

STUDENT COUNCILS AND BEYOND

Students as Effective Participants
in Educational Decision-Making

Articles from *Connect* 1990-2005

Compiled by Roger Holdsworth
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Credits and acknowledgements

These articles are collected and reprinted from issues of **Connect**, in most cases from between 1990 and 2005. They have been written by teachers and students in primary and secondary schools throughout Australia.

Many of the approaches and programs described here continue to exist and flourish, but others have changed or vanished, as those involved have reflected on and learned from their experiences, or have simply moved on to other schools or interests.

Connect

Connect is a small magazine dedicated to sharing practical information about active student participation in Australian primary and secondary schools. It has been published bi-monthly since late 1979.

Connect started as an attempt to consolidate and share practical information about some curriculum initiatives in which I was involved in the late 1970s: cross-age tutoring programs, student-produced community media, alternative and community schools and so on.

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At the end of each article I have included information about the original date of publication of that account, so you might both chase up the original issue, and also judge how current the account is. If you are interested to follow up stories with the writer, some information from the original publication in **Connect** has been included, but this should be used with caution for the above reasons.

Rapidly other teachers and students involved with similar or different initiatives began writing about and sharing their own experiences and resources, and **Connect** continued and grew.

Connect has maintained a commitment to three main ideas:

- the documentation of and support for the active participation of primary and secondary school students in decision-making and action about and in their education;

Resources and worksheets may be reproduced for non-commercial use within schools to extend, develop and improve practices, provided the author/s and source are acknowledged.

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The commitment of all these writers to documenting their practices and to sharing that with others is highly appreciated. I remain constantly in awe of the dedication, initiative and innovation of students and teachers throughout Australia. This book would, of course, not exist without their everyday work, thought and commitment.

Roger Holdsworth

- reflection on and sharing of practices in order to make these more effective and widespread;
- the development and sharing of practical resources to support, challenge and extend practices.

Connect only exists because individuals write the stories, and because they and their organisations (including schools) continue to subscribe to the journal. Information is included at the end of this book about how **you** can subscribe and continue to read about these initiatives.

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The views expressed in this book are those of the individual authors of the articles and are not necessarily those of **Connect**.

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Introduction: Purpose

Over many years, **Connect** has documented and shared stories about Student Councils * in primary and secondary schools. **Connect** has been strongly committed to the idea and practice of students organising to share in education decision-making. Increasingly however, there has been concern that practices in this area have become restricted and tokenistic. Several recent articles in **Connect** have developed such critiques, analysed the restrictions and suggested alternative approaches and strategies.

However, many of these articles and the resources that were associated with them, have appeared in various issues over 15 or more years. Some people have these back issues; others don't. Prompted by the strong interest in some training days around issues of 'Taking the Next Step', these articles have been drawn together and organised so that they challenge and resource reflective practice.

If you are looking for a simple manual on how to organise a Student Council, this is not it! If you are looking for unqualified answers, you won't find them here!

What you will find are descriptions of practices that are presented with pride, but also with doubts.

The book also concentrates on '**Student Councils and Beyond...**'. Though it argues for active student participation as a whole of curriculum approach and provides some leads in this direction, it doesn't set out to document the range of participatory curriculum initiatives that have also been published in **Connect**.

In the mid 1980s, four collections of articles from the first five years of **Connect** were published by the Victorian Participation and Equity Program (PEP). They had various curriculum foci: in areas of *Tutoring, Students and Radio, Students Publishing* and *Students and Work*. Apart from the latter (which is still available from **Connect**) these are now out of print. It was intended that a fifth volume around *Student Organisations* would be produced, but this never eventuated.

Twenty years later, it has... but perhaps with a more challenging and strategic focus.

Structure of this book

In collecting articles for this book, it was useful to start with some foundational ideas. **Part 1: The Context** therefore presents some conceptual articles about what we mean by 'student participation', 'student voice' and so on.

The core of the book is **Part 2: ReThinking Student Councils**, which starts with a challenge. This material first appeared in **Connect** 145-146 (February-April, 2004), and the structure of this section follows the extended set of articles in that issue in responding to the challenge. There are several sub-sections here (around elitism, structures, tokenism, curriculum links, partnerships with others, effective organisation, and networking with others) that outline possible strategies. Examples from primary and secondary schools show practices that try to 'go beyond' current restrictions.

Part 3: Starting Up then addresses the needs of those who are in the position of starting some form of student organisation, either after a period of non-existence, or at the start of a new year. This section also draws on some of the possibilities, structures and challenges in Part 2.

While this book is not a training manual for Student Councils, it was useful to share some of the ideas for activities that support effective student groups and that have been developed and shared through **Connect**.

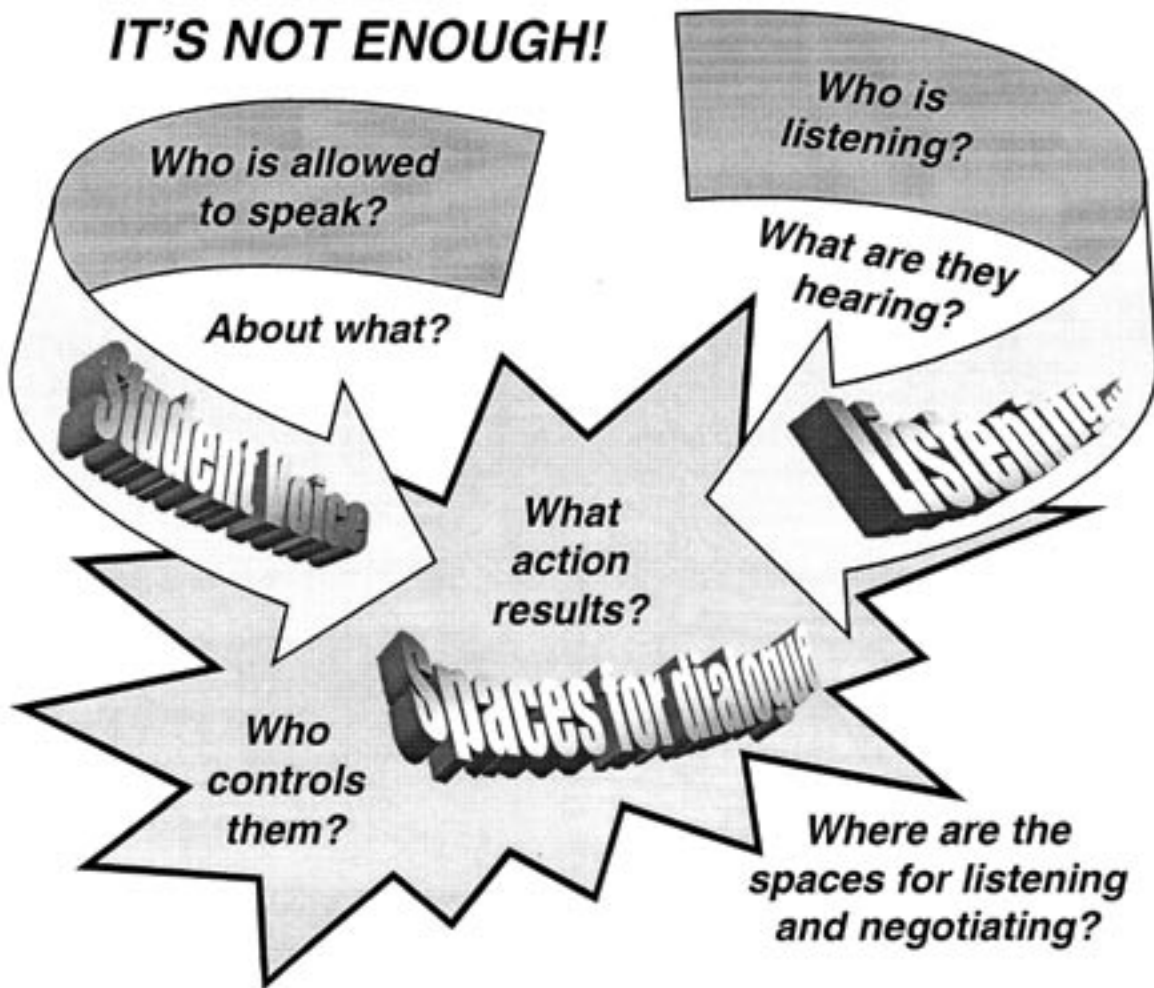
Therefore, in **Part 4: Training the Student Council**, some resources for training sessions in both primary and secondary schools are included. Here are some worksheets and checklists for your use.

Finally, two **Appendices** include further associated materials from **Connect** - around effective **classroom meetings** (particularly in primary schools), and around **curriculum negotiation**.

* A Footnote About Terms:

Sometimes the student groups described in this book have been called SRCs (Student Representative Councils) or JSCs (Junior School Councils - most often used in primary schools). But other terms have been used as well. So the term 'Student Council' has generally been used here to describe some form of school organisation run by and for students.

STUDENT VOICE: IT'S NOT ENOUGH!



Originally from cover, *Connect* 149, October 2004;
based on ideas and questions from Michael Fielding:
'Beyond the rhetoric of student voice' in *Forum* 43 (2), 2001