ReConnectEd

YOUNGER LEARNERS
BIGGER VOICES

Acknowledgment of Country

ReConnectEd acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community on which we live and learn. 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.

This work Is supported the Australian Council for Student Voice

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Australian Council for STUDENT VOICE

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

Anndd... we're back with the second exhilarating issue of ReConnectEd, and this time we're turning the spotlight on Australia's youngest students and their incredibly powerful voices. In this edition, we embark on an exploration of student voice and agency, uncovering the profound impact the primary school students and teachers are making not only within their school communities but also beyond.

Often, in our pursuit of discussing student voice and agency, we may inadvertently overlook the potent force emanating from the youngest learners. However, as we delve into the pages of this issue, you'll find yourself captivated by the remarkable endeavours and impassioned initiatives led by these budding changemakers.

In this edition of the journal, we are offered a captivating glimpse into the incredible impact that primary school students and teachers are creating within their school community and beyond. **Coauthored by the Junior School Council (JSC) student executives and JSC coordinators, Sophie Cartelli and Caitlin Wheeler**, this article sheds light on the diverse range of initiatives undertaken by the students, both within their immediate school environment and in the wider world beyond its walls. **Emma Donaldson** contributes an insightful discussion that centres around building self-capacity and determination within educators. Her work is an invaluable resource for all educators looking to empower their students through an initiative to Increase Indigenous Australian education. By harnessing their own strengths and fostering a sense of determination, educators can ignite a fire within their students, enabling them to blaze trails and create a better, more inclusive future for all. In the next article, we delve into the transformative journey of the **Student Voice Project at Guardian Angels (GA) school,** beginning with a significant shift in leadership during 2021. The project marked the first year where staff, students, and the community collaborated to investigate the profound impact of student voice. As the project entered its second year in 2022, the team built upon the strong foundations of clarity and definition, laying the groundwork for a powerful framework. Initially involving two dedicated staff members, the project was supported by a dynamic partnership between Brisbane Catholic Education and the Quaglia Institute. As the only primary school finalist in VicSRC's student voice awards in 2021, **Tecoma Primary School (TPS)** has since put a focus on consolidating practices and fostering change-makers. TPS is committed to ensuring that their students' involvement and agency remain intrinsic to their educational experience. Looking ahead, the school's emphasis will be on nurturing student agency and actively incorporating student feedback into future planning, particularly in inquiry-based subjects.

Finally, we bring back two **Connect Magazine archive** articles featuring Incredible Initiatives from primary schools: **Switched On/Switch-Off Learning Student Engagement Initiative**; and **Primary School Students Advise on Teacher Training**.

As we continue our journey in promoting educational excellence and fostering a culture of empathy and understanding, we hope this issue of ReConnectEd serves as a testament to the immense potential residing in the hearts and minds of young learners. Together, let's amplify their voices, nurture their dreams, and embrace their unwavering determination to transform the world.
Thank you for joining us on this incredible adventure. We are grateful for your continued support and enthusiasm for ReConnectEd. Together, we build bridges, cultivate connections, and empower the future.

Linh, ReConnectEd Editor

STUDENT VOICES MAKING AN IMPACT AT ROSANNA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Cowritten by the Junior School Council Student Executives, together with Junior School Council coordinators Sophie Cartelli and Caitlin Wheeler

In 2016, the Rosanna Primary School Junior School Council (JSC) decided that they no longer wanted to be just a fundraising body; rather they wanted to be a voice on behalf of all students and be proactive in taking action. They dedicated the year to a range of student-led initiatives, ranging from creating the '*Voiceometer'* to use as a student voice measurement tool, to highlighting and celebrating student voice through the '*Student Voice Awards',* and building a Chicken Coop which saw the development of our Garden Club.

In 2017, the amazing work of our JSC students was recognised at the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)'s Recognition Awards, an event that celebrates best practice in student voice, leadership, and student-led action in Victoria. Rosanna Primary School (RPS) won the primary school category of *SRC of the Year*; this award recognised a JSC that has created change identified by students through engaging with decision-making processes at school. We were so incredibly proud of this achievement and recognition of the students' outstanding dedication to harnessing student voice.

Each and every year since then, a new group of students join the JSC and continue to be a voice for their peers.

There are a number of ways that we have been involved in decision-making and leadership at our school.

We regularly work with teachers, parents and each other to support student learning and empower all students to have a voice. Here are some examples of how student voice, agency and leadership happen at our school:

- **Student-Led P-2 Deep Learning Protocols:**
Our learning values that were created by students in 2018 were revised recently to be more accessible for our junior students. You can read all about this process in the first issue of ReConnectEd.

The impact of this process has been incredible. Having a say in the way we learn empowers us to be the best learners we can be. Being heard makes us feel valued and want to achieve our full potential.

It's not just the JSC students who feel empowered. Through the reshaping of the P-2 Deep Learning Protocols, the junior students are seen as 'experts' with so much knowledge to offer. This helps them to understand the importance and impact of student voice. Having all teachers on board with this shows that our voices will continue to be heard as the years go on, regardless of who is part of the JSC group. This commitment to student voice-led action helps all students to feel confident to advocate for themselves and others.

The Prep students seeing Grade 1 peers delivering workshops on an initiative they have been driving, is hugely powerful.

A positive impact we have seen already is that the Prep teachers have already started using these student-created protocols during Inquiry and Development Play sessions, with Prep students setting their own learning goals based on these protocols.

- **The Rosanna Voice Student Newsletter:**

This started as a simple idea in a JSC meeting where we recognised the need to celebrate student voice and deep learning across the whole school. We thought it was important to find ways to reconnect with each other and our learning now that we were back in the classroom and finally face to face again.

This idea built upon our previous 'Student Voice Awards' that celebrated individual students and student voice achievements. We felt that a monthly newsletter written by students, for students, was an empowering platform to inspire students and teachers to harness student voice and agency, and support them through leading by example.

The Rosanna Voice has had a positive impact in multiple ways. It has really put a spotlight on student voice in the context of learning and shows our whole school community the ways we have a say in what and how we learn. We have hard copies at

the office, distribute copies to classrooms and post it online for families to read, which is a great conversation starter about the importance of student agency. It also helps connect families to what student agency looks like.

The Rosanna Voice is also an outlet for students like us to pursue our passion for writing, journalism, and reporting... but reporting on the things that are important to us!

Teachers have also been inspired by reading about what is happening in other classrooms and we're now seeing a more consistent approach to student-led learning across the school.

- **Dedication and Commitment to Student Voice Over the Years:**

We organised and hosted an official 'Ribbon Cutting Ceremony' for the opening of our Bike Shelter, something that was five years in the making! It all started when we were in Grade 2.

Following our annual Hot Cross Bun Drive fundraiser, our then JSC peers surveyed each class asking what we wanted the money to be put towards to improve our school. The majority of students wanted a cover for our bike area.

They did some research and found that they needed some more money to make it happen, so the 2019 Hot Cross Bun Drive went bigger and better! We did letter box drops to our neighbours and encouraged members from the community to purchase, which they did. We finally had enough money to get the bike shed cover happening. We asked parents of students to come down to the school to see how they could help get this cover installed. Despite COVID delaying the process, we persevered and had two more Hot Cross Bun Drives, adding more money to our total. We surveyed grades again, and there was still a resounding 'yes!' to the bike shelter. Three years later, we are now part of the JSC who were able to officially 'open' our bike shelter and continue the RPS legacy of turning student voice into action.

The opening of the bike shelter has had a positive impact on the whole school community. Whilst seemingly insignificant to some, the bike shelter is symbolic of the hard work, commitment, and dedication to student voice of the Junior School Council members over the past five years. It is a tangible symbol of student agency and a reminder that a simple idea can be recognised, heard, taken seriously, and put into action. After we submitted the proposal for approval and presented it to School Council, they were so impressed with our continual fundraising efforts that they made a small donation to our bike shelter. Also, some members of School Council were a part of building the bike shelter, so it really felt like a community project.

Other ways we are making an impact:
- We created a Suggestion Box as a non-confronting and anonymous way to encourage other students to speak up. This is where all students can submit ideas they have that they'd like us to discuss at JSC meetings. Each fortnight we empty out the Suggestion Box and go over what our peers are saying, choosing initiatives to focus on where we can make positive change.

- Classrooms have student-led and -run Class Meetings, where teachers sit back and listen. Students discuss their class goals, celebrate highlights and successes, and talk about things they'd like to improve or work on.
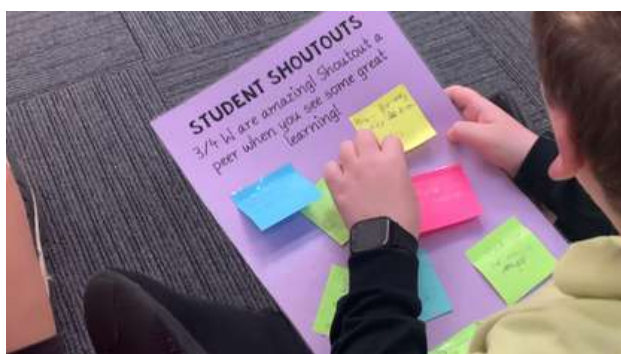
- We host fundraisers that are either for our school initiatives or for local not-for-profit charities within our community that we know rely heavily on donations.

- JSC students attend the Parent School Council meetings to provide a report about all the things we're working on and to share in decision-making. It is a platform for students to talk to adults about things that are important to us, and always gives parents a chance to ask us any questions.

- We have also had a part in the launch of our new School Values, firstly by hosting a design competition inviting students to design a mascot for our new values. We chose the top four finalists and went around to every grade getting them to vote for their favourite. As our school continues to develop what the expected behaviours are for each of the school values, we went into classes and ran an activity where students needed to list the types of major and minor incidents that

occur at school, and whereabouts in the school these incidents occur. This data is being collected and used for the implementation of the Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support Framework.

As teachers, we are beyond proud of the JSC representatives, both past and present. Our representatives really care about the students at RPS, and what is important to them, and are proud to be a voice on their behalf. It is always so rewarding to work with these exceptional group of students. We encourage all schools to have faith in their students that, given the opportunity to do so, they can create positive change.

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BUILDING STUDENT AGENCY AND SELF DETERMINATION

Emma Donaldson

I am an Upper Primary school teacher and in my past role I taught at a Government Primary School in the leafy green Southeastern suburbs of Melbourne. I had an extensive teaching history at the school and knew that, historically, student voice and self-determination was implemented in a limited capacity, and within teacher determined confines. I had begun exploring student voice and agency through professional development and readings and knew that authenticity, a perceived need for change, and student buy in were key factors in successfully facilitating student self-determination. The absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, cultural representation and language in the school and community provided the catalyst for a group of students from the senior years to create whole school, student-led change. The experience I had whilst working with these students, and teaching, learning, and unlearning with and from them, is one of the most formative and rewarding experiences of my teaching career.

In the beginning…
I extended an offer to any student of Year 4, 5 or 6 to participate in a Student Committee to address how we, as a school, might begin to address the complex and important inclusion of Indigenous voices, history and culture in a meaningful way. Both I and the students recognised the patchy and inconsistent ways in which Indigenous knowledge systems, culture, history and practices were represented within classrooms school-wide.

As one Year 6 student said at our inaugural meeting: "we say we'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live at Assembly every Monday, but how do we actually do that?" "What does acknowledge even mean?" another student added.

Therein was lit a fire. The group began questioning, wondering and challenging … each other, and the status quo. What were the systems and structures currently in place? Who had put them there? And, most importantly, where was the Indigenous representation?

The group began a process of suggesting and rejecting possible names for themselves, finally coming to one that received a group consensus: The WVC (Wurundjeri Voice Committee). They wanted to join with Traditional Custodians and add their student voice to the voice that had been missing in their Primary School on Wurundjeri land.

Building my own capacity, to facilitate the capacity building of my students

I began to read up on ideas about student voice, student agency and student participation. The resources available through Social Education Victoria and VicSRC were invaluable, and this broad definition felt particularly useful in helping the student group and me work through what it is we wanted to do:

> *'Student voice is an umbrella term we use when we talk about anything that includes students in decision making, from the classroom level right up to the systems level'*. (VicSRC, Getting Started with Student Voice: A quick guide for educators)

We wanted to address both classroom based, and also systemic change. This would involve looking at the fabric of our school and unpicking it in an effort to sew in a direct path for student voice and action.

We decided that the first thing we needed was space: a space that would enable conversations to occur in a free, respectful and intentional manner. I looked to Martin Renton's 'Challenging learning through questioning' and implemented his 'Rules for Talk'. We established 'norms' for our discussions: what did we want to see, hear and feel happen in this time?

The group established that 'wait time' was important, as was everyone having the opportunity to have their say.

Renton describes the purpose of *'Permissive Wait-Time'* as *'literally to 'give permission' for your students to continue a dialogue...this approach means stepping back from direct involvement and allowing your students time to explore their own questions and perspectives in open dialogue'*. (Renton, M. Challenging learning through questioning, Corwin, 2020).

I also introduced the concept of *'building on others' ideas'* during discussion and the students embraced this. In one of the student questionnaires (that I conducted throughout this process) students responded that we build on others' ideas to: *'create a bigger discussion from one small idea'* and to *'complement and add to each others' thoughts and ideas to make it the best we can be'*.

All questions are not equal

The process of supporting the WVC from idea inception to action seemed to be dependent on my own ability to effectively question and clarify the aims and intentions of the group. Again, through my reading of Martin Renton, I learned of the importance of effective questioning practices and that, through this, students can learn to set meaningful goals, problem solve, persevere and see success.

Even as I began to explore purposeful questioning, I could see that sometimes this also meant that the questioning did not come from me at all. In stepping back and enacting 'Permissive Wait-Time', I allowed students time to explore their own questions and perspectives in an open dialogue. I dipped back into the conversation to rejoin with a paraphrase of something a student said that could propel the discussion forward, offer a new insight or move to an action.

My role as teacher

I had to challenge my own thinking, existing practice and redefine my role. I could provide resources, provocations and opportunities, but the 'heavy lifting' would all be done by the students. The WVC were the guiding coalition, and to support them I needed to be responsive in my role. This involved, in part, facilitating meetings with key stakeholders, such as the school leadership team, the School Council president, and an artist from Wurundjeri Country. I also facilitated processes that assisted the group to move forward.

For example, I helped scaffold the WVC's planning to bring an idea to action and solidify its purpose. We established a 'Statement of Commitment', which was a vision statement that explained, in the students' own language, who we were and what we stood for, and we created outcomes that were linked to and led back to this document.

**Wurundjeri Voice Committee
Statement of Commitment 2022**

We are committed to teaching our students about the lands on which we live.

We are committed to raising the Wurundjeri voice, and to work with Wurundjeri Elders to educate our classmates about Wurundjeri history, culture and language.

We are committed to showing pride about the land on which we live, and to the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri.

We are committed to teaching our school community to be respectful towards Wurundjeri people and culture

Actions and outcomes

The WVC student committee began with the students in existing leadership roles: the 'House group' Captains and Vice Captains, the School Captain and Vice-Captain. I had the opportunity to discuss elevating and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, culture, and ways of knowing with students across the upper primary years in my capacity as a teacher. I offered students who responded with passion and engagement, invitations to committee meetings. Once the ball began rolling, students spoke to each other; the Art Captains were invited in their role to discuss the mural and House Logo projects; the students responsible for the school newsletter wanted to join the committee to better understand the process and planned projects. I also facilitated processes that assisted the group to move forward. Playground talk influenced other students who had thus far not been included or given opportunity to directly lead or guide school change, to join the committee and contribute.

Students would approach me on yard duty, or on my way to or from the carpark, to try and find out what it was this group of students were actually doing. Sometimes my response would be: "why don't you come along to a meeting and see?" Numbers swelled to around 35 students.

The WVC set their sights on a series of actions and began planning to achieve them. At meetings, students led the proceedings to assign working groups to different projects they had determined they wanted actioned and worked out their sequence. Each action led to the next, and at each stage the group were required to think, challenge and discuss deeply.

When the committee was deep in the brainstorming phase of discussion and ideas were flowing, they challenged each other respectfully and held each other accountable to the norms we had set up at the start of the process. Successful projects built a sense of purpose and confidence within the students of the committee and their ideas grew bolder and bigger. There were moments of collective joy and a tangible sense of pride as students walked the school grounds and took in the visual changes they had implemented.

The Big Project
The school had long established 'House Groups', and these four groups in the primary colours of red, blue, green and yellow were used to group students for different activities. Students already competed for their House in whole school athletic carnivals, and students could 'win' points for their house through good behaviour or other means.

At one meeting I proffered a question for discussion: "does our current House Group system have meaning? How could we make it so?" The responses snowballed, students built on each other's suggestions and ideas until a new, big project began to form:

> *The House Group system could be revised: each House could be renamed in Woiwurrung language, native animals could be chosen to represent each House and a logo drawn up, reflecting the animal and incorporating elements of traditional Wurundjeri art.*

I had a final provocation to offer the WVC: *"whilst we are working towards representing Aboriginal culture, language and knowledge systems in our school, do we have authentic voice and representation?"* This led to a meaty dialogue, in which the 11 and 12 year olds present thoughtfully and articulately discussed issues of privilege and power, visibility and representation.

I leant in, aware that this was a formative experience in my own teaching practice and not entirely sure that I was navigating it as fearlessly as my students.

Build a support network

Part of my role involved building relationships external to the core group and recruiting supporters. The parent community was key to this, including the parents who dropped their children to school early, or after dinner for WVC and School Council meetings. The School Council President and I would meet for early morning coffees and walks in which I would describe, in enthusiastic detail, the ideas and discussions the WVC had. I cannot emphasise enough how critical her support was in gaining traction and raising the funds required to see the WVC's ideas through to fruition. Finally, the School Council, who supported the WVC in their final presentation and signed off on the funds necessary to bring in a Wurundjeri and Yorta Yorta artist to work with the students in creating authentic and respectful representation in the logos they designed in collaboration for each House Group.

Reflection

There has been a legacy, created and left behind when those of the WVC who belonged to the Year 6 cohort graduated at the end of last year. Therein lies the heart of my reflection.

Is the legacy like a ceremonial garden in a school, planted with best intent and serving a lofty or honourable purpose, now left to go to seed? With those who planted it now gone and those left to be its caretakers uncertain of the original intent and left without the time or means to nourish and tend to it properly?
I too have moved on from the school. In order for the new House Groups, the legacy of the WVC, to maintain its purpose, and for

it to strengthen the connection between Country, culture and community, it must be spoken about. Students, teachers, parents and the wider community must know about the conversations, learnings and understandings that proceeded it and they must build on them.

So I challenge myself: Where in my process did I build access points for that to happen? Where in that process did I create student voice and agency beyond that of the group I worked with? How was it embedded in a more longstanding capacity?

This will be my focus moving forward and until then I hope that new students will take up the mantle, and new teachers will feel moved to build their own guiding coalition and support them.

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SMALL STEPS TO MAKE A BIG IMPACT AT TECOMA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Lisa Hoskins-Faul

In 2021, Tecoma Primary School (TPS) in Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs was honoured to be the only primary school amongst secondary schools, that became a finalist in the VicSRC Student Voice awards.

We have been taking steps as a school community towards transparent and embedded voice, agency, and leadership since our review in 2019. At times this was challenging through remote learning. But since the return to face-to-face learning, we have continued to take small steps, slowly consolidating practices that will eventually make a big impact in how our students are heard and respected as change makers and co-collaborators in the school and in their learning. We have made inroads but have clear goals ahead to ensure these aspects of our students' involvement at TPS are intrinsic to their experience.

Our continued focus moving forward will be on agency. Since our involvement with the VicSRC in 2019, we have been consolidating feedback from the students across all levels, prior to our planning day, to reflect on their learning and to discuss the ways in which they want to learn about different curriculum areas in future, primarily in inquiry-based subjects.

How do we do this?

A consistent feedback/reflection template has been created for all year levels (see page 15). This assures the questions asked are based on the whole school focus for the term, so we are getting authentic feedback on areas we have been working on. It includes celebrations and challenges for the students. In tying these areas in with our goals in our school strategic plan, we can use this as anecdotal evidence and fidelity for our Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). Our questioning centres around literacy, numeracy, and student engagement, as well as our inquiry topics.

Prior to our planning day, each class discusses the following term's inquiry topic:
- What interested them?
- How would they like to learn?
- What would make an authentic assessment/project at the end of the unit?

On the planning day, one student is chosen from each class to participate in a feedback session with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) team. For example, in our

Year 5/6 team we have three Year 5 classes and three Year 6 classes. These students join the team at the beginning of the day and give their voice about the term that has ended. They discuss specific lessons or instructions and what worked and what didn't for them. They have an opportunity to share ideas for how they think they might learn more effectively.

Students are very honest in these sessions! The template is filled out by each team on this day, so we have record of the conversation to look back on when required.

Students have had the voice to change things over the years in the classroom, such as creating a class library of our level-led novels in the senior classrooms, rather than rotating a set of books each term. They were concerned that many people didn't get the opportunity to finish a novel in a term and it wasn't fair to have to stop part way through and begin a new book.

What do the children share?
Our Preps have recently completed an inquiry unit about animals. They reflected on the enjoyment they had in hands-on activities and learning about different animals. Their challenges included some writing tasks. Looking forward to the next term's topic about fairy tales, the Preps had many wonderings: Are fairy tales real? How do fairies grow their wings? How did the fairies come alive if they weren't in the world before? What things are in fairy tales? This gives our teachers some rich starting points to ensure the unit encapsulates the interest of the students.

Our Year 1/2 students have completed an inquiry unit: "Are You Game?" Their reflection focused on the hands-on learning, the excursion to the MCG and the ability to make their own games as their assessment piece. Their challenges included making the instructions for their own game and having 'brain blocks' when trying to come up with ideas for their own games. Their upcoming inquiry is "On with The Show", tying in through whole school production. Students expressed they would like to learn about this by learning songs and dances, including drama in the classroom and the use of technology to watch and make videos.

Our Year 3/4 students have learnt about Australia's First Peoples over Term 2. Their reflection of their learning included immersion through a kit from Museums Victoria, which students felt helped them to understand more about how tools were made and how the First Peoples lived. They also mentioned a walking excursion into the city to Birrarung Marr, where they learnt about symbolism and bush tucker. In Term 3 they will be learning about "Habitats", and they suggested a real focus on animals, climates and where different habitats are in the world.

Our Year 5/6 students have completed a unit about democracy, called 'Rule the School'. Each year level had different experiences, as the Grade 5 students had the opportunity to go to Parliament House as a part of their camp, whereas the Grade 6 students had an incursion to learn about bills and laws. Challenging feedback included the comment that homework based around democracy didn't assist in their learning. They had the opportunity to create political parties within their classrooms and made party policies and platforms, to teach their class for a day. This

included preferential voting. The students were in agreement when they said this authentic learning helped them to understand the democratic process. Next term we look to our 'Invention Convention'. We had thought about changing this, but the students' ideas were to make an invention, to learn about inventors and to present their invention to the community.

As you can see, our students have voice in their learning about these topics. Our next step is to ensure students have more agency in this process; to have them begin to assist us in creating rich assessments for each level, including rubrics and the co-creation of success criteria. We have just finished the next review process at our school, and this is a clear path for us

moving forward. The areas we have slowly worked on over the past four years are embedded into our classroom culture, and our next steps are apparent.There will be professional development later in the year through the Victorian Academy, focussing on Rethinking Assessment to Build Agency in Learning to help us on our way. We look forward to learning and growing with our students!

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Student Reflection of Learning

Thoughts on our integrated unit (Title)	
Celebrations- what did you enjoy learning about?	Challenges - what did you find challenging?
How would you like to learn about NEXT TERM'S TOPIC (Title)?	

Literacy Reflection	
Celebrations- how did you enjoy learning about Reading or Writing?	Challenges - what did you find challenging?

Maths Reflection	
Celebrations-how did you enjoy learning? Can you think of an example of a lesson that really helped you?	Challenges - what would you like to see in maths sessions?

Student Voice - student feedback	
How has giving and receiving feedback helped you?	Challenges -what can be changed to make it easier for you to keep track of your goals or achieve them?

How are you feeling?	
Things to be grateful for	Things you might need support with

STUDENT VOICE CASE STUDY GUARDIAN ANGELS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Danielle Carter

Guardian Angels Catholic Primary School is situated in Ashmore on the Gold Coast in Queensland. The school has a population of over 780 students. With a change in leadership, 2021 was the first year that student voice was investigated by staff, students, and the community. We entered our second year with the Student Voice Project in 2022, building on the strong foundations of clarity of definition. There were two staff members initially involved in the student voice project, which was conducted with Brisbane Catholic Education partnering with the Quaglia Institute, and the team expanded to involve a core collaborative of six teachers at Guardian Angels (GA) to support systems, processes and structure to ensure 'Voice' is a way of operation at the school.

Purpose

Our goal in 2021 was to ensure there was a common understanding of voice with students, parents, and staff. We also wanted to identify areas within this where our students needed to develop further understanding. We wanted voice in the school to be a way of being.

We defined voice as:

- Sharing thoughts, ideas, and opinions that are genuine in an environment underpinned by trust and respect.
- Offering realistic suggestions and expectations for the good of the whole.
- Accepting responsibility for not only what you say but what needs to be done.

Opportunities to investigate skills and strategies to support voice were implemented from the data gained from the *iKnow Survey*.

There was an alignment of key school documents to embed student voice eg. Student Behaviour Support Plan, Annual Plans, where a GA learner was defined.

Our goal in 2022 was to deepen voice with students, parents, and staff as a way of operating at GA. We also wanted to identify skills that our students needed to develop further to support authentic voice within the school. A strong connection was linked to GA High Impact practices, which aligned seamlessly with core visible learning practices.

Background Analysis

Key documents and processes were reviewed during 2021. This provided an opportunity to clearly name student voice as a part of our way of operating at Guardian Angels.

Clear communication with all stakeholders was a priority. Clarity around key elements was a continual reference throughout the year: at parent/staff and student meetings, in newsletters, social media and professional development.

The use of the iKnow survey allowed teachers and students key skill areas to focus on and develop. Teaching these skills allowed richness in authentic voice and ownership.

In 2022, our defined statement of a 'GA Learner' and components of our behavioural support plan clearly linked the conceptual elements of voice into our ways of working.

Our named GA Learner elements:

Examples of student understanding of learning goals:

Focused communication with all stakeholders continued, as did referencing Student Voice through goals, professional development, communication pathways and community events.

The school clearly defined core high impact practices, which are evidence based, to provide clarity about our consistent way of operating within the school. A resource was developed to clearly define and support teachers, and induct new staff members.

Overview of GA Practices:

We continued to seek to see GA life through a student's perspective in order to refine our practices, gain perspective and celebrate.

Continued use of the *iKnow survey* allowed teachers and students to define key skill areas to focus on and develop. Teaching these skills allowed richness in authentic voice and ownership. The process was refined in 2022 and there was opportunity to link to build key focus skills in planning. Short cycle review process enabled GA to close the loop and empower students to know their impact/progress with focus goals. It was linked to class goal setting as a focus.

Example of classes focused iKnow Survey goals:

Example of an individual Class Goal:

Our Class Goal
(As decided by the students of 6G)
is to decrease the level of distractions in our class!

How: we will create a list of what is acceptable behaviour at tables in the class and what is deemed as distracting behaviours. We will agree on consequences of repeated distracting behaviours. Example, 3 reminders and you have a set seating space in the room or sit on your own.

Time Length: Week 1 – create agreement
Weeks 1-4 implement and adhered to agreement.

Reflection: In week 5 we will discuss as a class if distractions have reduced.

Example of prompts discussed in class and shared:

Value and expecting all voices

Problem or Questions → Ideas and possibility → Synthesising → Action Plan

Termly GA Cafes

| What things are good at GA? | What things do we need to improve? |

Think about and explain you thinking about:
- Classrooms
- Outside Spaces
- Learning Opportunities
- Resources

2 We have three main goals this term **LIGHTS ON @ GA**
- Lights on at GA
- Our Behaviour Process
- Writing

What has worked well? What have you liked?

What are some ideas to make these goals work better?

I Know My Class Survey
Goals created by students upon reflection of their results from "I know my class" survey.

Class	Goal	Timeframe	Review
6G	Reduce distractions within the class.	1-4 weeks	Term 4 Week 5
6B	Improve engagement with homework.	1-4 weeks	Term 4 Week 5
6M	Improve engagement with homework.	1-4 weeks	Term 4 Week 5
6W	Improve engagement with hands on tasks.	1-4 weeks	Term 4 Week 5

Class	Goal	Timeframe	Review
5G	Connect our learning to the real world.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
5B	Connect our learning to the real world.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
5M	Improve our ability to share our ideas.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
5W	Improve our ability to listen to each other.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4

Class	Goal	Timeframe	Review
4G	Improve our ability to listen to each other.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
4B	Improve our ability to work in teams.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
4M	Improve our ability to share our ideas.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
4W	Improve how we listen to each other.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4

Class	Goal	Timeframe	Review
3G	Reduce the calling out in our class.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
3B	Improve our ability to listen to each other.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
3M	Improve our ability to work in teams.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4
3W	Improve our ability to work in teams.	1-3 weeks	Term 4 Week 4

Our journey

In 2021, we looked at ways to promote an understanding of Student Voice:

1. A staff focus was linked to school goals of *Assessment Capable Learners* and a *Cohesive and Collective Professional Learning Culture*:
   - Embedded in definition as a learner at GA
   - Instructional Strategies
   - Feedback

2. Student understanding was promoted as part of our GA Learner. The definition was a focus as part of *WALKING the GA WAY*. Key songs, literature and activities were used to promote key elements:

   - Picture Book: Cay and Adlee Find their Voice by Cali and Russ Quaglia:
     The world is a noisy place. It's full of voices, but what are they all for? How are they different, and how do people use their voices to be heard? We all have an important voice. What kind of voice do you have?

   - Picture Book: Say Something by Peter H Reynolds
     Discuss the many ways that a single voice can make a difference. We can say something with our actions, our words, and our voices.

   - Song: I Have a Voice by the Beat Buds. Classes identified the key elements to discover:
     - *Everybody has a voice and the ability to use their voice to make a difference in the world.*
     - *No matter if my voice is small or loud, I can make a difference.*
     - *Find what you believe in, share what you have to say, your voice can make a difference.*

- *I have a voice and the power to speak.*
- *One voice has power and when our voices unite, we create a force like a meteorite.*
- *Let's make some noise, let's change the world with our choice.*
- *Picture Book: The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes by Mark Prett. Subject: Growth mindset/fixed mindset*
- *Link to school theme song for the year 'Live Our Story'*

3. Assemblies, gatherings, newsletter, and social media were all mediums used to reinforce and promote voice at GA. There was space in the library for focused display messages.

We also wanted to identify areas within this where our students needed to develop further understanding. We wanted voice in the school to be a way of being. The *iKnow my class survey* was used and linked to *GLOWS* and *GROWS* within each room.

Staff had time to unpack areas and identify strengths, areas for development and wonderings with their students. Students elaborated further in class discussion for clarification. These were used as areas of focus in Term 2/3. The *iKnow survey* is something we are looking to continue each semester.

We also took time to look at authentic opportunities to use voice when ideas or problems arise:

- Learning Affirmations and school feedback with Carter Conversations around the school to get input, ideas, and actionable ways to build our school
- Library Review and future planning Café
- Suggestion box: follow through where the mantra *Listen, Learn, Lead: Using Your Voice* was at the forefront

In 2022, we looked at ways to continue to embed voice in GA language, processes and practices:

- We continued references to our defined GA Learner. This was promoted at assemblies, newsletters, in classrooms, and named in student diaries. Our definition clearly names what is expected of a learner at GA.
- We continued to emphasise the core elements in the definition. Key songs, literature and activities continued to be a powerful way to promote key elements. In addition to those mentioned above, we used:
  - Maybe by Kobi Yamada: A Story About the Endless Potential in All of Us.
  - Be You by Peter H Reynolds: a celebration of individuality, persistence and staying true to YOU!
  - The Magnificent Thing by Ashley Spires: good options for dealing honestly with feelings, while at the same time reassuring children that it's okay to make mistakes.
  - Decibella by Julia Cook: gives children a fun to learn to be better communicators with the importance in using different volumes of their voice in different situations.

- The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig: teaches how small acts of kindness can help children feel included and allow them to flourish.
- Perfectly Norman by Tom Percieval: about embracing and celebrating what makes you unique.
- Clear links to GA Pedagogical Practices. Time was invested to unpack WHY, HOW and WHAT of these practices in our context.
- Link to school theme song for the year 'Shine Your Way' by Owl City and key elements of our theme 'Lights on @GA'

Some sample pages from our key document

An opportunity to shadow students to look, ascertain and view processes from their perspective was begun in 2022. Reflections were recorded and shared: an example is below:

We continued to refine our process for developing student skills. We closed the gap this year by building in reflection on how the classes achieved their goals and teachers linking skill needs within their planning.

Each term we used voice when ideas or problems arose, also to give input into school goals and needs from the students. These were really taken up by all classes as they have class meetings prior and representative came with their class voice on paper, and using technology.

Outcomes: *iKnow Survey* Data Analysis

Based on our analysis of the *iKnow Survey* Data from 2021 and 2022 (see details on the next page), we continue our journey to promote student voice as a way of being at GA in 2023. Strategic action planning allows us to be intentional through connecting direction, building skills and strategies to develop rigour and engagement for student voice at Guardian Angels. Over our journey we have noticed how empowering voice within our community is making a significant difference to driving learning and a community of learners that are striving to contribute actively to make a difference.

2021

Student Perceptions of Oneself in the Learning Process

Students should see themselves as active participants in the learning process. By creating an environment that encourages participation, collaboration, and exploration, teachers have the ability to engage students in meaningful ways.

Question	Total in Agreement
1. I use my imagination in class.	60.4%
2. I feel comfortable asking questions in this class.	42.8%
3. I give up when I do not understand something.	1.1%
4. I share my ideas in this class.	31.6%
5. I learn from my mistakes.	82.7%
6. I ask my teacher for help when I do not understand something.	62.9%
7. I listen to other students' ideas and opinions.	88.8%
8. It helps me learn when I work with other students.	48.8%
9. It is my responsibility to do my best in this class.	93.3%
10. I am bored in this class.	5.6%
11. I am excited to be a student in this class.	81.3%
12. I give my best effort in this class.	86.0%

Student Perceptions of the Course Overall

The course itself should be inspiring and relevant to students. Teachers can engage students by ensuring that course content is interesting and relates to students' everyday lives.

Question	Total in Agreement
13. The work in this class is easy for me.	14.1%
14. Students in this class listen to me.	30.5%
15. We use technology (computers, handheld devices, etc.) to help us learn in this class.	73.7%
16. What I am learning in this class helps me outside of school.	61.0%
17. I learn things that interest me in this class.	54.4%
18. Other students' behaviour in this class makes it hard for me to learn.	24.2%
19. Homework in this class helps me learn.	49.1%

Student Perceptions of the Teacher and Instruction

A teacher's level of engagement in class directly impacts students. By building positive relationships with students, designing lessons that afford students time to process and solve problems, and providing regular feedback to students, teachers can increase student engagement.

Question	Total in Agreement
20. My teacher cares about me.	85.6%
21. My teacher encourages students to work together.	58.1%
22. My teacher learns from students.	48.9%
23. My teacher treats students fairly.	77.5%
24. My teacher makes learning fun.	64.6%
25. My teacher wants me to be successful.	93.7%
26. My teacher encourages me to be creative.	74.4%
27. My teacher listens to my ideas.	73.9%

2022

In 2022, using the *iKnow Survey*, we saw that most areas increased from 2021 data except for questions 4, 10, and 14:

Student Perceptions of Oneself in the Learning Process

Students should see themselves as active participants in the learning process. By creating an environment that encourages participation, collaboration, and exploration, teachers have the ability to engage students in meaningful ways.

Question	Total in Agreement
1. I use my imagination in class.	62.6%
2. I feel comfortable asking questions in this class.	47.5%
3. I give up when I do not understand something.	1.4%
4. I share my ideas in this class.	37.8%
5. I learn from my mistakes.	78.8%
6. I ask my teacher for help when I do not understand something.	63.6%
7. I listen to other students' ideas and opinions.	92.0%
8. It helps me learn when I work with other students.	52.0%
9. It is my responsibility to do my best in this class.	95.4%
10. I am bored in this class.	3.6%
11. I am excited to be a student in this class.	81.4%
12. I give my best effort in this class.	88.2%

Student Perceptions of the Course Overall

The course itself should be inspiring and relevant to students. Teachers can engage students by ensuring that course content is interesting and relates to students' everyday lives.

Question	Total in Agreement
13. The work in this class is easy for me.	9.6%
14. Students in this class listen to me.	39.8%
15. We use technology (computers, handheld devices, etc.) to help us learn in this class.	85.3%
16. What I am learning in this class helps me outside of school.	56.0%
17. I learn things that interest me in this class.	61.4%
18. Other students' behaviour in this class makes it hard for me to learn.	30.6%
19. Homework in this class helps me learn.	55.9%

Student Perceptions of the Teacher and Instruction

A teacher's level of engagement in class directly impacts students. By building positive relationships with students, designing lessons that afford students time to process and solve problems, and providing regular feedback to students, teachers can increase student engagement.

Question	Total in Agreement
20. My teacher cares about me.	92.1%
21. My teacher encourages students to work together.	67.6%
22. My teacher learns from students.	55.4%
23. My teacher treats students fairly.	88.2%
24. My teacher makes learning fun.	68.9%
25. My teacher wants me to be successful.	96.9%
26. My teacher encourages me to be creative.	80.0%
27. My teacher listens to my ideas.	87.2%

Danielle Carter
Principal, Guardian Angels Catholic Primary School

Contact: dmcarter@bne.catholic.edu.au

Primary School Students Advise on Teacher Training
The Learning Partnerships Program

Maree Moore and Tania Rivett

Students at a Melbourne primary school are helping to train new teachers by providing information about what to do in classes and around the school. After all, they say, who knows better than students about what works and what doesn't?

These students' voices – and the ways in which they are shaping teaching – are part of the Learning Partnerships program at The University of Melbourne. Previous articles in Connect (#154-155, August-October 2005; and #162, December 2006) outlined this program, and provided some examples of how this was transforming curriculum within a secondary school. The work at St Margaret Mary's Primary School builds on this and continues the approach through a partnership within a primary school.

St Margaret Mary's is a co-educational Catholic primary school in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs, with a large component of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The school was introduced to the project in 2007 and continued their collaboration in 2008, with 42 students from Grades 3 and 4 involved in 2008. (Similar approaches were used in each year, but the student drawings are from the 2008 group.)

The **Learning Partnerships** program uses strong drama components to role-play situations facing students and teachers and, together, to explore possible solutions. Using these scenarios as a basis, the school students provide advice to trainee teachers about what makes an effective teacher and discuss how best to react in certain situations. For example, they have said that getting angry or yelling at students is high on the list of what to avoid, whereas listening, being fair and remaining calm are seen as better ways to respond in challenging situations. It should be noted that these students' involvement with such drama approaches prior to the project had been minimal.

How we (teachers) got involved

We are the teaching staff and facilitators of the program. Maree is a very experienced teacher with vast experience with all age groups and literacy backgrounds while Tania was, in 2008, a graduate classroom teacher with a major in Teaching Primary Drama. The other member of this team is Bern Murphy from the University.

Bern initially approached the Student Wellbeing Coordinator at the school and outlined a possible collaboration between us and the University. We were invited to a professional development day that gave more information about the project and, after attending this, the teaching staff committed to the project. As facilitators, we attended two further professional

IDEAS FOR NEW TEACHERS
3/4 M
SAINT MARGARET MARYS' PRIMARY SCHOOL BRUNSWICK NORTH
2ND-MAY-2008

development days for teachers from the several schools that were in the program. These days involved our introduction to and participation in a range of drama, literacy, problem solving, and team building activities, which also explored social issues

that are frequently confronted by students – and teachers – at school. These workshops were presented in a way that was very accessible for teachers without prior drama experience. The activities discussed were practical and, as we discovered when we started using them within our classrooms, could be easily adapted for a wide variety of ages and learning experiences.

Teacher resources were provided; these included support literature and possible frameworks for our workshops with trainee teachers (in a subject initially called *Education Policy, Schools and Society – EPSS –* then *Social and Professional Contexts – SPC*). These resources prepared us for what could have been daunting sessions for both us and for our students. They also laid the basis for on-going support through phone and e-mail contact throughout the term. As our University contact person, Bern was available to come into the school, chat with our children, outline the program at staff curriculum meetings and support us in any area of need.

How the students got involved

When we initially outlined the project to the children, we told them that they were going to have an opportunity to teach student teachers. In our classrooms, we started to discuss what teachers do, and work on some of the activities that would be used during our visits to Melbourne University. These fuelled their interest and, even at this early stage, their enthusiasm was high.

We implemented strategies that were provided at the PD that best suited our children; we selected topics for investigation that were age appropriate and relevant to our children and curriculum. The activities were used as tools for learning in a similar way to the ways in which we used the *Six Thinking Hats* earlier in the year. We found these techniques created a safe, supportive and challenging learning environment to explore many areas of our Religious Education (RE) and Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) program. These strategies for teaching and learning were most beneficial in curriculum areas such as maths, literacy and RE, as they involved a high level of inquiry learning.

The children also found these learning experiences exciting as they were novel and inclusive of all levels of understanding. This resulted in them producing high quality work – often far beyond the standard of work they had achieved with more conventional methods earlier in the year.

At the University

The core of the program was the sessions with the beginning teachers at the University, in which drama was used to explore and discuss situations facing both students and teachers within schools. Groups were led through techniques and subsequent discussions, where student, teacher and beginning teacher perspectives were valued.

Throughout the program, the children worked in group situations only, as a strategy to support confidence and learning. At no stage was any child (or adult) forced to perform or improvise individually in front of an audience. The mixed age and ability groups provided effective scaffolding for all involved in a variety of ways. A fundamental part of our preparation with the students involved developing a clear understanding of the importance of anonymity when discussion or reporting on the characters within their dramatisations. Specifically, children were directed not to refer to others by name on any occasion, and this was re-inforced throughout the year.

Sid
Do not be strict all the time because the children ⬛ might cry.

Ruby
Don't give too much hard work at once, because maybe they can't do it, and then they can't and start to anything at all. would feel to think that they

TONY

Let us have more time to work

~Advice for the teachers~

Do not give the Children too hard work or else they will get stuck.

Here are examples of two days with the trainee teachers. In the first session, we organised activities that facilitated the two groups getting to know each other, so we used 'meet and greet' strategies such as developing unique greeting actions or words, and mingling within the group The primary school students were armed with questions for the teachers that involved simple interviewing skills in search of basic information. They decided that asking the student teachers why it is that they wanted to be teachers in the first place would be the best starting point. The most effective way to do this was through paired sharing, and then moving around in a rotation, so that the primary students could briefly interview a number of student teachers and gather a range of responses. Digging deeper and asking why the teachers had chosen secondary and not primary teaching for their future, really made the university students think about their responses and made the task of the primary school students much easier. The activity leaders provided short but structured questions, and this allowed all students to feel competent with this activity.

This was a purposeful and effective use of our time, and one that established a safe environment, so that everyone could remain in their comfort zone. This was particularly important so that both our students and the trainee teachers could develop relationships that could be built on in future meetings.

In the second session, the foundations that were built during our first session led to more in-depth questioning and sharing. We found that having this second session was valuable in terms of the relationship between the two groups of students – as both our students and the trainee teachers were more relaxed in each other's presence. The primary students welcomed the fact that teachers remembered their names and they commented on feeling 'equal' to the student teachers. This allowed the students to feel comfortable in contributing to the group activities and involvement in role-play. In this session, students were invited to think about how

teachers maintain harmony within a classsroom, and what strategies are useful in preventing or dealing with misbehaviour. This was done through mixed groups developing a small role-play, followed by discussion of what was happening in the scenario and how things could be made easier. Another version of this was to ask students to put together a 'freeze frame' of both 'good' and 'bad' examples of what teachers do. The rest of the class were then invited to guess what was going on in the scenario. The benefit of this method is that students from all levels of abilities and confidence can readily participate.

Learning Partnerships in the curriculum

As classroom teachers, we initially questioned how we could include the Learning Partnerships program in our increasingly crowded curriculum. It soon became
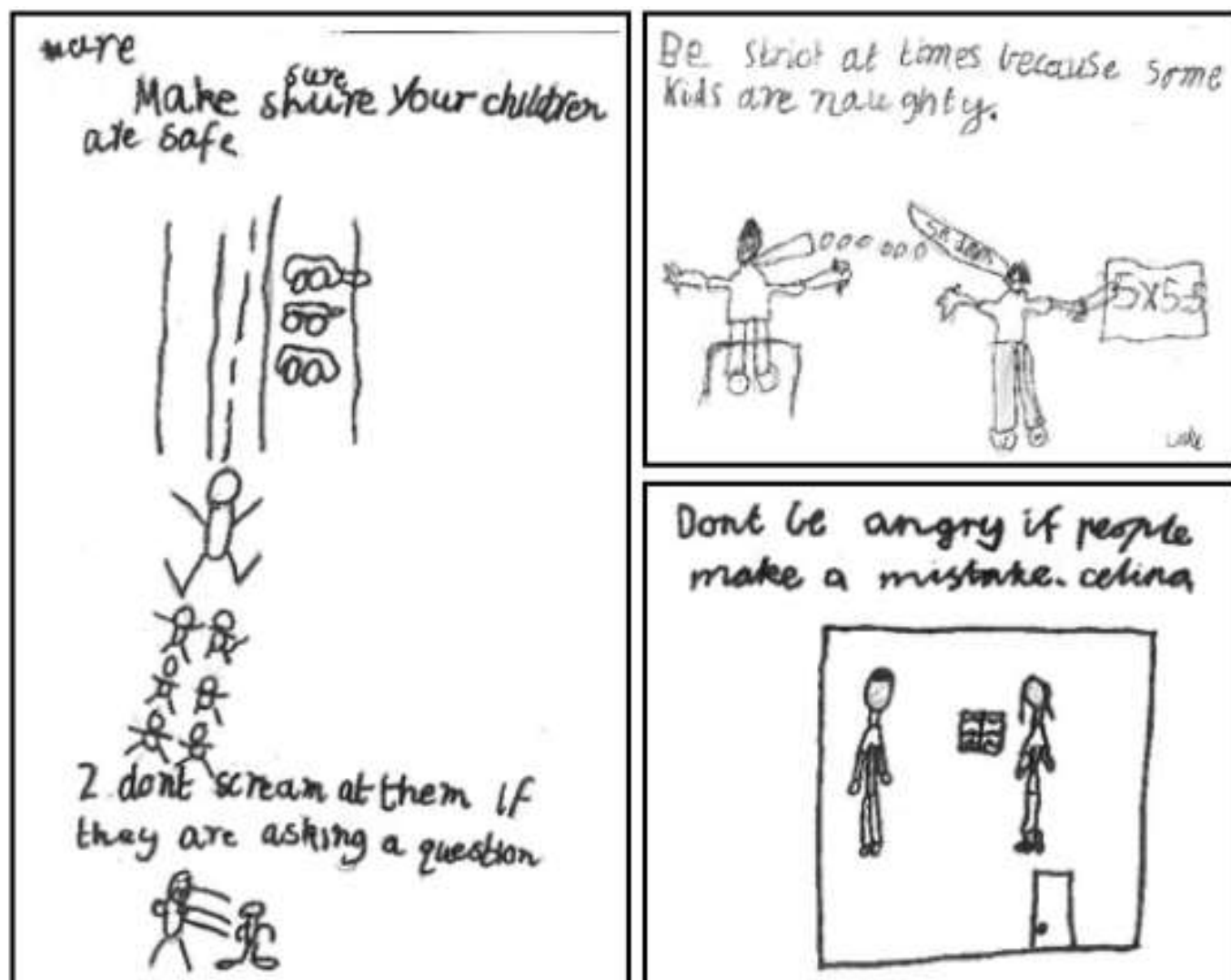
apparent to us that using this program as part of our pedagogy enabled us to explore and assess many aspects of our curriculum simultaneously. It was therefore not an 'extra' that added to our load, but a valuable investment of both teachers' and students' time.

We found that, when using the Learning Partnerships techniques, a revealing moment of the project for us was when a student who rarely contributes to any form of class discussion participated at a much higher level. In this case, this child's ability to demonstrate knowledge in the areas of literacy was not dictated by his ability to write. This allowed an assessment that was truly indicative of his understanding of text and other subject material.

For example, we used the technique of inviting students to become the conscience of another person when solving a dilemma. This technique, known as a 'hot seat', could be used in a range of situations and could involve the whole class by asking them to construct the possible thoughts of a person in a given dilemma or events that have happened in history. We found this strategy helped students to develop an understanding of a particular issue and move towards a deeper level of analysis.
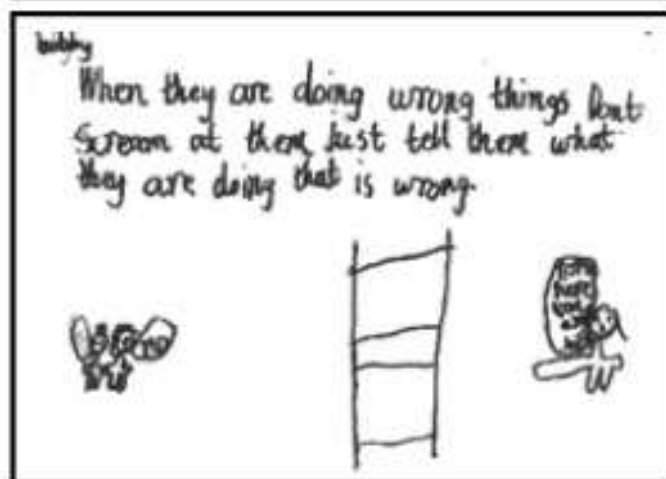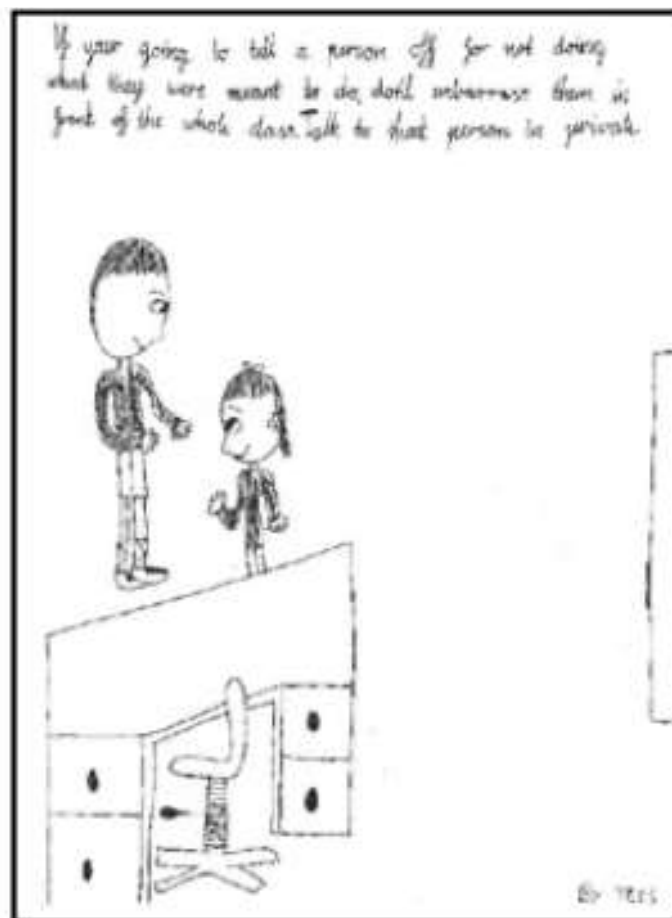
Another student had displayed limited language and social skills throughout the year and this frequently resulted in him being frustrated and not contributing to class discussions. Although he was, at times, reluctant to involve himself speaking in role throughout the dramatic activities, he was observed actively listening and involving himself in mime.

This level of participation and engagement was far beyond his previous input.

Formalising the advice

Following the involvement at the University, we suggested to the students that they might like to present their advice to new teachers in some way. They had seen the cartoons that some students at a secondary school had developed, and were excited about the possibilities for 'speaking' to new teachers in this way.

So we began by discussing with them what we had learnt – and what we had to say to new teachers. The students then worked in groups, dividing up the topics they wished to comment on. These cartoons are what they produced over a couple of sessions. Students at the primary level have well developed opinions and can offer sound advice on what

If your going to tell a person off for not doing what they were meant to do, don't embarrass them in front of the whole class. Talk to that person in private.

By Tess

••• Advice •••

Make sure the kids have fun but keep the class in control.

By Sophie

Mix fun with work because students will get bored

Dion

When they are doing wrong things don't scream at them just tell them what they are doing that is wrong.

works for them at an individual level in relation to effective teachers. They are able to dig much deeper than simply requiring that a teacher be someone who they 'liked'. The notion of the importance of a teacher **knowing** all of their students' needs, responding **fairly** in any situation and making sure the classroom is a place where kids feel **comfortable** so they can learn – were things that the students wanted to communicate to student teachers.

Outcomes

There have been many outcomes for our students. Most noticeable is the change in many of our students in confidence and ability to read in front of an audience. This has been most obvious in one student who was able to read at a class Mass at the end of the year – something that would have previously been impossible.

We have also seen that some of our children get very little opportunity to interact with adults other than their parents and teachers, and so we have found this program most valuable in developing their skills to engage with a wider circle of adults.

We have received only very positive feedback from our school community – students, parents and other teachers – about our undertaking of this project. And

Don't be a child's best friend because they have their own friends

Ashleigh

Give your children challenging work. Because they dont want work that is too easy for them.

9X9

By Frankie

MIX FUN IN LEARNING SO CHILDREN CAN HAVE FUN AND STILL LEARN!

BY CHRISTINE

Teachers must give children enough time to finish their work because if you don't they will have tonnes of work to finish

Lachlan

we believe that our students have produced some invaluable advice for teachers – that would otherwise not have been heard!

Maree Moore and Tania Rivett

For further information, contact:

Bern Murphy: bemurphy@unimelb.edu.au

These cartoons were developed in 2008 by students from St Margaret Mary's School, Brunswick North as a book for beginning teachers. This work supports the **Learning Partnerships Project** between The University of Melbourne and participating schools. In the Learning Partnerships project students assist teachers and doctors to develop their professional skills by participating in workshops with them and developing learning materials for them. This builds on the notion that to learn with and from young people is different from simply learning about them.

For more information about the **Learning Partnerships Project**, contact **Helen Cahill** (h.cahill@unimelb.edu.au) or **Bern Murphy** (bemurphy@unimelb.edu.au) at the Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.

Student Research and Action on Engagement Continues

**switched on
switched off**

As has been reported in previous issues of Connect (#168, December 2007; #172, August 2008), students at two Melbourne primary schools - Preston South PS and Penders Grove PS, and supported by the CASS Foundation – have been leading their school community in Student Action Teams around 'engagement with school'. In 2007, the students began by developing ideas about engagement, inventing models and insruments to 'measure' engagement and carrying out research about how engagement was influenced by what went on at school.

In the second report, the two schools reported on how they had worked individually and together around student-led approaches to investigating and acting on issues affecting engagement with school. The SAT at Preston South Primary School had led Grade 4 to 6 students through discussions and decisions about possible initiatives that would increase engagement, and had decided on student-led excursions as their primary strategy. This was to be developed, conducted and evaluated in Term 3.

At Penders Grove Primary School, the students had developed a theory that 'the more you know about engagement, the more you will be engaged'. To test this, they had conducted educational campaigns across the school community, and were set to evaluate their effectiveness before deciding on further action.

This report picks up from that mid-year report and outlines subsequent action at each school in these areas.

Penders Grove PS

During Term 2 2008, the Switched On/Switched Off Team at Pender's Grove Primary developed and conducted an Education Campaign with three foci: signage in the form of A-frames at the front of the school over several weeks; a Year 4-6 Engagement Treasure Hunt; and engagement workshops with individual classes. The SAT collected pre- and post-campaign data through a survey of students.

From the data collected in Term 2, the team isolated eight possible activities that they might now focus on. The SAT surveyed students in 3-4J, 5-6C and 5-6J, and three key areas emerged as possibilities for the rest of the year: the introduction of a Switched On/Switched Off Peer Engagement Award; the opening and planning of activities in the indigenous garden; and the planning of student-run excursions.

Action This Semester

1.   Data from the Education Campaign

During Term 3, students explored and interpreted the results gathered over the education campaign. This data was gathered from an online pre- and post-campaign survey written by students in the SAT and completed by all students in Years 4-6. The primary focus of the Education Campaign was to educate students on what engagement was with the belief that understanding and awareness of engagement empowered students to be more engaged.
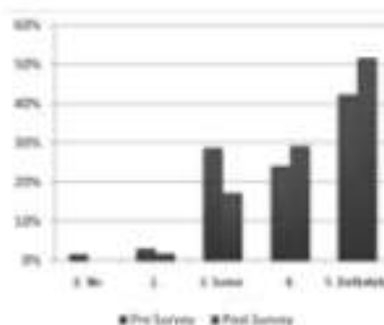

Figure 1 Compares pre and post survey responses to the question 'Do You Think Engagement is Important?'

Pre- and post-campaign survey responses to the question 'Do you think engagement is important?' show clear movement of students toward a greater understanding of engagement by the end of the engagement campaign.

In response to the major purpose of the Engagement Campaign, students in the post-campaign survey were asked if they agreed with the statement: 'Knowing more about engagement has helped me switch on more in learning'. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the overwhelming percentage of students agreed with the statement. The SAT recognised the significance of these results and used this information to shape their action in Term 4.
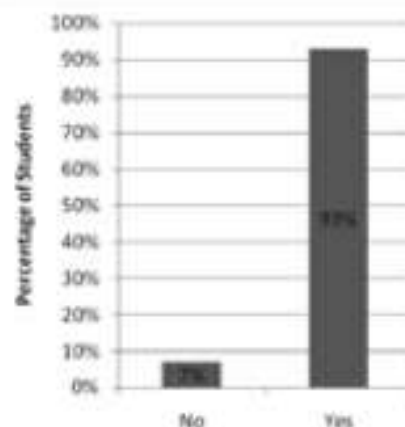

Figure 2 Students were asked if they agreed to the post survey statement 'Knowing more about engagement has helped me switch on more in learning'.

Students were surprised at the extent to which their peers agreed with their thesis that an understanding of engagement empowers students to take control of their engagement levels.

As we'll see later, the students are now exploring whether such engagement in activities carries over into classroom learning.

2.   Primary Action Focus

Using the data that was collected from the Education Campaign, the SAT refined a list of eight possible actions that students had suggested as ways to promote engagement at school. The SAT members then surveyed their classmates and identified three major foci for Term 4.

A Student Planned and Organised Excursion

Many of the students were excited about hearing of the actions of the Preston South SAT to plan and conduct their own excursion. This proved very popular among students at Pender's Grove but, after defining some of the characteristics of an effective excursion, the SAT decided to postpone any action until next year. It was thought that a more considered and timely approach would ensure a more effective excursion.

Fortnightly Whole School Student Engagement Awards

Students continued with their new understandings arising from the Education Campaign: that knowing more about engagement enables students to make decisions that make them more engaged. A Whole School reward system was not only a favoured option by students in Year 4-6 but was a logical step to raise engagement across the whole school.

> "It's been great in our class. We're having some great conversations about engagement and what it is."
>
> 1/2 Teacher

Students from Prep to Year 6 gathered three times over Term 4 during lunchtimes to bend wire, join connectors and create a simple light circuit controlled by a switch – to build engagement awards: a small 'engagement box' that symbolises being 'switched on'.

Members of the SAT then developed a process for peer nomination of students for engagement awards. They visited classes and explained the voting process for the awards. Students in the P/1 classes were invited to draw a picture of what engagement looked like, while the older students were invited to describe the characteristics and attitudes of the engaged student they were nominating. The SAT members collected the ballot papers and tallied the votes, read the comments and decided on a worthy person. It was interesting to note that the student who had received the most votes was not always the student who received the award. In some case the tally of votes was close and what determined the winner was the quality of the descriptive comments.

These Engagement Awards were presented to students by the SAT during whole school assemblies. During the presentation, it was clear that the whole assembly was strongly engaged. Members of the SAT had rehearsed their roles and speeches prior to the assembly. The behaviours and attitudes students had recorded on the nomination form

were read to the assembly, and the certificates also record these comments. The award recipients, along with their behaviours described by their peers, were published in the School Newsletter.

Staff have since decided not to continue with the regular weekly 'Student of the Week' Awards in favour of these student-led Engagement Awards.
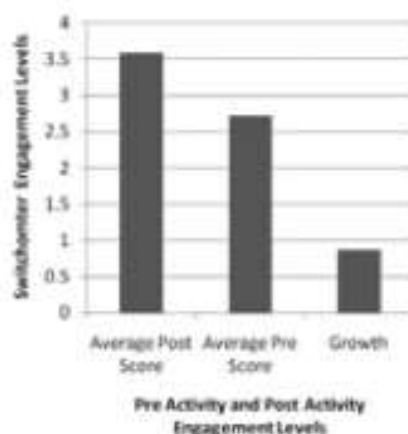
Opening of the Indigenous Garden and Activities

Students in Years 4-6 suggested that opening the Indigenous Garden would improve engagement. Over four weeks, three times each week, the SAT team opened the garden during lunchtime and organised activities including pot painting, weaving and mask making. Students from the SAT rostered themselves on to help conduct the activities and to collect a pre and post engagement rating (using the Switchometer).

With the frequency of activity in the Indigenous Garden, many students have entered the garden during planned activities and been using the garden as a retreat or simple quiet place.

The data derived from pre and post interviews has again shown students claim that these activities increase their engagement at school at lunchtime. The SAT recognised

Engagement Levels at the Indigenous Garden

Pre Activity and Post Activity Engagement Levels

that this data may reflect the immediate enjoyment of the event rather than record any improvement in engagement in learning back in the classroom, and therefore students followed up the initial visit to the garden with specific interviews with two students from each class. Their focus question was: 'Has your participation in the Indigenous Garden activities improved your engagement in the classroom?' This data is still being collected as this report is being collated.

Roger is a member of the Switched On/ Switched Off Team. He had been disruptive in class and uninterested in the discussions of the Action Team over the past few weeks. I took him to the local electronics shop to purchase the necessary equipment to build the Engagement Awards. That lunchtime fifteen students, including Roger, gathered in a spare room and began constructing these simple circuits.

Two days later, before school, he bounced up to me and said "Wanna see what I made Jeff?" He pulled out of his pocket his own switch. "I went down to the shops last night with mum and she bought me the battery and wires and stuff," he proudly announced. We, and later the class, agreed that this was the action of a student 'chasing learning', a student at Level 4 on the Switchometer.

A week later his classmates recognised the difference in his behaviour and attitude. They awarded him with their vote for a Whole School Engagement Award.

Engagement Award Nomination Form

Name

Class

This student has been really engaged because they —

switched on
switched off

Jeff Jackson
Switched On Switched Off School Coordinator
Penders Grove Primary School

Preston South PS

In the first half of 2008 the SAT at Preston South PS decided that the most effective method of engaging students would be through excursions that are planned and led by students. This was decided through brainstorming and then listing ten possibilities. The SAT then surveyed the upper grades (3-6) in the school. The 'action' chosen was to have an excursion where students had input into where they would go and what they would do on their excursion as well as having an active role in the day.

In planning the excursion, the SAT was driven by the idea: **Kids know kids best!**

Action

Students made a list of the requirements for a successful excursion. This list included things such as it being educational and having choices throughout the day. For example, if they saw a park they wanted to play in, they wanted to be able to stop and play there.

A key aspect of the excursion was the lunch break. The SAT decided that they should have a variety of activities available. We managed to have Angela Foley, a member of the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC), available to teach grass weaving, while others chose to play in the adventure playground and some walked and took water samples. This was very effective in engaging all students in this part of the day.

Also on the day, students viewed an Iranian (subtitled) film at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in the Federation Square precinct as well as going on a walking tour around the MCG.

The excursion has now been followed up by an excursion to Merri Creek (Dights Falls) and Trinwarren Tambour in Parkville. This excursion was funded by the MCMC and students had input into the sites they would visit and the activities they would participate in.

This excursion fitted in with a number of the elements that the SAT had identified as being important to improve student engagement in school: science, learning outside, working in the community, having new experiences – as well as student input into excursion organisation.

Data Collection

The data collected throughout the day of the SAT excursion to the city used the process of a pulse reading (engagement level) at specific points in the day. In addition, students designed an activity sheet, which all students filled in at two points throughout the day, and the SAT provided comments about their experiences of the day and their analysis of data collected from the pulse readings.

Collecting data on the day

Each student on the excursion had a pulse reading sheet and they had been trained by the SAT – prior to the excursion – how to use this tool. They also had a very simple activity sheet.

Post excursion

In the first SAT meeting after the excursion, students from the team were asked to do a 'Walk and Talk'. This is a short 3-5 minute activity where students choose a partner and walk and talk about a specific topic or question. During this time I provided post it notes for students to record their ideas about what they talked about. They were asked to do a PMI, where they come up with one plus or positive (P) thing about the excursion, one minus (M) thing and one interesting (I) thing.

The following list shows their ideas.

Plus/Positive	Minus/Negative	Interesting
Students' ideas were really good. Eg different activities at lunch time.	We couldn't do every idea on the excursion. Eg we couldn't do a tour of the MCG.	Everyone on the excursion had at least 1 new experience.
Went to different places.	Too much walking.	Went to the MCG.
Helping out with the group. Organising stuff. It was fun.	It was frustrating organising the activity sheets and putting them in order.	
Water testing.	Tram + MCG.	Movie.
Went to the city.	We didn't go in the MCG.	The movie.
It was cool making it (the excursion).	I didn't go.	
Planned by us!	Grass weaving.	Walking.
We saw a movie.	Squishy transport.	Movie in a foreign language.
Went to different places.	Too much walking.	Went to the MCG.
It was fun.	Walking.	We walked around the MCG.
It was fun. It was planned by us. Fun and interesting activities.	Too much walking. We only got 1 trick photograph.	Grass weaving. Movie in a different language.
We saw the movie and played in the park.	I wanted it to be longer.	The movie.
When all the kids were playing on the park in Birrarungmarr. When we went inside the MCG.	Not many people went to do the water sampling with Mr Ross. We didn't do everything and being tired at the end of the day.	We did weaving with Angela and it was fun.

This data is still being analysed by the SAT.

Passing it on

The success of the SAT approach is in students' realisation that what they are doing and learning can be passed on and used by other teachers and students to make school more engaging.

When our SAT discussed engagement strategies in terms of their excursion to the city, there was at least one voice in the team that expressed disappointment about sharing the process:

"But we had to work this out all by ourselves! If we tell them how to do it then we've done all the work!"

To some extent, this student was identifying that the process of discussion, research and decision-making about

student-led excursions was the important aspect in relation to engagement – not the excursion itself.

The team discussed how they could pass on what we had done and learnt in such a way as to not give the answers, but rather give others the ability to find their own answers. It was decided that a Do and Don't list for planning an excursion could be created. By creating this list, anyone using it would still have to plan things in their own way but they would have a guide to work from that would enable them to create an excursion that is an expression of their own class and their studies. This list is transferable to any class in any setting. A copy of this list has been tabled.

Where to next?

Having had a successful 'action phase' of the project at Preston South, the question is: where to next? There must be consideration given to what we have learnt this year; we must continue to act on these learnings to increase student engagement in school and learning.

From a project point of view we will be looking at ways in which we can communicate what we have learnt to others. Action will include the distribution of our Do and Don't list for planning an excursion as well as explaining our learning to other students and adults through texts and verbal presentations.

In 2009, the SAT will be constructing a guide, complete with illustrations, images and cartoons accompanied by written text explaining their ideas about student engagement. The learnings of students within the SAT provide a knowledge bank from which students can reflect on what they know about the factors affecting engagement and the solutions, actions and measures that can be taken to counteract negative factors.

Students will be creating an artefact which is accessible to people of all ages, while engaging in a medium (art) that they have already identified as 'engaging'.

In terms of 'passing on' the process we have followed, the students will also be working to organise and reflect on the process they have used so that this too can be passed on to other interested parties.

Sam Ross
Engagement School Coordinator
Preston South Primary School

Contacts:
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saminlondon@cheerful.com

Reflections

For me, the discoveries of this year – from the 'action phase' – have been numerous and varied:

√ "Kids know kids best!"

√ Students become engaged when they are consulted and involved in decision-making processes.

√ Students have creative ideas about how to get themselves and their peers 'switched on'.

√ Students can articulate their thoughts in various ways that they find engaging.

√ When given the opportunity, students engage in solutions to issues that affect them.

√ Student planned excursions are engaging.

√ Positive play at recess and lunchtimes helps engage students socially.

√ Certain subject areas are more engaging than others.

√ Tasks and activities can be challenging yet engaging.

√ Fun doesn't mean engaging.

√ Positive adult role-models support student engagement.

Teacher Learnings

There are two key learnings that I have taken from working with the SAT on the issue of student engagement. These relate to teacher practice and the use of a SAT approach in tackling issues.

In terms of practice there are many aspects of what the SAT outlined for planning an excursion that translate directly to classroom practice. These include things such as;

√ Giving students choices.

√ Providing new experiences.

√ Considering what students know.

√ Letting kids talk.

√ Providing variety.

The list goes on! If you look at the students' Do and Don't list for planning an excursion, almost all of it transfers to classroom practice.

Listening to students' ideas about this has effectively taken the mystery out of how to make school more engaging from a planning perspective. There are certainly other factors that affect student engagement such as coming to school with or without having eaten breakfast, peer pressure, social issues and personal relationships with teachers, but students from the SAT have been very clear about what they believe teachers should be thinking about when planning.

This learning is not necessarily new but it certainly is powerful in confirming many of these ideas that are incorporated in teacher training, literature and conversation within the profession.

The other key area of learning for teachers is the effectiveness, usefulness and power of using a SAT to solve issues within a school setting. This is summed up beautifully by the quote at the beginning of this report, which has become a slogan for our SAT: "Kids know kids best!"

Students have come to see that their opinions, ideas and work are valued and have produced their best work when it has been purposeful and relevant. The composition of the team in terms of ability, age, knowledge and skills has been important. Regular meetings, making it real (not tokenistic), listening and taking action have made it effective.

Sam Ross

Inter-school Student Forum

At the end of 2008, a second inter-school Student Forum was held at Penders Grove Primary School. The Forum enabled each of the Student Action Teams to report to the other about their year's work – with particular emphasis on actions in the second half of the year.

In planning their presentations, students decided that they didn't simply want to talk about what they had done, but wanted to allow others to experience the activities: they noted that this would be more engaging. Therefore, the Forum also included time for students to lead other students (and teachers and visitors) through some of practical hands-on activities they have been conducting at their schools. Below are some of the images from these activities (courtesy Jeff Jackson):

And in 2009...

This project will continue in 2009 with the support of the CASS Foundation, with a focus on student dissemination of learnings.

The **CASS Foundation** is a small private foundation that provides grants for medical and scientific research and education projects. In 2004, the Foundation commissioned researchers at Monash University to conduct a review about student engagement. Their report: ***Student disengagement from primary schooling: a review of research and practice***, led the Foundation to provide funding in 2007 for seven projects in Victorian primary schools designed to improve student engagement.

For further information about the CASS Foundation, or to read or download a copy of the Monash report, please visit the CASS website: **www.cassfoundation.org**

Student Action Teams:

Implementing Productive Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms

Student Action Teams - teams of students who, as part of their school curriculum, adopt a community issue that they care passionately about, research it, decide what needs to be changed or improved and take action to achieve that.

In this book (April 2006) primary and secondary schools in Melbourne's northern suburbs tell how to establish and implement **Student Action Teams**. They describe their students' work researching and acting around *traffic safety* and the *environment* and reflect on what they have learnt: the basic principles of **Student Action Teams**, their practical operation, and the stories of successful approaches and outcomes in two projects. The principles and approaches outlined here can be used to guide developments in any school - acting alone or in a cluster. Includes sample worksheets and proformas.

Order NOW from **Connect**: $33 or $27.50 for **Connect** subscribers.

WHAT'S HAPPENING? ACSV ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES SEMINAR

In 2019 there was a major international Conference around Student Voice, Agency and Participation in Melbourne.

Four years on from this face-to-face event:

- What has changed?
- What is the current 'state of play' for Student Voice?
- How are these ideas embedded in school plans and practices - beyond the rhetoric?

If you are a teacher, school student, school leader, academic, policy worker or member of a support organisation and if you are active in the area of Student Voice, Agency and Participation, this seminar is essential for you.

It will be an opportunity to hear from a variety of stakeholders across the lines that often divide us. It will be a chance to discuss crucial issues with those in schools, communities, and the broader education system.

This seminar will challenge you and inspire you as you explore innovative and practical solutions and strategies.

It will help us to plan for initiatives in 2024 and beyond, ensuring that we are equipped to make an impact in Australia's education space

Register here
Wednesday, 11 October 2023
9:30 am – 12:30 pm
Community Hub @ The Dock, Melbourne

VICSRC CONGRESS 2023

Congress is VicSRC's flagship student-led experience which brings together secondary students from across Victoria to unpack ideas and solve issues in the education system. The top ideas, as voted by students, become the focus of VicSRC's advocacy for the next 12 months, spearheaded by the VicSRC Student Executive Advisory Committee.

Ticket price includes:
- Lunch
- Congress tshirt
- Showbag, including a Congress Keep Cup

Register for tickets here
Discounted tickets available for VicSRC Partner Schools and Student Community members until midnight July 2 - check your email for your code or sign up now as a Student Community member or Partner School to get access.

Fri 8th Sep 2023
8:30 am - 4:00 pm AEST
Wurun Senior Campus
111 Queens Parade, Fitzroy North
VIC 3068, Australia

SOCIAL AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Global Citizenship Education: Student voices, school aims and practices

Wed 16 August 2023
7:30-8:30 AEST
Online
Registration link

Global citizenship, a complex concept, continues to feature prominently in global education policy to prepare young people for visions of future societies.

In this webinar, Dr Caroline Ferguson will discuss her research which foregrounds student voice, exploring how global citizenship education manifests in the lived experience of secondary students in international schools in Finland, Australia and The Netherlands.

In looking at these findings alongside teacher perspectives plus analysis of school aims in mission statements and self-representational texts, suggestions will be discussed for building upon young peoples' global consciousness to nurture exploration of their full humanity as valued active agents.

This is a free event and is suitable to anyone working with school students regarding student voice, civic and citizenship and student representative councils.

The Voice Referendum and Schools: What teachers need to know

Wed 27 September 2023
5-7pm AEST
In person: University of Technology Sydney
Online (Simulcast)

Registration for in person event (UTS Sydney)
Registration for online event

The Voice referendum presents an opportunity to teach students about:

- Democracy and democratic representation
- Referendums and the Australian constitution
- The responsibility of citizens to vote

This event will focus on effective teaching strategies that will empower teachers to invite students to have robust, respectful and constructive explorations and discussions of the referendum.

The event will be held in person at the University of Technology Sydney (limited seating) and simulcast online via Zoom.

Global citizenship education:
Student voices, school aims and practices

A free webinar featuring Dr Caroline Ferguson

Wednesday 16 August 2023
7:30-8:30pm AEST
Zoom

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Social and Citizenship Education
Association of Australia
SCEAA

Save your spot now on Eventbrite!

Curriculum, Community, and Beyond:
Future Directions in Citizenship Education Conference
5-7 October 2023, Canberra

Call for papers!
Submit by clicking here

THE VOICE REFERENDUM

THE VOICE REFERENDUM AND SCHOOLS:

WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW

27 SEPT

5-7pm AEST

University of Technology Sydney + Zoom

The Voice referendum presents an opportunity to teach students about:
- democracy and democratic representation
- referendums and the Australian constitution
- the responsibility of citizens to vote

This event will focus on effective teaching strategies that will empower teachers to invite students to have robust, respectful and constructive explorations and discussions of the referendum.

Register now: In person attendance

Online/Zoom attendance

Curriculum, Community, and Beyond:
Future Directions in Citizenship Education Conference
5-7 October 2023, Canberra

SAVE THE DATE!

EDUCATION EQUITY ALLIANCE

The Education Equity Alliance has been established by a group of students, teachers and school/system leaders passionate about achieving a more equitable education system. They recognise the need for urgent change and believe it is critical that students and teachers are empowered to be partners in this, which they tested through a successful pilot in May 2023 (more info here).

Our current priority is getting even more students and teachers involved in both understanding education equity and identifying priorities for change. You can find more information and register for these workshops here. And if you have any questions at all please contact us at hello@equityalliance.com.au

Student Agency for Education Equity

Education Equity Alliance – Student Workshops

Do you want to deepen your students' understanding of education equity, including their own experiences and those of their peers?

Do you want to create a space where you and your students can discuss education equity in a productive and supportive manner?

Do you want to enable students to exercise agency to improve education equity?

Register HERE. Or for more information contact hello@equityalliance.com.au

Who?
- Facilitated by an Equity Alliance team member (past/current teacher or school leader)
- Co-facilitated by a **school staff member** - organise sessions, supervise group
- A relevant **student group (Year 7-12)**. Different schools have implemented in different ways:
  - As leadership development for their SRC/student leaders
  - As a curriculum activity for a particular class
  - As a tiered intervention for at-risk students

What?
- Two x one-hour workshops
- Ideally held over consecutive weeks
- Aligned to Victorian Curriculum: Personal and Social Capability
- First workshop covers:
  - Analysis of contributors and barriers to success in education
  - Analysis of key definitions and data of education equity
  - Reflection on case studies of individual experiences of eduction equity
- Second workshop covers:
  - Collaborating to identify/design initiatives and strategies that would improve equity
  - Introduction to agency and activism for system change

Why?
The evidence base for student agency activities, including those focused on education inequity, demonstrates their potential to:
- Improve student wellbeing
- Improve student belonging
- Improve resilience

This has been found to be especially the case for students who have experienced significant inequity. See our website for further information.

What then?
Following the workshops, students will be invited to:
- Submit their ideas for reform to the Education Equity Alliance
- Collaborate with teachers and system stakeholders in a Social Lab to pursue education reform
- Join the Alliance's student community and/or student leadership group

What participating students have been saying...

'We got to talk about things that go unsaid'

'We were able to say what we think and be heard'

'I enjoyed the group discussions and hearing what other students think. This helped me expand my own thinking'.

'100% of student participants believe all students should be learning about how equitable our education system is'.

NEXT ISSUE

UPCOMING ISSUES

The **third issue** of *ReConnectEd* 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.**

2024 themes will be released In the next issue, however, we are always open to submissions for future issues.

If you would like to contribute an article to the next edition or future editions, email **reconnected@studentvoice.org.au**

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