ReConnectEd

RECONNECTING STUDENT PARTNERSHIPS AND
PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

ISSUE 1

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CONTENTS

ReConnectEd acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. Sovereignty for these lands has never been ceded and there is no justice without First Nations justice.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to issue 1 of *ReConnectEd*. This is a new online journal centred on student voice, agency and participation.

You may have been aware of the long-running publication Connect, which came out from 1979 to 2021. *ReConnectEd* aims to carry on the legacy of and build on the essence of its predecessor, Connect Magazine. It aims to:

- Document and share student participation approaches and initiatives
- Support reflective practices among those working to increase student participation
- Develop and share access to resources

ReConnectEd's purpose is to place student participation at the centre of both primary and secondary school learning and governance. As such we focus on showcasing how student participation can be extended to various school and classroom practices, and place students at the centre of school policy development and implementation. Additionally, *ReConnected* aims to highlight the need for co-agency to occur across students, teachers and the community alike to allow these discussions to occur.

ReConnectEd wishes to include a variety of authors: students, teachers, academics and researchers, and community members - and to make its articles accessible to a wide range of readers.

ReConnectEd is being published as a labour of love by an editorial committee of school students (current and immediately ex), school teachers, academics, policy workers and members of supportive organisations. **See the website: for details and subscription** to the publication.

ReConnectEd is being hosted by the **Australian Council for Student Voice**. It is available as a blog-style set of web pages, and also as a PDF-style document.

This issue of *ReConnectEd* introduces you to the journal. In it, you will find articles that challenge you and hopefully inspire you. **Roger Holdsworth** writes about the need for the continuation of reflection, documentation and sharing of resources and practices in the classroom; **Chris Bush** has revived Connect's Student Voice Audit, creating an online version for schools to assess their level of Student Voice integration; **Laura Newman** gives teachers a guide to empowering themselves, their students and those around them; **Ester Koelle and Linh Dang** discuss how student voice and agency can be implemented in the classroom and beyond through relationship building and community connections; and last but not least, **Sophie Cartelli** discusses Rosanna Primary School's newly revised Deep Leaning Protocol's designed by Prep students.

The second issue of *ReConnected* is 'Tiny Humans, Big Voices' centring student voice and agency in Primary Schools. The deadline for this issue will be the 1st July. Additionally, our third and last issue for the year will centre on 'Curriculum and pedagogy'. This deadline will be in October. If any of you would like to contribute an article to this Issue please contact **reconnected@studentvoice.org.au**

Linh Dang

MEET THE TEAM

LINH DANG

Linh is a recent high school graduate and editor of ReConnectEd with a passion for student voice. Linh served two terms on the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) from 2020-2022, where she advocated for student voice and agency in schools and high-level decision-making processes . During her term, Linh worked heavily in the areas of consent education, respectful relationships and mental health where she was able to influence major reforms such as the Schools Mental Health reform. Linh is currently the editor of ReConnectEd and education facilitator.

ROGER HOLDSWORTH

Roger Holdsworth was an innovative secondary school teacher, curriculum consultant, youth sector policy worker, University researcher/writer/lecturer and independent consultant. From 1979 to 2021 he edited and published the practice journal Connect: 42 years and 250 issues.

LAURA NEWMAN

Laura is a humanities and media educator with interests in student agency, culturally responsive teaching and literacy. She is the Executive Officer of Social Education Victoria, a subject association for teachers of politics, sociology, civics and citizenship. Laura has also worked as a lecturer and clinical teaching specialist at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. As an unapologetic education geek, she has written about social education and developed content for organisations such as the ABC, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority as well as in Social Education Victoria's journal, Ethos

SIENNA GLADSTONE

Sienna is a year 12 VCE student from regional South West Victoria. Her passion for student voice encompasses the areas of consent education, mental health and neurodiverse inclusion within schools. She is currently serving her third term as a student executive advisory committee member for VicSRC and holds the Victorian state title for Lions Youth of the Year.

ADAM BRODIE-MCKENZIE

Adam Brodie-McKenzie is driven to promote student voice and agency from systems level to the classroom. He is currently a Lecturer at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Adam previously was the inaugural Master Teacher of Humanities at the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership as well as a Learning Specialist in Student Agency at University High School. He has written and presented on developing meaningful student voice and agency across sectors, locally and globally

LEW ZIPIN

Lew Zipin holds honorary positions with the University of South Australia, Stellenbosch University, South Africa; and Victoria University, Melbourne. His research focuses on curriculum activity that engages students from marginalised social positions by connecting school-subject knowledge to funds of knowledge, based in students' community life-worlds, which address problems that matter for social and planetary futures. Students identify, research, and act on those problems, in collaboration with teachers, academics and community residents. In the process, young people develop knowledgeable voice and agency to advance futures of inclusive and co-participatory social justice.

MARIE BRENNAN

Marie Brennan retired in 2016 after 25 years in five Australian universities. She has honorary positions at the University of South Australia, Stellenbosch University, South Africa and Victoria University, Melbourne. Her earlier career was as a humanities teacher in Victorian technical schools, then working in the Education Department as a researcher with schools, co-leading the School Improvement Plan and then working in the Ministry's Policy Unit. Marie continues to write, research and contribute to community groups, supporting young people, families and teachers in community-based research and activism.

MITCHELL SPRAGUE

Mitch has a passion for student voice, and his student voice journey started with the Victorian Student Representative Council. Mitch worked as part of the Student Executive Advisory Committee from 2018 – 2020. He provided advice to both state and federal governments on student voice and agency within educational policy, focusing on areas of environmental education, indigenous inclusion, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Mitch is currently the National Convenor of the Australian Council for Student Voice. He works as part of a dynamic team which stretches across Australia and provides strategic guidance and governance to the organisation, working in collaboration to advocate for greater student involvement in decision-making and agency in education.

THE DISTURBING SOUND OF SILENCE

Roger Holdsworth

**Maybe it's just me... Maybe I'm just out of the loop now ...**

But ... are things rather quiet out there?

Let me expand on what I mean, and what concerns me.

In November 2021 I published the final issue of a practice journal called Connect that I'd been editing and disseminating bi-monthly for 42 years: 250 issues. I started it as a classroom teacher in Melbourne in late 1979, to share information about approaches in which I'd been involved and about which I was being asked for advice: a cross-age tutoring program, a school-based student-run multi-lingual community newspaper, the development of a small 'democratic' community school and so on.

It grew from there, with increasingly more and more people contributing their stories, including about students' participation in school governance, and writing about what they'd learnt from their practices. Other teachers contributed; students wrote about their passions and practices; organisations shared their initiatives around students on committees and boards – and about their support for participatory classrooms.

It was initially only a print publication, then was available both in print and online, and eventually became solely an electronic publication. All back issues are still available, still useful (I hope) both to describe the trajectory of change (in an area that was initially called 'youth participation in education', then 'student participation' and
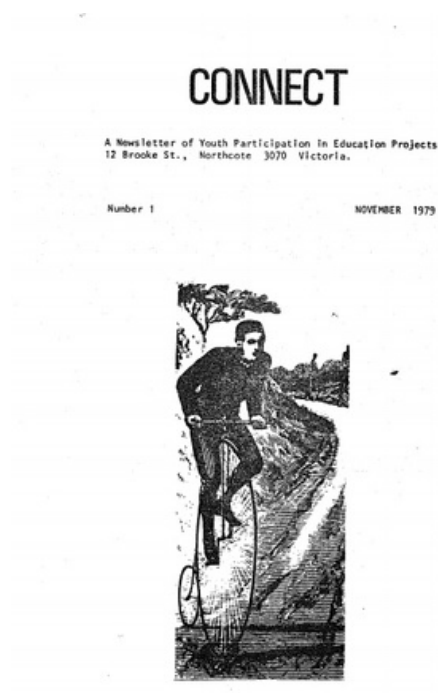
First Issue of Connect Magazine Nov, 1979

Last issue of Connect Magazine Nov, 2021

eventually adding in 'student voice and 'student agency'), and also to communicate abiding great ideas and practices: https://research.acer.edu.au/connect/

The journal had three major intentions: it was dedicated to supporting people (students, teachers, consultants, school leadership, policymakers and others) to:

- Reflect on practices about student voice, agency and participation in primary and secondary schools, classrooms and systems;
- Systematically document these practices, and
- Share these stories with others.

Along the way, it also reviewed, developed and shared resources to help in that work. It seemed right to stop 'neatly' at that point in 2021, to see if the need still existed and, if so, to encourage the 'next generation' to look at ways in which such ends could be met. From describing myself for many years as a 'failed retiree', it seemed about time to finally succeed at something.

However, looking back over the last subsequent (almost) 18 months, I'm struck by the silences in these areas.

Though again, let me reiterate, it may be me, being now out of the loop. There might be a lot happening out there. But I haven't heard about it, even though I'm still interested. If I haven't heard about it, I suspect others may not have heard either.

And I worry that there's more 'evidence' of the silence:

- While a Facebook page called **Student Voice Research and Practice** still exists, there's not been a lot shared there for a while, and what has been, has been about system level advocacy or training or research, not about school or classroom level practice;
- The **International Journal for Student Voice** has not been published for a while... though Dana Mitra advises me that an issue is coming in a few months
- Planned Student Voice conferences (online or face to face) in Australia and the USA didn't go ahead in 2022. However, there has been a recent online Symposium in Australia this year, organised by the **Australian Council for Student Voice (ACSV)** and again I'm advised that the good people in **Vermont's UP for Learning** have taken on the initiative for a US-based international event later this year.

Does this silence matter? Perhaps there's just a 'natural cycle' in such activities, with the previous strong activity of the last couple of decades in particular currently ebbing. I remember a similar phase here in Australia in the late 1980s following a strong attention to 'student participation' earlier in that decade; check Peter Mildenhall's article 'Wither/Whither on the Vine' in Connect 53 in October 1988

It may be that other imperatives have emerged for schools and systems: perhaps the educational responses to COVID have had a role. Perhaps schools have been so busy maintaining some form of 'teaching and learning' following

the COVID era, initially online and then blended and then returning to classrooms, that the momentum previously established through face-to-face classroom and networks may have dissipated. Perhaps the strength of practices relied upon the commitment to 'informal student voice' in the relationships between students and teachers that underpin the formal aspects, and this became challenged during this time of distancing.

Perhaps the totally understandable responses to providing support around student mental health and wellbeing became a priority that swept aside the focus on student-teacher relationships in the classroom, school and system partnerships. Good questions and wonderings … and questions that would be valuable to explore in partnerships between the experts: the students, the teachers, the parents, the educational leaders, the communities, the researchers and others.

But I continue to argue that the underlying approaches that have driven us for at least 50 years, and that resulted in the intentions of *Connect*, remain important and that we need to make a conscious and concerted effort to maintain these. Reflections, documentation and sharing remain vital if we're to challenge the silence.

So here are a few impertinent comments about what I think I learnt, in working with you as an editor and sharer of your stories:

Reflection
Reflection is at the core of strengthening and improving – and even maintaining – your own practices. The first step is to think about

what you've been doing – and maybe still are doing. What is actually happening? How do we know? Do different people see what's happening differently?

In reflecting on an initiative, so we can improve its operation and outcomes, we're able to collect valuable different perspectives: how do students experience what is happening? How about different groups of students, especially those most often excluded from participation and success? How do teachers, parents, school leadership experience it?

Some questions could be asked formally: what actually occurred? (Was it different from what was intended? Why?) Who was involved? How? Who wasn't? Why?

What were the outcomes? How do we know? What were the intended outcomes and what were unintended? What do we learn from the experience? If we did it again, what would we do differently?

Write down all this information, these views and perspectives, results of surveys and focus groups and discussions – haphazardly if necessary. Then look through the information, perhaps with a diverse group of participants and others. What patterns do you notice?

What does it tell us for our own development? What's the next step?

Systematic Documentation
The next step is to organise those reflections into a story. I remember that the late Professor Art Pearl often said: "If it hasn't been written about, it hasn't happened." The story 'captures' the events – for you, and eventually for others.

Memory alone is fallible and foolable. The development of the story starts in the process of making sense of reflections, both for yourselves, but also in preparation for sharing with others. I like to start with sub-headings to organise the account.

What came first? Why did you start this initiative? Why there; why then? What were you responding to?

Describe, as 'objectively' as you can, what happened: what you did, and what you encountered.

Did it go smoothly, or as you expected? What emerged as facilitators or barriers? How did you respond?

And then collect together any evidence/data about outcomes: comments from participants, formalised evaluations and so on.

And finally, what advice would you have for your younger self, or for others considering something similar? What's the next phase of the story for you?

Sharing
Once you have that all together, I'd strongly encourage you to share your story and what you learned. Others may be faced by similar challenges or be interested in similar approaches; your experience will be invaluable. In fact, I remain convinced that hearing/reading/learning about real practices in sufficient detail to try something similar, is the most likely way that broader change occurs.

Have a think about how your story communicates to others. What have you assumed about your situation and circumstances? What is unique, and what perhaps more common? How can you present the different voices and perspectives? (I've sometimes suggested a layout of 'boxes' on the page to make it look interesting and to highlight the contributions from different groups and people.)

Convey your **critical** learnings. One of the most frustrating aspects of editing such stories for Connect over the years, was having to ask contributors to be critical, not just boastful. I can understand the pressures on schools, in a climate of explicit or implicit competition between schools, to paint practices in positive lights, despite any hurdles encountered or mis-steps made. But we learn less from the rose-coloured glasses, than from a sharing of the exploration of dead-ends and difficulties – and how these were overcome.

In sharing your story, think also about audience: who do you want to read your story? Who do you want to influence? Your language, including assumptions about jargon – can either lock readers out from understanding your story, or speak clearly to them across borders, jurisdictions and systems. Don't assume; explain in simple language.

And finally, as an editor, I was constantly asking contributors to provide or suggest images to accompany words. They make the writing clearer, and ground the story in its reality.

Wither/Whither again?

This new old practice journal **ReConnectEd** is exciting, and bold – and important. I hope its success challenges my initial pessimism about the silence. I hope it keeps me in the loop.

Is there still interest to reflect on, write about, share and read about, practical stories around initiatives in the area of student voice, agency and participation? I want to believe there is a thirst for such ideas; and to read about them in order to develop our own practices. It just needs the commitment to do something about that documentation and sharing. And that commitment needs to come from practitioners: students, teachers, leadership, consultants, parents, administrators, support groups … not just from the editorial group. It might have to happen in new ways, but maintain the old excitement in practice

Roger Holdsworth
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STUDENT VOICE AUDIT REIMAGINED

Chris Bush

At University High School, we understand that student agency is an essential component of creating a positive and effective learning environment. To assess the level of student voice and agency in our school, we recently redesigned Roger Holdsworth's Student Agency Audit from *Connect Magazine* making it suitable for use on Google Forms. **Click here** to view the survey and if you'd like to have your own, editable version to use with your own school, email Chris Bush by **clicking here.**

Our redesigned audit is focused on measuring student involvement in school decision-making, including the power and responsibility students feel they have over their own learning.

Questions that we've included in the survey ask students to indicate the extent to which these, and many others, were true or not:

- Students and teachers work together to design lesson plans for the class
- Students and teachers jointly discuss and decide on learning and teaching approaches
- Students have time and opportunity to direct their own learning
- Teachers learn from their students
- Students analyse, discuss and present the results of Student Attitude Surveys
- Students lead teacher professional development around issues identified by students (eg through a Teach the Teacher program)

We hope that our experience in redesigning the Student Agency Audit will be helpful for other schools looking to evaluate the level of student voice and agency in their own communities. By making the audit more accessible and user-friendly, we will be able to gather valuable feedback from our students and improve the overall learning experience at our school.

Whilst we are yet to carry out the audit with a pilot group, we suspect that one of the major takeaways, based on feedback from previous Student Summits at our school, is that our students want more opportunities to provide feedback to their teachers and to have their voices listened to, heard and acted upon.

We believe that by putting student agency at the centre of our approach to education, we can create a more engaged, collaborative, and effective learning environment for all of our students, creating a learning community where all learners can thrive.

We encourage other schools to use the Student Agency Audit and other similar resources to evaluate the level of student voice and agency in their own communities and to work towards creating a more student-centred approach to education.

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HOW DO WE EMPOWER TEACHERS TO EMPOWER STUDENTS?

Laura Newman

Two things that I hear a lot when discussing student voice and agency with teachers is that a really clear rationale for student voice is important, and also, that it is devilishly difficult to implement in schools. This article is a summary of some elements that contribute to its trickiness and commentary on strategies that are working.

If you're wondering 'why student voice?' or why teachers should care about student voice, I suggest that teachers check out this PD, this policy document or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It isn't the focus here. I could also give you persuasive anecdotes about how student voice can profoundly change your experience of teaching for the better but the focus of this article is a discussion of the factors that can help teachers with student voice.

VicSRC Student Voice, Agency and Participation Resource kit

So, if we can agree that including student voice in our practice is good, why is it likely to be difficult to implement?

Schools

When we're talking about starting and implementing student voice initiatives, there are a few things that make it tricky.

We don't like to talk about the way that power works in schools – we can say informally that teachers feel really disempowered in their roles but engaging with what this means for our experiences of school-based professional learning (as something that is done to us), professional trust (we are overly timetabled which removes time to autonomously plan, mark or collaborate with colleagues) and myriad other things, big and small, seem too big a conversation to get into.

Compared to other, more high performing, school systems (many Nordic countries for example), teachers in Australia aren't given a heap of autonomy; they already feel disempowered, which makes the prospect of potentially sacrificing what little authority or power they have to students unattractive. It can feel like an affront to their professionalism, which is experienced as another in a series of affronts to their professionalism. Yet I don't necessarily see this as an accurate reflection of how power is distributed in schools, I find it empowering to support my students to have a voice. However, it is a factor that impacts teachers' willingness and capacity to take risks with student voice.

Support teachers – there is no student agency without teacher agency

Many of the factors that limit student voice and agency are also limiting teachers' ability to feel like they have agency in their teaching and a voice in their schools. In the absence of clear direction and supports from leadership, student voice is almost doomed to be seen as an add-on to what teachers do. With inadequate support voice initiatives are one of the few things that teachers can say 'no' to in exchange for say, looking after their elderly parents, feeding their fish or sleeping eight hours.

When we are stressed and overworked, it isn't an environment that nurtures innovative practice – we are more likely to be resistant.

A really useful practice when exploring student voice is to use some of the same mechanisms for staff input (one example would be teacher perception surveys as well as student perception surveys).

Towards a shared vision for student voice

My idea of student voice in education is that students have authentic input into their education and their schools. This is sometimes described as maximalist. I think a lot about the convention of the rights of the child that says that children and young people have the right to a say in the things that affect them- so I don't see a lot as off limits in terms of student voice. Many people would say this is too extreme, and that the school should put limits on what decisions students can

make. Many school leaders will make the decision that having some sort of leadership program, having a few students sitting on school council (as is mandated in government schools in Victoria) and students occasionally getting to choose their own case study in class are as far as student voice efforts should practically go.

Get comfortable with discomfort

As teachers, we are really used to cognitive dissonance in our work. We support students to thrive in exams we think are a limited way of assessing learning, we implement stuff that we don't believe will support students all the time. Student voice, and the inherent threat to teacher power and authority that this involves, is a different kind of discomfort.

Sometimes, schools with really coherent leadership, that is concerned with limiting teachers' workloads, will have a laser focus on the school priorities 'doing less well' which I've seen result in a really cool literacy program, with very little student input, and a continuous delaying of student voice because we aren't going to focus on it until we have our other priorities achieved. The issue here is that those other priorities will be in progress indefinitely and, without significant changes to our education system focus, it will be tremendously difficult to be able to focus on student voice rather than literacy or attendance BECAUSE, and I would argue inaccurately, a genuine partnership with students about literacy and attendance could really help in these areas – and more importantly, what are the students' priorities for their school? Or do we not care? Or do we really, genuinely think we know better?

Things that can help

Define your terms
Understanding what you mean by student voice – we think of it as an umbrella term that includes everything from students feeling in control of their learning through metacognition, to students having a substantial say in how their school runs. What do you mean by student voice?

Some schools have done great work developing a shared understanding and some level of knowledge about student voice; some schools have assumed that everyone knows what it is and agrees. I would argue that we are working with simultaneous competing definitions and it is helpful for you to get clear on what you mean – if only so you can understand where it might not exactly fit with your colleagues or leadership.

Find your people
Here I mean staff and students – what teachers at your school are keen to work with student voice? Is there an Assistant Principal who really believes? Is there an English teacher who is arguing gently and patiently for more student-choice in English text selection? Are there students whose voices are not included in the current structures of the school? These are your people. Sometimes change occurs in schools because a critical mass of staff and students is asking for it. In order to make your student voice projects thrive, you need to be working in a team. This is not to say that a solo teacher seeking authentic student input and

feedback on classes, and working in partnership to plan classes and choose topics and assessments is not incredible, it is, and you're amazing – it just depends on if the goal is to be one teacher in a school being amazing or to create change at your school as a whole.

Build slowly on whatever foundations you find
If I were a broken record, I'd be stuck on the phrase 'schools are complex ecosystems'. Whichever school you are at, there is guaranteed to be, or have been, some attempts at student voice in the past. Never assume that because you don't know about it, it never existed. Student voice is not new: students were mandatory on school council for 15 years in Victoria until the mid 1990s when the policy was changed. Your best ally for creating student voice change at your school might be the teacher whose initiatives weren't supported by the school 10 years before you arrived at the school and who is disappointed that their attempts haven't worked – curiosity and humility will do wonders in finding out who these people are and not offending them by saying things like 'this school doesn't do anything for student voice'.

Similarly, build on whatever foundations are working for your school now. I began my student voice journey by taking on the student engagement program – which covered the student leadership and extra-curricular activities. For a while, we focused on things like harmony day or school assemblies, because this is what was working, and then, gradually, began to build into other activities which I considered to be more substantive opportunities for students to make decisions. For this gradual change to be sustainable it is worth understanding the existing program fully rather than continually trying to reinvent programs. It is

difficult to discover exactly why a program works or doesn't work if you don't have an in-depth understanding of how it works.

Document what you are doing

School institutional memories are short, and student representatives, leaders (whatever you want to call them) are continually graduating, moving forward and being replaced with new students! You are in a continuous process of renewal – this is super exciting but also means that you will always be trying to catch students up on where projects are, help them to understand how student voice work is done at your school and bring in teachers who might be helping with these roles. Making videos, writing notes, getting students to create how-to-guides and using a platform like google classrooms to share resources for doing this is essential for you to be able to ensure you have a team of students and teachers ready to work in partnership.

So, good luck out there, and if you are the teacher leading student empowerment initiatives at your school, we see you, and well done.

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INSIGHTS ON STUDENT AGENCY FROM THE GALILEO PROGRAM
Ester Koelle and Linh Dang

The Galileo Program is a term-long speciality program undertaken by University High School Year 9 students in Melbourne. It is based on an inquiry and project-based learning model, with a strong focus on collaboration across students, teachers and the wider community.

Based on the four General Capabilities in the Victorian Curriculum - Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, and Personal and Social Development - the program aims to support students to develop agency as independent learners who feel empowered to make change in the local community. While the program design involves Year 9 students leaving mainstream classes for one term to explicitly develop the General Capabilities with a focus on student empowerment, these experiences can also be facilitated in mainstream classrooms. Our hope is that through sharing the Galileo model, staff can access opportunities in their classroom to support student agency.

Community Partnerships
One key element of the program is facilitating community partnerships, in particular through community service and local excursions. These opportunities allow students to build connections with the outside world, facilitating a sense of ownership and social purpose. Throughout the term, our students participate in a community service program with Carlton Primary School students.

As part of the program, students research literacy development strategies for young learners and utilise these strategies in 1-1 reading sessions with Prep to Grade 3 students. Additionally, Galileo students organise team games for the primary school students, utilising their leadership and organisational skills to mentor and coach.

Research Projects
Students further develop connections beyond the classroom through their Galileo Research Project. Early in the term, students research the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and select five goals that they are the most passionate about. Based on their preferences, students are placed into a Research Group with four other students.

Within their groups, students are required to interview an expert on their topic, and to survey the general public. These experiences require students to demonstrate independence, as they are tasked with contacting an expert to interview, and utilising research to create their own interview and survey questions. Students can often find this process daunting as they are required to complete tasks well beyond their comfort zone, yet feel a deep sense of accomplishment and independence through facilitating the process themselves. These experiences allow students the chance to develop personal and social skills through interacting with the community outside of the classroom.

Student empowerment is further facilitated through agency and choice within the classroom

environment. Once students have been placed into a research group based on their preferences at the beginning of the term, students individually write an inquiry question to frame their research. While receiving support from their teacher, students are encouraged to lead the direction of their project, exploring topics that are important to them. Through placing students at the centre of the classroom, the program redefines students as agents of knowledge rather than recipients. This allows students to build educational purpose and drive, as they take active roles in the ownership of their learning. In the diagram below, we represent this growth as rising steps in a ladder, from students experiencing themselves as manipulated objects of education processes, to people who exercise and develop agency in their activities of co-creative learning.

Student Voice Ladder of Participation (Jovanovski, 2020)

Co-Agency

The program's unique structure reframes the role of teachers in the classroom to foster student agency as individuals and within

collective activity. Whilst the traditional classroom promotes teachers as figures of authority, delivering knowledge and learning through instruction to passive recipients (OECD, 2018), Galileo creates a learning environment built on co-agency among students, and between students and teachers, by positioning students as researchers and teachers as mentors. Teachers encourage students to call them by their first names, and they promote student independence and voice by providing guidance, rather than instruction throughout the research project's development and active fulfilment.

This shift in power dynamics in the classroom supports student agency to emerge, evolve and grow, as the student-teacher relationship becomes a partnership in which students take active roles as organisers of, and in, their learning. Students can thus recognise that their opinions, perspectives and viewpoints are valuable to the learning process – including reciprocity in which students 'teach their teachers' as well as learn from and with them. Furthermore, this pedagogical model builds students' senses of autonomy and ability to work confidently in groups, sharing with peers the load of worthy knowledge labours, while teachers offer lessons in supportive tools such as 'conflict resolution' to equip students to work together without direct teacher intervention, enabling students to gain a higher level of social, emotional and communicative skills.

This reciprocity in learning and teaching ('pedagogy') starts with re-evaluating the traditional roles of 'students' and 'teachers' in the classroom. By taking a step back, teachers make space for students to take more active roles in their learning, which in turn establishes a relationship based on mutual trust and

respect, thereby empowering students to voice their thoughts, questions, and indeed critical and opposing opinions, while feeling comfortably safe to do so. As student voice achieves parity with teachers in the classroom, a culture of collaboration evolves, reinforcing the formation of a student-and-teacher partnership.

How can student-teacher partnerships be created?

Actively utilising student feedback to redevelop pedagogical practices in the classroom is a richly valuable means to generate sustainable learning-and-teaching partnerships among students and teachers. This can be done through various strategies, such as a weekly or bimonthly student survey with questions coupled with short responses to questions such as, 'How can this be improved?' When actively prioritising student feedback, teachers are better able to understand how students learn, to hear what students say is and isn't working in teaching approaches, to consider how they might better tackle the learning process and content in the future, and so on, thereby enhancing classroom pedagogic practices.

Importantly, viewing students as co-creators in the learning and teaching process shifts away from assumptions that students are merely learners in an educational didacticism, instead actively centring students at the heart of the learning-and-teaching model. This shift engages and empowers students, as they feel purpose and ownership in their education, thus making good, in practice, on principles of student voice and agency.

Ultimately, by giving students the opportunity to co-create, interact with their local communities and take initiative in their learning, schools not only empower students but provide them with a platform to understand, develop and embody student agency and voice. Thus, this positions students at the centre of the learning and teaching process as they take ownership of their role as the largest stakeholder in education.

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DEEP LEARNING PROTOCOLS

Sophie Cartelli

The development of the Rosanna Primary School 'Deep Learning Protocols' in 2019 was a chance for students to be involved in establishing shared understandings of what learning should look like for the whole school. Developed by students, it provides an agreed language and focus for shaping and discussing learning in the classroom. Since implementing these, we have created spaces for everyone's voices to continuously rework and reshape them, based on our needs. A great example of this is involving our junior students to help make our Deep Learning Protocols Prep-2 friendly.

To begin this process, the 2021 Junior School Council (JSC) students (ranging from Years 2 – 6) were consulted about which protocols could be adapted to suit our Prep – Grade 2 students and be easily integrated into the classrooms. Students developed a timeline of when each protocol should be introduced (for example, some of the protocols could be tied into our Start Up program and introduced in Term 1).

Once these timelines were established, work began in the Prep classrooms to explore student voice. Prep teachers provided a range of opportunities for the Prep students to make decisions about their learning. This proved a way to explicitly show their ability to use student voice. This continued throughout remote learning, where the Prep teachers consulted students about the learning they enjoyed and what they wanted to do each week. Once we were back in the classroom and face to face again, the Prep students

engaged in a range of workshops to unpack each of the Deep Learning Protocols, working in groups to determine what they believed 'deep learning' looked like for each protocol. Their ideas and responses were in junior student-friendly language and bundled into central themes and formed the revised Prep – 2 Deep Learning Protocols. The next step for the Preps was to develop visuals to support each of the learning dispositions under each Protocol.

The goal was for this cohort of Prep students to be the experts and teach the following year's Preps about effective deep learning.

Whilst COVID was a challenging time and caused a delay in completing this process, I continued to work with the Prep students as they moved into Grade 1 in 2022. It was important to show them how valued and important their voices are, and how they all have the capacity to act and make effective change.

I used all this information to develop the visual Deep Learning Protocols in draft form. The JSC team then met with the now Grade 1 students and together, they collectively finalised the

protocols and offered suggested changes and amendments.

The Grade 1s who were involved in this process since 2021, with support of the JSC, planned workshops and delivered these in each of the Prep, 1 and 2 classes to further explore the revised P-2 protocols. They have also supported the Prep teachers with how to introduce the first protocol, to get a head start on developing the Preps' understanding of what it means to be an effective deep learner.

At the end of last year, some students from the JSC attended a staff meeting to introduce the finalised Prep-2 Deep Learning Protocols and used one of the student-developed and led activities with the staff. It was a very empowering experience for the students, the experts of deep learning, to inform teachers about the purpose of the protocols and how to engage with them.

I incorporated all this information into our 2023 'Start Up' program for the Prep-2 teachers with a suggested plan on how to introduce each of the protocols, along with student-developed activity ideas.

This year, the 2023 Prep classes have been introduced to student voice and what it means in the context of their learning. They stood in a circle and took turns sharing what they love about learning, how they like to learn and what they'd like to learn more about. As each student shared, they passed a ball of string around and once everyone contributed, they were able to see a web that was a visual representation of how interconnected their ideas are and how they are all part of the learning journey.
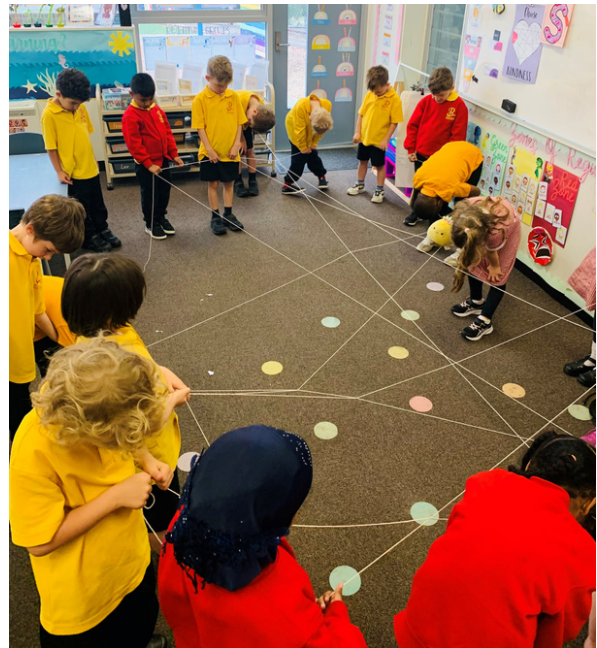
The Prep classes have been introduced to the Deep Learning Protocols, which, as a starting point, are being used as a basis for their development play. For one session, their goal was to focus on the protocol of 'Learning with Others'. They used sticker dots to record each time they saw or heard their examples of their peers demonstrating the dispositions of the protocol.
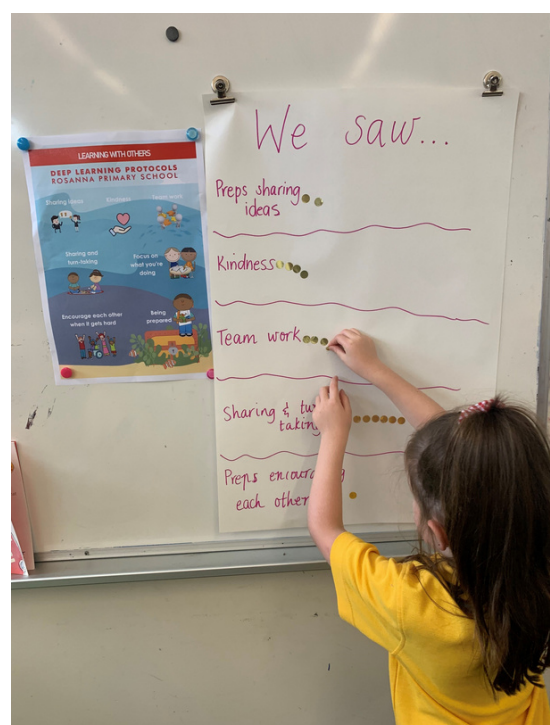
The 2021 Preps who began this incredible journey, demonstrated outstanding agency in the way they shaped and developed our values for learning at Rosanna Primary School. Further to this, as the ones who enter classrooms and deliver workshops that they've co-created with their peers, it is significantly empowering for our junior students as they are witnessing and experiencing firsthand, just how valued their voices are. This year they are in Grade 2 and have paved the way for student voice and agency in the younger years for the students who have come after them and will continue to come over the years.

Teacher Reflection

In the initial shaping of the Deep Learning Protocols, students spoke of learning being like swimming. Some stay at the edges, chasing the wash of the waves up and down the beach. One student explained, "in the shallows, you are just dipping your toes into the rock pools". As learners become more adventurous, they head out into the waves and learn to put their heads under water. Then, there are those who wear suits and explore the depths of the seas. One student emphasised, "You see! That is where the real treasure is!" Another continued, "there is a sense of accomplishment at the bottom, when you are exploring, when you discover the treasure!" Students more clearly described learning as shallow, underwater and deep.

When I met with the JSC students in 2021, I asked them what they thought about how to introduce the Protocols to Prep students. It was their advice to remove the levelled reflections so that the junior students could focus solely on doing their 'deepest learning',

and remove the abstract idea of multi-levels of learning, for now. Instead, they recommended that the levels be introduced from grade 3/4 where they will have developed a strong understanding of self-evaluating their own deep learning. Next, we discussed whether all 9 of the protocols should be introduced to junior students. The JSC went through each and came to the conclusion to focus on only 8 out of the 9 at the junior level, choosing to leave out the protocol focusing on metacognition: 'Thinking About Thinking'. When I asked the JSC for their reasoning, they explained that it is such an abstract concept for the young students and they don't want to risk them disengaging from the protocols. This is where they emphasised the importance of the protocols being accessible to all students.

From the perspective of the Prep teachers, we have seen how easily our students have engaged with the language of the Deep Learning Protocols. The protocols have been so easy to incorporate into any learning activity we do and we have just started using them as a way for the Preps to reflect on their learning throughout a lesson. I've had some Preps even question whether they think they did their deepest learning after a task, which led to a rich discussion about how they can improve next time.

I spoke to the Grade 1/2 teachers who used the original Deep Learning Protocols last year. They reported that the initial ones were way too wordy, and although they had them displayed in the classroom and tried to incorporate them into teaching and learning, it was simply too much information and not visual enough. Since incorporating the revised P-2 protocols, they reported how much they are using them and referring to them daily. The 1/2 students even

used the protocols to set learning goals for the term, including how they will achieve their goals. The biggest difference is that there are very minimal, short and sharp words/phrases under each protocol, accompanied by a clear visual, making them so much more accessible for all their students.

Considering all of this, the junior school teachers have observed a shift in their students being able to self-reflect on their learning and identify what they need to do to achieve a goal or do their 'deepest learning'.

The language is consistent across the school so students are familiar with it, are using the protocols daily and are engaging so positively, which has had a positive impact on their ability to be independent learners.

Sophie Cartelli

Sophie began working at Rosanna Primary School in 2015 in Grades 5/6 with a keen interest and passion for student voice and agency, and student-led learning. In 2016, she undertook the leadership of our Junior School Council group with the goal of shifting it from solely a fundraising body to making real change within the school in the context of student voice and agency.

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Credit for Participation

*L*ately, an issue has been re-emerging that has been considered – on and off – for over 20 years: that of providing students who are active participants in formal school decision-making (on SRCs and on Boards and Committees) with **time, recognition and other support**. This issue has been addressed under the headings of 'credit' and 'accreditation'.

In dusting off old copies of **Connect**, we came across several articles that are still highly relevant today - even if some of the specific policy references have changed. In 1995, in re-addressing this issue, we noted that the concern was with "extending academic credit to students for their participation in school activities – principally around school and regional governance. This issue was initially referred to as 'Accreditation', but (as this term has taken on other, more specific, meanings) has come to be called simply 'Credit.'"

The first article was originally published in **Connect** 31 in February 1985 and reprinted in **Connect** 91 in February 1995. In turn, it originally drew on some articles in **Connect** 29 under the heading 'Toward Accreditation', in which various schools and consultants documented some ideas about recognising the work that students do on committees (etc) as part of their 'normal' school work. The article was developed by a working group of a Student Advisory Group of the Victorian Participation and Equity program (PEP) and members of the Student Participation Support Network.

We're also interested to explore this issue further in future issues of **Connect** – from today's perspectives and in today's climate.

Another Step ... Towards Accreditation

What is 'Accreditation'?

Accreditation here means a way of formally recognising participation on committees both inside and outside schools, as part of students' workload. It appears most obviously in ways of giving credit for such work within the school's reporting system.

Why is Accreditation Necessary?

Students are at school to learn. Accreditation raises two issues:

*   participation in various structures is a valid learning experience and should be recognised within the overall teaching/learning strategy of the school;

*   students should not be penalised for missing classes or homework times to attend meetings – this should not be an extra, unrecognised burden.

Behind this, accreditation is also important to enable **all** students to have access to participation and representation, not just those students who can 'afford the time'.

What are the Issues?

An approach to accreditation of students' participation on committees (etc) must pay attention to the following sorts of issues:

*   If the student misses classes to serve on a committee, must class content be 'caught up'? Are there alternatives?

*   What structural changes can happen to school organisation to make such attendance less personally disruptive?

*   Should student representatives be required to present a formal report that can 'count' against course requirements?

*   Who can/should attest to 'performance' on committees? In what terms?

*   Can goals of involvement be specified that enable assessment to be negotiated?

*   If some form of accreditation is negotiated, is it best as a new/separate unit, or incorporated into other subjects (eg English)? How about other subjects?

*   What are the implications of such accreditation for the way one (teacher or student) approaches all other classes? eg class committees? negotiation?

(from **Connect** 29, October 1984)

Problems

The following danger areas need to be kept in mind:

- Participation on committees can be ignored or marginalised;
- Vague promises of recognition can be given, that are later denied;
- Students can be pressured to catch up on work missed, or 'failed' because of 'missed classes';
- Teachers and students can lack an understanding of the importance of accreditation, why it must happen, how it can happen;
- Students can spring the requirement for accreditation on teachers at the end of the year. Teachers need notice in order to work out arrangements – this must be done at the **start** of the year.

What is Needed?

1. Students need **time** to:
   - **prepare:** read papers, consult with other students, lobby other committee members, travel (if necessary), write proposals, research issues;
   - **attend:** meetings can be during school hours (clashing with classes), at recesses, out of school hours;
   - **follow-up:** write reports, discuss with fellow members, report back to constituents.

   This time needs to be available **without penalty** ie students should not be penalised for being on committees or carrying out recognised work in relation to attendance.

2. A form of **reporting** is needed that enables participation to be recognised.

   It is difficult to conceive of a student receiving a letter or numerical grade for participation. Rather, a descriptive reporting system is needed to summarise the achievements in terms of specific and negotiated goals. Such a reporting system should give parity to a report on participation with all other subject reports. As such, this poses a challenge to the whole school's system of assessment and reporting.

3. The accreditation of participation should be, as far as practicable, part of the **regular recognition** the school gives to students' achievements.

   Accreditation of participation should not be an 'add-on' element either structurally or in terms of the reporting format. It should be involved in and affect mainstream operation of the school.

4. At least a **reference** should be made available by the committee (etc) outlining attendance and involvement, skills and abilities exhibited, and growth shown.

   This should be the minimum form of accreditation.

Where Accreditation Can Be Placed

1. **A separate subject can be created eg as an elective.** This could be a cross-age subject, say called 'Government'.

   The subject would enrol all students involved on committees (SRC, School Council, Regional or State Committees etc) and could both give time for preparation and involvement, as well as providing some training and background.

   It would be relatively difficult to timetable in order to allow all interested and involved students to be in class; it could reinforce a marginalisation of such involvement.

2. **A subject could be created but not time-tabled.** Teacher time would be allocated and enrolled students would communicate with this teacher in small groups or one-to-one.

   This recognises the involvement formally in both students and teacher time and is flexible in arrangement. It is, however, easily absorbed – the time just vanishes to other things.

3. **An existing subject can undertake participation as a 'project'** eg a Politics class could set up an SRC as part of its 'normal' workload.

   This could give both time and a natural focus for recognition. It could, however, seriously restrict who can become involved. Perhaps 'time in lieu' could be given for the project to run during recesses or after school.

4. **A general subject eg 'Extension Studies' can be created for a range of activities of which participation on committees is one possibility.**

   Similar comments to 2. (above) can be made.

5. **An existing subject can recognise participation as part of the workload of that subject.**

   For example, an English class could accept work done for meetings (minutes, reports etc) as equivalent to essays, exercises etc. This would mean that an agreement could be made about certain class lessons for which attendance was compulsory and others during which a student could be involved in meeting preparation, attendance or follow-up.

This seems to have the greatest flexibility and easiest recognition as part of the school's 'valid' curriculum. It does require extensive understanding of the issues by the whole school and explicit negotiation of processes.

What Should a Student Have to Do?

Attendance at a meeting is not enough (just as attendance in a class is not enough). There should be explicit agreement on what needs to be produced and on what evidence credit is available.

Some possibilities are:

1. A student's verbal contribution to a meeting could be recorded in the minutes (in as much detail as required). These minutes could be accumulated by the student as 'evidence'.

2. A student could produce written reports, both to the meeting and as a report to constituents. These reports could be filed by the student.

3. Reports could be published eg in a school newspaper, community newspaper, in the school newsletter to parents, in a taped speech or interview over the PA system or on local radio etc. Copies of these reports could be filed by the student.

4. Speeches made to the meeting or to students (including at after-school functions) could be filed, either in written form, or on tape.

5. Long-term or overview reports could be produced by the student using previous documents (minutes, reports etc) as evidence.

6. The student could (should!) keep a diary that includes:
   - administrative details – date of meeting, purpose, conversations etc;
   - content of meetings – motions moved, topics discussed, reactions of others;
   - personal reactions – feelings, uncertainties, tactics proposed etc.

   This diary would form a record in itself and also be a source for student self-assessment.

Who Will Oversee Accreditation?

Self-assessment could be part of the outcome of accreditation of participation. But the participation and the pieces of work required probably also need some other 'verification'

Possibilities for who could do this depend on the 'location' of the accreditation:

1. The teacher of the new or 'regular' subject could receive work done and enter it as part of the student's recorded achievements. This person would then also be responsible for writing reports as required.

2. A 'special' teacher could be allocated the task (with time release if possible) for formally recognising participation (negotiating goals and workloads, writing reports etc) where an informal arrangement is decided upon.

3. An 'outsider' (eg consultant, PWC, parent, Principal) could maintain an overview and negotiate both goals and assessment.

4. A committee member could undertake to provide such a role.

5. It is possible that a mixture of these approaches could be used, with the committee members, consultants, parents and Principal (for example) feeding reports to a specific teacher charged with their collation.

What Steps Should Be Undertaken?

1. These points need to be established in principle. An outline needs to be proposed to the school Principal and School Council.

2. Arrangements of accreditation need to be worked out clearly and in detail and written down. These can be negotiated individually or with a group.

3. A contract embodying these points needs to be signed by teachers and students involved.

4. Possibly a special form can be produced to include student and teacher assessment of participation.

Roger Holdsworth
for the Working Party, 1985

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Negotiated Exemptions and Substitutions

*The second article 'from the archives' comes from **Connect** 34, August 1985. Margaret Ellis was a regional consultant with the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) in Victoria. We have extracted some sections from her article, which don't repeat the statements of need and commitment from the other articles reproduced here, but rather add some practical ideas about how credit can be provided.*

Marg also provided a practical example from Echuca Technical School from 1984, and this illustrates one way that a school discovered to recognise the work of students on committees in that school.

It is inappropriate to award students recognition for their participation other than as part of the curriculum. Special references, letters of commendation etc, do **not** overcome the educational disadvantage currently experienced by student representatives. Only through credit as part of the curriculum can this educational disadvantage be overcome.

Some Approaches to Student Accreditation

Many of these tasks performed by student representatives are identical to, or similar to, or highly appropriate to, tasks for which students receive credit in class, but for which student representatives currently gain no credit. Some schools have recognised this and have negotiated 'exemptions' from class work on the basis of work done as student representatives. Other schools have introduced electives or subjects in which student participation and associated skills comprise major components of the courses.

Negotiated exemptions:

Students negotiate with schools to receive credit for their work in existing subjects. At Echuca Technical School in 1984, for example, Year 9 students involved with the Participation and Equity Program (PEP Task Force negotiated with their English teacher to have their oral contribution in task force meetings, schools reference group meetings and student network meetings count towards and be assessed as part of their oral English work. The assessment was done by a task force teacher. Similarly, their written reports of all meetings attended, articles written for school bulletins and newsletters, speeches written for presentation at school assemblies etc, were accepted in lieu of other written materials as part of the assessable workload. It is possible that student treasurers could have their financial books etc regarded as part of their mathematics or accounting workload and that student researchers could have their surveys/interviews and findings regarded as part of social studies or politics subjects etc.

A more detailed case study of Echuca Technical School is included (see box - right).

It is important that all students are treated equally in such negotiations. Because teachers might differ in the extent to which they will negotiate exemptions, it is important that school curriculum committees or Councils provide a guideline for negotiated exemptions or perhaps establish a moderating group for exemptions.

The Next Steps

It is urgent and essential that schools address the issues of student participation and student accreditation. Possible approaches have been suggested and it is now up to schools to select or devise the approach that best meets the needs of first, the student representatives and second, the school.

A starting point could be raising the issue in meetings of staff, students, parents, curriculum committees and School Councils. Following on from this, the Council of curriculum committee could form a widely representative Student Accreditation Subcommittee, whose brief is to consult widely, explore the possibilities and recommend policy and practices for the school.

Some of the areas to be explore would include:

• which model of accreditation is most suitable?

• what actual work is required of the student representative?

• how should this work be presented and/or assessed?

• what background skills and information does the student representative need?

• who will over-see the accreditation and make the assessment?

• should individual 'contracts' for each student be negotiated;

• should 'contracts' be negotiated with individual teachers, faculty/ department staff, curriculum committee or a student accreditation moderating group?

• how will the student representatives' performance and assessment be reported back to the student and parents?

Perhaps the Schools Reference Group of PEP schools could assist schools to get started by, for example:

• listing the tasks of student representatives;

• identifying subject areas where those tasks might be appropriately assigned and assessed;

• recommending on models of accreditation;

• drafting a policy guideline on accreditation; and

• drafting a syllabus for a 'Student Participation' unit/elective/subject.

Margaret Ellis, 1985

Negotiated Exemptions and Substitutions:
One Example at Echuca TS

In 1984, Echuca Technical School became a Participation and Equity Program school. Among other things, this involved the school in further developing its student participation in educational decision-making.

Very soon into the school's PEP activities, it became clear that the student representatives on the PEP Management Committee were missing many classes, falling behind in their work and being placed under great pressure because of their role as student representatives. It was apparent that action had to be taken to ensure that these students were not penalised for their participation.

One of the staff members on the PEP Management Committee was also one of the school's four SRC liaison teachers and, fortunately as it turned out, was also the English teacher of the PEP student representatives. Because of her involvement with a broad range of student representatives, she was aware of the tasks that such students had to undertake as part of the educational decision-making processes and she saw their appropriateness to the school's curriculum. She decided, as a trial scheme, to negotiate exemptions or substitutions from the required work in her English classes for the PEP student representatives.

All students in her English classes were required to complete a minimum number of writing activities, varied in type and length according to the students' abilities and conceptual development. In Term 3, all students were expected to complete 20 such pieces of assessable writing. The PEP student representatives were given complete exemption from five of these on the basis of off-setting time missed in all classes because of participation in meetings. The time that would have been spent on those units could be used to catch up on other missed work eg writing up notes, studying for tests etc.

The PEP student representatives were also allowed (after negotiation on relative effort, degree of difficulty etc) to substitute **written work** done as part of their student participation for other written work which would normally be done for English. Examples of this substitution were:

* agenda and minutes of student subcommittees in lieu of summary-writing and technical/instructional writing exercises;
* letters to other SRCs, school committees etc in lieu of letter-writing exercises;
* reports of PEP meetings for the SRC and other student committees in lieu of report writing or essay writing exercises;
* articles written for the school bulletins and parent newsletters in lieu of creative writing exercises;
* design and administration of surveys in lieu of major written assignments.

Oral English was a major part of the English syllabus, and the PEP student representatives, instead of being assessed on impromptu and prepared talks in class, contribution to small-group and whole-class discussions in lessons, and recitations etc, were allowed to substitute their participation in committee meetings, their skills in chairing meetings, their addresses to form, year and school assemblies, and their interviews with the Principal etc. Because the English teacher was an SRC liaison teacher and on the PEP Task Force, the assessment of these tasks was relatively easily arranged.

The **reading** activities of student representatives were also exempted or substituted. Because PEP student representatives were required to read a great deal of documentation, including committee papers, Ministerial Papers, the PEP Guide etc, they were required to read fewer novels, short stories and comprehension materials. Often, in class they were given the choice of reading materials relevant to their student representative tasks, or general English reading matter.

On occasions, material used for **clear-thinking exercises** were directly related to the student representatives' work eg analysis of arguments for students having more say in their own learning experiences. From time to time, writing exercises were suggested that would help these students formulate their opinions eg essay topics were set on such matters as: "Should this school continue with its present form of assessment? Discuss."

The students' reports clearly stated that they had been given exemptions for certain tasks because they had participated in other activities. These other activities were listed. The reports also stated that these students had completed a number of other tasks that had been included in their assessable work as equivalent substitutions. These tasks were listed too.

There were a number of student representatives' jobs that could have been substituted in other classes, but because of the trial nature of the scheme, were not. These jobs included typing of documentation (Secretarial Studies), taking of minutes (Secretarial Studies), keeping financial records (Accounting), design of posters and publicity materials (Art or Graphics), devising surveys (Social Studies).

In short, the negotiated exemptions and substitutions scheme not only removed the penalties of student participation and awarded students due credit for their participation, but broadened the curriculum so that it was based on real life experience, rather than on academic exercises.

Margaret Ellis, Regional PEP Consultant
Loddon Campaspe Mallee Region, Vic

Putting the Participation Back Into Representation

Giving academic credit to representation contains some major traps. These are not organisational traps – the wealth of available material and the publication of *Credit and Support* will go a long way towards solution of such questions of process.

No, what I'm referring to are the educational traps.

After all, in Victoria we have a statement in Ministerial Paper 6 (*Curriculum Development and Planning in Victoria*) that:

> 9.1 The Government intends that **all** students have access to educational experiences that are challenging, purposeful and comprehensive and that result in **all** students improving their educational achievement. *(my emphasis)*

and this is further developed:

> 9.3 The task of ensuring effective access requires that schools ... design courses so that students may participate in each area of learning and are not prevented from continuing their learning as a result of school organisation... *(pp 12-13)*

To put it bluntly, how can we justify giving time and formal credit within the school's curriculum to learning activities to which, necessarily, only a few students can gain access? Aren't we just establishing another elite, exclusive subject areas (and potentially opening that area to already advantaged students)?

Let's look at how representation develops. Within a school of (say) 600 students, decisions of the type made by a School Council (school curriculum and discipline policies, resource allocation, forward planning and so on) are generally dealt with at some distance from the forums of the whole school body. A few small (alternative or community) schools have developed procedures by which the whole school community can meet as one and decide upon policy directions, but such an approach within a large institution is cumbersome and probably unmanageable. Thus forms of representation are developed.

Perhaps there are three students on the School Council and they, in turn, are drawn from and/or advised by a Student Representative Council (SRC) – consisting perhaps of two students from each home or class group. In the best of circumstances, the students on the School Council meet regularly with the SRC to report on issues facing the School Council and, where necessary, the representatives on the SRC return to their 'constituents' for discussion and advice. Perhaps both the SRC and the home/class meetings are regularly timetabled to allow this to happen and are recognised to that extent as important components of the school's curriculum or organisational structure.

It has been argued at some length that both time (to carry out the role of representative) and formal credit for learning are important. Not least among the reasons has been a desire to ensure that no-one is de-barred from becoming a representative.

But that's not enough. To repeat the dilemma: only a few can be representatives; how can we support credit for something to which only a few can gain access? In the approach we outlined above, the representatives on the bodies act essentially as individuals. They themselves are active participants in the decision-making process and are guided regularly by links with their constituents, but they are still not affecting the educational passivity of the great body of students.

There is a way out the dilemma, but it is a difficult and challenging **curriculum** decision. Participation must be put back into representation.

A approach to representation that identifies it as primarily participative enables us to turn the question round by asking: how can we transform the nature of the issues under consideration and the participation process, so that it is necessarily inclusive and common? That is, how can we build the issues into a curriculum that is open to all, important to all and through which, in various ways, all students can contribute to achieving commonly agreed goals? The issues of recognition through allocation of time, credit and support, then become the 'normal' curriculum and administrative questions of the school – ones of goal setting and allocation of resources to their achievement – and student participation is essential to the ways in which the school's learning program is implemented.

In such participatory representation, the presence of representatives upon a decision-making body is only one part of a broader form of participation by all students in the issues under consideration. This will mean the development of regular forums (an SRC and class group meetings) for discussion of issues, in order to inform and draw direction. That's a necessary condition, but still not sufficient. Participatory representation can and should go beyond that, in directions that are educative rather than administrative.

An educative approach regards the many policy issues under consideration to be central to the curriculum processes of the school and thus relevant to active consideration and investigation within the teaching and learning strategies of the school. They are planned as part of the democratically determined curriculum of the school.

So, for example, development of a school policy on rights and responsibilities for the whole school community would involve, firstly, an understanding of why such a policy is an important part of the learning of the community and secondly, how development of that policy might involve the active participation of all students in investigation of the issue as part of their classroom practice. Various classroom groups might look at aspects of the issue, coordinating their interests through their SRC representatives. One group might decide to interview parents or to draw them into active participation on the policy determination; another group might investigate existing charters of rights at international levels; another might collect examples of practices from other schools, together with processes of development and reactions from the school communities; still another might grapple with the political issues associated with an Australian Bill of Rights. A variety of activities, adopted with attention to age, interest, experience and abilities, would aim to have as many students as possible active participants in issues that affect both their behaviour in the school and the role of the school in its wider social context. Final decision-making on such a policy and its implementation, monitoring and evaluation, would follow as a natural consequence of this education process.

The process of participatory representation becomes concerned with providing a means for improving the learning experiences of **all** about significant issues, rather than either regarding representation as an external **task**, or providing access to a learning experience only for a few representatives.

I can outline such an approach briefly, but of course I can't dismiss the difficulties involved in such massive curriculum re-orientation. Present practices of representation are a stage (and must be seen to be that) **towards** such a broader view of participation. Students **are** still working on these bodies and **are** still being advised and informed by student organisations. Representation is, in many circumstances, a legislative reality and requirement. It is important that, as part of the development of student participation in that curriculum re-orientation, representation of students continues, and continues to expose its needs and opportunities.

Such changes don't occur by waiting until the perfect scenario of student participation can be put into place wholesale, or by solving questions of credit at classroom level and slowly extending the bounds of participation into 'upper levels' only after processes are secure in the classroom.

Change is a more complex political process, that advances jerkily, seizing opportunities and developing in several directions at once. Hopefully such directions cohere – a major issue is to make sure they do. In such a view, student representation in its present (imperfect) form is one more step, an opportunity to be developed towards broader models of participation. And that brings us back to the immediate issues of credit and support.

It does, however, sound one enormous warning note. Not every form of representation and not every form of participation is deserving of credit and support. The measure must be: is such representation aimed at the maximisation of the participation of all in activities that lead to an improved learning experience for all?

Roger Holdsworth, 1986

Student Action Teams:
Credit and Assessment

*The fourth and final article 'from the archives' comes from a more recent source: the **Student Action Teams Manual**: 'Acting for Change' (2001 - retitled: 'Learning in the Community' when reprinted in 2003). This manual is available on-line at: **www.eduweb.vic.gov. au/edulibrary/public/curricman/ middleyear/StudentActionTeams Manual2003.pdf***

*In this section on 'Credit and assessment' useful distinctions are made between acknowledgement, academic credit and provision of time. However, the basic ideas about negotiated exemptions and student requirements carry ideas from the earlier articles. The **Manual** also adds a useful **Credit Checklist**.*

The Student Action Team (SAT) is an important part of the school, and the work of students and teachers in it needs to be recognised.

Students

A Student Action Team should involve student learning and there should be some form of assessment or credit available for students' work. This could involve a formal assessment within or alongside other subjects, a specific reference or certification, special access to training – as well as more intangible results like publicity through the local press and personal satisfaction.

It is important to distinguish between:

- **acknowledgement or recognition by the school:** through certification, references, newsletter articles, awards at assemblies, access to specific benefits associated with the work. This says: *"You're doing a good job; you're doing this officially".* This is the very minimum that the school should do!
- **academic credit:** assessment of the skills gained, either in a personal reference or within a subject's assessment processes. This says: *"You've learned specific things; you've completed work requirements".*
- **provision of time:** for the team to complete their work (including allocation of time or replacement activities within other subjects). This says: *"You have formal time within your school commitments to do these important things".*

One way to achieve this is to have a system of negotiated exemptions and replacements within appropriate subjects – work requirements that don't need to be done, or work requirements from the SAT that replace other class work.

Requirements

It is not sufficient just to claim to have been on a team; students will need to make sure that their SAT work is documented – a diary, records of meetings, details of reports written or talks given, results of research undertaken. These need to be outlined, negotiated and agreed in advance.

Credit Checklist

A checklist could be developed for each individual member of the SAT:

- time provided
- formal assessment
- certificate
- reference
- skill objectives specified
- work requirements specified
- acknowledgement (assembly etc)
- training opportunities provided
- training undertaken

Examples

Previous SATs identified several ways of providing recognition, assessment and time:

"There will always be joint projects being developed as part of the SOSE curriculum"

"Research questions for SAT will be included in other subject areas"

"SAT will be a SOSE elective known as Community Studies"

"SAT may occur within an English class"

"SAT will be a formal sub-committee of the SRC"

"A display of leadership awards given to SAT members"

"A plaque saying that students were recognised for participating in SAT"

NEXT ISSUE

UPCOMING ISSUES

The **second issue** *ReConnectEd* will publish will centre on student voice, agency and participation in primary schools. The deadline for article contributions for this edition is **July 1st** If you would like to share your stories of student voice and work in the primary school space, we would love to hear from you! Alternatively, if the curriculum and pedagogical practices are something that you're passionate about, *ReConnectEd's* **third Issue** will highlight existing curricula, what should be in the curriculum and what pedagogy is central to enhancing student voice, agency and participation. The deadline for these articles is **October 31st.**

If you would like to contribute an article to either edition, email
reconnected@studentvoice.org.au

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