer assessment have to play in formative assessment, which they define as:

Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited. (Black & Wiliam, 1998)

Black and Wiliam offer five key strategies for effective formative assessment. Each is made more powerful when the learner is an active participant in the process.

1. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions (Understanding Goals) and criteria for success *(Sharing learning intentions)*

2. Engineering effective classroom discussion, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning and allow the learner to clarify where they are with their learning *(Questioning)*

3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward and allows the learner to understand what actions they may take as they strive to advance their learning *(Feedback)*

4. Activating students as owners of their own learning who have knowledge of what they might have done to achieve success and what they might change. Students must actively reflect upon their learning journey and plan their next steps as key players in partnerships for learning with their teachers and peers *(Self-assessment)*

5. Activating students as instructional resources for one another *(Peer-assessment)*

As long as assessment is something that occurs **to** students rather than something that occurs **with** students, our efforts to enhance student voice, choice and agency will be limited. Assessment is a powerful messaging system that shouts above the noise of other systems. If we hope to include our students as full partners in learning and if we wish to empower them as self-navigating life-long learners, then we must allow them to be agentic assessors of their learning.

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From the blog *'The Learner's Way'* at:
https://thelearnersway.net/

2. Curiosity, critical thinking and agency as responses to the Australian bushfire crisis

The bushfire crisis that is currently impacting Australia is beyond devastating. The scale of these fires defies the imagination. For so long now we have lived with skies laden with smoke as a constant and inescapable reminder that this is not an ordinary summer. This is weather and drought at its most extreme. Our only salvation will be rain, but this is not the season for that and the long term forecasts are not promising.

The news coming to us from the areas most impacted by the fires tells a story of heartbreak and loss. Lives have been lost. Countless animals have died what must surely have been cruel deaths. These fires will have pushed many much loved Australian species beyond the brink of extinction. Suffering abounds. There was a time not long past when the loss of one or two family homes to bushfire was newsworthy. This summer the number of families displaced and with no home to return to is in the hundreds and climbing rapidly. Thousands have been evacuated. Many have been forced to escape to the sanctuary of our coastal waters. Day has been transformed into night and the sky turned blood red. This is apocalypse now.

The impact of these bushfires will be felt by all Australians now and for a long time to come. One cannot be untouched by the imagery, and most will have close personal connections to the people and places directly impacted. Our young people, in particular, will be affected and will need special care in the weeks and months to come. For many, the return to school in early February will be challenging. Many will have been forced away from the communities they call home. Some will have lost loved ones. All will carry emotional scars from the imagery and the environment they have endured over summer. There will be much for schools to do as a support to the healing process.

Alongside the emotional healing that will be required, our students are bound to arrive back in our classrooms with many questions. They will have seen and heard the debate about our collective responses to the bushfire crisis. They will want to understand the connection between extreme climate events and climate change. They will want to know why some people continue to argue against anthropogenic global warming. They will have questions about the response of our politicians to the crisis and want to better understand our political systems. Our students will have opinions on what might be done and what they feel should be done. There will be those who are angry, those ready for a fight, those who are feeling disempowered and many who feel frightened. There will be questions about trust and of what the future might bring. They will want to know what they can do.

Nurturing curiosity

A good starting point will be nurturing their curiosity. If our young people become healthy skeptics who challenge claims with wisdom and sound evidence, the world will be a better place for all. In these 'post-truth' times, when fake news is the new normal, a desire to understand the motivation behind bold claims becomes a critical life skill. Our children need to have the skills to question and interrogate claims made in the media and to become truth seekers. By helping our students to understand the scientific method and by showing them how science tests and re-tests knowledge, we are equipping them with skills that will allow them to confront fake-news head-on.

The ability to reason with evidence is a thinking move that can be enhanced by the use of appropriate thinking routines. Used effectively and with an understanding of the thinking required in a given situation, brings structure to our thinking. Thinking routines bring a degree of order to our thinking that might otherwise be absent and can transform the challenging task of thinking well into a manageable process. When

used in the classroom, thinking routines have the added benefit of making the thinking of our students visible. Students can work through the steps of a thinking routine independently or in small groups and capture the thinking that occurs in response to each step for later sharing. The thinking might be captured with pen and paper, on post-it notes or in a digital format. When we make the thinking of our students visible in these ways we create opportunities for further discussion and particularly in the realm of truth-seeking, we require our students to reason with the evidence they have gathered. Empty claims are quickly debunked when students are asked to share their reasoning in a culture that values thinking and makes it visible.

These thinking routines are particularly useful when the aim is reasoning with evidence. Learn more and find other routines here: *Project Zero Thinking Routines* (http://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines).

- **Connect, Extend, Challenge**: How are the ideas presented and *Connected* to what you already know? What new ideas are presented that *Extend* what you know? What is still *Challenging* for you about the new topic and/or its connection with prior learning? Use individually, recording your responses on paper or in a group with each member responding to the three questions in turn.

- **Think, Puzzle, Explore**: Answer these three questions: What do you *Think* you know about this topic? What questions or *Puzzles* do you have? How can you *Explore* this topic? When *Exploring,* begin by looking for ways to expand on what you already know to maximise the benefits of your prior learning.

- **I used to think . . ., Now I think . . .**: When you are reviewing a topic take time to include this simple routine. Start with *'I used to think . . . '* then move on to *'Now I think . . '* Add power by combining with *'What connections are there between the two?'* This routine should help you identify connections with prior knowledge and allow you to identify which parts are entirely new.

- **I see (hear, feel, touch, taste), I think, I wonder**: Open your senses to the experience and describe it, give voice to your thoughts as you explore with your senses; finish by asking questions that share what you have sensed, and discuss how each sense added to your understanding

- **What makes you say that?** A powerful question for encouraging deeper thinking and one that works best when students learn that this question is not an attack on their thinking but is aimed at revealing more detail.

Agency

Armed with curiosity, a desire to seek the truth and the power to reason with evidence, our students will require a strong sense of **agency**. When we confront frightening and challenging circumstances, we have choices to make. If we confront these challenges with a belief that we can influence our individual and collective trajectory, so that we might shape our futures, we demonstrate positive agency.

'Agency' is the ability to make choices and direct activity based on one's own resourcefulness and enterprise. This entails thinking about the world not as something that unfolds separate and apart from us but as a field of action that we can potentially direct and influence.

Creating Cultures of Thinking: Ron Ritchhart

A sense of **agency** can be the best defence against the potential to feel overwhelmed and disempowered by the scale of the crisis. Helping our students to realise and act upon their desire to make the world a better place, can result in powerful learning.

Globally, students are finding their voice and speaking truth to power. We need more of this and schools should not stifle this activism.

In a democratic society, where freedom of speech is protected, we are fortunate to have processes through which citizens and their communities can be heard. Helping our students to understand how our political system is structured, how the power of the powerful is managed by laws that protect all citizens, is an important part of our role in preparing our students for their tomorrow.

Student voice should not be something that is restricted to discussion of matters constrained to the school grounds. Our students will want opportunities to organise and present a collective response to what they have witnessed over this summer. Our students understand that the actions taken or not taken now will have profound consequences for their future and they know that they cannot wait until they leave school to have a say in how we respond.

Perhaps the traditional role of schools has been the maintenance of the status quo. This role might need to be challenged. This is not advocating for teacher activists but it is a likely consequence of a shift in focus from the transfer of knowledge to developing thinking dispositions. As we empower our students to be problem finders and truth seekers, we should expect that they will challenge the "way things are done here". As our young people challenge the truth of claims made by those in power, it becomes inevitable that schools become the point of origin for their collective voice. If we are genuine in our desire to promote critical thinking, curiosity and student agency, we should not stand in the way of this.

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From the blog *'The Learner's Way'* at:
https://thelearnersway.net/

The Passcodes to Learning

There is no shortage of required passcodes in our lives these days - for basic entry into our phones, access to *wifi* at the library or coffee shop, or, if we are fortunate, unlocking the door keypad on a vacation rental. Passcodes are a gateway to frequently essential, often new, and sometimes uncharted destinations, in both a literal and figurative sense.

On the cusp of retirement, I wish to share the story of what I have come to believe, over a lifetime, are the **five powerful codes** that enable access to the heart of learner-centred education...and life.

These particular codes (unlike the myriad of others I tend to forget) shaped my first career in health care. Then, during my second career, in education, they drove me to create the non-profit **UP for Learning (Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning)**, with the goal to ensure that each and every young person can experience authentic and enlivened learning within a caring community, seeding a life of learning and even joy.

The first three passcodes are interrelated and embedded in our relationships with one another. They are: feeling **known** and **valued**, which in turn allows us to claim our own voice. Having a voice means speaking our truth and feeling safe to assert our wants and needs. With these three codes, we know that who we are and what we care about matters in the world. These are essential to finding and mobilising our personal power.

The fourth code is a sense of **purpose** in our pursuits; the work at hand is relevant and meaningful, engenders ownership, and invites shared responsibility. Feeling purposeful kindles the spirit and provides a reason for being and doing.

These four passcodes open the gateway to **agency**, the synergistic outcome when an individual feels known and valued, utilises their 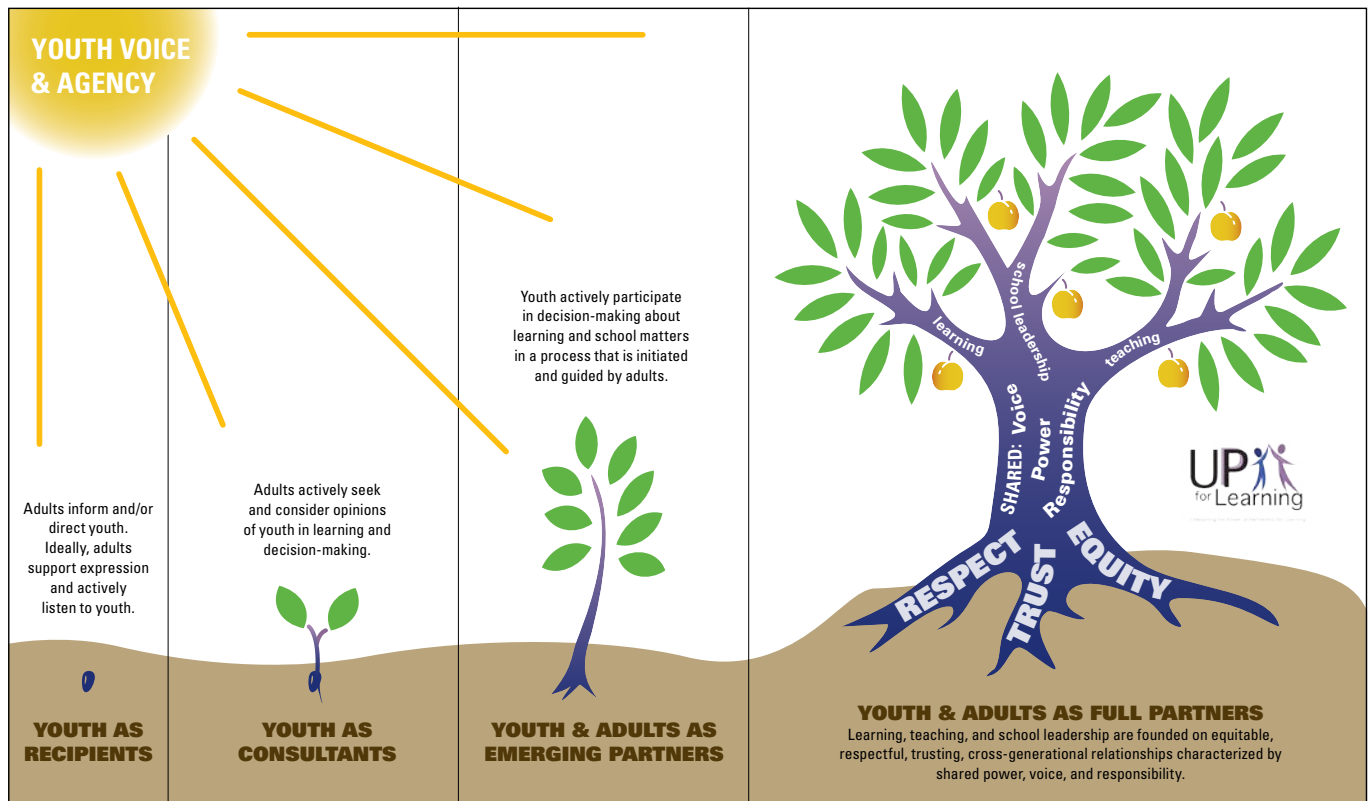voice and finds purpose in life, and has the opportunity to act on that purpose. Agency, the fifth and most powerful passcode, is our capacity to shape our own lives and often to help shape the lives of others in the process. Agency is most often realised in relationship to others, and is particularly powerful within the context of an authentic partnership, grounded in care and mutual respect.

The desire to be known and valued, to have voice, be purposeful and have agency in our lives, is evident across our lifespan. We see it in the two-year-old who is adamant that she **will** pick out what she is to wear that day, and in the 95-year-old elder who fiercely protects his independent living decision when others doubt his capability. We see it in the teenager who craves learning that is personally relevant and meaningful.

This is a shared human desire and need. Yet, it is far too often that, for many reasons and in many varied contexts, one or more of these essential codes are inaccessible, blocked by institutional norms and practices that intentionally or inadvertently limit individual or group access.

YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY

Youth actively participate in decision-making about learning and school matters in a process that is initiated and guided by adults.

Adults inform and/or direct youth. Ideally, adults support expression and actively listen to youth.

Adults actively seek and consider opinions of youth in learning and decision-making.

YOUTH AS RECIPIENTS

YOUTH AS CONSULTANTS

YOUTH & ADULTS AS EMERGING PARTNERS

learning · school leadership · teaching

SHARED: Voice · Power · Responsibility

RESPECT · TRUST · EQUITY

UP for Learning

YOUTH & ADULTS AS FULL PARTNERS
Learning, teaching, and school leadership are founded on equitable, respectful, trusting, cross-generational relationships characterized by shared power, voice, and responsibility.

This is my story of a growing realisation over my lifetime, in two very different professional contexts, of the profound influence of these codes on health, healing, and learning.

The Passcodes to Healing:

The importance of being known and valued, having voice, feeling purposeful and able to effect change in one's life, became clear to me during my first jobs out of college. I was a Program Director at the American Cancer Society in Massachusetts, and later I became Director of Service and Rehabilitation for the state. In between, I was the coordinator of the Cancer Information Service, a toll-free hotline of the Dana Farber Cancer Centre. In all three positions, I listened to the stories of cancer patients and family members on a daily basis, learning of the emotional and logistical challenges that accompanied their struggle with a life threatening disease.

In listening to thousands of stories, I discovered that the health care system offered too few opportunities for patients to raise their questions and concerns, and too few chances to be partners in decisions about their health. An entrenched institutional power structure reinforced the assumption that physicians held the ultimate knowledge and sole capacity to diagnose, treat, and cure. The patient's role was to be the passive recipient of this

care: to simply comply, not to challenge or have voice.

My own life journey, however, had taught me something different: that for the people I spoke with on the phone, a more empowered experience was possible. My dad had recently died of cancer. Over the course of his care, he had some extraordinary providers who saw him as a whole person, not simply as his disease. He was known. His caregivers engaged him in his treatment. He was valued and had a sense of purpose, tending to his own wellness with his diet and sustained hope. He rebounded from recurrences many times. It was evident to me that his caregivers' belief in his strength, coupled with his own will and sense of agency, contributed to his perseverance over years of treatment and multiple remissions.

Even so, his experience had not been an ideal course of treatment. There were some poignant instances where my father was stripped of his dignity and worth, leaving him feeling devalued, helpless, and out of control. My father knew his only option in those moments was to be a passive and compliant patient, a position that robbed him of his own sense of agency. These moments were heart-wrenching to witness. On one occasion, while with him in the emergency room, I vowed to myself that I would do all in my power

at my work to protect others from similar experiences.

Through both my personal and professional encounters I learned that a change was necessary, from the predominant physician-patient relationship to a new paradigm of partnership. Most physicians cared deeply about their patients, but the norms of the system at large were contrary to patient empowerment. When health care is done 'to and for' patients in a compliance model, rather than 'with' each individual in a partnership model, there is an implicit message that "you have no meaningful contribution to your healing; it is out of your hands, and in mine". Patients' ability to mobilise their own resources on their own behalf was at best not recognised, and at worst devalued. Patients' voices were silenced; they were afraid to ask questions, unsure if they had a right to do so. They were effectively robbed of a sense of purpose and agency as they struggled to survive.

Yet research has affirmed time and again the power of the mind-body connection – the significant contribution a person can make to their healing if they are given the opportunity. I came to believe that the compliance-oriented physician-patient relationship needed to shift. There was a need for a different model of care, one with a new set of passcodes. Only then could patients feel

empowered to take a purposeful role in their healing, bringing the full potential of their will to live to their cause.

During that time period, my work and my doctoral studies focused on means to affirm the value and worth of patients' questions, the essential nature of their involvement in their treatment, and their self-advocacy; the goal was to help them believe in, reclaim, and exercise their voices and agency. I ended this chapter of my first career as director of a network of five rural health centres in northern Vermont. Here I was inspired by witnessing a deep commitment to the quality and depth of the provider-patient relationship, imbued with dignity and mutual respect - a new code.

The Passcodes of Learning:

After 15 years as a professional in the health care sector, I retrained as a school psychologist, returning to my college major and life-long fascination with child development. I anticipated working one-on-one with children, moving away from the systems-level change of my health care years. However, I quickly began to see the same institutional patterns that I had witnessed in health care surfacing in education.

The initial focus of my new profession was conducting evaluations for students who were struggling with learning and/ or behavioural issues. I noticed that the system rendered these children voiceless and disempowered. Sadly, they believed that they were 'deficient', that they were 'the problem'. It pained me to witness their loss of hope and lack of agency. As a result of these system forces, I often cited 'learned passivity' in my evaluations. They were perhaps known, but they did not feel valued. They lacked a sense of purpose, and did not feel capable of shaping their own lives. The educational system, often inadvertently, reinforced these negative messages and low expectations.

These learners were trapped in an environment ruled by a set of institutional passcodes that effectively hindered or blocked them from realising their capacity to learn. These codes assumed that these children needed to be 'fixed'; that their remediation would be best accomplished through adult shaping of their behaviours and/or learning, often through external reward systems. Results were measured in frequency of compliance and incremental progress toward adult designed goals that were not co-created or shared with

the learners. If the child faltered, they had failed the 'treatment' and it was a further indication of their weaknesses or deficits. This would lead to another round of remediation.

I realised that the same dynamic that had impeded patients from reaching their full healing power was also diminishing students' capacity to access their full learning potential. New passcodes were needed.

As physicians care for their patients, so too do educators care deeply about their students. However, the norms of the educational system at large are contrary to learner-empowerment. When learning is done 'to and for' learners, rather than 'with' them as full partners, there is a powerful implicit message that *"you are not wise enough, capable enough, or motivated enough to share responsibility and ownership in learning."*

These low expectations are particularly damaging to students who have struggled in the system and so often have low self-esteem. In fact, though, the wrong codes negatively impact *all* learners. Research has shown that many students are 'playing the game of school', biding their time as they build their portfolios for post-secondary career or college options. They do not question the quality or depth of their learning, often admitting that, although they are receiving good grades, they retain very little of the subject material. These students are gaining the skills to 'play life's

games', but they're not discovering how to be self-driven learners or advocates for learning with integrity. Faulty passcodes, in emphasising rote learning and performance on standardised test-taking, deflect from authentic learning.

As I observed this system at work, I came to believe that the predominant student-teacher paradigm needed to shift from one of student-compliance to one of partnership. A new paradigm, accessed through new passcodes, could empower all learners to unleash their desire and capacity to learn. **Education Reimagined**'s description of the learner-centred paradigm powerfully captures what happens when the right passcodes are set:

"Learners are seen and known as wondrous, curious individuals with vast capabilities and limitless potential … learning is a lifelong pursuit and our natural excitement and eagerness to discover and learn is fostered throughout our lives, particularly in our earliest years … learners are active participants in their learning as they gradually become owners of it, and learning itself is seen as an engaging and exciting process. Each child's interests, passions, dreams, skills, and needs shape his or her learning experience and drive the commitments and actions of the adults and communities supporting him or her."

UP for Learning has been contributing to a learner-centred paradigm shift in Vermont by mobilising youth as full partners and change agents in school redesign, demonstrating what happens when all five codes are simultaneously opened. For example,

"The student-led faculty meeting was unlike anything I have ever seen in terms of students and teachers holding a discussion about a topic as sensitive as their teaching methods. I heard from a lot of teachers that **they were awestruck about what had just happened.**

—YATST student reflection, from an evaluation by Dr. Dana Mitra, PA State University

Values & Guiding Principles

SHARE RESPONSIBILITY: The process of change must be transparent and must be driven by adults and youth in partnership.

START FROM STRENGTHS: Students and educators have the wisdom and capacity to orchestrate change. Beginning with what's working provides hope and energizes a community to embrace change.

ASSUME POSITIVE INTENTIONS: Educators truly want students to thrive. Young people are ready and able to commit to their learning and be involved in its design.

SEEK EQUITY & JUSTICE: The human need to be valued and heard is universal. *All* young people have a right to a meaningful and engaging education.

CREATE OPEN DIALOGUE: Deep conversation is central to changing school cultures. Young people are particularly able initiators of this dialogue, creating a shared vision for education and the learning process.

EMPLOY DATA TO DRIVE CHANGE: Research is a vitally important way to build credibility between youth and adults. When a community works together to make meaning of their own data, they are strengthened by what they learn and emboldened to take action.

Please be in touch.

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UP for Learning

Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Our mission is to

shift the youth-adult relationship at the heart of education to partnership, and to increase youth agency. This ensures that all young people have opportunities, support, knowledge, and skills to pursue active roles in their learning, their lives, and their community.

young people become integral members of youth-adult teams conducting research and taking actions to:

- Increase rigour, relevance, relationships and shared responsibility in the learning environment.
- Implement school-wide restorative practices.
- Develop and implement research-based communications campaigns to build public understanding and support for personalised learning and proficiency-based assessment approaches.
- Improve the health and well-being of their communities by utilising the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* data as a catalyst for dialogue and change.
- Revamp districts' strategic plans by researching stakeholder wants and desires.

UP for Learning introduces and reinforces a simple yet profound set of passwords that guide both the process as well as the outcomes of these teams. We provide training and coaching to ensure both the fidelity of the youth-adult partnership framework for these teams, as well as the skill and knowledge base necessary to be successful in their respective goals.

One poignant example is the decision of many **UP** schools to create a mid-semester learner-teacher feedback system. Following a schoolwide survey, results often show that teachers believe they frequently check in with students about their learning and adapt accordingly. In contrast, learners often report a low frequency of this occurrence; they feel teachers are not checking in with them. To close this 'puzzling gap' in the data, **UP** school teams have created a simple feedback form that allows each student to share with their teachers the strengths and challenges of the learning environment, to self-assess as learners and partners, and to set their own goals. Teachers analyse this data and share the findings with their classes mid-semester, leading dialogue about ways to build on strengths and address areas of needed growth. These changes are then enacted, as immediate evidence of the value of learner perspectives. Both teacher and learner goals are then pursued, in a partnership that is essential to a vital learning community.

If a central goal of education is to prepare young people to be capable and active citizens, we must equip them to be self-advocates and agents of change. Adolescents share an unparalleled thirst for affirmation of their worth in the world and a desire to shape their life course. They are ready! Their voices, their directness, and their ownership of the new paradigm ensures a shared decision-making and change process that rightfully incorporates the viewpoints of all stakeholders.

Being known, valued, and using one's voice in purposeful change work concurrently develops core workforce skills, such as independent learning, self-advocacy, decision-making, communication and problem-solving. Importantly, as teachers share the new passcodes, and free themselves from the traditional power relationship, they discover that their hope and motivation are renewed.

There is a synergy that happens when young people's creativity, insights, and optimism meet educators' professional commitment, organisational skills and systems savvy, creating an authentic partnership. As with any paradigm shift, this new relationship must be nurtured to avoid falling back on old habits. When youth and adults share their love of learning and desire for change, however, both are equally empowered and equally humbled. The result can be magical. We all become our better selves.

These passcodes to learning are an imperative for the redesign of our educational system. We might forget our *Netflix* password, but we cannot allow ourselves to forget the human passcodes: that every individual deserves to feel known and valued, to have a voice, to feel a sense of purpose, and find agency to shape their lives. As basic human rights, these deserve to be etched into our memory. They provide access to that place where we can realise our fullest potential, whatever our pursuit.

We do not believe in
ourselves until someone
reveals that deep inside us
something is valuable,
worth listening to,
worthy of our touch,
sacred to our touch.
Once we believe in ourselves
we can
risk curiosity,
wonder, spontaneous delight,
or any experience that reveals
the human spirit.

ee cummings

Helen Beattie
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Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

64 Ways to Amplify Youth Voice and Agency through Partnership

Classrooms

1. Laugh together daily.

2. Make learning transparent, with a continuous feedback loop between learners and teachers.

3. Employ powerful "circle practices" to promote deep dialogue and a sense of community.

4. Begin the year by exploring the uniqueness of each person's identity.

5. Ask for input from youth from day one (eg. choice in seating options, classroom design, etc.)

6. Provide books and resources that are both windows and mirrors for all young people.

7. Weave meaningful choices into curriculum design.

8. Begin the year with personal stories and shared dreams.

9. Share your own stories with your students.

10. Model the way that students can work to overcome their own biases and assumptions by listening for and accepting as truth the stories that other people tell about themselves.

11. Teach youth about how their brains learn, including effective learning strategies, so that they can be drivers of their education.

12. Establish a "language of learning" so that everyone is able to self-assess, monitor and shape their learning and provide effective teacher feedback.

13. Involve learners in decisions about the curriculum, teaching approaches, and assessment strategies.

14. Task learners to create/design aspects of the physical classroom space.

15. Create opportunities for youth to design bulletin boards and displays.

16. Display and honor the work of all learners.

17. Encourage mistakes as an essential attribute of learning - and model mistake making on a regular basis.

18. Engage learners in creating and sustaining classroom norms and expectations to ensure a safe and constructive learning environment.

19. Establish student-led conferences to reflect on strengths and set goals.

20. Create opportunities for students to lead in the classroom (eg. facilitate morning circle, teach a lesson, etc.).

21. Encourage learners to be peer teachers and/or tutors.

22. Support the development of meaningful Personalized Learning Plans, insuring that they are visited regularly and adapted over time to reflect shifting interests.

23. Create a culture of trust, respect and equity by optimizing opportunities for youth and adults to work together toward a meaningful common vision and purpose, sharing power, voice and responsibility in the process.

24. Utilize an action research model to drive change.

25. Believe in the capacity of each and every person's ability to learn (growth mindset) and reinforce this at every turn. Hold high expectations for all learners and address your own implicit biases that limit expectations.

26. Liberally weave relevance and purpose into the curriculum, reinforcing the capacity of young people as change agents (eg. project-based learning).

27. Administer a classroom feedback form on a regular basis, to understand the learning experience of every learner, and include a learner self-assessment component to affirm the partnership.

28. Share the findings of the classroom feedback survey, including stated goals to adapt instruction accordingly. Support learners to set their own learning goals as well.

29. Do the work you ask of your students along with them.

Hallways

30. Greet learners — making eye contact and welcoming them into the classroom.

31. Display student work.

32. Create opportunities for youth to design bulletin boards and displays.

33. Visibly honor a wide-cross section of students in hallway choices.

34. Decorate hallways with quotes that affirm the value and capacity of all students and the importance of equity.

35. Encourage students to create murals and other artwork that is representative of their community.

School-wide Infrastructure

36. Create and sustain a representative student government that is committed to promoting equity.

37. Include students on committees (leadership team, curriculum, hiring, etc.)

38. Organize student teams to analyze survey data relating to learning and school climate/health, sharing their findings with others.

39. Encourage students to use their data analysis to spark action, including assessing the impact of these actions.

40. Provide space for youth to co-design curriculum

41. Mobilize youth-adult action research teams to contribute continuous improvement efforts.

42. Form and support youth-adult teams to implement restorative practices school-wide.

43. Teach a change paradigm that is strengths-based and solution focused.

44. Model and teach powerful and inclusive dialogue facilitation skills, and mobilize students as facilitators whenever possible.

45. Create cross-grade mentoring and tutoring opportunities.

46. Support courses taught by students, with an adult mentor.

47. Create a "J Term" option with interest-based learning opportunities offered for a 1-3 week period each year.

48. Make sure joy is valued and readily evident throughout the school.

49. Ensure that youth voice, agency and partnership are evident in all pertinent literature describing the courses and the school.

50. Have a team of students organize and lead school assemblies.

51. Host regular cross-generational community building school events (food and fun).

52. Build a regular time during the week where faculty and learners have time together to build a trusting relationship, and where peers regularly support and honor each other.

53. Create an social media account that features success pictures/stories of youth and adults working together on behalf of change, and instances that reinforce youth capacity as leaders.

54. Create a consciousness about the impact of rigor, relevance, relationships and shared responsibility as essential to engagement and motivation, with teachers and learners tending to their presence on an ongoing basis.

55. Have youth as fully valued members of the school board.

Community

56. Engage community members as mentors, tutors and internship partners.

57. Provide opportunities and support for youth to present to local decision making groups (Select Boards, Planning Commissions, etc.) on projects that will have a positive impact on the community

58. Tie the curriculum to community whenever possible, utilizing it as a rich learning context.

59. Expand the realm of career opportunities for youth by having adults share their professional life stories.

60. Bring in community members to witness learning accomplishments and provide feedback.

61. Submit articles to the local paper or utilize social media on a regular basis to capture the desire and capacity of young people to be change agents (ideally written or posted by youth).

62. Have youth be the initiators and facilitators of community dialogue groups regarding education.

63. Support opportunities for youth to be initiators of community action to improve the health and well-being of their communities, linking this to academic credit when possible.

64. Engage community members from a wide variety of education and career backgrounds and youth in dialogue about a successful high school career and the realm of post-secondary possibilities.

UP for Learning Find more resources to empower youth and build partnerships with adults at **upforlearning.org**

over

Australian visit

Danske Skoleelever represents all Danish pupils from the ages of 6 to 16 years, to stakeholders in the educational area, such as other NGOs, municipalities, government agencies, and political parties.

A unique thing about our organisation is that **we are by and for pupils**. This means that we are completely led by democratically elected students in the form of a presidency and board, but have adults working in our organisation for us, taking care of tasks, such as accountancy, that require a specific educational skill.

We work for creating a better school life for all pupils in Denmark and make sure that all pupils are equipped with the skills to participate in a democratic society. To achieve that, we believe that pupils should be heard when solving the challenges in the education area on every level of decision making, right from local school boards to ministries.

Presidency: Thea (middle) is President; Nik and Leanor are both Vice-Presidents

In addition, we have in the last couple of years made several projects with partners such as the **Danish Ministry of Education**, **TDC** (the biggest telecommunications in Denmark) and **Danske Bank** (the largest bank in Denmark), all with the same objective of creating a better school life for the pupils and preparing them for taking part in society.

We are traveling to Australia

Every year, the leadership of our organisation – the Presidency, the HR-Manager, Deputy Head, Head of Secretariat and three Board members – travels abroad to gain inspiration and knowledge that we can bring back home, and use to create a better school life for Danish pupils. In former years we have been to the USA, Scandinavia, China, and England.

This year we are traveling to southeast Australia, visiting Melbourne, Canberra, and Sydney in February. There are a lot of reasons behind our decision to pick Australia as this year's destination.

First of all, we think **we can learn a lot from Australia.** We believe Australia is a country with a strong tradition in teaching democratic values and making sure that students are listened to and engaged in their school day. This is also a common theme for most of our visits here in Australia: *how do we make sure pupils are involved in the decision-making processes?*

Additionally, we are also interested in **the differences between the Danish** and the Australian educational system. One major difference is the variation of schools in Australia. In Australia, you have a way bigger share of religious and single-sex schools than in Denmark. We haven't had single-sex schools in Denmark since the 1950s. Besides this, inclusion is also going to be a political priority for our organisation in the coming year, and we believe Australia is a country with a strong inclusion effort, from which we think we can learn a lot.

In Denmark we also see a rising number of parents choosing to **move their children into private education**. We fear that this might harm the mix of students from different social classes; we think that this also is a concern for a lot of Australians and that we could learn a lot from how you solve the issue.

Planned meetings

Currently, we are planning to visit a whole lot of different schools, organisations and researchers among student voice. A common theme throughout our trip is that we are seeking schools and organisations that work with student voice practices, and make sure that students are involved in the decision making processes of the schools. To name a few examples, we are going to visit the **Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC), the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER),** and Social Ventures Australia (SVA).

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National Board

VicSRC's ALTER Program

In 2019, VicSRC piloted the **ALTER Program** with 25 primary schools across Victoria and the support of the **Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership**.

ALTER supports primary students and teachers to create collaborative and sustainable change in their schools and communities using VicSRC's *ALTER Model of Student-Led Action*.

The program includes a series of two training workshops and culminates in a third event focussed on celebration and reflection. The entire program is co-facilitated by secondary students and VicSRC staff.

Workshop 1 focuses on asking and listening. Students identify their issue and design surveys or community forums to consult with their student body on the cause of the issue and potential solutions.

Students come prepared to **Workshop 2** with their evidence from listening to their student body, and then think through and plan a solution to the issue that they will enact in their school.

Finally, students and teachers from all participating schools come together to reflect on the work they have done and celebrate their achievements.

ALTER is a location-based program, with three to six schools in an area coming together for workshops. **ALTER** has been developed specifically for primary schools, but can be adapted to a secondary school setting.

If you are interested in participating in the **ALTER Program** in 2020, we encourage you to reach out to other schools in your area to join you, and contact **VicSRC** for dates and pricing.

Teach the Teacher Online

The VicSRC's **Teach the Teacher Program** is a student-led professional development program for teachers and school staff. The students design and implement the entire **Teach the Teacher** program themselves.

With the support of teachers and school leadership, students undertake VicSRC training to design and facilitate a professional development session for their teachers and school leadership based around a prevalent issue important to the student body. Together they then learn how to turn the solutions developed from this session into a plan of action to drive change.

The VicSRC is currently developing **Teach the Teacher** into an online course, that will be accessible to schools across Australia and internationally. This course will be an interactive learning experience that guides schools through the **Teach the Teacher** program, with videos, resources, tips and best practice examples. **Teach the Teacher Online** will be designed to be used on its own, or alongside VicSRC face-to-face workshops.

Teach the Teacher Online is anticipated to be launched in the second half of 2020. Express your interest at: http://teachtheteacher.org.au/online-learning/ for updates.

TEACH THE TEACHER

Creating positive communities through student-led conversation

Meet some current VicSRC Executive members

Returning for a third term on the VicSRC Executive Committee is **Bri!** Welcome back!

Why did you run for another exec term?

I'm continuing as an exec member because I feel like there's so much more I can do in this role. While student voice is super important at a school level, I feel like I should take advantage of the opportunity I have to make state-wide, systemic change. This will be my third term now, but I'm still just as keen as I was when I started!

How has being on exec changed how you see student voice at your school?

I think initially I saw student voice as only something certain people could do – as if you had to wait for the teachers to pick you in order for your opinion to be valid. Thankfully now I know this isn't the case, because student voice should come from all students.

What new or continuing issues are important to you?

An issue I feel is particularly important is working on improving the transitional process between primary and secondary school. I will admit, as a student at a P-12 school, this was not an issue I was initially aware of, though after all the fantastic discussions and work done at Congress (go PASTA!), I've come to realise the importance of having a smooth, cohesive transition.

What are you most looking forward to this year?

As the **Congress Coordinator** for 2020, I'm beyond stoked to be orchestrating the event that has been such a highlight of my high school experience and made me who I am today. I certainly wouldn't be writing this right now if it hadn't been for Congress, so I hope I can create such a life changing experience for others as well!

And as we welcome 2020, we also welcome back **Mitch** who is returning for a second term on the Student Executive Committee!

Why did you run for another exec term?

I ran for another term because I enjoyed my first term very much. I really enjoyed working with the exec and ambassadors on congress priorities and working to change the education system.

How has being on exec changed how you see student voice at your school?

When I first started at VicSRC, my school wasn't as invested in Student Voice as other schools. However, since then I have seen student voice develop at my school, now my school develop more of an interest in student voice and hearing what students want.

What new or continuing issues are important to you?

Sustainability is a new area of focus during this term, and it something that I'm really passionate about. I'm looking forward to working on it among other priorities.

What are you most looking forward to this year?

I think I'm looking forward to working with the other executives and building a relationship with them.

The VicSRC Executive Committee welcomes **James** from Melbourne's western suburbs for his first Executive term.

Why did you run for the Executive?

Well, it's a pretty long story. I've always had an interest in helping my peers and, so when I found out about the SRC in Year 3, it immediately clicked. From that point on I've worked to do what I love, which is helping my fellow students voice their concerns and ideas to the relevant people, to ensure they get the best out of their education. I found out about the VicSRC last year, and after observing the amazing work the organisation did, I decided to run for the Executive.

How is student voice practised at your school?

There are many pathways for students to voice their ideas within the school!

The main pathway is through the **SRC**, which involves a team of representative students from each form class, an **Executive** team elected by their respective cohort, and a **Cabinet** of six Year 12s.

Through the SRC, students can raise concerns to their Executives, who will then work on solutions alongside the representatives. The Cabinet can assist the Executive, but also have their own agenda to work on. The aim is to act in the interest of students, benefiting their time as students at the school. Unlike the normal Cabinet structure, we have a holistic Cabinet, meaning each member has an equal part in representing the student body. Between the six members, each person has a **Portfolio**, which looks over certain aspects of the school.

Other than the SRC our school also has many student-led clubs that focus on student voice within particular areas. For example, we have an **Environmental Action Group**, which focuses around how students can work towards a sustainable future, and how we can better protect the environment. The SRC works with clubs like these to help hold events with other schools, which can get the conversation going in other schools.

What issues are important to you?

I'm kind of a tech geek, so an issue that is super important to me is **cyber safety**. It seems odd, but the number of people our age who click on phishing scams and are unaware of it, is way too high. With technology evolving over the years, these scams will get more and more ambiguous, meaning we have to step up our game now.
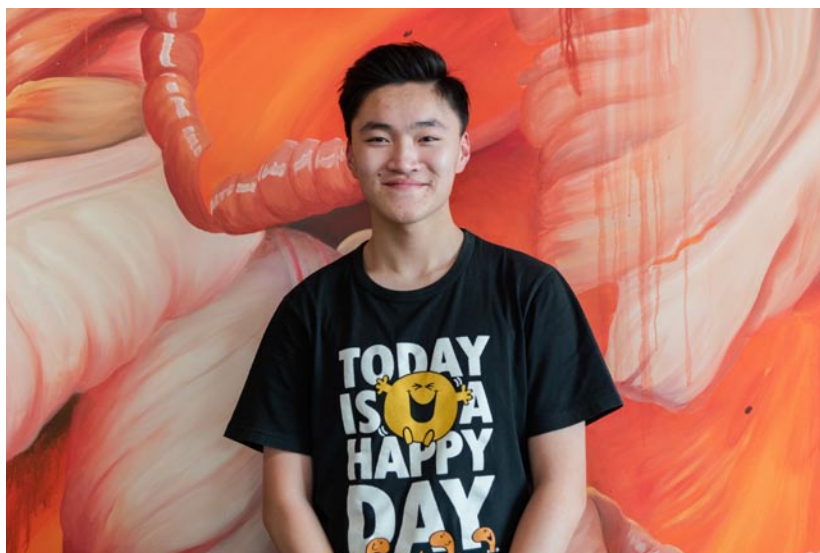
Another issue that is really important to me, and is also one of the Congress Priorities, is the distribution of the **Civics and Citizenship Education** program. It's a program that was created for students from Year 7 to 10, but unfortunately, it hasn't been distributed that well. My school is fortunate enough to have a whole program dedicated to Civics and Citizenship Education near the end of the year, but for many other schools it's not even taught. This issue is very important to me, as it relates to this whole debate about lowering the voting age. There are students out there who aren't able to vote yet but have a clear understanding of how the government works, and probably know a lot more than some 18 year olds out there.

The Civics and Citizenship Education program, if taught properly, can help teach students the basics of how the whole system works, meaning that, when they turn 18, they are able to vote based on their own decisions, rather than randomly voting or voting for what their friends voted for.

What are you most looking forward to this year?

I'm looking forward to the work that we will accomplish as a VicSRC Executive team this year! These priorities require a lot of work from us, but also you all! Make sure to keep an eye on the **Student Voice Hub** about our progress on these priorities and make sure to give us your input on the forums!

New VicSRC Staff

VicSRC Student Voice Hub Digital Project Coordinator

Joshua Watson has joined VicSRC for the summer to look after the *Student Voice Hub* in the temporary absence of Kirsty Fromholtz. He has worked in various government jobs across Australia and has already increased the average height of the team significantly.

Joshua originally hails from England and is studying a Masters of International Relations. He enjoys cycling, reading and playing Dungeons and Dragons - an ideal combo for someone who wants to do a PhD in history!

VicSRC Communications Assistant

Hella Ibrahim has joined the VicSRC staff in 2020, doubling the comms capacity of the team and therefore making the comms team unstoppable. She is founder and Editorial Director of *Djed Press*, an online publication prioritising and centring the voices of people of colour. Hella has truly excellent taste in books, asks incisive and important questions about sports (how do points work in tennis?) and is set on befriending all of the dogs in the building, which the office whole-heartedly supports.

TERM ONE
JAN - FEB - MAR

VicSRC Open Day *28th January*

Start your Teach the Teacher program

Student Ambassador Recruitment
December 2019-31st January

Student Editorial Team Recruitment
7th January-7th February

TERM TWO
APR - MAY - JUN

Buy Congress tickets

Still time to start Teach the Teacher!

VicSRC Exec Nominations
22nd June-26th July

TERM THREE
JUL - AUG - SEP

Congress 2020 *7th-9th July*

Exec Election voting
10th-23rd August

Nominate for Student Voice Awards
September

TERM FOUR
OCT - NOV - DEC

Student Voice Awards ceremony
October

Vic Partner SRC SCHOOLS

Thinking about becoming a **VicSRC Partner School**? Wondering what it's all about? Here's what it means.

Share our vision

Being a **Partner** of Victoria's peak body for school-aged students connects you with a community committed to a student-focused education system.

Together we pursue positive change in our education system through advocacy in schools and communities. We collaborate with schools, students, educators and like-minded organisations to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

Stay informed

As a peak body, we are on the ground every day supporting and empowering student voice in schools, with students and with educators.

We keep our **Partner Schools** up to date with all the latest news, innovations and opportunities through regular communications designed to support you to empower student voice. When we produce new resources and tools, our **Partner Schools** are the first to know.

Add your story

We share best practice student voice. Celebrate your wins and share your learnings with schools across Victoria!

Support student voice

We are a student-led not-for-profit organisation; your support means we can continue to empower student voices in all aspects of education.

FAQs

Are we eligible to be VicSRC Partner School?

If you are a recognised school in Victoria – primary, secondary, P-12, government, Catholic, independent, flexible-learning – then you are eligible!

How much does it cost?

It only costs $150+GST per year to be a **Partner School**.

We can't afford $150+GST; can we still be a Partner School?

We are always willing to make our programs as accessible as possible! Send an email through and we'll be very happy to discuss your options: partnerships@vicsrc.org.au

Where do we sign up?

Register as a **VicSRC Partner School** right here: **https://bit.ly/3avn5Ek**   Once you complete the form you'll receive a confirmation email outlining the next steps (please allow 5 business days for confirmation).

"The Student Voice Hub is a place where teachers, students and principals can all come together to collaborate, get resources and talk to people and know what's happening in other schools around the state in regards to student voice."

The **Student Voice Hub** is designed **by** young people **for** young people!

It is a place for students, teachers and everyone who is passionate about the opinions and ideas of young people. It:

- Showcases examples of best practice through case studies
- Connects schools and organisations passionate about students taking action to improve their schooling experience
- Provides a safe space for stakeholders to discuss issues that matter to them
- Provides resources that support students, teachers and school leaders to take action within their classroom, school and organisation.

Student Membership is Free!

Student members contribute to blogs, forums and polls, as well as access many great resources. Students shape the future of the Student Voice Hub; be part of our community to have a voice and create positive change.

We are working hard to make this a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Currently under Australian privacy laws we require parental/guardian permission for people under 15 to register.

https://studentvoicehub.org.au/

The **Student Voice Hub** *was developed by the* **VicSRC** *with support from the Victorian Department of Education and Training.*

2020 International Conference on Student Voice

SAVE THE DATE
June 23–24, 2020
Minneapolis

**For information, contact Kay Augustine: kayaugustine@gmail.com
or Dana Mitra: dlm54@psu.edu**

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.

2020 Conference

Social and Citizenship Education Association of Australia

November 19-21, 2020, Melbourne

Civics and Citizenship Education in a Disrupted World: Youth Voice, Agency and Action in Schools and Communities

- What contributions can educators make to empowering young people to understand and have voice and agency as citizens now?
- How can teaching and learning involve youth in issues that matter in their lives including personal and social learning, health and wellbeing and identity and belonging?
- How can educators respond to the impact of social media and new technologies in young peoples lives?
- How can young people engage with and respond to other disruptive forces including the rise of authoritarianism, economic imbalances, threats to democracy and distrust of politicians?
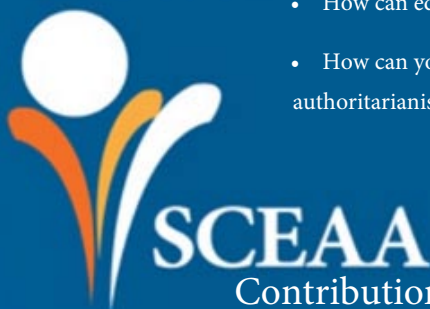
SCEAA

Contributions of articles about youth voice and agency are also invited to our journal *The Social Educator*

Expressions of interest: Email seaa@sev.asn.au   www.sceaa.org.au   #SCEAA

Amplify Toolkit: Victoria, Australia

The *Amplify* toolkit has been developed by the Victorian Department of Education and Training. It provides access to a collection of purposefully created *Amplify* professional resources, and a curated and growing selection of external student voice, agency and leadership (SVAL) resources.

The *Amplify* tools, resources and activities are designed to help teams of teachers (eg Professional Learning Communities, Communities of Practice, Key Learning Areas) establish a shared understanding of SVAL, and design and implement SVAL initiatives that are suitable for their school context. They provide a scaffolded approach to support SVAL implementation.

The *Amplify* toolkit is at:
https://bit.ly/37KaScv

Our Voices, Our Schools: Ireland

Ireland signed the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* in 1992 and became the first country in the world to develop a *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015-2020) (**https://bit.ly/2sMNPiH**). The Strategy is a cross-government strategy with commitments for all Government Departments and State Agencies. It aims to support organisations in a self-improvement journey towards adopting best practice in giving children and young people a voice in decision-making. The **Department of Children and Youth Affairs** provides advice, support and training for government departments who consult with young people as part of their decision-making processes.

Comhairle na nÓg is the representative youth organisation facilitated and supported by the **Department of Children and Youth Affairs**. It is one of the permanent structures in place to enable children and young people to have a voice in national and local decision making on matters that affect their lives.
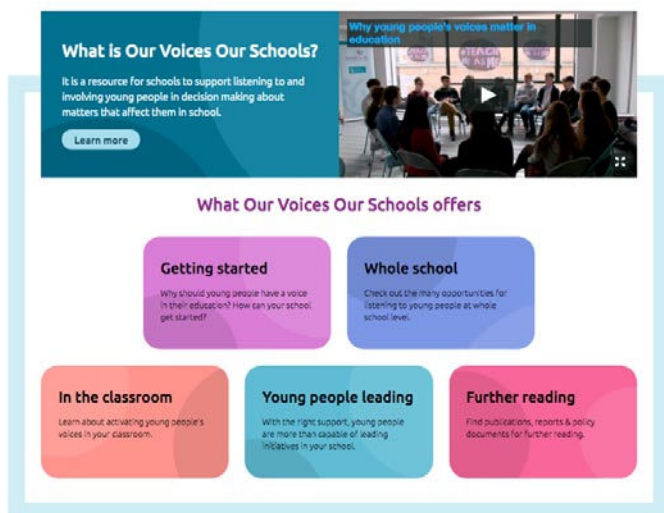
Further information: ***citizenparticipation@dcya.gov.ie***

In 2017, the **Comhairle na nÓg** National Executive decided to focus specifically on equality in the school setting. One of the key actions resulting from this decision was the development of an online resource to assist schools developing

- a culture of valuing young people's voice
- practices of authentic listening leading to action
- an awareness of opportunities.

The resource, *Our Voices, Our Schools* (**https://www.ourvoicesourschools.ie/**), was launched on December 4th by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, TD.

This resource adopts a rights-based approach based on the rights set out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The resource sets out to highlight the many opportunities that exist to hear the voices of young people in schools. It also seeks to identify ways in which these opportunities can be maximised to the benefit of the entire school community.

The resource presents support material and guidance in four main sectors:

- **Getting started:** ideas for reflecting on and building a supportive culture in schools;
- **Whole school:** highlighting opportunities to involve and listen to young people in policy development, planning, reflection at a whole-school level;
- **In the classroom:** resources to support conversations about learning, assessment and classroom culture;
- **Young people leading:** young people are encouraged to initiate and lead their own initiatives in the school.

John and Ger Halbert

Student Voice Research and Practice facebook group
www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

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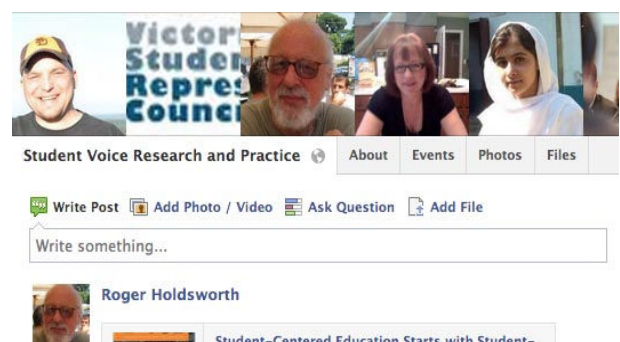
Vale David Gribble

We were saddened to hear of the recent death of **David Gribble**, following a fall.

David founded **Sands School** (Devon) and **Park School** in England, and was a key founder of the **International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC)**. The following information is provided by **Jerry Mintz** from AERO (US) and the **Phoenix Education Trust** (UK):

"It is clear that without David there would be no **IDEC** (International Democratic Education Conference), no **EUDEC**, no **APDEC**, etc. After the small meeting we had in Hadera, Israel in 1993, there would have no follow up if David had not organised a second meeting in England the next year. He followed that up with an organisational newsletter for the next several years. He called it the *Hadera Conference* then. The rest in history. David had that sense of history." *(Jerry Mintz)*

"You may have heard the sad news that David Gribble has passed away, aged 87. This is most devastating for his family of course, and it is a sadness felt by many in our network of education pioneers ... David's website is very inspiring and has details of his books, articles, talks and other miscellaneous snippets of his life and ideas: **www.davidgribble.co.uk/**. Other related projects can be found at: **www.libed.org.uk**; **www.authoritarianschooling.co.uk**; **www.idenetwork.org** " *(Phoenix Education Trust)*

"Teaching is not a matter of making children learn; it is a matter of making sure you don't get in their way."

David Gribble

Global students' voices on the Australian fire emergency

Together with the **European Students' Union - ESU** and other student organisations around the world, we are seriously alarmed by the situation in Australia and we want to show our solidarity to the people in Australia.

Australia is currently facing the effects of the worst environmental crisis in modern history. A place well known for its abundant biodiversity has been engulfed in a cycle of wildfires and as a result, human lives and animal species are in grave danger.

We denounce the negligence of the international community, as this crisis is coming shortly after the failure of the **UN Climate Change Conference** in Madrid, at the end of 2019. The decisions of not acting on climate change will cause and aggravate tragedies such as this one.

Read the full statement at: **http://bit.ly/2FE8mIZ**

OBESSU

OBESSU
Rue de l'Industrie, 10,
1000, Brussels Belgium
secretariat@obessu.org

Advance Notice:

Youth for Peace Award, 2020

An initiative of **Psychologists for Peace**, an interest group of the
Australian Psychological Society

The 2020 theme is
"Climate, Conflict and Peacebuilding"

The climate crisis is real, and many people recognise the need for speedy action.

Unfortunately, there are still groups who are resistant to change, who haven't got the message in a way they can really hear it. Young people are creative communicators; in the past year or two they have shown how successful they can be at getting the message of the climate crisis across.

So **Psychologists for Peace** are inviting groups of young people, aged 12-24 years, to get together, to identify a group who are currently resistant to climate action and to develop a 'pitch' to get them on board.

The climate crisis is a peace issue:

It causes and increases conflict. (For example, with every 0.5 degree warming, interpersonal aggression increases by 10-20%); it will cause widespread shortages of food, water and livable land which can easily erupt in violence; refugees seeking a safe new home are often not welcomed.

The climate crisis is a justice issue:

The next generation who didn't cause it will bear its worst impacts; developing countries which did little to cause it will suffer the more than the developed world which did cause it; just alternatives are needed for people working in fossil-fuel industries like coal mines and coal-fired power stations who will need new jobs.

And the climate crisis is a psychological issue:

It is caused by human behaviour, it arouses deep feelings, and it demands fast changes in our attitudes and behaviour – these are all psychological issues.

The climate crisis can also be an opportunity for peacebuilding:

For example, people can come together to fight for climate action and a just transition; more local production of food and energy can create more cohesive communities.

The **Youth for Peace Award** is for a group project not just because 'many minds are better than one', but also because thinking about the climate crisis can be hard on your own and working as a team helps develop skills in cooperation, conflict resolution and problem-solving. It can also be more fun! Working with others is also an effective way to manage climate anxiety.

The task this year will be to develop a creative campaign/pitch to promote messages about the connections between climate, conflict and peacebuilding to influence the attitudes and/or behaviour of specific, chosen audience(s).

When the Award is officially opened, further details will be provided in a forthcoming issue of *Connect* and on the **Australian Psychological Society, Psychologists for Peace website.**

For further information please contact **Liz Freeman:** efreeman@unimelb.edu.au

Psychologists
for Peace
Interest Group

APS Australian
Psychological
Society

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

SFYS School Focused Youth Service

Hold the date:
WISA Conference in Victoria: Focussing on Students

Melbourne, Vic: Thursday 30 April *(with SFYS)*

For more information, see: www.wisawellbeing.com.au; linsey@wisawellbeing.com.au

Connect on facebook

C onnect 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 40). Even though we are now solely on-line, there are still costs associated with publication.

By supporting *Connect* with your donations, you keep us going. To make a donation to the work of *Connect*, use the form in this issue or contact us for bank account details to make an electronic transfer of funds.

Connect Publications: Order Form

Tax Invoice: ABN: 98 174 663 341

To: *Connect*, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote VIC 3070 Australia
       e-mail: r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au

Connect On-Line Subscription *(all 6 issues annually e-mailed to you FREE)*:

Simply provide your e-mail address (below or by e-mail) and name and phone number (in case of bounces).
There is no cost; however donations to support *Connect*'s work are appreciated and acknowledged.

❑   **I enclose a donation to support the work of *Connect*.**

or: ❑   I am already a subscriber to *Connect*.

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... copies	***Foxfire** 9* (1 available) §	$10	$ 5*	$ ....
... copies	*Students and Work* (maximum of 10 copies per order)	$ 6	$ 5*	$ ....
... copies	*SRC Pamphlets Set* (2 sets available) §	$ 6	$ 5*	$ ....

(§ check availability before ordering; * discounted rate for subscribers to *Connect*)

B: Total for publications: $...........

NOTE: all amounts include postage/packaging within Australia (GST not applicable - input taxed)

(**Postage:**   *Outside Australia* add $5 per copy of publications $...........)

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Clearinghouse

ASPRINworld:
the Connect website!
www.asprinworld.com/connect

Connect has a website at *ASPRINworld*. The *Connect* section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, index of recent back issue contents (hyperlinked to PDFs) and summaries of and order information for *Student Councils and Beyond*, *Student Action Teams*, *Reaching High* and *Switched On to Learning*.

Connect is also archived and available electronically:
research.acer.edu.au/connect

All issues of *Connect* are archived through the ACER Research Repository: **ACEReSearch**. *Connect* issues from #1 to the current issue are available for *free* download, and recent issues can be searched by key terms. See the *ASPRINworld* site for index details of recent issues, then link to and download the whole issue you are interested in.

www.informit.com.au

In addition, current and recent issues of *Connect* are now available on-line to libraries and others who subscribe to RMIT's *Informit* site – a site that contains databases of many Australian publications. You can access whole issues of *Connect* as well as individual articles. Costs apply, either by a library subscription to *Informit*'s databases, or through individual payments per view for articles.

Articles from *Connect* are also discoverable through *EBSCOhost* research databases.

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

Local and International Publications Received

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

International:

Mind the gap: Teachers' conceptions of student-staff partnership and its potential to enhance educational quality (Samantha E Martens, Ineke H A P Wolfhagen, Jill R D Whittingham & Diana H J M Dolmans; Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University, the Netherlands) *Medical Teacher*; 2020: https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2019.1708874

Sowing seeds to harvest healthier adults: The working principles and impact of participatory health research with children in a primary school context (Tineke Abma, Sarah Lips & Janine Schrijver; The Netherlands) *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*; January 2020, 17, 451: https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17020451

Student Leadership 4.0 (Süleyman Gavut Göker, Çanakkale 18 Mart University, Turkey) 2019; chapter in *Educational Leadership*

**UPdate** (UP for Learning, Vermont, USA) January 2020

Connect On-Line!

All issues of *Connect* from 1979 to the present (that's over **40 years**!) are freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), all the issues of *Connect* have been scanned or up-loaded into the ACER's Research Repository: *ACEReSearch.*

You can find these issues of *Connect* at:

http://research.acer.edu.au/connect

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

Connect has a commitment to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation. We are totally supported by donations!
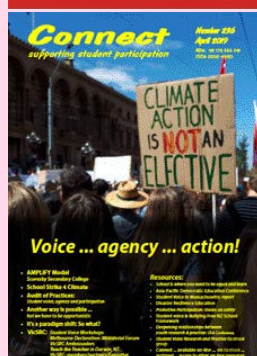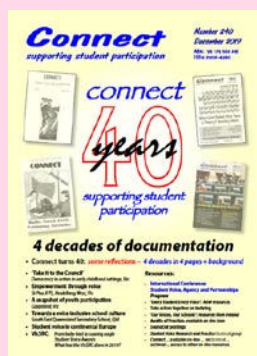
Let us know

There may be some gaps or improvements necessary. As you use this resource, let us know what you find. (If an issue of *Connect* seems to be missing, check the issues either side, as *double issues* show up only as one issue number.) If you have any ideas for improving this resource, please let us know.

Most importantly, please USE this resource.

All copies of *Connect* are available on-line ... for free!

http://research.acer.edu.au/connect