

Student Representation on School Governance Councils

Prepared for VicSRC by Eve Mayes, Deakin University | November 2016



About the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing students in Victoria. The VicSRC's vision is a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focused. The organisation exists to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET), Newsboys Foundation and Catholic Education Melbourne.

For further information please contact:

Krista Seddon
VicSRC Manager
manager@vicsrc.org.au
03 9267 3744

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Background.....	5
Aims and methodology	5
Findings.....	6
Awareness and attitudes	6
Benefits.....	7
Challenges	7
Summary of Recommendations.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	9
List of abbreviations.....	9
List of abbreviations for research activities	9
List of figures.....	10
List of appendices	10
The Victorian context	11
Introduction to this study.....	13
School councils in Victoria.....	13
Methodology.....	17
Methodological challenges.....	17
Research design and enactment.....	19
Findings.....	27
Students' limited awareness of school council and students' representation.....	27
Benefits of student representation on School Council.....	30
Benefit 1: Students have experiential knowledge that other adults may not have.	30
Benefit 2: Young people and adults learn and connect through dialogue.....	31
Benefit 3: Students have a right to have influence on decisions that affect them.	32
Benefit 4: Student representation can improve communication between the school council and the broader student body.	33
Benefit 5: Student representatives benefit individually.....	34
Benefit 6: Students feel heard and valued when changes happen.	34
Challenges of student representation on school council.....	36
Challenge 1: Students' experiential knowledge may not be recognised, trusted or valued...36	
Challenge 2: There are relational, structural and spatial barriers to learning from and connecting with each other.....	39
Challenge 3: Choosing/ electing student representatives who will represent the range of students enrolled in the school and take the role seriously.....	42
Challenge 4: Student representatives can feel caught in the middle.....	44
Challenge 5: The time costs for student representatives on school council	45
Challenge 6: Student representation without action is tokenistic and potentially damaging.	46
Recommendations and implementation ideas	47

Recommendation #1: Student representation on school councils should be mandatory.....	47
Recommendation #2: Students should be represented on school councils - as “ <i>students</i> ,” not “ <i>community members</i> .”.....	48
Recommendation #3: Students representatives on school councils should be equally valued members, with schools moving towards students having full voting rights and membership responsibilities.....	49
Recommendation #4: Students should be consulted in decisions about how to appoint/ elect student representatives, who should be the student representatives, and how many student representatives there should be.....	49
Recommendation #5: Students and adults should both undertake training and receive support in school council work.....	51
Recommendation #6: The structure of school council meetings should support student representatives’ meaningful contribution through, for example, the early distribution of meeting agendas, invitations to offer their feedback on other reports, and student involvement in sub-committees.....	53
Recommendation #7: Student representatives should give a student report that represents students’ concerns, and should report back to the student body about other school council discussions and decisions.....	54
Recommendation #8: Student representatives should be “ <i>equally seated</i> ” with other members of the school council.....	54
Recommendation #9: Schools should be accountable to report how students are represented on their school council.....	55
Recommendation #10: Student representation on school council should be one aspect of a whole school vision that meaningfully involves students in all aspects of their education.....	55
Conclusion	56
School council self-audit tool	57
Reference List.....	60
Appendices.....	64
Appendix A Research Planning Meeting PowerPoint.....	64
Appendix B Principal Phone Interview Questions.....	70
Appendix C Student Workshop Structure and Description of Activities.....	71
Appendix D Online Survey.....	79
Appendix E Outline of the Participatory Analysis Session	86
Appendix F A reprint of past articles published in the journal <i>Connect</i> related to student representation on committees.....	89

Executive Summary

Background

The state of Victoria has had an historical policy commitment to valuing the ‘voices’ of students. Under early legislation in Victoria, the *Constituting Orders for the Education (School Councils) Act 1975*, membership arrangements for school councils were reviewed. By the late 1970s, many government secondary school councils included elected students in the membership category of “student”, with membership decisions underpinned by a participatory democratic approach to local representation. This was endorsed in the requirements for membership outlined in Ministerial Papers issued between 1982 and 1984.

However, following a change of state government in 1992, further regulation changes in 1993 around ‘self-managing schools’ saw alterations to the membership of school councils, and the membership category of “student” disappeared.

More than a decade after “student” disappeared as a membership category, the *Report on the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools* (Victoria State Government, 2006) suggested a need for clarification of the modes, purposes and functions of school councils. This review reported “unanimous agreement that school councils had a major role to play in community engagement and involvement”, but “less unanimity among stakeholders” regarding the composition of membership of school councils (Victoria State Government, 2006, p. 6). A recommendation of the review and a “priority action area” identified in the subsequent *Response to the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools* (Allan, 2006) was that “[w]ays in which students can be involved in school council decision-making processes will be identified and promoted” (p. 5).

This report explores one approach to strengthening student participation in decision-making that has been identified as a priority by the VicSRC Executive and recommended by the *Report on the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools*: the identification and promotion of student involvement in school councils. This report offers practical examples of how schools can, as the DET’s Framework for Improving Student Outcomes prioritises, “give students a greater say in the decisions that affect their learning and their lives at school” (Victoria State Government, 2015a, p. 12).

Aims and methodology

This study was undertaken with the following purposes:

- To gather the views of students and principals across a range of Victorian schools on the issue of student representation on school governance councils.
- To collect and create resources to support schools to initiate or extend meaningful student representation on school governance councils.

In accordance with the philosophy and history of the VicSRC, this study was participatory in its design, enactment and analysis, listening to and acting on the views and insights of students, as the “consequential stakeholders” (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 113) whom schools are “ostensibly designed to serve” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). A central feature in this participatory methodology was the partnership of adult researchers and six student researchers. Simultaneously, the study sought principals’ views and experiences, as those with deep understanding of school council structures, processes and practices, with these views and experiences to inform and deepen research activities with students.

Findings were assembled from a range of research activities:

- Secondary school students involved with the VicSRC were invited to be *Research Interns* on this study, and to be part of designing, doing, and analysing the data. **Six** Research Interns have been a central part of the research team.
- Two *student workshops* were held (one in metropolitan Melbourne and one in regional Victoria), designed and facilitated by Research Interns. **Twenty-one** students from Years 7-12 participated in these workshops, where they explored the potential benefits and challenges of student representation in school councils.
- **218** students filled out an *anonymous online survey*, sharing their experiences, views and ideas.
- **Ten principals** were also *interviewed* about their experiences of and perspectives on student representation on school councils.

Findings

Awareness and attitudes

A significant finding from the student online survey and the Student Workshops was that students generally had limited awareness of the work of school councils, and whether or not their schools include students as representatives on the school council. When asked, in the online survey, how much they knew about what happens on their school’s council, 84.85% of respondents indicated that they knew “nothing” or “very little” about what happens on their school’s governance council.

Notwithstanding this limited awareness, the overwhelming majority of students attending the Student Workshops and responding to the online survey articulated support for student representation on school councils. 80.16% of respondents to the online survey indicated that they thought students should be members of their school’s council.

Principals, too, were supportive of having students on school councils, and 8 out of 10 of the interviewed principals already have student representatives on their councils. For 6 of these schools, the school captains were the default school council student representatives.

Benefits

From the Student Workshops, principal phone interviews, student online surveys, and the participatory analysis session, six key benefits of student representation on school councils have been synthesised.

- Benefit 1: Students have experiential knowledge that other adults may not have.
- Benefit 2: Young people and adults learn and connect through dialogue.
- Benefit 3: Students have a right to have influence on decisions that affect them.
- Benefit 4: Student representation can improve communication between the school council and the broader student body.
- Benefit 5: Student representatives benefit individually.
- Benefit 6: Students feel heard and valued when changes happen.

Challenges

Alongside discussing potential benefits of student representation on school councils, students and principals also raised concerns about the challenges of student representation.

- Challenge 1: Students' experiential knowledge may not be recognised, trusted or valued.
- Challenge 2: There are relational, structural and spatial barriers to learning from and connecting with each other.
- Challenge 3: Choosing/ electing student representatives who will represent the range of students enrolled in the school and take the role seriously.
- Challenge 4: Student representatives can feel caught in the middle.
- Challenge 5: The time costs for student representatives on school council.
- Challenge 6: Student representation without action is tokenistic and potentially damaging.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Student representation on School Councils should be mandatory.

Recommendation #2: Students should be represented on school councils - as "*students*," not "*community members*."

Recommendation #3: Students representatives on school councils should be equally valued members, with schools moving towards students having full voting rights and membership responsibilities.

Recommendation #4: Students should be consulted in decisions about how to appoint/ elect student representatives, who should be the student representatives, and how many student representatives there should be.

Recommendation #5: Students and adults should both undertake training and receive support in school council work, to strengthen mutual respect and trust.

Recommendation #6: The structure of school council meetings should support student representatives' meaningful contribution through, for example, the early distribution of meeting agendas, invitations to offer their feedback on other reports, and student involvement in sub-committees.

Recommendation #7: Student representatives should give a student report that represents students' concerns, and should report back to the student body about other school council discussions and decisions.

Recommendation #8: Student representatives should be "*equally seated*" with other members of the school council.

Recommendation #9: Schools should be accountable to report how students are represented on their school council.

Recommendation #10: Student representation on school council should be one aspect of a whole school vision that meaningfully involves students in all aspects of their education.

Acknowledgements

The research team acknowledges and thanks the students who participated in student workshops and the online survey and shared their hopes, concerns and ideas. The team also thanks the principals who shared their insights and experiences in phone interviews.

Eve Mayes acknowledges and thanks the research team: Vansh Grover, Roghayeh Sadaghi, Sarah Goh, William Wilson, Emma Gilbert, and Laura Cantwell (Research Interns), Pinchy Breheny (Deakin University, Research Assistant) and Roger Holdsworth (critical friend).

The research team appreciates the vision, support and guidance of the VicSRC and, in particular, Krista Seddon, Manager. Thanks also to Fiona Campbell and Sophie Moore for communications and administrative support. Thanks also to Daphanie Teo (Deakin University) for administrative support. Jill Blackmore is acknowledged for her advice and support of Eve Mayes in the early stages of the project. Susan Groundwater-Smith was a generous reader of a draft of this report.

List of abbreviations

DET	Department of Education and Training
N=	Number
SRC	Student Representative Council
UNCRC	United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child

List of abbreviations for research activities

FG	Focus Group (research activity)
MSW	Metropolitan Student Workshop
OS	Online Survey
PI	Principal Interview
PR	Post-it Reflections (research activity)
RB	Recommendations Brainstorm (research activity)
RI	Research Intern
RSW	Regional Student Workshop
SCD	School Council Discussion (research activity)
SW	Student Workshop
SU	Stepping Up (research activity)
TF	True/ False (research activity)
VR	Visual Representation (research activity)
WR	Written reflection (research activity)

List of figures

- Figure 1. Modes of student participation and representation on school councils.*
Figure 2. Youth participation ladder
Figure 3. Student Research Interns
Figure 4. Principal phone interviews
Figure 5. An example of one visual representation of an 'ideal' school council
Figure 6. Online survey demographic details
Figure 7. Online survey: Respondents' year at school
Figure 8. Online survey: Students' awareness of what happens on their school's council
Figure 9. Online survey: Students' awareness of student involvement on school council
Figure 10. Online survey: Students' opinions about student representation on school council

List of appendices

- Appendix A Research Planning Meeting PowerPoint
Appendix B Principal Phone Interview Questions
Appendix C Student Workshop Structure and Description of Activities
Appendix D Online Survey
Appendix E Outline of the Participatory Analysis Session
Appendix F A reprint of past articles published in the journal *Connect* related to student representation on committees

The Victorian context

The state of Victoria has had an historical policy commitment to valuing the ‘voices’ of students (Manefield, Collins, Moore, Mahar, & Warne, 2007). In Victoria, there have been many examples of schools where the local representation of stakeholders, including students, have been integral to the lived pedagogy of participatory democratic citizenship, for the purposes of improving schooling for all students (see for example, past issues of the journal *Connect*; Morris, 2015).

Under early legislation in Victoria, the *Constituting Orders for the Education (School Councils) Act 1975*, membership arrangements for school councils were reviewed, so that “almost all school councils had elected parent and teacher representatives” and “a few co-opted members of the local community” (Morris, 2016, para. 23). By the late 1970s, “[t]he majority of secondary school councils also included elected students” (Morris, 2016, para. 23), with membership decisions underpinned by a commitment to local representation. Student membership was endorsed by Ministerial Papers issued between 1982 and 1984, in particular Ministerial Paper No. 1: Decision Making in Victorian Schools (March 1983) and Ministerial Paper No. 4: School Councils (April 1983). A focus on supporting the role of students on school councils developed strongly in the early 1980s, with workshops and resources produced through the Supplementary Grants Program (Disadvantaged Schools Program) and the Victorian Participation and Equity Program (see for example, past issues of the journal *Connect*).

However, following a change of state government in 1992, further regulation changes in 1993 around ‘self-managing schools’ saw alterations to the membership of school councils¹ (see Jones, 1993). The new state government introduced new boundaries on membership categories, limiting the number of teachers/staff who could be members of a school council. This has been argued to have been an attempt to curtail the influence of teachers (and their unions) on school councils (Australian Education Union, 2005). The “student” membership category vanished, replaced with the option for school councils to co-opt students into the “community member” category (Jones, 1993). At the time of this change, Allen Jones (Social Education Coordinator at Wendouree Secondary College) commented on the potential consequences of these changes:

[I]t appears that the only way students will get onto a school council is if they have some relevant expertise or if the school council decides to take a policy decision to include students. It is also unlikely that many school councils will co-opt students when there is limit to the overall number of co-opted Councillors. [*Schools of the Future*, the Liberal-National Coalition State program] clearly writes the students out of the formal decision-making body. [...] Once you remove the students as a legal entity from the school council, you must be saying that students are incapable of making decisions or

¹ It is beyond the scope of this contextual introduction to critically analyse the ascendance of neoliberal modes of governance, and the relationship between neoliberal educational reforms and school governance practices. Participatory democratic modes of school governance concerned with stakeholder representation and consultative processes might be contrasted with models foregrounding strategic accountability and the cooption of members with expertise (see, for example, Wilkins, 2016). Questions remain about the consequences of school council members needing particular forms of ‘expertise’, and the implications of reconstituting students and parents as ‘clients’ and ‘consumers’ of education. Questions of who should be members of school councils should be preceded by an interrogation of past and present democratic processes and practices, the purposes of school councils, roles of students, parents and teachers in schools, the relationship between governance processes in schools and governance processes in society, and whether schools are more akin to a community, or to a corporation.

participating effectively in the creation of the School Charter or the Code of Conduct – something in which students would seem to have a vested interest. [...] Whatever assumptions the policy makers had about students, no one can deny that a new definition of what students can or cannot do is being used. (Jones, 1993, pp. 5-6)

Nevertheless, an unknown number of schools continued with student representation in their membership, taking advantage of the co-option provisions to add students as members with special or appropriate expertise.

More than a decade after “student” disappeared as a membership category, the *Report on the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools* suggested a need for clarification of the modes, purposes and functions of school councils (Victoria State Government, 2006). This review reported “unanimous agreement that school councils had a major role to play in community engagement and involvement”, but “less unanimity among stakeholders” regarding the composition of membership of school councils. It was reported that there was “some support for mandating a student category from the peak student body and some individual schools” (Victoria State Government, 2006, p. 6). A recommendation of the review and a “priority action area” identified in the subsequent *Response to the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools* (Allan, 2006) was that “[w]ays in which students can be involved in school council decision-making processes will be identified and promoted” (p. 5).

Following these reviews, recent policy documents published by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) demonstrate a renewed commitment to greater participation of students in decisions that affect their learning and lives at school. In 2015, following a large-scale consultation, the Victorian DET produced a Framework for Improving Student Outcomes, with the third priority “Positive Climate for Learning” (2015). The “evidence-based initiative” accompanying this priority is:

Empowering students and building school pride: Schools will develop approaches that give students a greater say in the decisions that affect their learning and their lives at school. The whole school community will engage with students so they have voice in the learning process, and fully and proudly participate in school life. (Victoria State Government, 2015a, p. 12)

Future reforms identified at the end of this document include “investigating ways to give students a stronger voice in their learning, making it more relevant and engaging” (Victoria State Government, 2015a, p. 17).

These commitments suggest an acknowledgement of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC], United Nations, 1989), and, in particular, Article 12: that children have a right not only to express their views about matters affecting them, but for these views to be taken seriously. The ratification of this convention by Australia in 1990 (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007) has been argued to provide a legal foundation for students’ participation (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015), strengthening the case for children

and young people's participation in institutional decision-making and research about issues that affect their lives (Payne, 2009; Veerman, 1992).

There is a need for examples of how schools can, in practical terms, "give students a stronger voice in their learning" and specific "approaches" for "empowering students." This report explores one approach to strengthening student participation in decision-making in learning and school life that has been identified as a priority by the VicSRC Executive and recommended by the *Report on the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools*: the identification and promotion of student involvement in school councils.

Introduction to this study

The VicSRC Executive, working with funding from the Victorian DET, commissioned this study. This study focuses on the highest priority voted by students at the VicSRC Congress in 2015: *School Leadership and Governance*. This study was undertaken with the following purposes:

- To gather the views of students and principals across a range of Victorian schools on the issue of student representation on school governance councils.
- To collect and create resources to support schools to initiate or extend meaningful student representation on school governance councils.

This report primarily considers the experiences, views, and ideas of secondary school students at Victorian schools and principals of secondary and Preparatory to Year 12 government schools.

School councils in Victoria

A range of terms are used across educational jurisdictions nationally and internationally to describe school governance bodies and their members². For the purposes of this report, the term *school council* or *school governance council* is used. The term "governance" is added when contextually necessary to avoid confusion with Student Representative Councils, which generally are comprised of students to further the interests and needs of students.

This report uses the term *school council member* to refer to members of a school council with full voting rights and membership responsibilities³. The term *student representative* is used to refer to students who are present at school council meetings, but recognises that the voting rights of these students are diverse and often unclear.

School councils' objectives are listed in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* as including to:

² For example, the term "school board" is used in the United States of America to describe the body overseeing schools (Fletcher & King, 2014), while "school council" is used in Australia (Victoria State Government, 2015b). In the UK, "school council" refers to the student body that, in Australia, is often referred to as the "Student Representative Council."

³ Members of school governance councils are called "governors" in the United Kingdom (Hallgarten, Breslin, & Hannam, 2004), and "board members" or "trustees" in North America (Fletcher & King, 2014; Student Voice Initiative, 2014). In Australia, members of school councils are also referred to as "councillors" (Victoria State Government, 2015b). Note that, across jurisdictions, the voting rights of students in these respective roles may vary, and each context's legislation must be examined individually.

- assist in the efficient governance of the school
- ensure that its decisions affecting students of the school are made having regard, as a primary consideration, to the best interests of the students
- enhance the educational opportunities of the students of the school
- ensure the school and the council comply with any requirements of the Act, the regulations, a Ministerial Order or a direction, guideline or policy issued under the Act. (paraphrased in Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 3)

The functions of a school council are described in the Victorian DET's *Improving School Governance* training document as including:

- establishing the broad direction and vision of the school within the school's community
- participating in the development and monitoring of the school strategic plan
- approving the annual budget and monitoring expenditure
- developing, reviewing and updating school policies
- raising funds for school-related purposes
- maintaining the school's grounds and facilities
- entering into contracts (such as for cleaning or construction work)
- reporting annually to the school community and to the Department
- creating interest in the school in the wider community
- informing itself of and taking into account the views of the community
- regulating and facilitating the after-hours use of school premises and grounds
- operating a children's service at the school or other premises controlled by the Minister. (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 6)

These functions are not solely carried out during school council meetings. Sub-committees (which may be composed of both school council and non-school council members) may meet separately and make recommendations to the school council (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 17). Examples of sub-committees include finance, buildings and grounds (facilities), education policy, student leadership, information technology, community building, and the canteen (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 17).

School councils in Victoria currently need to include, in their composition, the principal, parent members, department employee members, and other community members (of no more than one third composition for each respective group). "Community member" is an "optional membership category" where "a school council decides that it wishes to" incorporate "additional skills and perspectives to the school council" (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 3). The potential modes of student involvement in school councils are outlined in the *Improving School Governance* training document, beyond the mandate to "keep students' best interests in mind at all times":

At times a school council will consult with students, particularly in relation to policy development on topics of interest to students. Council might also have links with the student representative body. Some school councils co-opt students into the community member category. (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 14)

Students on school council beyond Victoria

Different modes of student participation and representation on school councils, as described in other national and international accounts of school council structures of representation, are visually depicted in **Figure 1. Modes of student participation and representation on school councils.** **Figure 1** does not include other modes of consultation with students or the student representative body led by school council members or school staff that may occur outside of school council meetings, nor student involvement in school council sub-committees (see Recommendations section below).

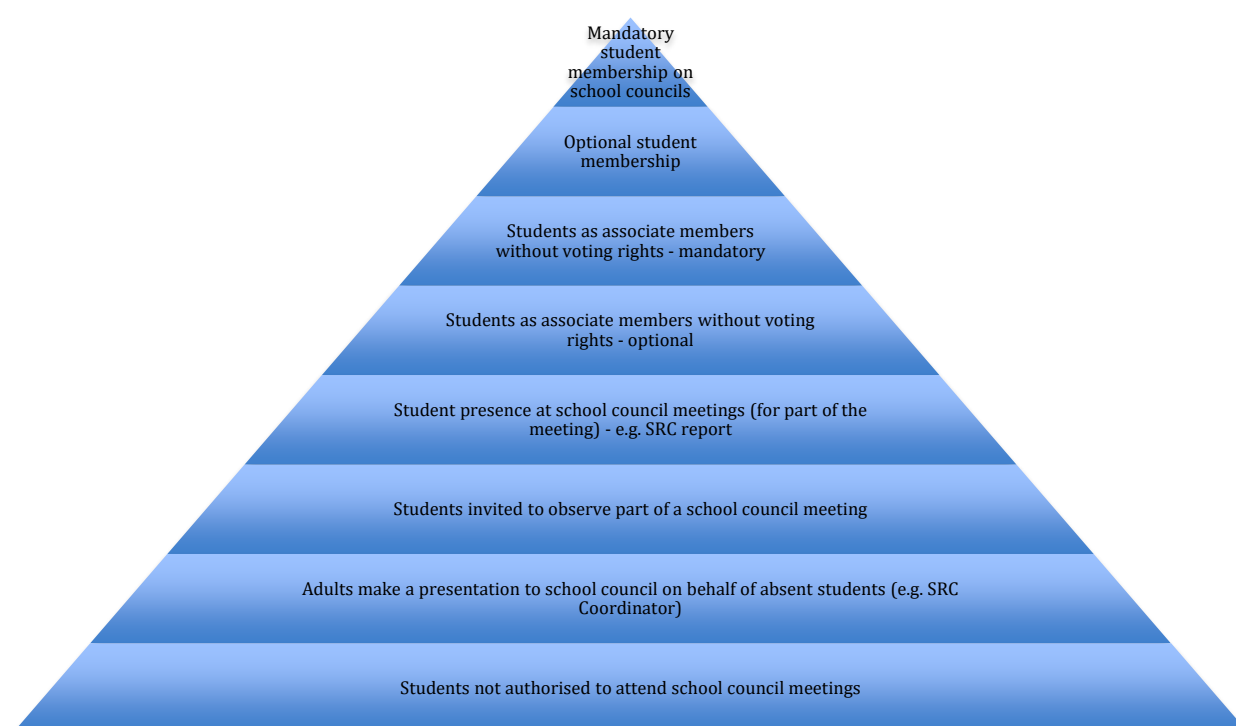


Figure 1. Modes of student participation and representation on school councils.

For example, in the UK, historically, students have been invited “to meetings and committees as observers (excluding confidential items) giving them the opportunity to see how a governing body works and what kinds of issues are discussed” and to engage in “strategic decision-making” (DfES, 2003, cited in Hallgarten et al., 2004, p. ii). More recently in the UK, students have been appointed as ‘associate members’ allowing them to attend full governing body meetings and become members of governing body committees” (DfES, 2003, cited in Hallgarten et al., 2004, p. ii). The involvement of students as trustees on school boards has been recently mandated through legislation in a number of provinces in Canada (Student Voice Initiative, 2014).

Research conducted on the issue of student representation on school governance bodies has explored potential challenges in student membership, mapped practices across jurisdictions, canvassed the opinions of stakeholders and closely explored examples of democratic

governance practices in schools. In the UK, Hallgarten, Breslin and Hannam's *"I was a teenage governor"* report (2003) considered the potential benefits and "pitfalls" of including students as associate members. In the USA, at a state level, Fletcher and King (2014) have mapped the legislated and actual participation of students on school boards across individual states. Students in the state of Kentucky have conducted action research to advocate for student representation on school boards (Student Voice Team, 2016). Also in the USA, Brasof (2015), Brasof and Spector (2016) and Mitra and Serriere (2016) have qualitatively explored the democratic governance practices of individual schools with a strong reputation for meaningful student participation.

These various modes of participation and representation may be mapped onto Holdsworth's student participation continuum – a continuum that focuses on the degree to which students are active or passive, and the action that follows (or does not follow) student participation and representation (cf. Fielding & Moss, 2011; Hart, 1992; Lodge, 2005).

Youth/ student voice: 'speaking out'
Being heard
Being listened to
Being listened to seriously and with respect (including a willingness to argue with students with logic and evidence)
Incorporating youth/ student views into action taken by others
Shared decision-making, implementation of action and reflection on the action with young people

Figure 2. Student participation continuum (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 358)

While *Figure 2 (Student participation continuum)* visually suggests an ascending 'ladder' of involvement of students on school governance councils, to involve students in school governance without thoughtful consideration of all the possible benefits and challenges may have unforeseen and even damaging consequences. The UK Report *"I was a teenage governor"* cautions that:

[...] appointing pupils as associate members of governing bodies without some deeper thought and actions relating to pupil democracy throughout the school could have a worse than tokenistic impact. (Hallgarten et al., 2004)

The extent to which student representation on school councils is a demonstration of egalitarian relations and practices in schools is a matter for debate; mandatory student representation could also, in some contexts, become an exercise in 'box-ticking.' There is, therefore, a need for accounts from principals on the benefits and challenges of student representation on school councils, and a need to intersect these perspectives with students' accounts.

Methodology

In accordance with the philosophy and history of the VicSRC, this study was participatory in its design, enactment and analysis, listening to and acting on the views and insights of students, as the “consequential stakeholders” (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 113) whom schools are “ostensibly designed to serve” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). A central feature in this participatory methodology was the partnership of adult researchers and six student researchers, with the hope that our differing standpoints and skills could foster the possibility of dialogical and methodological “creativity and renewal” (Fielding, 2004, p. 307). Simultaneously, the study sought principals’ views and experiences, as those with deep understanding of school council structures, processes and practices, with these views and experiences to inform and deepen research activities with students.

Methodological challenges

Before outlining the details of the research methods, the challenges associated with exploring students’ perspectives on school governance need to be foregrounded. Research with children and young people is frequently premised on the need for exploration of children and young people’s perspectives and lived experiences, with lived experiences conflated with the UNCRC clause: “the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child” (United Nations, 1989). According to the logic of Article 12, students are directly impacted by the decisions made by school councils, and therefore have a right to express their views about school councils.

Yet, students may not be fully aware of either the existence of school councils or what occurs in their school council meetings, since the majority of students are not present at these meetings. Students may not be aware, for example, of who is on their school’s council, the decisions that are made there, and may misunderstand an adult researcher’s focus group question about school councils to be a question about Student Representative Councils (SRCs), since SRCs are closer to their direct experience of school governance. Unlike consulting with students about matters that they directly experience (like uniforms, behaviour policies, and teaching and learning), school councils impact indirectly on students, who nevertheless experience the consequences of decisions made at these meetings. Students may not be aware of the connection between this zone of decision making and their daily lives in school. How, then, can students be consulted about the issue of student representation on school councils?

This dilemma – of how to ask students about their views on school councils, when they may have limited direct experience of them – raises a number of methodological questions:

- *Should students be excluded from conversations about school councils, because the majority of students have limited awareness of these meetings?* Such logic would reinforce and perpetuate students’ exclusion from this domain where important decisions are made.
- *Should only students who have experience of school councils be consulted, as the students who ‘understand’ the objectives and functions of school councils?* Such logic,

similarly, would exclude the majority of students, and result in research that would only consult the (arguably) 'elite' student representatives.

- *Should students be widely consulted, even if there is confusion about, for example, the difference between Student Representative Councils (SRCs) and school councils?* This logic, however, may lead to misinterpretations of students' views (for example, interpreting a student's expression of his/her views about councils to be about school councils, when in actuality the student was articulating his/ her opinion on SRCs).

Accordingly, a research approach needed to be taken that would not only ask students about their views and opinions on matters affecting them, but to also deliberately offer resources, time and opportunities for students to form their views on these issues. Lundy and McEvoy (2012), two researchers working with a rights-based approach to research with children and young people, have argued persuasively for the need for young people to have opportunities to build capacity on the "substantive issues under investigation" (p. 131), especially for research on issues "which impact on [students'] lives, but to which [students] may not have given any consideration and therefore, understandably, are unlikely to have a predetermined or informed view" (p. 132). Rather than excluding young people from issues perceived to be "beyond their grasp" or to gather opinions that may be perceived to be "superficial" (p. 132), Lundy and McEvoy appeal to the UNCRC clarification that the child or young person does not need to have "comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the matter affecting him or her, but that she has sufficient understanding to be capable of appropriately forming her or his view on the matter, as a "precondition of the child's clarified decisions" (UN, 2009, pp. 9, 10, cited by McEvoy & Lundy, 2012, p. 132, emphasis added). Students, therefore, should be given opportunities not only to express their views, but also "to form new views through [...] interaction with [contextual] information, adults and peers" (p. 132). This mode of research, too, becomes an educative intervention in its own right, generating new modes of thinking, relating and living, and transforming schools.

Accordingly, the approach taken in this study explored the issue of student representation on school councils with students and principals at multiple depths of exploration, with the aim of fostering *informed* modes of student voice.

Research design and enactment

a) VicSRC Congress Elective: *Students as Researchers*

At the VicSRC Congress in July 2016, 19 secondary school students attended the elective, *Students as Researchers*. This elective, facilitated by Eve Mayes and Roger Holdsworth, and supported by Pinchy Breheny, was intended to explore different modes of research and participation, principles of research ethics, and designing and doing quantitative and qualitative research, in order to support students to do their own research in their schools.

b) Student Research Interns: Planning and designing

Following the Students as Researchers elective, the VicSRC sent information about this study to students who registered for the VicSRC Congress. Six students volunteered to be involved in the project as Research Interns (RIs). These students ranged in year level, region and school type (see *Figure 3: Student research interns*).

First name	Region	Year level	School type
Vansh Grover	North-West outer metropolitan Melbourne	7	Government
Roghayeh Sadeghi	South-West regional Victoria	9	Government
William Wilson	South-East regional Victoria	10	Government
Sarah Goh	Metropolitan Melbourne	11	Government
Emma Gilbert	Metropolitan Melbourne	10	Government
Laura Cantwell	Metropolitan Melbourne	10	Independent

Figure 3. Student Research Interns.

A **research planning meeting** was held with the research team at the VicSRC offices in early August on a Saturday, to plan and negotiate the research activities for Student Workshops. Before planning these research activities, the research team considered historical and contemporary contexts and practices for school councils, including the function and purposes of school councils, and historical examples of student representation, particularly in Australia (see *Appendix A: Research Planning Meeting PowerPoint*). While the general research activities and methods had been approved by Deakin University and the Victorian DET's ethics processes, the specifics of the Student Workshop activities and the online survey questions were planned at this research meeting. In the interim period between this planning session and the Student Workshops, Research Interns were encouraged to find out further information about the composition of their school's council, to inform their own perspectives, and were sent the VicDET *Improving School Governance* training document (Victoria State Government, 2015b). In this interim period before the Student Workshops, phone interviews with principals also began.

c) Principal interviews (PIs)

Conducting principal phone interviews was intended to form evidence about existing governance practices in Victorian schools: if and how students are represented on school councils, and principals' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of student representation. Finding out principals' experiences and views was also intended to inform student research activities and discussions, by raising further considerations with Research Interns and student participants that may not have been initially apparent to them during initial research discussions. For example, later in some of the Student Workshops, a number of concerns that had been raised by principals during phone interviews were shared with students for further discussion: for example, concerns about the discussion of "delicate topics", confidentiality, and time pressures (see Findings section). Adding these further considerations extended students' research conversations beyond their initial perspectives, enabling the further formation of students' views.

All principals subscribing to the VicSRC e-newsletter were sent information about the principal phone interviews and invited to consider participating, and to nominate a preferred time and phone number for an interview. A total of ten secondary school leaders, including six secondary school principals, two Preparatory to Year 12 school principals, one Deputy Principal, and one Leading Teacher were interviewed for this study (see *Figure 4: Principal phone interviews*).

Interviewees represented ten government schools. This small sample of school leaders is not considered to be representative of the views and governance practices of all Victorian schools. Most notably, this study focused more on considerations of student representatives in the secondary years of schooling, and primary school students and principals are not represented. Furthermore, principals who subscribe to the VicSRC e-newsletter and who self-selected to participate in this study may represent schools more sympathetic to student participation. These viewpoints and governance practices, rather than representing all Victorian schools, offer an indication of some of the possible views and governance practices in Victorian schools. Further research could be done with principals across school types (primary, secondary, P-12) and school sectors (government, independent, Catholic) to further explore principals' perspectives on the particular benefits and challenges in different contexts and settings.

Semi-structured interviews with principals and leading teachers began with general questions about the interviewee's school and their positive and challenging experiences in their role, before questions about their school's governance practices. Interviewees were then asked about their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of student representation on school governance councils, and their awareness of any examples or resources available to support student representation on school councils. These interview questions are listed in *Appendix B: Principal phone interview questions*.

Interviews were between 8 and 28 minutes in length. All interviews were conducted on the phone, and digitally audio recorded following the interviewee's signed and verbal consent.

From this sample of ten schools, eight schools currently had student representatives on their governing council. Of these eight schools with student representatives, six of these student representatives were also the school captains.

Principal?	Secondary or prep-12?	Students on SC?	If students on SC, How many? Which students?
Principal	Secondary	Yes	The two school captains
Principal	Secondary	Yes	The two school captains
Principal	Secondary	Not official members, but can come in and present about issues	N/A
Principal	Prep to year 12 (different campuses)	Students can attend but aren't officially invited	N/A
Principal	Secondary	Yes	The two SRC presidents
Principal	Secondary	Yes	The two school captains
Principal	Secondary	Voluntary for students to attend a meeting once a term	Open to students in leadership positions, eg a house captain or on the leadership team
Principal	P-12	Yes	The two School Captains
Deputy Principal role across alliance 4 schools	Secondary	Yes	The school captains
Leading Teacher	Secondary	Yes	The two school captains

Figure 4. Principal phone interviews.

d) Student Workshops (SW)

Student Workshops were organised to generate data about students' perceptions of the potential benefits and challenges of student participation on school governance councils.

Students were invited to consider participating in Student Workshops through the VicSRC's Facebook page and through a notification sent to the VicSRC's e-newsletter subscribers, which linked to an EventBrite page with further details (<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/student-regional-workshops-tickets-27085778292?platform=hootsuite>). In these invitations, schools were invited to:

... send between 3-6 students to attend one Student Workshop about student participation in school governance councils. We encourage schools to send students from a range of year levels (for example, 3 students from Years 7-9, and 3 students from Years 10-12). Schools are encouraged to send a group of students with a majority who are not currently involved in student leadership activities.

This invitation acknowledges a perennial challenge in research and in student participation: how not to perpetuate a pattern of privilege in who gets to speak for the experience of other students (Alcoff, 1991; Fielding, 2004), and how to broaden the range of students who participate beyond those typically represented in leadership.

While initially four workshops were planned, time restraints and registration considerations meant that only two workshops were held. The first workshop was hosted by a north-east Victorian DET school, approximately 180 kms from Melbourne. The second workshop was hosted by a Victorian DET school in the inner-west of metropolitan Melbourne. Research activities at both workshops were facilitated by two student Research Interns (Vansh and Roghayeh at the regional workshop, and Sarah and William at the metropolitan workshop), with the support of Eve Mayes, Roger Holdsworth and Pinchy Breheny. A total of 21 students attended these two workshops.

The Regional Student Workshop (RSW) was attended by 7 students from the one school. The SRC Coordinator organised the participation of these students. Participating students ranged in year level from Year 9 to Year 11. Four of these students were members of the school's 'student voice' group, while three of the students were not involved in formalised student voice processes at the school. A senior student who currently serves as a member of the school's school council was briefly invited in to answer student questions about school councils.

The Metropolitan Student Workshop (MSW) was attended by 14 students from three schools. Participating students were in Years 7, 9, 10 and 11. Approximately ten of these students were members of their schools' 'student voice' group, while four of the students were not involved in formalised student voice processes at their schools. Two further senior students who had previously been members of their school's council were briefly invited in to answer student questions about school councils.

These two workshops were structured with research activities designed and facilitated by the Research Interns (see above and *Appendix C: Student Workshop Structure and Description of Activities*). Workshops included the following research activities:

- **A 'True and False' activity (TF)**, where students moved across the room in response to factual and attitudinal statements, was designed to gauge students' awareness about the difference between student councils and Student Representative Councils, and the history of student representation on school councils. It also aimed to enable students to begin considering their stance on issues related to students on school councils.
- **Focus groups (FG)** which explored students' perceptions of the possible benefits and challenges of student representation on school councils, through interactive activities that included the use of visual postcards (for metaphorical thinking) and the use of M&Ms and Skittles (to take turns sharing ideas about potential benefits and challenges of student representation on school councils). Typed notes with student quotations were taken during these focus groups by Eve Mayes and Pinchy Breheny. Students also wrote reflective responses on post it notes at the end of the focus groups (PR, Post-it Reflections), writing down an important point that was raised, or something else that they wanted to say but didn't get to say during the focus group discussion.
- **Current and previous student school council representatives** from both the regional and metropolitan host schools attended part of both student workshops. At the RSW, this student was one of the school captains, and one of two current school council representatives. At the MSW, two senior students, who were previously members of the

school council (during different years), came to part of the workshop. In both these workshops, research activities were paused when these students came. Participating students then informally asked questions of these current and previous student school council representatives about their experiences as a student member of the school council. Quotations from these informal discussions (informally documented through typing notes) are referred to in this report with the abbreviation SCD: School Council Discussion.

- In a **Stepping Up** (SU) activity, students were given a role card (e.g. principal, community member, student), and were to respond to scenarios as if they were this role. Students stepped forward if they thought that they would feel positive in the scenario situation, stepped backwards if they thought they would feel negative in the scenario situation, or sat down if they did not think that they would be involved. Research Interns encouraged student participants to explain their responses. This activity was intended to foster appreciation for different stakeholder interests represented in school communities.
- In a **fish bowl Role Play of a school council meeting** (RP), half of the student participants participated in a role play of a school council meeting (with particular roles), and the other half of the student participants observed. In this activity, students considered the perspectives of other members of school councils (parents, teachers, community members), and deliberated further on the potential benefits and challenges of active participation for student representatives in school council meetings.
- Students, in pairs or groups, created a **Visual Representation** (VR) of their 'ideal' school council using visual fruit erasers to represent stakeholder groups (e.g. parents, principal, teachers, students, community members), and to compose a written explanation of the reasons for their visual representation (see *Figure 5: An example of one visual representation of an 'ideal' school council*). This activity promoted discussion of the composition of school councils and how to organise and facilitate school meetings to support the active participation of student representatives, particularly through spatial design and seating arrangements.



Figure 5. An example of one visual representation of an 'ideal' school council.

- Towards the end of the workshops, groups brainstormed the **Recommendations** (RB) that they would like to see this study's report include. These recommendations were shared and discussed with the broader group at the end of each workshop. Students also wrote **Written Reflections** (WR) about what they felt were the key points raised during the day.

e) Student Online Survey (OS)

In a final dimension of this study, an anonymous online survey was designed by, shared with and analysed by students (see **Appendix D**: Online survey). The Participant Information Statement at the beginning of the survey had been approved by Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Victorian DET ethics process, and was unable to be modified, even as Research Interns were concerned that its length might deter students from completing it. Student Research Interns contributed to the formulation of the survey questions in the early research design/ planning meeting.

The survey's 15 questions included initial questions about the respondent's school type, region, and the respondent's year at school, followed by questions about the respondent's school's processes of decision-making, understanding of their school's council's composition, their perception of possible benefits and challenges of student representation on school councils, and other stories or ideas relating to student involvement in school decision-making. These questions included both closed (with boxes to tick) and open-ended questions.

A weblink to the online survey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Deakin_VicSRC_Survey) was sent out through the VicSRC e-newsletter, to students, teachers, principals, and community members subscribing to this mailing list, and published on the VicSRC website and Facebook page. This initial invitation may have subsequently been shared by, for example, SRC Coordinators with students at their schools (although it cannot be known how survey respondents found out about the survey). The weblink was also shared by the Research Interns with their networks. This mode of sampling was respondent-driven, snowballing through social networks of those connected to the VicSRC (Morgan, 2008). This sample is therefore not taken to be a conclusive representation of Victorian students' views and experiences. It has been interpreted instead as an indication of some students' perceptions of potential benefits and challenges of student representation on school governance councils.

A total of **218** students completed the survey by the closure date. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they attended government schools (93.49%; N= 201 respondents). Respondents represented both metropolitan and regional Victoria (see **Figure 6: Online survey: Respondents' year at school**), with a total of 52.6% of respondents located in metropolitan Victoria, and 47.4% of respondents from regional Victoria.

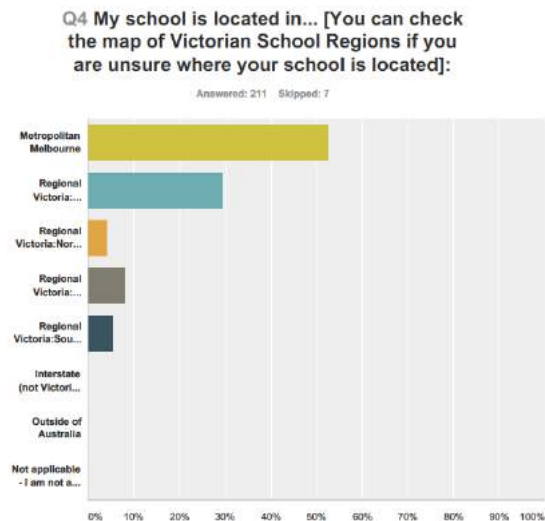


Figure 5. Online survey: Respondents' school locations.

Respondents represented all years of secondary school, with a larger number of participants in Years 10 and 11 (46.73% of respondents; N= 100).

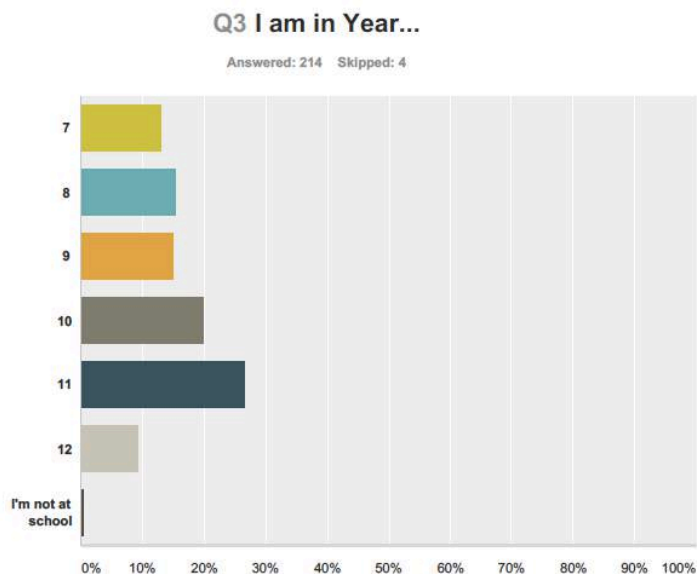


Figure 7. Online survey: Respondents' year at school.

There were a number of limitations of this survey that limit its usefulness as an indication of students' understanding and perceptions of student representation on school councils. A number of responses in the survey suggested that some students may have responded to some questions thinking about Student Representative Councils (rather than school councils). In addition, the number of respondents who 'skipped' certain questions may suggest some confusion about some of the questions (or, perhaps, a resistance to the premise of some of the questions). Further, the context within which students answered the survey is not known: whether responses were completed individually at home, completed in a group, or completed during class time. Unlike the Student Workshops, where the function of school councils and

experiences of student representation at school councils could be discussed at length, the medium of an online survey did not permit clarification of terminology or dialogical debate.

During the participatory analysis session, the research team discussed these limitations at length, and concluded that the quantitative responses could not be taken as necessarily reliable. The focus of analytic attention, subsequently, was turned towards the open-ended responses to the online survey questions.

f) Participatory analysis

After the Student Workshops had been held, and towards the end of the principal phone interviews and online survey completion period, a participatory analysis session was held with members of the research team, including five of the six student Research Interns (Vansh, Roghayeh, Sarah, Emma and Laura), Eve and Roger. The purpose of this participatory analysis afternoon was to collaboratively establish a sense of the key benefits and challenges that had been discussed across the different research dimensions (principal phone interviews, Student Workshops and online survey responses), and to draft key recommendations for the report (see *Appendix E: Outline of the participatory analysis session*).

The central role of the Research Interns in this process of analysis must be stressed. Student Research Interns, as described above, had multiple opportunities to consider historical and contemporary contexts and practices for school councils, and to debate the associated possible benefits and challenges of student representation on school councils. As facilitators at the Student Workshops, the Research Interns were well positioned to make interpretive assessments of students' views articulated at these workshops, and to assess the qualitative comments made in student surveys, from their perspective as students. These Research Interns were deeply engaged in discussions about issues surrounding school governance, as well as the issues surrounding qualitative research.

The research team each had key roles during this analysis session, as well as each taking responsibility for analysis of different dimensions of the research. Roles included timekeeping, data organisation, note-taking, photography, and sceptic. The analysis session began with individual reflections on "a moment that glowed/ lingering impression/ strong memory from one of the parts of this research" – an activity intended to explore the points of interest from the study. Pairs then read through data from different parts of the research in stages (the workshops, and online survey responses), highlighting and making notes of quotations felt to be of significance in exploring the benefits and challenges of student representation on school councils. Individual members of the research team also, progressively, took leave of the analysis meeting to conduct their own self-interview (using an audio recorder) about their experience of the research, answering questions that the research team had collaboratively written. In a series of group discussions synthesising the analysis, key quotations and ideas from different parts of the research were mapped on the whiteboard (see *Figures 8: Photograph of whiteboard analysis notes: Challenges* and *9: Photograph of whiteboard analysis notes: Benefits*).

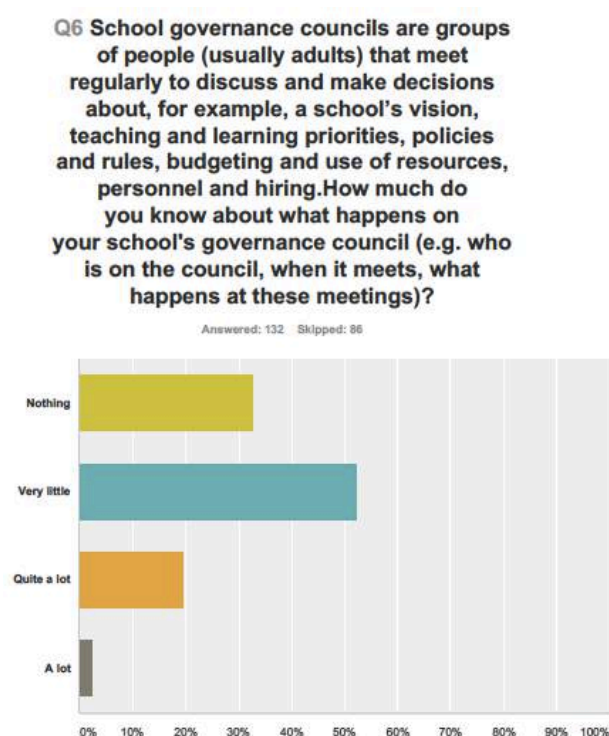


Figure 10. Online survey: Students' awareness of what happens on their school's council.

Those who asserted that they knew “quite a lot” or “a lot” indicated, in open-ended responses, that their awareness came through direct involvement on council or through student leadership, or through the involvement of friends, or through communication channels at their school (e.g. assemblies or newsletters).

Similarly, when asked in the online survey whether they knew if their school involved students on their school council, 46.04% either did not think that their school involves students, or were “not sure” if their school involves students, and 92 respondents skipped this question (see *Figure 11. Online survey: Students' awareness of student involvement on school council.*).

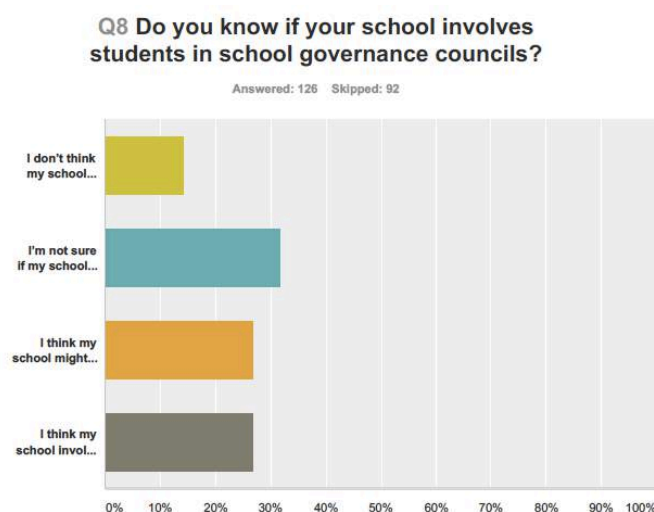


Figure 11. Online survey: Students' awareness of student involvement on school council.

Of those who did think that students were involved in school council, a variety of modes of involvement were described in open-ended responses, including students attending meetings to present a report, students partially attending meetings, student representation without voting rights, and student representation with reporting and voting rights. A number of these open-ended responses indicated that the school captains were the default student representatives at school council. Other open-ended responses suggested that students interpreted “student involvement” to entail student involvement in Student Representative Councils and student leadership (rather than school council meetings).

These findings from the online survey parallel responses at the Student Workshops to the early True and False activity (see description above) and discussions about the differences between the school council and Student Representative Council, the functions of school councils, and the legislative history of student representation on Victorian school councils. In response to the statement: “In Victoria, it is currently compulsory for secondary schools to have at least one student on the school council”, five students at the Regional Student Workshop thought that this was “true”, and four thought that it was “false”. All students in the metropolitan workshop moved the middle of the room to indicate that they were “not sure,” indicating an overall limited awareness among students about the legislation surrounding student representation on school councils, and a possible disconnect between school councils and the student body.

Notwithstanding this limited awareness, the overwhelming majority of students attending the Student Workshops and responding to the online survey articulated support for student representation on school councils. 80.16% of respondents to the online survey indicated that they thought students should be members of their school’s council (see *Figure 12. Online survey: Students’ opinions about student representation on school council*).

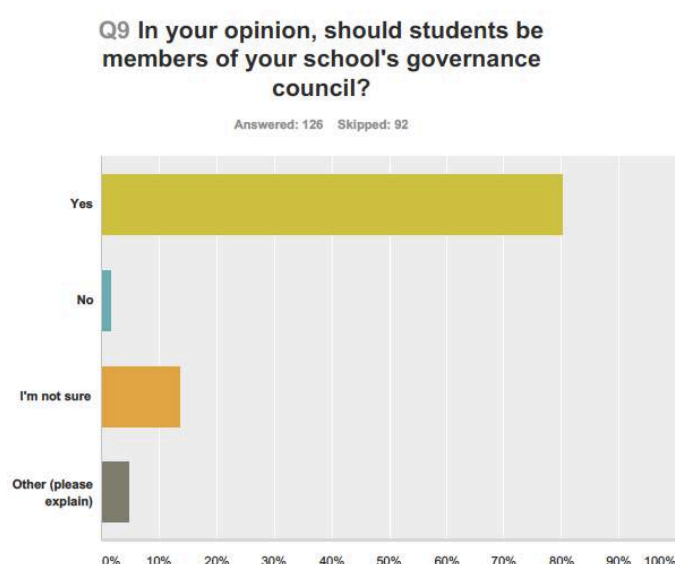


Figure 12. Online survey: Students’ opinions about student representation on School Council.

Students’ explanations of their perceptions of possible benefits of student representation on school councils are discussed in the next section.

Benefits of student representation on School Council

From the Student Workshops, principal phone interviews, student online surveys, and the participatory analysis session, six key benefits of student representation on school councils have been synthesised. Quotations from various research dimensions are included in discussing these benefits, with contextualisation of the quotation in parentheses, using abbreviations to indicate the research activity when these quotations were spoken/ written (see *List of abbreviations* above). These six benefits have associated challenges, which are further discussed in the following section.

Benefit 1: Students have experiential knowledge that other adults may not have.

Students and principals alike stated that students' direct experience of school, and their central role there, affords them knowledge:

The school is made for us – we know what's best for our school. We go there; we know what needs to be improved. (MSW, TF)

The student council is for the school. Students know what's good and bad about the school and how to improve. (MSW, TF)

[S]tudents know the most about what's going on in classes and can give a perspective that the teachers and parents may not necessarily have. (OS, Q11)

This knowledge is “unique”: “*Student voices provide a unique insight into the school from another angle that can't be accessed by anyone else*”(OS, Q11). It was argued that some of the adult (parent and teacher) knowledge represented at school council comes from students telling them: “*the parents and teachers are only aware of the issues due to the students telling them*” (MSW, WR). Students bring other modes of knowledge and thought: “*Having students – won't just be parents who are old and used to their old ways. If students are there, they have a new way of thinking compared to parents*”(MSW, FG). A principal spoke about the “*untapped potential and untapped resource*” that students can be – “*we sometimes underestimate the ability of students [...], how perceptive students are [...] in regards to the environment that they're in every day*”(PI). These words resonate with other research arguments that student input can sharpen organisational strategic planning and visioning (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kirshner, 2008; Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2003; Student Voice Team, 2016).

While adults can learn from students, this learning is not uni-directional. Student representation on school councils was also argued to offer an opportunity for mutual learning: “*Students know stuff that teachers don't know [...]. Students don't know some things that teachers know. It's an opportunity for a partnership*”(RSW, FG). Working together offers opportunities for reciprocal learning: “*Adults can learn things from students as well as students learning things from adults*” (OS, Q11). The second benefit foregrounds the reciprocity that is made possible through dialogue on school councils.

Benefit 2: Young people and adults learn and connect through dialogue.

Students spoke at the Student Workshops about how student representation may foster “*better communication*” and a “*closer relationship*” between students and adults, which “*creates a better school environment*” (MSW, FG). “*Connect[ion]*” was articulated by one student as a function of school councils, making this statement as he pointed to a postcard visual image (see **Figure 11**. *Typed and photographed postcard response to a focus group question about how school councils work, MSW*).

The school council exists as a body to connect students, teachers and principals so we can make decisions about the school together.



Figure 13. Postcard response to a focus group discussion of how School Councils work, MSW.

For another student, student representation will lead to “*less distance between those in leadership and students, an understanding of what the student community wants*” (OS, Q11).

In these modes of dialogue, “intergenerational learning” and connection become possible (Fielding, 2011). Student representation was argued to develop students’ understanding of other perspectives:

[As a student representative you are] *trying to think of everyone in the school* – [telling the adults] *‘this is how a student sees it.’ [...] Very often it’s the adults who make the decisions, so it’s good to have a student there. [...] You see the perspective of the adults.* (MSW, SCD)

According to a principal, students can grow in understanding of school governance:

I think it will give them a really good idea of what goes behind running a school, about the big decisions, about if we spend money on this, how is it going to improve student learning? [...] I think it will be an eye opener to see what's actually discussed at the council and even just to witness how minutes are taken, agenda items, how to speak, when you motion something, how you vote, how it's debated, all that stuff, to be in on those meetings. (PI)

Being part of policy decision-making processes can make the challenges of making these decisions more intelligible to students: *"If students are part of the decisions then they understand the importance of the decisions"*(OS, Q11). A principal explained:

It's good for them to understand that you can't just make a decision about school uniform or the types of computers on the booklist – you can't just make that decision overnight. It's something that needs to go through a process and there's lots of considerations about it. We've got to consider the cost and how that compares to previous expectations we've had on parents to purchase things. All those bits and pieces become a big issue for the way that decisions get made and I guess if kids get exposure to that, they more than likely will become a little more receptive to those decisions. (PI)

Student representatives can understand policy decisions by directly hearing their rationales, and can be in a position to communicate these rationales to others: *"If students are part of the decisions then they understand the importance of the decisions"*(OS, Q11).

[E]ven if they're there and they're hearing about the decision, they're getting it almost straight from the horse's mouth if you know what I mean. It's not third hand and then they don't know why that decision's been made. So if they know why the decision's been made then there's a better understanding and then that gets round to the other students. [...] So I suppose that's why I think it's important for the students to be there, to understand that there is policy that we have to follow and there's a line. (PI)

Adult school council members, too, learn from students: *"They will not only learn how to have successful meeting but students can also give feedback about how to have fun but successful meetings"*(OS, Q11).

One principal spoke about benefits for *"those college council members who aren't employees of the school"* – that they *"get to actually talk to other students and find out their opinions"*(PI).

Benefit 3: Students have a right to have influence on decisions that affect them.

Student representation on school councils was argued by a number of students to be a right, enabling influence on matters affecting them at school *"in the engine room"* of the school (RSW, FG). Two written responses at the end of a focus group exemplify students' views on this point:

Students have a place on school council as they deserve to have an active role in making important decisions for their education.

Students should have as much say as teachers do because it is our learning environment and we have the right to feel safe and comfortable. (MSW, PR)

One principal, in articulating his support for student involvement in “every aspect of the school’s operation”, argued that, “ultimately they’re a significant, very large percentage of the community so why shouldn’t they have not only an opinion but an actual right to change how the school operates?” (PI).

It is not only that students have a right to have influence, but their presence also promotes the representation of the demographics of the school community, and the particular needs of students in specific contexts. “[M]y school council’s members are 100% Caucasian whilst my school is almost entirely not. It would be good to have some form of representation even if it’s from students” (OS, Q11). One student at the Regional Student Workshop was emphatic about the importance of student representation for the opportunity to advocate for the needs of students in regional communities:

In country schools we don’t have as much opportunities [for example, in labs, to do experiments] – we have to go to Melbourne. So they [student representatives] can put their [other students’] ideas forward. Even though [the meetings are] boring, it’s really important. (RSW, SU)

Some students said that student representatives can have “the courage and voice for the students that don’t have the courage and voice” on matters affecting them (MSW, PR). With student representation, adults “would see our perspective, and not impose rules/ideas that negatively affect us” (OS, Q11).

Benefit 4: Student representation can improve communication between the school council and the broader student body.

It was not only stated that student representation has the potential to connect students and adults within the council, but also that these student representatives can “link the entire student body to the council” (MSW, FG, PR). This is to move beyond a uni-directional transmission model of communication, towards a more dialogical mode of collaborative deliberation and decision-making:

You try to understand [the school council’s perspective on an issue] and bring it into SRC meetings. Other students didn’t want to think about it the ways adults see it. It’s useful to see their perspective even if you don’t want the same thing. (MSW, SCD)

For one principal, too, this “conduit” enables student voice to go beyond “lip service”:

I also think that it's important that they go back to the student body and say that student voice is taken very seriously. It's not lip service. Everything that it brought to me is discussed. They don't get everything they want. Not everybody does in life, so I'm not interested in ambit claims but I am very interested in considered, concerned enquiries about improvements across the board. I think it's a nice conduit between the two groups. (PI)

Having a representative who is known by other students to be a representative was argued by one student to delineate a clear line of dialogue between the SRC and the school council: *"you go to [a student voice group] and it goes straight to school council – clarity is good"* (MSW, FG). Having a student representative at school council who is also involved in the SRC was argued to enable student work to be shared and actioned, with the student representative as a mediator. This mediation was contrasted to instances where students do not know how to bring their concerns beyond the SRC to higher decision-making channels. A former school council member described how, in a feedback loop, she could alert the SRC to the school council's deliberations, so that the SRC could make a contribution to decision-making: *"[I could go] back to SRC, saying, 'they're looking at it from this way.' How can we write our proposal to help address what they're thinking about?"* (MSW, SCD). Such a dialogical movement has the potential to bolster the purposefulness of SRC discussions – beyond petitioning or demanding for particular changes, towards a more dialogical space of decision-making on shared concerns.

Benefit 5: Student representatives benefit individually.

In addition to these benefits for schools, adults and the student body, students also mentioned individual benefits for student representatives. It must be stressed that these individual benefits were not as foregrounded as the benefits discussed for the student body, adults and the school. Students spoke about how participating as a student representative would *"improve students' confidence and speaking skills"* (MSW, FG), *"help with literacy skills"*, and that the experience would be *"good to put on your resume"* (RSW, FG). A student with current experience as a student representative spoke about benefitting from the *"experience from being in a setting with important people"* and being *"treated like an adult"* as *"prepar[ing] you for when you leave school – how to handle yourself, talk to people"* (RSW, SCD).

Benefit 6: Students feel heard and valued when changes happen.

Across the student workshops, students frequently used the word *"valued"* to describe student involvement in school councils:

*It makes students feel valued in school because they get a voice.
Students feel valued and involved because they can help out.
[Student representation] means that the students have to be looked at as a valuable member of the school community. The non-school members have to look to the students as people who are important.* (MSW, FG)

In these responses, “*value*” is a feeling experienced by students, but also an adjective indicating adults’ recognition of young people as “*valuable*”.

For another student, to be recognised as “*valuable*” and to feel “*valued*” has the potential to re-engage students in learning:

A lot of people are more passive in their education – ‘that’s the rules, that’s what I have to do’. People lose interest when they feel they have no agency. It’s important that students get to make real decisions that relate to them. It might re-engage people in the idea that schools are for them. (MSW FG)

They also feel that they are a part of the school community instead of constantly having teachers do things to them. (OS, Q11)

It would help if students could freely discuss with higher ups their issues, because if they can make a change about what they think is important, the more likely it is for them to enjoy and attend school more. (OS, Q11)

This concept of engagement, connection to community and enjoyment resonates with research literature about the significance of student participation for their sense of *efficacy*: students’ belief that they can make a difference in the world (Brasof & Spector, 2016; Mayes, Mitra, & Serriere, 2016; Pawluch, 2016; Student Voice Team, 2016; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Interestingly, however, students in this study did not speak about future democratic participation and civic engagement as benefits of student participation. Rather, the engagement and connection that was spoken about was rooted in immanent, present experiences of school and democratic processes.

These potential “changes” were considered exciting: “*Changes are actually made, nothing stays the same. Things are new*” (RSW, SCD). According to one principal, this process of collective action benefits all:

We’ve been working through that list [of student recommendations]. It’s taken us about eight to ten months and we’ve spent thousands of dollars but the kids have seen that what they’re asking for is taken seriously. Some of it we’re saying, ‘No, we can’t do that,’ but a lot of it, we’ve said, ‘Yep,’ and I’ve said, ‘I agree with the kids, it actually is awful, we should fix it.’ So there’s stuff that we’ve worked slowly through and this is about making their place, their school nicer but our workplace nicer too. It actually is beautifying our environment for everybody. (PI)

In such an environment students feel that they “*have their voice heard, and decisions aren’t necessarily made for them, but with them*” (OS, Q11).

Challenges of student representation on school council

Alongside discussing potential benefits of student representation on school councils, students and principals also raised concerns about the challenges of student representation. These challenges can be viewed as another angle on some of the potential benefits discussed above.

Challenge 1: Students' experiential knowledge may not be recognised, trusted or valued.

Even as adults and young people asserted the value of bringing students' experiential knowledge into the “engine room” of the school council, concerns were raised about deficit conceptions of young people's capabilities, maturity and trustworthiness, and student/ teacher power relations. In this section, the issue of confidentiality is explored as a challenge that exemplifies differing conceptions of young people and educational power relations, as experienced by students.

It was argued that a deficit conception of young people may shape some adults' attitudes towards student representatives:

I think that students are looked down upon and are not considered smart enough to know what we want or to be involved in big decisions. They underestimate us. (OS, Q13)

The likelihood of them not being listened to could be high, the staff and parents may not want them there, they could not be taken seriously. (OS, Q13)

If the adults don't listen to them, they might not listen to them because they're biased – thinking the student doesn't know much as a child. (MSW, FG)

One principal described a particular “mindset” towards young people and educational relations:

The challenge is trying to change the mindset of the staff. Some of the staff think that a student doesn't really have an opportunity to talk about curriculum – they shouldn't be given the opportunity – they think it's wrong. [...] [Some staff have a] very definite view of what education should be and so asking them to differentiate or change what they do, asking students for feedback about their class, they find quite threatening. 'Hang on, I'm the teacher so I'm here to tell the students what they need to know because I'm the expert.' (PI)

Another principal suggested that “some parents will be a bit apprehensive initially when you set it up, wondering what the role of the student is there” (PI). Students, too, might take on these entrenched messages about young people's inferiority: “the teachers are the bigger person they know what the right decision is. I'm just a little kid” (RSW, TF).

Power relations in education may also negatively impact on students' opportunities to feel that they are valued and trustworthy members of a school council. Students spoke about the potential for "*opposition from certain people in the school council from giving students almost an equal amount of sway in decision-making*" affecting the depth of student involvement (MSW, FG). One student wrote that some adults could be:

[...] extremely opposed to having students in positions of power as it challenges the traditional hierarchy in school; they're not used to students voicing their opinions from a higher level than students are usually at, so they would be very intimidated by it and would try to do anything to stop students from doing so. (OS, Q13)

One principal spoke about the challenges of working with teachers' views of power relations:

[Y]ou've really got to work with the students around that respectful feedback because any elevation in student voice in some school communities could be seen as a decrease in teacher voice. That has to be handled really well so that teachers still feel that they're not easy targets for criticism, that we can work together and that if the feedback is positive, constructive and specific, then we can move on things but you do need to build a culture around that. (PI)

Some students, too, conceptualised power as a zero-sum game, where increasing the power of some subtracts from the power of others: "*Teachers would need to respect that children might have different ideas. They'd need to be prepared to listen and give up some of the power*" (OS, Q13). Social expectations and relations were thought to contingently shape how adults could respond to young people, depending on the attitudes of others around them: "*Maybe some adults wouldn't be comfortable asking the students asking for their opinion because of other adults – 'if I give a chance to other students, what will they think of me?'*" (MSW, FG).

For some students, shifting these lingering conceptions of young people and power relations would "*take time*":

It isn't easy for adults to accept that students, teenagers, would have equal power as them in the decision making of the school, and that is completely understandable. The major challenges would revolve around trust between students and adult members, which could take time to solve. (OS, Q12)

Yet other students articulated a more pessimistic view of the fixed nature of educational power relations and the potential for changes to these relations: "*The teachers are in a higher level of power, so whatever the students say, the teachers aren't going to listen*" (RSW, FG).

An example: Differing views on young people and confidentiality

Differing conceptions of young people and educational relations are exemplified in differing responses to the challenge of keeping sensitive information discussed in school council meetings confidential. For some principals and students, the student representatives on school council needed to be the school captains because of the challenge of preserving confidentiality; students could “*go and talk to all and sundry about it in the school: ‘When we were at school council Mr So-and-so said he didn’t want hoodies, so he’s the one who’s prevented that’*”(PI). Student involvement, for some, needs to be limited at times, when discussing sensitive issues:

There might be times where I don’t think it’s appropriate for students to be there, if we’re talking about a particular family or whatever, in distress and what we need to do about it. (PI)

[Y]ou’ve got to balance confidentiality and colleagues’ right to privacy about certain things [...] there are sometimes some boundaries that we can’t allow students into. So that’s the tricky part. (PI)

“Delicate” issues present particular dilemmas for principals and councils:

Do we include kids in the discussion about – we had a student suicide a couple of weeks ago so I reported that to the school council about our process in dealing with that. That’s a delicate one. At the end of the day, they’re the ones going through it so that would be – I guess that’s the challenge is when we’re talking about some of those more delicate issues and that probably need a little bit of delicacy in handling [them]. (PI)

Some students shared this concern about the potential for students to “*spread confidential information*”(RSW, FG), “*disclos[ing] information to other students, leading to future issues*”(OS, Q12). “[school councils] *deal with sensitive issues such as employment and funding which is not appropriate for students*”(OS, Q13).

Yet, other attitudes and approaches to confidentiality were also suggested in principals’ and students’ responses. One principal said, in response to a question about the challenges of involving students, said that there are: “*No more [challenges] than working with any other human being*”(PI). Assumptions about young people’s capacity to maintain confidentiality were discussed as a challenge related to trust:

It’s partly teachers and whoever [who] assume students are going to be the problem – that’s part of the issue. ‘We don’t trust you about this stuff.’ They misjudge how students understand how important this is and what an important place they hold. (MSW, FG)

Students acknowledged the variability in both adult attitudes towards young people, and in young people’s display of maturity:

There are some students who are more mature than others. There are always students who will exaggerate. [... But] A 12-year old student can be more mature than a 40-year old can. (RSW, FG)

Sometimes students are more mature than teachers regarding some topics. [...]

Sometimes it's adults who are the ones spreading stuff rather than students. (MSW, FG)

One student wrote, in a post-it note at the end of a focus group, that the “biggest factor” in student representation “*is the trust between the students and adult members. Do they trust the student to keep this confidential? Do they trust the student to make the right decision?*” (MSW, PR). Confidentiality, therefore, is a challenge that exemplifies differing attitudes to young people and differing approaches to high-level decision-making in schools.

Challenge 2: There are relational, structural and spatial barriers to learning from and connecting with each other.

While student representation on school councils may foster dialogue and improved relationships between adults and young people in schools, there are a number of relational, structural and spatial barriers to mutual learning and relating. These barriers are not only felt by students. Previous research has emphasised the relational and structural difficulties in promoting inclusion in school governing bodies, particularly for parents in marginalised communities and for demographic groups marginalised within school communities (e.g. Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Hallgarten et al., 2004).

Relationally, according to students, to be a student representative in a room full of adults is daunting. In a response to the attitudinal statement in the “True and False” activity at the Student Regional Workshop, “If students were on a school governing council, they might get intimidated by the adults there,” students almost unanimously answered “true” (SRW, TF). One former school council student representative described the scene:

[Y]ou walk in, you've got the principal and other teachers – principal and high up teachers – the people who volunteer are quite often head of faculties. We had a member of parliament [on school council]. You have high important people – people from [a university]. You're not walking into a relaxed setting. (MSW, SCD)

Students may be numerically disadvantaged, outnumbered by the number of adults in the room (cf. Kyte, 1985, p. 15). Student representatives are also at a temporal disadvantage because, compared to most adults, who may serve for a number of consecutive years, students generally may only serve for one school year: “*Because they're Year 12 students they're only ever on there for a year whereas of course every other member is on there for at least two years in terms of their term and often they're re-standing*” (PI). Consequently, there may be a set of established relationships in a school council meeting room that a student representative will need to enter into, navigate and negotiate.

A selection of students' comments from the workshops and the online survey suggests how "fear and stress" may impact on students' capacities to meaningfully participate in school council meetings:

It would be a difficult environment to place inexperienced young people in when they may be confronted by older, traditionally powerful people. (OS, Q13)

Adults can get scary at times – 'no, this is how it should be done.' As students we get intimidated. (RSW TF)

Adults can easily overrule students more than adults. (RSW, TF)

There could be a lot of fear and stress for the students if they want to talk to the adults that stops them from showing their true selves and what they really want to tell them. (MSW, FG)

It may be intimidating for students to express themselves in front of school principals and vice principals. (OS, Q13)

Having to say your opinion but not knowing if it's going to be accepted: being scared of judgment from the adults in the meeting. (RSW, FG)

Sometimes some students aren't very confident in speaking up in front of or to people that seem or are more professional than ourselves. (OS, Q13)

Trying to explain something and they misunderstand what you say and your ideas. (RSW, FG)

Sometimes students can get intimidated [about] voicing their own opinion and don't manage to get their voice out which could be crucial or important to the school community." (MSW, FG)

This fear was linked by students to particular relational and structural practices. A student previously involved as a school council representative described some of the habitual patterns of speech in school council meetings, when a student asked her, "Do you think you had the same amount of what you got to say as the adults did?"

In some ways yes in some ways no. They want to move through quickly. Sometimes it's hard to get a voice. They do want you there and want your input. You picture a meeting and everyone having a say – like this. It is everyone sitting around a table. You have the school council president: agenda 1: this is what we talked about last week, are we going to move this motion? It's an open discussion that's controlled – very formalised. We eat dinner while we're doing it. If it's too casual you don't get anything done. We're here to get things done. (MSW, SCD)

The need for a tight, predetermined agenda, and pre-established long-term priorities may limit students from adding new items or returning to older items:

Student: [Was there] *SRC reporting at council meetings?*

Former SC representative: *A quick, 'anything to say?' You've got to get your moment quickly, get whatever you can in. It's probably different now. [...]*

Student: *Did you raise [a particular SRC concern] at school council?*

Former SC member: *I did once but it wasn't received well. They'd already had all the discussions and it was set. It wasn't a time for review. [...] But SRC was really focused on it. But school council was like, 'we've done that issue. That is for the 3-year review – put it up then.'* (MSW, SCD)

One principal questioned his own past experiences with students in school council meetings: *"I don't know whether we've had an artificial barrier by making them sit there for two hours and have very little to say. It must be very dull for them to be part of that process"* (PI). The capacity of students to raise their concerns is dependent on adults building in opportunities and time for students to speak into the structure of the meeting:

A conscious effort needs to be made for the student to contribute – they don't have the open space to communicate like the adults, only when the principal gives them the very limited amount of time to speak. (MSW, RP debrief discussion).

These habitual patterns of who speaks at meetings shape what student representatives can say and do, and what they cannot say and do.

The spatial configuration of the meeting room was also strongly argued to shape students' experiences of adult meetings, and their capacity to speak and to act. Who is seated where, how the room is arranged, and where the student(s) is/ are physically positioned were key factors for students: *"Where the students sit = big factor"* (MSW, RP, student's written notes). One former school council member described his experience of the spatial arrangement of school council meetings, and how this arrangement shaped his experience:

We went into a room like a restaurant. [...] We [students] were put separately from the rest of the school council. We weren't sitting in the same position on the table. [...] We were at the back, slightly off in the corner. We just kind of watched what happened. I often sat on the side a bit, from nerves. (MSW, SCD)

Similarly, one student wrote about his/ her experience on the school council in the online survey: *"I was actively not included on the same table as other members (sat to the side) not given a vote and only speaking to report news from the SRC"* (OS, Q14). Observing a role play of a school council meeting, one student made a connection between a student's physical separation and their contribution to the meeting: *"[The] student is separated from the other members, both contribution-wise and seating-wise"* (MSW, RP, student's written notes). The management of space and seating can be experienced by students as a form of *"power play"* (MSW, RP, student's written notes). These relational, structural and spatial conditions shape students' experiences and capacities to contribute to school council meetings.

Challenge 3: Choosing/ electing student representatives who will represent the range of students enrolled in the school and take the role seriously.

Even as students generally agreed that students have a right to be represented in school council, since decisions are made there that affect them, students also raised concerns about which students should be the ones to represent them. The majority of principals interviewed for this study indicated that, if students were represented on school council, it was generally the school captains (see **Figure 4. Principal phone interviews** above), and that this was their understanding of the general practice of other surrounding schools with student representatives. However, students raised questions about whether or not school captains are necessarily the most appropriate representatives, and whether student representatives (Captains and/ or school council representatives) should be chosen by the school executive (who understand the responsibilities of the role), or by other students voting to elect a representative. These are questions that connect with broader debates about political representation in democracies. One principal summarised these debates:

[...] The word representative could be taken in two ways. Do they [Student school captains as school council representatives] represent their peers when they go along to these things [school council meetings]? Yes, I do think they do that. I think they do that to the best of their ability. I think they represent the thinking that they are aware of to the best of their ability. Are they representative of our students in terms of behaviour, demography, age, skin colour, language? No, not necessarily but then you could argue that parliament and you go down into Victoria – everybody down is a white middle class man or woman – is that representative of Victoria? Not at all. We face the same challenges around democratic representation that others would. But do they attempt to represent their peers? I think they absolutely do. (PI)

Some students expressed concern that, in co-opting the school captains or students already in leadership, other students are overlooked for such positions because of their comparatively weaker “*reputation and achievements*”, with their “*ideas*”, consequently, “*go[ing] to waste*” (RSW, FG). One student questioned, “*What if the principal chooses who he likes best?*” Such as person was described as a “*Principal’s pet – if the principal says do this, that’s what they do*” (RSW, TF). Another student chose a particular postcard image in a focus group to explain the challenges of relative homogeneity of views (see **Figure 14. Postcard response to a focus group discussion of how School Councils work, MSW**): “*In a school council, while it seems like it might be diverse, they are all still cupcakes – you don’t get that outside diverse opinions that you should be getting*” (MSW, FG).



Figure 14. Postcard response to a focus group discussion of how School Councils work, MSW.

These words resonate with the recent reflections of a Canadian student:

The irony lies in that fact: those who are placed to solve the problem of student disengagement are the very students who are most disengaged. [...] Though seemingly productive, [including the “archetypal student leader”] can perpetuate a homogeneous circle of ideas, which fail at attacking fundamental causes of student disengagement. (Twagirayezu, 2015, para. 7 and para. 9)

These discussions of who represents students suggest some of the difficulties of recruiting, selecting/ electing and appointing student representatives, and the potential for exclusions.

Yet, to have student representatives who were not the usual ‘type’ of student leader was also considered to have its challenges. Some students wondered about the motivations and actions of student representatives – whether representatives could:

- choose to be involved “*solely for a badge or to feel respected [...] They participate just to only get the credentials but they don’t take action*”(MSW, FG),
- “*say things that only would work for them*”(RSW, FG),
- “*make irrational suggestions*”that might “*do more harm than good*”(MSW, FG),
- “*abuse their power*”(OS, Q9),
- be “*a bit naïve*”(OS, Q13)
- “*present some unreasonable or irrational suggestions which they have ulterior or selfish motives to*”(MSW, RP, student’s written notes),
- participate “*for a laugh and not to fulfil their role*” (RSW, FG, student’s notes), and/or
- “*lack understanding of processes and requirements*”(OS, Q13).

In considering who might represent students, one student wondered how “*to somehow (????????) choose a student representative that genuinely cares about student wellbeing and student action*”(MSW, RP, student’s written notes). Another suggested that “*the most responsible and active student who would do things for the greater good of the community*”be

chosen (OS, Q13), while another suggested only have “*students who have proven their maturity [...] allowed*” serve as representatives (OS, Q9). Recommendations related to these questions of how student representatives are chosen or elected, and who is chosen or elected, are further discussed below.

Challenge 4: Student representatives can feel caught in the middle

Student representatives on school councils may serve to connect and mediate between the school council, the SRC and the student body (see above). However, the student representatives who work and move between these groups, with their sometimes differing priorities, may feel certain tensions, as described by a former school council student representative:

SC representative: *[I was] in an in-between place – I couldn’t make any changes to school council, but the SRC wants you to do something about it. [...]*

Student: *What were the main challenges you faced during your time?*

SC representative: *Finding my feet and getting the students to understand when trying to bring it back to them. [...] You’re the one taking back the information and often the students didn’t want to hear it. It [information from school council] didn’t serve their [the SRC’s] purpose. Their purpose was changing uniform, and I had no news on uniform. I had news on maintenance, on grants to do this building, or fix our garden. Then students are complaining, ‘we’re making garden, but we are not doing this.’ But it’s explaining to them the grant has to be used for the garden. Sometimes students think, ‘why are you spending money on that and not on this?’ You have to explain to them that sometimes you don’t get a choice. You then speak for students, but then students don’t like it. It’s really hard to have clear communication from the mass to the representatives to the decision makers. You need to get a way to do that.*

Conversely, another student described how student representatives might be “*be bias[ed] towards the side of the students without thinking about the big picture for the wider school community. This could lead to bad decisions being made as the students want what is best for them*”(OS, Q13). Whether the student takes the side of the student “*without thinking about the big picture*”, or tries to explain school council decisions to students, the student may be left caught in-between, at times, competing interests. Positioned to help students understand or be more receptive to decisions (see Benefit 4 above), it could also be argued that the student representative may become an intermediary in the service of better governing the student body (cf. Bragg, 2007; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). As one student wrote, “*They give them leadership positions and claim that it gives them a ‘student voice’ but in reality they just use that student to do their dirty work and the students never really have a say in anything*”(OS, Q8). Considerations of how to support students in this ‘in-between’ role are explored further below.

Challenge 5: The time costs for student representatives on school council.

Time for students to be representatives on school councils was another challenge raised by both students and principals. Students spoke about the challenges of time: “*not many students have time to show up to meetings*”(OS, Q13). A principal of a school in a community facing challenging circumstances spoke about the multiple competing pressures on students that may make attending meetings difficult, and the competing times that suit adults and young people:

[I]f we have meetings at times when it's their sports time or their part-time work time, it's just another barrier. So we either suit the parents or we suit the students. I've heard so many of our students who are actually working and they contribute to the economy in their home and so to take them out of a part-time work shift to come and do something, you'd want to know that it was valuable because that young person's missing a contribution to the weekly groceries or whatever else they're contributing to. (PI)

Those students in comparatively socioeconomically advantaged situations may be more available to participate than others, potentially perpetuating a cycle of the “usual suspects’ (bright, normally middle class)” representing others, to the marginalisation of others (Hallgarten et al., 2004, p. 11).

In particular, for students in their final year of high school, to be on school council may impact on their school work, potentially creating “*added pressure along with their school work to perform*”(OS, Q13). A student currently serving on school council did concede that going to meetings “*takes away from my study*”, but added “*It's only once a month – I only really losing an hour a month*”(RSW, SCD). These time pressures may lead, in a desire to support students, to lower expectations on student attendance or flexible arrangements:

It's just tough when you're doing VCE if you've got effectively a whole night gone. [...] So sometimes they'll request not to be there, just like any other member of college council would and that's fine. [...] Often by September each year they're starting to get a bit concerned about their studies as they well should and sometimes they're not able to make a couple of meetings there until the next lot of captains start. (PI).

These flexible expectations on student attendance and participation at meetings may contribute to the comparative reduced participation of students in school council meetings compared to other categories of members.

Challenge 6: Student representation without action is tokenistic and potentially damaging.

Finally, but significantly, to include student representatives without action taken in response to students' contributions risks tokenism and other "demoralising versions of democracy in action" (Hallgarten et al., 2004, p. 11). Some students spoke about students "*attending*" without being "*actually be heard or acknowledged*" as "*tokenistic representation – not having students with real power, but there as just a gesture*" (MSW, FG). Students spoke about the negative consequences of participating without anything changing:

It might discourage the students. They feel that there's no hope for them to improve their school. (MSW, TF)

Students may not feel valued and be discouraged resulting in less students taking part in council and they might not want to do anything afterwards in terms of leadership in the school. (MSW, FG)

Experiences of nothing changing as a result of student representation may contribute to disenchantment with democratic processes and future apathy, rather than strengthening students' belief in their capacity to make a difference in the world.

The challenge articulated by a number of the principals is to avoid tokenistic student representation on school councils:

It's just trying to work out how you make it look to the student that it's not just a tokenistic, 'You've come to the meeting, thanks for coming and goodbye.'[...] I think it's disrespectful to tell a person, 'You can come and tell us what's going on,' if you're not going to listen to them. So I think it's a level of being able to have a genuine open process that allows them to be part of that. The nice part of that would be seeing the consequences of some of those decisions. (PI)

Student representation on school councils, according to another principal, should be one aspect of a broader set of practices where students are "*involved in every aspect of the school's operation*" (PI). In the following section, recommendations are made to support schools to avoid tokenistic recommendations, supported with positive examples of practices that students and principals described, and other recommendations crafted by students.

Recommendations and implementation ideas

The following recommendations are compiled from recommendations written and spoken by students at the Regional and Metropolitan Student Workshops, students' online survey responses, principals' accounts in their phone interviews, and the research team's discussions during the participatory analysis session. While quotations are not used for these recommendations, these statements reflect what was spoken and written in these settings. Where relevant, for later recommendations, *Implementation ideas* elaborate on positive examples and ideas from individual schools (principals' or students' accounts), including quotations from students or principals. These recommendations resonate with recommendations made in other previously published accounts of student representation on school councils (see *Appendix F*: A reprint of past articles published in the journal *Connect* related to student representation on committees).

Recommendation #1: Student representation on school councils should be mandatory.

The current legislation does not mandate student presence nor representation on school councils. This study suggests strong student support for student representation on school councils. The selection of principals interviewed for this study also supported student representation, although further research might explore the perspectives of a larger number of principals. Mandatory student representation will bring students' perspectives into this "ultimate democratic forum within the school community" (Australian Education Union, 2005, p. 2).

It is recognised that schools may be at different places on a continuum of student participation, and that the process of moving school councils towards mandatory student representation should not be rushed. In recommending mandatory student participation on school councils, it is *not* recommended that all schools immediately move to full membership rights and responsibilities for students. Mandatory student representation on school councils may initially look different in different contexts.

Mandating student participation will impel schools to begin processes of contextual reflection with students, teachers, parents and community members on what this participation will mean, how students will participate, what resources and support that students may need, and processes for meaningfully listening and acting. Such reflective processes can serve to reconfigure patterns of representation on school councils to better represent and consider students' "best interests" (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 3).

Implementation Ideas:

In moving towards mandatory student representation on school councils, schools should carefully and collaboratively set some "foundations" (cf. Hallgarten et al., 2004, p. 15),

considering questions about students' rights, responsibilities, assets and needs and re-thinking details of school council structures and relations.

In moving towards mandatory student representation, schools may also experiment and test out less formalised modes of student representation (cf. Hallgarten et al., 2004, p. 15): for example, student representation through:

- A school council member taking responsibility for establishing and strengthening connections and communication between the SRC to the school council, through attending SRC meetings
- The principal and/ or school council president attending SRC meeting(s) at strategic points of the year to discuss key decisions to be made by the school council;
- Distributing (possibly abridged) minutes from school council meetings to SRC leaders, to discuss with the SRC. These SRC leaders could then give feedback to the school principal or school council president, to be shared at the next school council meeting;
- Student representation in school council sub-committees (see also Recommendation #6).

These processes of reflection and initial experimentation may be assisted by carefully considering the recommendations below, and dialogical deliberation on the questions in the “School Council Audit Tool” below.

Recommendation #2: Students should be represented on school councils - as “*students*,” not “*community members*.”

The current legislation, which includes students under the category of “community member”, coopted to serve on council, has meant that some schools do not necessarily include students. Section 2.3.2(2) of the *Education and Training Reform Act (ETRA) 2006* provides that the Minister may constitute a school council as a body corporate by Ministerial Order (known as constituting order), and that the constituting order prescribes the composition of the school council.

It is recommended that the Ministerial Order create a separate membership mandatory category: “students”. Including students as a separate category, with mandatory representation (see Recommendation #1) will foreground the significance of students as stakeholders in their education. As discussed above, moving towards this category of membership should be accompanied by processes of collaborative reflection and planning.

Implementation Idea:

- That the Ministerial Order create a separate membership mandatory category: “students”.

Recommendation #3: Students representatives on school councils should be equally valued members, with schools moving towards students having full voting rights and membership responsibilities.

Being equally valued members of school councils includes students taking on the rights and responsibilities that other members may take, with appropriate training and support (see Recommendation #5). As one principal with student representatives put it: “*They’re viewed as equal participants so we don’t make a fuss of them because they’re students. They’re just other members of the college council*” with the “*same rights and responsibilities*” (PI). The value of student representatives should be explored with school council members, before students are integrated as members (see Recommendation #5).

Implementation Ideas:

These rights and responsibilities might include:

- The right to participate, with flexible arrangements at times. For example, student representatives may request to participate only in particular parts of the meeting via Skype if they are unable to attend a full meeting, or request to leave earlier.
- Responsibilities to make full contributions when present, and to send apologies if unable to attend (for example, if an assessment task is due).

Further ideas about preparing students for and supporting students with their particular rights and responsibilities are explored in Recommendation #5.

Recommendation #4: Students should be consulted in decisions about how to appoint/ elect student representatives, who should be the student representatives, and how many student representatives there should be.

A variety of views on how students should be selected, who should be selected, and how many student representatives there should be were articulated during this study. There was no unanimous agreement on the best process for selecting and/or voting on student representatives. In addition, there was not a clear consensus on which students are best positioned to represent their school. The question about whether ‘representation’ means elected leadership representing the student body (as in parliamentary modes of representation) or whether representatives should reflect the diversity of the student body, was not settled. These questions deserve open debate among the student body (see implementation questions and ideas below).

A number of questions for consideration and implementation ideas are suggested below, although these should not be taken as absolute statements. Schools need to engage in dialogue with students about the relative benefits and challenges of the implementation ideas below in their particular context. These ideas share the core principle of consulting the student body about the process of appointing student representatives; that there should be *“more influence from students to who goes on school council”* (MSW, RD).

Implementation questions for consideration and ideas:

- **What processes for applying for school council membership as a student will be put into place?** Schools should consider whether students will apply, be voted in (by whom?), be invited, or appointed, and whether *“the same process of applying for school council [will] be applied to both adults and young people”* (MSW, RD).
- **What criteria for student membership will be applied to students?** Schools should consider the criterion for which students become student representatives, and the openness of school council meetings to students who are not already in leadership. Should student membership be restricted to senior students, and/ or to students who are already student leaders? One student at the RSW said, *“Students should be allowed to be part of school council no matter circumstances if they want to be”* (RSW, RD). Another student at the MSW said that *“Students ranging from Year 7-12 should take part in the school council”* (MSW, RD). The implications, tensions, and possibilities of such recommendations should be considered by schools.
- **How many students will be represented on school council?** Schools should consider the number of student representatives on school council. While two members appeared to be the default number of schools involved in this study, schools might reflect on these numbers, considering the size of their school, community demographics, and other contextual factors. At the MSW, students recommended that *“there should be a minimum number of students”* (MSW, RD). It is recommended that there be no less than two student representatives.
- **What time of the school year will students be elected/ co-opted? What time of the school year will students begin to attend school council meetings?** Schools should consider whether students will begin attending council meetings at the same time of the year as other new council members, with the possibility then of shared training and induction processes. At the same time, consideration may also be needed as to the demands of particular stages of the school year according to the student’s year level. For example, students in Year 12 may not be able to consistently attend meetings from September onwards; a factor that hinders their meaningful participation, potentially just at the stage of the year when they are beginning to feel comfortable with school council processes. One principal interviewed for this study reported students beginning to attend school council meetings in Term 4 (with their term running until the end of the following

Term 3). However, this flexible term also meant that these student members could not attend school council training with the other school council members.

- **Will all student representatives attend consistently, or will students rotate?** During this study, students considered the relative advantages and challenges of student representation by the same students over the year. One suggestion at the MSW was that schools could have at least one consistent student representative on school council, and other student representatives who attend on a rotational basis: *“It’s important that there’s at least one regular person – a lot of the things discussed each meeting are ongoing. [But there] could be a rotation of other students”*(MSW, FG).

Recommendation #5: Students and adults should both undertake training and receive support in school council work.

At present, school council members undertake training for their role (Victoria State Government, 2015b). Students should be part of this training, done together with adults. Student representatives should receive the same training as other school council members in their roles, rights and responsibilities. As a number of principals said, if training is not provided for students to *“be able to do their roles properly”*, meaningful participation will become *“really hard for them”*(PI).

In order to shift deficit attitudes about young people and to strengthen mutual respect and trust, students discussed *“giving the adults the opportunity to get to know the student [representatives] more”*(MSW, FG). Time spent together in training will support the development of partnerships between adults and young people. Specific ideas for tailored training and support for adults and students, which may be done together to strengthen their partnership, are suggested below.

Implementation ideas: Training and support for adults

- Training targeted to support adults may include exploration of assumptions about young people and discussion of ways of working with young people for the benefit of the whole school.
- Training targeted to support adults may also explore a range of ways to approach the issue of confidentiality, and strategies to support all council members (including students) to maintain confidentiality.

Implementation ideas: Training and support for students

Training targeted towards students will support them to fulfil their role as school council members, by understanding key structures, language and processes, and understanding the central importance of confidentiality. Specific training/ induction sessions could involve, for example:

- The general structure of school council meetings and meeting procedures.
- Key subjects discussed at school council – for example, strategic planning and finance.
- Introduction to particular language, abbreviations and acronyms frequently used at meetings (cf. Kyte, 1985).
- Tailored discussion of the code of conduct for school council members, with a focus on training in maintaining confidentiality. One principal described the importance of this training in confidentiality:

[Y]ou're dealing with a school council which, by its very nature, is privy to the most confidential information. So you've got to train your students. They've got to pledge that there are certain things that they must keep confidential to the school council otherwise you won't have free and open debate within the council meetings. [...] It's part of the culture of the way in which you accept leadership at [School name], that are responsibilities in representation. (PI)

- Exploration of issues of representation: what it means that student representatives “do not speak solely for their friends, [...] or students with a specific set of needs, but for every student” at their school (Student Voice Initiative, 2014, p. 2).
- How to design and conduct consultative research.

In addition to training, having a support person or mentor for student representatives was considered to be important for students across research activities. It was not definitively decided who this support person/ mentor should be: whether this person should be:

- A sitting member of school council,
- An outside support who attends meetings with students as appropriate, or
- An outside support that the student representative can speak to before meetings, or debrief with after meetings.

This support person might be:

- A former student school council,
- A SRC Coordinator,
- A teacher selected by the student representative,
- A parent,
- The principal, or
- The school council president.

The role of this support person/ mentor could be flexible, according to the student representative(s)' needs and concerns. Some student representatives may choose to meet with this support person before their first meeting only, or maintain an ongoing relationship with this person. The role of this support person/ mentor could include:

- To review agenda and meeting papers with student representatives prior to the meeting,
- To explain language/ terminology,
- To look out for the student representatives at the meeting and ensure that they are comfortable and included in discussions,
- To assist, where appropriate, students to express their ideas or concerns (if, for example, student representatives do not wish to raise a concern by themselves),
- To encourage the student representative(s) to contribute in their role on school council.

Recommendation #6: The structure of school council meetings should support student representatives' meaningful contribution through, for example, the early distribution of meeting agendas, invitations to offer their feedback on other reports, and student involvement in sub-committees.

Careful deliberation on school council structures can help to challenge some of the barriers of uncertainty and fear that hinder some students from feeling that they can make meaningful contributions to these meetings. Specific ideas for school council structures are suggested below.

Implementation ideas:

- **The early distribution of meeting agendas** – The careful preparation and distribution of meeting agendas “at least five working days before the meeting” is already recommended in the *Improving School Governance* manual (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 20). However, anecdotal evidence from this study suggests that, in practice, this does not always occur. Distributing agendas early will enable student representatives (as it enables other representatives) “to reflect on the issues, to gather more information if necessary and to canvass the opinions of school community members” (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 20), including other students.
- **Explicit invitations for student representatives to contribute during school council meetings** – The structure of school council meetings should not only include time allocated for a student report (see Recommendation #7), but also deliberate opportunities for students to give feedback on other reports. Adult school council members might consider what kinds of “explicit gestures” could be made to signal that adults are “stepping back in order to create a space” for students’ contributions (Mitra, 2009, p. 426). Explicitly signaling and inviting students to contribute will strengthen a sense that students are equally valued on the council (see Recommendation #3).
- **Student involvement in sub-committees** – To involve students only in school council meetings, and not in other sub-committees where “a significant amount of work may be

undertaken” (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 20), risks tokenism. Involvement in sub-committees may enable students to “do lots of different things [that are] not bound by the tightness of a school council meeting” (PI). One school principal described a particular model of sub-committees, where a number of students are involved, with students choosing their subcommittee – a model that might be considered by other schools.

Recommendation #7: Student representatives should give a student report that represents students’ concerns, and should report back to the student body about other school council discussions and decisions.

In addition to explicit invitations to offer feedback on other reports, students felt that there should be time allocated and structured into the school council agenda for a student report. Such a report would strengthen the feedback loop between the student body and the school council. Likewise, at SRC (or equivalent) meetings with students, time should be allocated and structured for student representatives to report on (non-confidential) matters discussed at school council meetings, for discussion.

Consideration must be given to the position of this student report on the school council meeting agenda. As students discussed more than 30 years ago in an article about student representation in the journal *Connect*, student reports should not be positioned at “the end of a long and boring agenda” (BEHS and SRCS students, 1985, p. 13). Such positioning not only symbolically marginalises student contributions, but also results in more rushed attention to this report. The student report should be situated earlier in school council meeting agendas, to signal its significance.

Recommendation #8: Student representatives should be “*equally seated*” with other members of the school council.

Attention to the seating arrangements in school council meetings and the power relations that they symbolise and materialise is needed. What students described as “*safe seating arrangements*” can “*put students in the best position to act as possible*” (MSW, RD). Being “*equally seated*” has the potential to support student representatives to feel “comfortable”, counteracting potential feelings of intimidation, therefore strengthening students’ capacity to meaningfully participate in school council meetings (MSW, RD).

Implementation ideas:

Ideas for such “safe seating arrangements” could include:

- “Students [...] sitting between adults”(MSW, RD);
- Students sitting “near the ‘power players”, in a “power triangle”, with the “strong aura” of power “radiating to the students”(MSW, RD);
- A seating plan (RSW, RD and VR);
- At times, student representatives choosing to sit with other student representatives, and at other times, strategically working with other members (RSW, VR).

Recommendation #9: Schools should be accountable to report how students are represented on their school council.

Full student membership on school councils is the first recommendation of this report, with the caveat that some schools may need more time, resources and opportunities to experiment before full student representation is achievable. In the meantime, strengthening schools’ accountability to report how students’ “best interests” (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 3) are not only considered, but also represented on their school council can assist schools to deepen meaningful student participation. Reporting on what they are doing to value, listen to and respond to students’ concerns at the level of school council will assist school councils to reflect collectively on their processes and practices.

Implementation ideas:

- The annual school council report to the school community and the VicDET could include a section about student participation in school council decision-making. In this section, the ways in which the school council has consulted with, listened to, and/ or included students as representatives in their decision-making processes could be detailed.

Recommendation #10: Student representation on school council should be one aspect of a whole school vision that meaningfully involves students in all aspects of their education.

Student representation on school councils alone does not constitute meaningful student participation. Indeed, as stressed in the early sections of this report, students may be present in school councils meetings without having any influence, or a school may not need to have a small number of student representatives on school council because “*every student is empowered to take control of their own education, [and] they don’t actually need representatives. They just do it on a one to one basis [...] they literally just walk up*”(PI).

Conclusion

Alterations of the composition of school governance councils “do not necessarily alter the hidden curriculum of the classroom or other pedagogical space” (Hartley, 2010, p. 359). There is, perhaps, a need for a deeper rethinking of the structures of schools, the relationship between schools and society, and the purposes of schooling. Student participation on school councils should be understood as one outworking of a participatory democratic school community, where students, parents, teachers and community members are involved in shared decision-making and partnership. Such “radical democratic approaches to intergenerational learning” have the potential to generate “shared delight and shared responsibility between adults and young people”, to the benefit of all (Fielding, 2011).

School council self-audit tool

Evaluating the conditions for student representation on school councils (adapted from Fielding, 2001, pp. 134-135)

Zone of evaluation	Fielding's questions (2001, pp. 134-135)	Further questions for school councils
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who</i> is allowed to speak? • <i>To whom</i> are they allowed to speak? • <i>What</i> are they allowed to speak about? • What <i>language</i> is encouraged/allowed? • <i>Who decides</i> the answers to these questions? • <i>How</i> are those decisions made? • <i>How, when, where, to whom and how often</i> are those decisions communicated? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At school council meetings, <i>who decides</i> who gets to speak, when they get to speak, and what they get to speak about? • If your school council were to calculate the amount of time each member spoke during a meeting, <i>whose voices</i> would be most dominant? • How <i>accessible</i> is the language used at school council meetings for student representatives? What measures are in place to <i>support</i> students' understanding of this language? • What <i>strategies</i> could <i>encourage</i> student representatives to speak? • How are the decisions made at school council meetings <i>reported back</i> to the student body? • Are there <i>opportunities</i> for <i>other students</i> to speak to the school council about their responses to these decisions?
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who</i> is listening? • <i>Why</i> are they listening? • <i>How</i> are they listening? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What happens</i> when students speak at school council meetings? • Do students <i>feel 'heard'</i> at school council meetings? How do you know? • What kinds of "explicit gestures" could adults make to signal that they are "<i>stepping back</i>" in order to create a space" for students' shared responsibility and contributions at school council meetings (Mitra, 2009, p. 426)?
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the skills of dialogue <i>encouraged and supported</i> through training or other appropriate means? • Are those skills understood, developed and practised within the <i>context of democratic values and dispositions</i>? • Are those skills themselves <i>transformed</i> by those values and dispositions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What <i>training</i> is provided for school council members to support student representatives? • What <i>training</i> is provided for student representatives? • What <i>support</i> is provided for school council members and, in particular, for student representatives? • How does training for school council members encourage <i>mutual respect and trust</i> between members of the school council? • Beyond initial training, how does the school council continue to

		<i>reflect on members' listening skills throughout the year?</i>
Attitudes and dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do those involved <i>regard each other</i>? • To what degree are the <i>principle of equal value</i> and the <i>dispositions of care</i> felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What <i>attitudes</i> to young people are demonstrated through the school council's processes, the language used and the decisions made at meetings? • To what extent do people feel <i>equally valued</i> in school council meetings?
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How often</i> does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur? • Who <i>decided</i>? • How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or <i>relate to other organizational arrangements</i> (particularly those involving adults)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there space in the school council meeting agenda for a <i>student report</i> as a standing item? • <i>Where</i> is this student report positioned in the school council meeting <i>agenda</i>? • Is <i>sufficient time</i> allocated for discussion of the student report and other student concerns that arise during the meeting?
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the <i>cultural norms and values</i> of the school system proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? • Do the <i>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</i> demonstrate values supportive of student voice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does student representation in the school council align with or contrast with the <i>cultural norms and values</i> of the everyday life of the school? • Is student voice in school decision-making part of the school's <i>practices, traditions and routines</i> outside of the school council?
Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where</i> are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters [...] take place? • Who <i>controls</i> them? • What <i>values</i> shape their being and their use? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where</i> are school council meetings held? How does this physical location support and/ or constrain the active participation of student representatives? • <i>When</i> are school council meetings held? How does this meeting time support and/ or constrain the active participation of student representatives? • What are the <i>seating arrangements</i> for school council meetings? Where do students sit? What do these seating arrangements communicate about students' value?
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What <i>action</i> is taken? • Who feels <i>responsible</i>? • <i>What happens</i> if aspirations and good intentions are not realised? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What <i>action</i> is taken as a result of student reports and contributions to school council meetings? • Who is <i>responsible</i> to consider what action will be taken after student reports are given? • <i>What happens</i> when students' concerns cannot be actioned? How are these discussions and decisions communicated?
The Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need <i>new structures</i>? • Do we need <i>new ways of relating to each other</i>? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need <i>new structures</i>? • Do we need <i>new ways of relating to each other</i>?

Reference List

- Alcoff, L. (1991). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, 20, 5-32. doi:10.2307/1354221
- Allan, J. (2006). *Response to the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools*. Melbourne: Victoria State Government Retrieved from http://www.det.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/projects/schoolgov/Response_SchoolGovernance_in_VicGovSchools-rpt.pdf.
- Australian Education Union. (2005). AEU Response to the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/school_governance.pdf
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2007). Australia's commitment to children's rights and reporting to the UN. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/australias-commitment-childrens-rights-and-reporting-un>
- BEHS and SRCS students. (1985). The Eppalock Decalaration. *Connect*, 32, 13-15.
- Blackmore, J., & Hutchison, K. (2010). Ambivalent relations: the 'tricky footwork' of parental involvement in school communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(5), 499-515. doi:10.1080/13603110802657685
- Bragg, S. (2007). 'Student voice' and governmentality: The production of enterprising subjects? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(3), 343-358. doi:10.1080/01596300701458905
- Brasof, M. (2015). *Student voice and school governance: Distributing leadership to youth and adults*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Brasof, M., & Spector, A. (2016). Teach students about civics through schoolwide governance. *Kappan Magazine*, 97(7), 63-68.
- Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.
- Fielding, M. (2001). Students as radical agents of change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2, 123-141. doi:10.1023/A:1017949213447
- Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(2), 295-311.
- Fielding, M. (2011). Student voice and inclusive education. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 70(1), 1-14.
- Fielding, M., & Moss, P. (2011). *Radical education and the common school: A democratic alternative*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fletcher, A., & King, A. (2014). *SoundOut guide to students on school boards*. Retrieved from Olympia, WA: <https://soundout.org/wp-content/uploads/edd/2015/01/SoundOut-Guide-to-Students-on-School-Boards-2nd-Edition.pdf>

- Groundwater-Smith, S. (2007). Student voice: Essential testimony for ethical schools. In A. G.-S. Campbell, S. (Ed.), *An ethical approach to practitioner research: Dealing with issues and dilemmas in action research* (pp. 113-128). London: Routledge.
- Groundwater-Smith, S., Dockett, S., & Bottrell, D. (2015). *Participatory research with children and young people*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA, New Delhi & Singapore: Sage.
- Hallgarten, J., Breslin, T., & Hannam, D. (2004). *I was a teenage governor. Project report phase 1: Pupil Governorship: initial thoughts and possibilities*. Retrieved from http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/lib_res_pdf/0158.pdf
- Hart, R. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence, Italy: Unicef.
- Holdsworth, R. (2000). Schools that create real roles of value for young people. *Prospects*, 30(3), 349-362. doi:10.1007/BF02754058
- Jones, A. (1993). Students: The dispossessed in the new power relations in Victorian state schools. *Connect*, 83, 3-9.
- Kirshner, B. (2008). Guided participation in three youth activism organizations: Facilitation, apprenticeship, and joint work. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 17(1), 60-101.
- Kirshner, B., O'Donoghue, J. L., & McLaughlin, M. W. (Eds.). (2003). *New directions for youth development: Youth participation improving institutions and communities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kyte, C. (1985). For students on school councils. *Connect*, 32, 15-19.
- Lodge, C. (2005). From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: Problematising student participation in school improvement. *Journal of Educational Change*, 6, 125-146. doi:10.1007/s10833-005-1299-3
- Lundy, L., & McEvoy, L. (2012). Children's rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood*, 19(1), 129-144. doi:10.1177/0907568211409078
- Manefield, J., Collins, R., Moore, J., Mahar, S., & Warne, C. (2007). *Student voice: A historical perspective and new directions, Paper No. 10*. Melbourne: Victorian Department of Education Retrieved from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/research/researchpublications.htm>.
- Mayes, E., Mitra, D. L., & Serriere, S. C. (2016). Figured worlds of citizenship: Examining differences made in 'making a difference' in an elementary school classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(3), 605-658. doi:10.3102/0002831216648378
- Ministry of Education, Victoria. (1983). Decision making in Victorian Schools. Ministerial Paper No. 1. Melbourne: Ministry of Education, Victoria: March.
- Ministry of Education, Victoria. (1983). School Councils. Ministerial Paper No. 4. Melbourne: Ministry of Education, Victoria: April.
- Mitra, D. L. (2009). Collaborating with students: Building youth-adult partnerships in schools. *American Journal of Education*, 115(3), 407-436.
- Mitra, D. L., & Serriere, S. S. C. (2016). *Civic education in the elementary grades: Promoting student engagement in an era of accountability*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

- Morgan, D. (2008). Snowball sampling. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (pp. 816-817): London, New Delhi & Singapore: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Morris, W. (2016). History of School Councils. Retrieved from <http://www.viccsso.org.au/school-councils/history-of-school-councils>
- Pawluch, A. (2016). Playing the Trump card. Retrieved from <https://studentvoicepractitioners.com/2016/06/20/playing-the-trump-card-by-andrew-pawluch/>
- Payne, L. (2009). Twenty years on: The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the United Kingdom. *Children & Society*, 23(2), 149-155. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00212.x
- Student Voice Initiative. (2014). *Student Trustee Handbook*. Retrieved from Ontario: <http://studentvoicei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Student-Voice-Initiative-Student-Trustee-Handbook.pdf>
- Student Voice Team. (2016). *Students as partners: Integrating student voice in the governing bodies of Kentucky schools*. Retrieved from Kentucky: <http://prichardcommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Students-as-Partners-final-web.pdf>
- Twagirayezu, P. (2015). Student voice: Priorizing the disengaged. Retrieved from <https://studentvoicepractitioners.com/2015/08/19/student-voice-prioritizing-the-disengaged/>
- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child, 20th November 1989, Treaty Series, vol. 1577*. Geneva: United Nations General Assembly.
- Veerman, P. E. (1992). *The rights of the child and the changing image of childhood*. Dordrecht, Boston & Norwell, MA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Victoria State Government. (2006). *Report on the Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools*. Melbourne: Victoria State Government Retrieved from https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/projects/schoolgov/Report_ReviewOfSchoolGovernance_in_VicGovSchools_July2005-rpt.pdf.
- Victoria State Government. (2015a). *Education State: Schools*. Melbourne: Victorian Department of Education and Training Retrieved from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/educationstate/launch.pdf>.
- Victoria State Government. (2015b). *Improving School Governance*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Training Retrieved from http://schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au/pdfs/isg_governancemanual.pdf.
- Whitty, G., & Wisby, E. (2007). Whose voice? An exploration of the current policy interest in pupil involvement in school decision-making. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 17(3), 303-319. doi:10.1080/09620210701543957
- Wilkins, A. (2016). *Modernising school governance: Corporate planning and expert handling in state education*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Zimmerman, B. J., Bandura, A., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29(3), 663-676.

Appendices

Appendix A Research Planning Meeting PowerPoint

Students on school governance councils: Planning Student Regional Workshops

VicSRC Offices
Saturday 6 August 2016 - 9-12am

Introduction to Research Planning

- VicSRC and Deakin University research project: *Student Voice In School Decision-making: Student Representation on School Governance Councils* - background
- Today: Negotiating the design of this project:
 1. What the project is about (and thinking about the idea of students being on school governance councils)
 2. Designing the research methods
 3. Doing research: Ethics

Timeline for today


- 9-9:15 *Introducing ourselves*
- 9:15-9:45 - *Recapping the project so far/ the issues around student participation on school governance councils*
- 9:45-10 - *Brainstorm focus group activities*
- 10-10:30 - *Design and plan specific focus group activities*
- 10:30-10:45 - *Morning tea break*
- 10:45-11:00 - *Discuss online survey (and issues in designing surveys)*
- 11-11:30 - *Re-work/ design online survey*
- 11:30-12 - *Getting ready for the Student Regional Workshops*

Introducing ourselves

- Name
- School
- Why you're interested in this project
- 2 things that are True, one thing that is False about you

What the project is about (and who decided what the project would be about)

- Students' and principals' views on students being on school governance councils
- What do students and principals think of students being on school governance councils? Benefits? Challenges? Good examples?
- What recommendations should we make to the VicDET (and other schools)?



Designing research - What has already been approved


- Student regional workshops: 10am-2pm
 - [REGIONAL] (1st Sept)
 - [REGIONAL] (2nd Sept)
 - [REGIONAL] (8th Sept)
 - [REGIONAL] (9th Sept)
- Online student surveys
- Principal Phone Interviews (Pinchy)

TODAY =
Designing what will happen at these workshops, designing the survey

This project - What mode of student participation is this research project?

- Data sources - *passive, objects*
- Respondents - *passive, responding*
- Co-researchers - *experts working with adults*
- Researchware - *pursuing your own research agenda*
- Intergenerational research and a "radical collegiality"

From King, L., & Pilling, N. (2005). 'It's not easy being a radical': Student views on the practice of a value-challenging, anti-trait & 'researchware', learning school project. *Education Research*, 30(1), 105-120. (unpublished)



Being a Research Intern

- Plain Language Statement and Consent Form - questions?

2. Designing research: Steps in participatory/ action research

- Identify a problem/ issue (e.g. students on school governance councils)
- Investigate - collect data on the problem using various research methods (e.g. surveys, focus groups, arts-based methods...)
- Analyse the data
- Develop actions/ recommendations based on the data
- Take action/ report your findings/ make recommendations in the hope of creating positive change

From: <http://www.schollgovernance.vic.edu.au/12-what-school-councils-do>



2. Designing research:


- Identify a problem/ issue (e.g. students on school governance councils - Identified by VicSRC 2015 Executive)
- Define key terms - School governance councils in Victoria:
- <http://www.schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au/12-what-school-councils-do>
- What do you know about what a school council does?
- (You need to make sure you're clear about what a school council is, if you're facilitating research about it. There are no dumb questions here!)



From VicDET: Improving School Governance

<http://www.schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au/12-what-school-councils-do>

- Acting as a team, [school] council supports the principal to provide the best possible educational outcomes for students.
- All school councils in Victoria operate under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the Act).
- The Act lists school council's objectives as being to:
 - assist in the efficient governance of the school
 - ensure that its decisions affecting students of the school are made having regard, as a primary consideration, to the best interests of the students
 - enhance the educational opportunities of the students of the school
 - ensure the school and the council comply with any requirements of the Act, the regulations, a Ministerial Order or a direction, guideline or policy issued under the Act.



The functions of a school council

<http://www.schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au/12-what-school-councils-do>

- The functions of a school council are outlined in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and include:
 - establishing the broad direction and vision of the school within the school's community
 - participating in the development and monitoring of the school strategic plan
 - approving the annual budget and monitoring expenditure
 - developing, reviewing and updating school policies
 - raising funds for school-related purposes
 - maintaining the school's grounds and facilities
 - entering into contracts (such as for cleaning or construction work)
 - reporting annually to the school community and to the Department
 - creating interest in the school in the wider community
 - informing itself of and taking into account the views of the community
 - regulating and facilitating the after hours use of school premises and grounds
 - ensuring a children's centre at the school or other premises controlled by the Minister



Possible student roles on school governance councils (historical and present)

- Compulsory student representative on school governance councils?
- Optional student representatives with voting rights
- Associate members without voting rights (A, 2002)
- Students invited to part or all of meeting, but not at meetings for student to staff issues
- Students invited to observe part of a meeting
- Students not authorised to attend meetings

A quick history of students on school governance councils in Australia

- 1975: First School Councils in Victoria
- 1982: Ministerial Paper No. 4: School Councils - membership, role, membership, etc. Two students to be elected by students in all public primary government schools, agreed for primary schools
- 1984: Restructure of School Councils - student membership abolished
- 2002: Review of School Governance in Victorian Schools - no change to role of students

Students on Victorian School Governance Councils

- "Councillors are required by legislation to keep students' best interests in mind at all times."
- At times a school council will consult with students, particularly in relation to policy development on topics of interest to students.
- Councils might also have links with the student representative body.
- Some school councils co-opt students into the community member category.
- - p. 14
http://schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au/pdf/056_governancemanual.pdf



Student involvement in school councils?



8. Students/Adult Equality
7. Completely Student Driven
6. Students/Adult Equality
5. Students Consulted
4. Students Informed
3. Tokenism
2. Decoration
1. Manipulation

<http://teachnet.org/teacher/04/teacher/teacher.htm>

Adapted by Alison Peckham (2002) from work by Roger Smith and Gifford

2. Designing research: [From VicSRC Congress - look at Butcher's paper]

- Discuss your own experiences at your table/ group: Are students on governance councils at your school? How are big and small decisions made at your school?
- Interrogate/ question your assumptions and reflect before proceeding [WALL REFLECTIONS]
- IS IT NECESSARILY A NEGATIVE THING FOR STUDENTS TO NOT BE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE COUNCILS?
- WHAT DO WE NEED TO FIND OUT BEFORE WE TAKE ACTION (AS THE VICSRC)? [What type of 'data'?]
- WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN ANY RESEARCH WE DO (AS THE VICSRC)? [Participants]
- HOW COULD WE FIND OUT WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW? [Methods]

2. Designing research: An example

- Investigate - collect data on the problem using various research methods (e.g. surveys, focus groups, arts-based methods...)
- ... But, before we do anything... ETHICS



2. Designing research

Investigate – and ETHICS

<http://www.evidence.net.au/78884-143>

- The need for ethics - abuses (the Milgram experiment, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study)
- Research participant rights (for the research to have merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, respect)
- Considering risks and benefits of research
- Gaining consent (initial and ongoing)
- Confidentiality and privacy



And thinking about how to keep a record of what happens

- How can you keep a record of what happens in a focus group?
- What are the ethics considerations to keep in mind when recording data?
- What kind of data will the activity generate? How will it help us answer our research questions?
- Data:
 - Post it notes
 - Butcher's paper - writing
 - Student writing - other paper/ document saved on computer
 - Audio recording - digital recorder, iPad
 - Photographs - taken by iPad or other digital camera

Student Regional Workshop - Ideas

- Interactive Introductory activities exploring the issue of students being part of school decision making and running a school (1 hour - 10:00-11:00am)
 - E.g. Filling in a 'dance card' finding someone who:
 - is on their School's Student Representative Council,
 - someone who has been overseas,
 - someone who has represented their school,
 - someone who has a relative who is a teacher,
 - someone who likes pizza etc.
 - Responding to a newspaper article/ visual image that relates to the issue of student participation in school governance, and will discuss their responses to the article/ image: An emotion, a question, a quote.
- Morning tea (20 mins - 11:00-11:20am)
- Focus group discussions and activities (1 hour: 11:20am - 12:20pm)
- Lunch (40 mins - 12:20-1:00pm)
- Finish focus group discussions and activities (30 mins - 1:00-1:30pm)
- A brainstorm session/ discussion at the end (30 mins - 1:30-2:00pm) - summary of main points, ideas, recommendations etc.

Ideas for research activities with students about students on school councils?

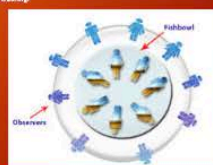
- From the Vic SRC Workshop...
 - Questions
 - Responding to visuals
 - Drawing (e.g. a council meeting)
 - Creating a role play etc (8 mins).
- TODAY = looking these in - activities and questions



2. Designing research: Facilitating focus groups

<https://instructionaldesignideas.wordpress.com/2016/07/26/fishbowl-for-training/>

- A fishbowl focus group: Half of the group 'in' the focus group, and the other half observing (analysing what a focus group facilitator needs to do and think about)
- Observation checklist: Half of the group observing the focus group



2. Designing research: Facilitating focus groups

- Ethical discussion/ Introduction: consent, recording voices, confidentiality and privacy.
- Postcard Icebreaker - Which image is most like how decisions are made in your school?
- Follow up discussion: Are students part of school decision making at your school? How are decisions made at your school, from your understanding?
- Benefits and challenges: What would be some benefits of having students on school governance councils? What would be some challenges of having students on school governance councils?
- Pairs to choose one interesting headline/ image/ quotation about the issue: from newspaper articles about students participating in school councils/ boards/ major decisions
- End of focus group: Post it note: One important point that was raised (by anyone) during the focus group.



2. Designing research: Debrief - facilitating focus groups

- 1. Introduction: The purpose of the focus group is introduced by the facilitator, and explains that there are no right or wrong answers.
- 2. The facilitator explains how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.
- 3. The facilitator seeks the participants' consent.
- 4. The facilitator checks if there are any questions before starting the focus group.
- 5. Questioning: The facilitator's facial expressions and body language are open and welcoming (uncrossed arms, leaning forward etc).
- 6. The facilitator faces towards whoever is speaking, and maintains eye contact.
- 7. The facilitator asks open questions (not closed questions - yes/no answers.)
- 8. Instructions and questions are clear in phrasing - understandable for participants.
- 9. Participants are able to finish their sentences without interruption from the facilitator or others.
- 10. Follow up questions are asked to encourage participants to elaborate.
- 11. Questions are evenly distributed between participants - all included, courage participants to elaborate.
- 12. End - Participants are asked if there is anything else they wanted to add. The focus group is concluded with thanks to the participants.



2. Designing research: Debrief - facilitating focus groups - reflection

• Individual student Post-it note reflection

- Responding to one of the following questions:
 - "What was something I learned from this activity?" or
 - "What was something that surprised me during this activity?" or
 - "How can I apply this learning when I am a researcher with other students?"



2. Designing research: Designing an online survey

- Do this online survey...
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/learn/online-surveys/101-how-to-design-a-good-online-survey/>
- Think about, while doing the survey (1 question per 3 students):
 - PURPOSE: What is the purpose of an online survey?
 - DESIGN: What makes a 'good' survey?
 - DATA: What are the differences between the data generated in a focus group, and the data generated in a survey?
 - ADVANTAGES: What are the advantages of survey data? What can survey data tell you?
 - DISADVANTAGES: What are the disadvantages of survey data? What can't survey data tell you?



2. Designing research: Designing an online survey



- Design of an online survey (5 mins):
In small groups (of 4-5 students), compose 2 survey questions for the anonymous online student survey about student participation in school governance councils.

Reflection/ conclusion (5 mins):

- What were the key points you learned about conducting ethical research during this elective?
- What do you think are the key challenges in conducting research with secondary school students?
- How will you address these challenges, as you conduct research with secondary school students?



Appendix B Principal Phone Interview Questions

Victorian Secondary School Principal phone interview schedule and questions

Good morning/ afternoon. Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about student participation in school governance. You were invited because you are a principal of a Victorian secondary school.

There are no wrong answers but just different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if you think that it might be different from other people's points of view. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

As discussed in the Plain Language Statement and Consent form, I have a recording device. You've indicated on your Consent Form that you DO/ DO NOT wish to be recorded. [IF THE PRINCIPAL HAS INDICATED THAT HE/ SHE IS HAPPY TO BE RECORDED.] I'm hoping to record the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. While I might use your name during the conversation, your name(s) won't be used in any reports written about the conversation. You can be assured of complete confidentiality.

Are you still okay with this interview being recorded? [Participant responds.]

Well, let's begin.

Interview topics/ prompts:

School experiences as a school principal

- Tell me about the school where you are a principal (e.g. government/ independent/ Catholic? Coeducational/ single-sex? Comprehensive/ selective?).
- What do you enjoy about being a principal at [NAME OF SCHOOL]?
- What is challenging about being a principal at [NAME OF SCHOOL]?

Student participation in leadership and school governance at the Principal's school

- Are students involved in leadership activities at [NAME OF SCHOOL]? Describe these activities.
- How do you understand the role of school governance councils/ boards?
- Who is involved in school governance councils/ boards at [NAME OF SCHOOL]? Describe how school governance happens at [NAME OF SCHOOL] and in your region.
- Are students involved in school governance meetings at [NAME OF SCHOOL]? Why or why not?

Views on student participation in school governance councils

- Do you know of any examples of student participation in school governance councils in your region or other parts of Victoria? [IF YES] What has worked well in these examples? What has been challenging?
- Do you consider there to be benefits of student participation in school governance (for students, for adults, for the school, for the community)? [IF YES] Please describe these benefits.

- Do you consider there to be challenges in involving students in school governance? [IF YES] Please describe these challenges.

Other important information/ texts

- Are you aware of any helpful resources to support schools in involving students in school governance processes and practices that you recommend that we read/ view? [IF YES] Please describe these resources.
- Is there anything else that you want to say about student participation in school governance?

Appendix C Student Workshop Structure and Description of Activities

VicSRC Student Regional Workshops Structure of workshops and description of activities

Time	Activity	Configur- ation	Resources
10:00-10:10	<u>Welcome (Host school and Eve)</u> - Quick introduction and plan for the day		
10:10-10:20	<u>Icebreaker – People bingo: Roger</u> Students are to speak to others to fill in their bingo card – and meet others. (This activity will also raise the issue of the difference between a School Council and a Student Representative Council.)	Whole group – students meeting other students	People bingo cards X 20 copies total (See Resource 1 below)
10:20-10:25	<u>Introduction to the Project: Eve</u> Eve to introduce this research project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of the Regional Workshops How this project started Ethics and ensuring confidentiality/ privacy – not saying particular names of students/ teachers/ principals, respecting others in the group, not sharing what others have said beyond the group etc... 	Whole group	
10:25-10:40	<u>True and false game about school councils: Facilitated by 2 RIs</u> Student RIs (alternate) to read out a statement, and students to move to the left side of the room if they think it is TRUE, and move to the right side of the room if they think it is FALSE. (Positions in room between 'True' and 'false' explained – 'Absolutely true/ strongly agree', 'True/ agree', 'don't know', 'False/ disagree', 'Absolutely false/ strongly disagree'. These True and False statements will at first be <i>attitudinal</i> (including everyone). Student RIs will ask students to call out why they responded with True or False (explain answer). The True and False Statements then will become <i>factual</i> . One half of the room will get knocked out for incorrect answers. (This activity will help students begin to think about what a school council is and what it does, and whether students are on these school councils.)	Whole group – moving to left or right side of the room	True and false statements – 4 copies (See Resource 2 below)
10:40-10:45	<u>Moving into focus groups: Facilitated by 2 RIs</u> A game will be played to organise focus groups. Students will need to, without speaking at all, arrange themselves in order of birthday (i.e. date and month, not year) – e.g. 1 st Jan on one side of the room, down to 31 Dec	Whole group at first, and then into focus groups.	N/A

	<p>at the other side of the room. Students will then be in focus groups based on this order (e.g. January/ Feb students together etc.).</p> <p><i>Size of focus group will depend on the number of students who have registered to come, and the number of facilitators present. Ideally, focus groups will have been 4-6 students in a group.</i></p>		
10:45-11:40	<p>Focus group 1: Thinking about school decision-making, school councils and students: Facilitated by 2 RIs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [RIs – see Resource 5 for further information about school councils] • RI – confirm with students their consent for audio recording, and turn on the audio recorder etc. • Postcard icebreaker – Which postcard image is most like how decisions are made in your school? [Students say their name, school, and their response] • RIs ask students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think a school council is? • Who do you think is on your school's council (e.g. parents, principal, community members, students...) • What do you think a school council does? • After these answers, the RI clarifies any misconceptions about what a school council is and what it does. • M&M activity – Students are to choose as many M&Ms as they like from the bowl, but can't eat them yet. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are to then split their M&Ms into two groups (their choice of how many in each group). • Ask for a volunteer to be a scribe (who gets 5 extra M&Ms). This student is to write notes about the Benefits and Challenges on a Table – see Resource 3 Benefits/ challenges table. • 1st group of M&Ms – for each M&M, students are to say one possible <i>positive/ benefit</i> of having students on school governing councils. Opening question = <i>What could be good about having students on school governing councils?</i> [Discuss all the benefits from all students in the group, and any other ideas.] Students can eat their M&M when they have said the benefit. If students have more to say, let this conversation continue. • 2nd group of M&Ms – for each M&M, students are to say one possible <i>challenging</i> in having students on school governing councils. Opening question = <i>What could be challenging about having students on school governing councils?</i> [Discuss all the challenges.] Students can eat their M&M when they have said the challenge. If students have more to say, let this conversation continue. • Make sure notes have been taken from this conversation! • Post it note reflection from focus group – Students write on a post it note: <i>One important point that was raised in this focus group discussion [or, something I wanted to say but didn't get to say...]</i> 	<p>Focus groups – 1 RI per focus group</p>	<p>Digital recorders Postcards</p> <p>Info sheet for RIs (to help with clarifying what a student council is and does)</p> <p>M&Ms – 1 small bowl per focus group (back up = Skittles for anyone with allergies?)</p> <p>Benefit/ challenge table X 10 total (See Resource 3 below) – Print on coloured paper</p> <p>Post it notes</p>
11:40-12:00	Morning tea		
12:00-12:20	Stepping up – Other people's perspectives on school councils: Facilitated by 2 RIs	Whole group – standing in a line – step	Role cards (laminated) and scenario

	<p>Students stand in a line, and are given a 'role' card (e.g. principal, parent who is on school council, parent who isn't on school council, student on school council, student who dislikes the school).</p> <p>Scenarios are read out (see Resource 4: Stepping up below). Responding to this scenario, students are to step forward if they (in their <i>role</i>) would feel <i>good</i>, or not so good, in this situation. (<i>If their role would not be involved in this particular scenario, students sit down on the ground.</i>)</p> <p>RIs read the scenarios out. After students have stepped forward or backwards, RIs ask students for their reason for stepping forward or back.</p>	forwards or backwards	sheets (and on PPT) (See Resource 4 below)
12:20-12:40	<p>Fish bowl Puppet role play of a school council meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students to volunteer, following the previous 'Stepping up' activity, to take on the role of one member of a school council (e.g. principal, parent, student representative, community representative). (<i>This improvised role play could use puppets, as a way of being able to film the role play.</i>) Scenario [<i>Perhaps a facilitator with a knowledge of how school councils run could be the principal in this role play.</i>] This is an important school council meeting. A big decision needs to be made about the use of \$750 000 of government funding that has been granted for buildings/ resources at the school. Role play what happens at this meeting. – 12 mins Those who are not involved as characters in this role play sit as the 'audience', and are to take notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who <i>gets to speak</i>? - Who <i>does not get</i> to speak? - What is <i>talked about</i> in this meeting? - What is <i>unable to be talked about</i> in this setting? - What is <i>positive</i> about what is happening in this meeting? - What is <i>challenging</i> about what is happening in this meeting? Debrief after meeting (8 mins) – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss questions above... - What did you notice? - From this role play, what <i>recommendations</i> would you make for how school councils could run? 	Small groups – based on role – e.g. principal, parent, teacher, student, community member	Puppets Ipad/ video recording devices
12:40-1:20	Lunch		
1:20-1:45	<p>Visual representation of an ideal school council: The dreaming – Facilitated by RIs</p> <p>In original focus groups, students are to create a visual representation of their ideal school council – how many people? Who? What would they do? Groups will be given fruit erasers as representing groups (e.g. parents, principal, teachers, students, community members) to use. Groups will take a picture of their final configuration, and write a description of why they think this configuration is an effective one. Groups then share back with the bigger group (1:35-1:45).</p>	Original focus group 1	Fruit erasers (gps of people) and paper circles (table) Ipad – to take picture of configuration
1:45-2:00	<p>Recommendations for schools? (Eve to facilitate)</p> <p>As a whole group, Eve asks groups to brainstorm (for 2 mins in groups) on butcher's paper recommendations for schools and school systems. Groups are to use the language of recommendations <i>E.g. It is recommended that...</i> Groups share their recommendations back with the bigger group. Discussion: <i>What action should be taken from here?</i></p>	Whole group configuration, but groups work to brainstorm	Butcher's paper

Resource 1

People bingo – Find someone who...

... Likes pizza.	... Goes to the school where this Workshop is happening.	... Has had a conversation with their principal in the last 4 weeks.
... Thinks that students should have more of a say in big decisions made at their school.	... Is a member of the Student Representative Council at their school.	... Has been to a school council meeting.
... Is a member of their school's council.	Has a family member who is a teacher.	... Was born in the same month as you.

Resource 2

True/ False Statements – School governing councils and students

Attitudinal statements:

1. Everyone has a say in my school.
2. Students should be put in charge of decisions made at school.

Factual statements:

3. A school council is different to a Student Representative Council. **[True]**
4. In Australia, all schools have had school councils since 1920. **[False: Only since 1975].**
5. In Victoria, it is currently compulsory for secondary schools to have at least one student on the school council. **[False: Not compulsory.]**
6. In the 1980s in Victoria, it was policy that government secondary schools had at least two students on their school council. **[True]**
7. At the present time, some schools have students on school councils, in the category of "Students." **[False: They are in the category of "community member"]**
8. Under Victorian law, an objective of school councils is to make decisions affecting students with the best interests of the students in mind. **[True]**
9. At school council meetings, the school council makes decisions about which students should be expelled, and which teachers should be fired. **[False]**
10. At school council meetings, the school council makes decisions about the school's vision, strategic plans, policies, budgeting and expenditure. **[True]**

Attitudinal statements (Strongly agree/ agree/ don't know/ disagree, strongly disagree):

11. If students were on a school governing council, they might get intimidated by the adults there: parents, teachers, principal.

12. If students were on a school's governing council, but they weren't listened to, it could be more damaging than helpful.
13. It would be good for more schools to have students on their school councils.

Resource 3

Having students on school governing councils – NOTES from focus group

Group name: _____

BENEFITS of having students on school governing councils	CHALLENGES of having students on school governing councils

Resource 4

Stepping Up

Role Cards (to laminate on coloured paper)

School principal

A parent who is on the school council

A parent who isn't on the school council

A Year 12 student who is a student representative on the school council

A Year 9 student who dislikes the school

A Year 8 student who has just joined the school council

A local community member who has been on the school council for 10 years

A teacher at the school who is not on the school council

A teacher at the school who is on the school council

Scenarios

Your school does not have student representatives on the school council. The school council is about to make a major decision about how to use a significant amount of government funding.

Your school does not have student representatives on the school council. Students have been organising a petition about the current uniform policy.

Your school does not have student representatives on the school council. The school principal is about to retire. The process for selecting a new school principal has begun. The school council is meeting to discuss the job selection criteria for a new school principal.

Your school has never had a student representative on the school council. The VicDET has just made it mandatory for all schools to include at least one student on the school council.

Two student representatives have just been included on the school council. This meeting is their first meeting as members of the school council. On the agenda is a discussion of last year's financial expenditure. The meeting includes a lot of financial statements and accounting jargon.

Resource 5

Information Sheet on School Councils (for focus group facilitators)

What is a school council?

- A group of people that supports the principal to provide the best possible educational outcomes for students.
- School councils meet a number of times a year to make decisions about what is happening at the school.

What are the aims of school councils?

To:

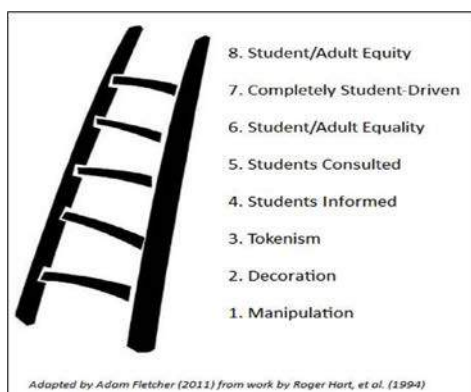
- Help to run the school efficiently
- Ensure that the school's *decisions affecting students* are made with the *best interests* of the students at the school as their primary consideration
- Enhance the *educational opportunities of the students* of the school
- Ensure the school and the council *comply* with any requirements of the Act, the regulations, a Ministerial Order or a direction, guideline or policy issued under the Act. (Education and Training Reform Act 2006, paraphrased in Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 3)

What do school councils actually do?

- Establish the broad *direction and vision* of the school within the school's community
- Participate in the development and monitoring of the *school strategic plan*
- Approve the *annual budget and monitoring expenditure*
- Develop, review and update *school policies*
- *Raise funds* for school-related purposes
- Maintain the school's *grounds and facilities*
- Enter into *contracts* (such as for cleaning or construction work)
- *Report* annually to the school community and to the Department

- *Create interest* in the school in the wider community
- Inform itself of and taking into account the *views of the community*
- Regulate and facilitate the *after-hours use of school premises and grounds*
- Operate a children's service at the school or other premises controlled by the Minister. (Victoria State Government, 2015b, p. 6)

The ladder of participation (ways in which students can be involved in school decisions)



Youth/ student voice: 'speaking out'
Being heard
Being listened to
Being listened to seriously and with respect (including a willingness to argue with students with logic and evidence)
Incorporating youth/ student views into action taken by others
Shared decision-making, implementation of action and reflection on the action with young people

Youth participation ladder (Holdsworth, 2000).



A quick history of students on school governance councils in Australia

1975: First School Councils in Victoria

1983: Ministerial Paper No. 4: School Councils - establishes role, membership etc; two students to be elected by students in all post-primary (government) schools; optional for primary schools

1994: Restructure of School Councils - student membership vanishes

2005: Review of School Governance in Victorian Schools - no change to role of students

Appendix D Online Survey



Student representation on school governance councils

Thank you for taking the time to tell us what you think about students and school governance councils.

This survey should take about 10-15 minutes. There is information about the survey on the next page.

Please read this information and, if you agree to complete the survey, click next' to start.



Student representation on school governance councils

Full Project Title: *Student Voice in School Decision Making: Student Representation on School Governance Councils*
Principal Researcher: Eve Mayes +61 3 5247 9551 eve.mayes@deakin.edu.au
Research Assistant: Sophie Breheny +61 3 9267 3710 sophie.breheny@deakin.edu.au

Your Consent

You are invited to take part in an **anonymous online survey** as part of a research project about secondary school student representation on **school governance councils** (*groups of people that meet regularly to discuss and make decisions about, for example, a school's vision, teaching and learning priorities, policies and rules, budgeting and use of resources, personnel and hiring*).

The **Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)** has asked Dr Eve Mayes, from Deakin University, to lead this research project. This survey, and other research activities, have been designed by a research team that includes secondary school student researchers.

You can decide if you want to complete this survey or not. *You don't have to do the survey.*

The **purpose** of this introductory Plain Language Statement is to explain to you as openly and clearly as possible what this project is about so that you can make a fully informed decision about whether you are going to participate. Please read this Plain Language Statement carefully.

If you would like to **talk to someone** about the project, you can call Eve Mayes, Lecturer in Pedagogy and Curriculum: **+61 3 5247 9551**, or email: eve.mayes@deakin.edu.au. If the phone is not answered, you can leave a message and Eve will return your phone call as soon as possible.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, you can complete the survey. By completing this survey, you are **consenting** (agreeing) to be part of this project.

If you begin the survey, but **do not wish to continue**, you may close the survey window before completion. If you close the survey window, your answers will be deleted, and you will have withdrawn from the survey. We are not requesting your parent/ carer's consent for you to participate in this online survey because this survey is anonymous.

Aims and project outcomes

- **To gather the views of students and principals** across Victorian schools on the issue of student representation on school governance councils.
- **To collect and create resources** to support schools to initiate or extend meaningful student participation on school governance councils.

Project outcomes will include a report written for the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) and a two-page executive summary sent to participating students, principals and schools.

Methods: What you will be invited to respond to in the survey

This survey will take **approximately 10-15 minutes** to complete. You will be invited to respond to questions about your school, your experiences at school, and what you think about students being involved in decision-making at school.

While this survey will give you a chance to **have a say** and **share your experiences** about students being part of big and small decisions at school, we cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any direct benefits from participation.

What if I want to know about the survey results?

If you want to know about the survey **results** and the project's **findings**, you will need to contact the project researcher separately (to maintain privacy and confidentiality).

Financial or other relevant declarations

The researchers involved in the study do not have any interests, financial or otherwise, that conflict in the conduct of this study.

Complaints

This project has been **approved** by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee, and by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2016-193).

If you have any **complaints** about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

Postal Address: The Manager, Ethics and Biosafety,
Deakin Research Integrity,
Deakin University,
221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood VIC 3125
Email: research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
Phone: + 61 03 9251 7129

Please quote project number 2016-193.

I'm happy to do the survey.

If you have read and understand this information about the research project and would like to participate, click Next.



Student representation on school governance councils

1. I am a Victorian secondary school student.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. My school is (select all that apply):

- ☐ Government
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Selective
- ☐ Non-selective
- ☐ Co-educational
- ☐ Single sex
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. I am in Year...

4. My school is located in... [You can check the [map of Victorian School Regions](#) if you are unsure where your school is located]:

- ☐ **Metropolitan** Melbourne
- ☐ **Regional** Victoria: **North-Eastern** Victoria region
- ☐ **Regional** Victoria: **North-Western** Victoria region
- ☐ **Regional** Victoria: **South-Eastern** Victoria region
- ☐ **Regional** Victoria: **South-Western** Victoria region
- ☐ **Interstate** (not Victoria, but still in Australia)
- ☐ Outside of Australia
- ☐ Not applicable - I am not at school



Student representation on school governance councils

5. Describe **your understanding** of what **your school does to make small and big decisions** about, for example, your school's vision, policy and rules, budgeting and resources, and school personnel and hiring. *(Who makes these decisions? How are these decisions made?)*

6. **School governance councils** are groups of people (usually adults) that meet regularly to discuss and make decisions about, for example, a school's vision, teaching and learning priorities, policies and rules, budgeting and use of resources, personnel and hiring.

How much do you **know** about **what happens** on your school's governance council (e.g. who is on the council, when it meets, what happens at these meetings)?

- ☐ Nothing
- ☐ Very little
- ☐ Quite a lot
- ☐ A lot

If you answered "quite a lot" or "a lot", how do you know this information?

7. **Who** do you think are **members** of your school's governance council? (E.g. principal, teachers, head teachers, parents, community members, students etc)



Student representation on school governance councils

8. Do you **know if your school involves students** in school governance councils?

- ☐ I don't think my school involves students
- ☐ I'm not sure if my school involves students or not – it's not discussed or known to me
- ☐ I think my school might involve students, but I'm not sure how
- ☐ I think my school involves students, in the following ways (please describe below)

9. In your opinion, **should** students be members of your school's governance council?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ Other (please explain)



Student representation on school governance councils

10. Do you think having students as part of formal school governance councils would have **benefits**?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

11. If you answered **Yes** to Q10, describe these benefits.



Student representation on school governance councils

12. Do you think having students as part of formal school governance councils would have **challenges**?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

13. If you answered **Yes** to Q12, describe these **challenges**.



Student representation on school governance councils

14. Do you have a **story to share** about being involved in your school's governance council? If your answer is **Yes**, please share your story.

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (please share your story)

15. Do you have any **other ideas** about how students could be part of school decision-making processes and practices? If so, describe your ideas.

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (please describe your ideas)

Thank you for your participation in this anonymous online survey!

Please contact Dr Eve Mayes at Deakin University (eve.mayes@deakin.edu.au) if you have any **further questions** about this survey, or if you would like to be notified of the **results** of this survey.

Appendix E Outline of the Participatory Analysis Session

VicSRC school councils project
Collaborative Analysis – Sat 10th Sept 2016, 12:30-3:30pm

1. 12:30-12:40 – Volunteer for key roles (to keep us on track):

- a. *Timekeeper*
 - b. *Past data organiser* (to make sure that all PAST data is neatly re-organised after we look at it)
 - c. *Photographer* (of all written notes/ visuals/ whiteboard writing that we generate today)
 - d. *Today's data organiser* (to make sure that everything we generate today – post it notes etc – is organised together, labelled with today's date, and collated and filed with paper clips)
 - e. *Sceptic* (to question what we're doing and why we're doing it)
- Give out **notebooks** – for notes along the way / questions/ points for later etc.

2. 12:40-1:00 - A moment that glowed/ lingering impression/ strong memory

- *Before starting analysis: A moment that glowed/ lingering impression/ strong memory* from one of the parts of this research (could be the VicSRC Elective, or Saturday research planning session, or Student Workshops, or online survey, or today...).
 - Discuss as a group, then
 - Write in your little notebook, and then
 - Progressively photograph and type up on Eve's laptop
 - Try to write it with the 5 senses/ descriptively.

NAME	A moment that glowed/ lingering impression/ strong memory (and from which part of the research)

3. 1:00-1:20 - Recap purpose of today and approach to analysis

- Identifying key points that the **report** needs to include – themes, quotations, ideas
- Brainstorm ideas for further work
- Look quickly at a few examples of ‘final reports’ (e.g. last year VicSRC one; other student voice ones) – Discuss: *What do these reports generally include?* Discuss overall components, and also “executive summary”, “snapshots”, Appendices.
- Discuss contested ideas about ‘voice’ and data analysis, and where I am coming from as a researcher: (return to first images from the VicSRC Elective about different modes of research)
 - Conceptions of ‘voice’ and ‘data’ as ‘*authentic*’ vs and conceptions of ‘voice’ and ‘data’ as *co-constructed, created* in and through the research event.
 - Analysing ‘voice’ and ‘data’ – *‘themes’ and objectivity/ subjectivity* (we are entangled in what we think is important from this research, because of our own views)
 - Emotion* and data analysis – rejecting it, vs embracing and working with it.
- Setting up our self-accounts: Throughout the day – one at a time, go into another room to record your own account of you yourself and this research:
 - Brainstorm:** *What questions do you want each other to answer about your experiences of this research?* (WRITE THESE ON MINI WHITE-BOARDS) – e.g. Why did you decide to become part of this research? What did you find surprising about what students said? etc
 - Discuss these answers briefly... Students might jot their ideas down briefly.
 - Each person to go away, one at a time, to record their account of their work.

4. 1:20-1:50 – Familiarising ourselves with the elective/ workshop/ principal data

- (1:20-1:35) Individually/ in pairs: Read through the data from:
 - Student Workshops
 - Typed up summaries of the whole research
 - Principal phone interviews
- Write in little notebooks/ Type up – Your sense of key quotations – and why this quotation is important/ interesting.

Key quotations

Source (e.g. post it note, audio recording)	Quotation	Why is it important/ interesting?

- (1:35-1:50) Report back and discuss
- On whiteboard – key word themes – compile (and take a photograph of

5. 1:50-2:30 – Familiarising ourselves with the survey data

- (1:50-2:05) Individually/ in pairs: Read through the data from one section of the survey (*3 questions each person*)
- What are the key themes you can pick up from students’ answers?

- What are some key quotations?

Survey question	Key themes	Key quotations

6. 2:30-3:10 – Synthesising the data

- List of quotations in these key areas, cut up. Move them around to group them into key ideas/ themes [from Eve typed up summary of notes/ data].
- Group discussion: Key ideas/ themes from the data about:

Benefits?	
Challenges?	
Alternatives/ solutions?	
Recommendations?	
Other questions that still remain to be answered?	
Further directions to be taken?	

7. 3:10-3:30 – This research and me

- Group discussion about what you said on your audio recording – noticing what others said.
- *What have been the key highs of being a student and a researcher?*
- *What have been the challenges of being a student and a researcher?*
- Final reflection – writing up on laptops.

Students and Committees: 1984

These three discussion papers were produced within the Victorian Transition Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) and the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) in 1983-84. They were initially published in

Connect 27/28, June-August 1984. The papers were intended as guides for the use of committees or for students who were members of committees and bodies such as School Councils.

*While some specific references have changed over time (eg names and references to investigations into legal liability), the **issues, principles and action** in these documents remain intensely relevant to today's considerations.*

Students on Committees: For Committees

Preamble

In a variety of educational programs and school structures, representation in decision making is being accorded to students and student groups. Government policies, as reflected in the Ministerial Papers, call for such representation. This poses challenges for school structures, for committee procedures and for teaching and learning approaches.

This paper, prepared as a response to these Government initiatives, attempts to outline some of the **principles** under which such representation should operate, and some **action** steps to be taken by the various programs and committees.

Introduction

Why are students being approached for representation within programs and school structures?

A summary of various papers and other writings on this subject must point to the changing nature of youth, their position in society, their diminishing life options, and the role of education in this regard. James Coleman has written that:

The student role of young persons has become enlarged to the point where that role constitutes the major portion of their youth. But the student role is not a role of taking action and experiencing consequences ... It is a relatively passive role, always in preparation for action, but never acting.¹

In recognition of the need for a response to these dilemmas, that alters the educational experience for young people, various programs have insisted that young people be brought into a more active role in decision-making about the implementation of program activities. This occurs within specific projects, within school-based decision-making structures and on area, regional and state committees.

Such representation is seen to have important educational value for the students (both generally and in specific skill areas). It recognises the value of the contribution that students make to the development of the program and provides a model of access to decision-making skills for all students. Tony Knight points to a rationale for programs which allows students to develop and demonstrate competencies to:

1. function as participants with adults in the planning and the resolution of problems in school and community settings;
2. learn the processes of debate, discussion and decision-making in group structures;
3. develop and plan human service activities;
4. link academic content and learning in order to deal with important social issues.²

The following discussion paper on student representation on committees is being circulated for your information and comment. It has been produced by a working party convened by the Policy Coordination and Program Review Committee of (Victorian) TEAC (Transition Education Advisory Committee) and comprising people with experience in TEAC (State and Regional), the Supplementary Grants Program, the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, the Youth Action Program, and the Student Action in Education Project.

The proposals included as 'principles' in the paper are intended to be positions which committees could work towards. Groups that do not initially feel able to implement all these points should not be deterred from starting to develop action. Action suggestions are included in each section ...

Marge Smythe
Chairperson

Policy Coordination and Program Review Committee

And Peter Cole comments upon specific aspects of such programs as they relate to the transition of young people from school to work or further study:

... the transition from school to work or further study is one significant part of the broader process of the transition of youth from dependent to independent status;

the process by which youth in transition are assisted, should value rather than devalue the contribution which youth can make to society;

schools and their communities have an important role to play in the process by which youth are prepared for transition;

youth facing difficulties in exercising options should be assisted and supported whilst negotiating the process of moving towards chosen paths;

youth that are most severely disadvantaged should be given priority in the allocation of support resources.³

Participation by young people in the planning, implementation, evaluation and review of programs must be developed in the context of the above general statements. Since circumstances vary between programs, specific consideration needs to be given to the reasons for such representation and the outcomes expected from such representation. It is vital that such consideration provide a model for the basis of continuing representation and involve students in joint planning of the purposes for involvement.

2. Regional student groups should be set up to include student representatives from all government post-primary schools (initially);
3. A State-level student group be set up to include members from all regional groups;
4. The role of the regional and state groups be to:
 - a) promote the issue of student participation in decision-making in schools, through in-service, publications etc;
 - b) assist individual schools in setting up appropriate student forums;
 - c) provide the basis for closer student links/networks within and between schools;
 - d) act as a resource group for students and others seeking information and assistance.
- b) Adopt a program of pre-meeting meetings, resourced by the auspicing body, whereby agenda and major issues are discussed and clarified with student representatives;
- c) Adopt a more flexible meeting procedure allowing for short adjournments whereby particular issues can be clarified and elaborated with student representatives;
- d) Adopt a meeting reporting format which clearly itemises decisions taken and persons responsible for actions;
- e) Adopt a procedure of a verbal summary of all business completed at the end of the meeting by the executive officer;
- f) Encourage a point form synopsis or summary of the main concepts presented in committee documents as a face sheet to all documents.

5. Support

Issues pertinent to the area of support for students involved in decision-making include:

- a concern about student inexperience in such processes;
- a concern about student disadvantage in relation to general meeting procedures;
- the need for communication channels between student representatives and their broader student constituencies.

These issues could be re-stated as positions of principle:

In order for effective student participation in educational decision-making forums, the following principles should be endorsed:

- a) All student participants must have access to support programs designed to assist them in their work in decision-making forums;
- b) All forums which include student representatives should adopt meeting procedures to maximise the effectiveness of student participation;
- c) All student representatives be required to utilise appropriate communication channels with their broader constituency as an integral part of their role.

Action:

The above principle positions need to be supported with appropriate programs and resources in order to make the statement of principle an actuality. The following methods are raised for consideration:

1. a) Generate in-service programs for student representatives resourced by the auspicing body. Issues to include: meeting procedures, methods of developing communication channels, rationale for student participation, elaboration of roles of all participating bodies;
- b) Develop a network of students as consultants, resourced by the auspicing body, to assist the work of new student representatives.
2. a) Adopt a program of committee tutors, responsible to each student representative, required to assist student representatives on committees;

3. a) Develop a program of report-back meetings conducted by student representatives with their broader constituency, supported by the auspicing body;
- b) Support the development of student media programs to which student representatives submit reports of decisions taken and the nature of the debate;
- c) Develop a program of student seminars/conferences at which substantial and long-term issues relating to the work of student representatives can be considered.

6. Credit for Students' Work

Students, it must be understood, are at school firstly to pass and progress. They hold this responsibility to themselves and often to their parents. If involvement has to happen at the expense of academic or scholastic achievement, then it is an oppressive system which will not allow equality for students in decision-making processes.⁴

Students should not be disadvantaged by their participation on committees occurring at the expense of their school work. To ensure that this does not happen, students should receive full credit for their committee work and attendance. Such credit should, wherever possible, be integrated into the school's curriculum with the committee work given full value as an important learning experience.

Action:

Negotiations will have to take place when student membership of committees is being arranged, involving the committee, School Council and administration, students, parents and teachers. The committee concerned will have to take substantial responsibility for this action by having a committee member or members act as liaison person/s, keeping in regular contact with the school/s involved. This liaison could include:

- seeking Education Department endorsement for the proposal to have students on the committee;
- developing a task orientation to the role of students on committees. Students would benefit from having specific tasks/projects/responsibilities to oversee, to identify with and to report about;
- seeking negotiated 'contracts' covering such things as:
 - a) school subjects or programs with which the committee work links;

- b) probably time commitments of the committee work and arrangements this might necessitate for the student/s with other school subjects or programs;
- c) agreed goals and format for descriptive assessment of the student's committee work;
- writing of assessment and other reports regarding the student's committee work.

7. Arranging Time Out of School

Students should be able to be involved in committees and to assemble and discuss issues of concern to them, during school time.

Action:

Liaison between the committee and school/s will have to take into account:

1. the need for flexibility in both committee and school timetables/timelines;
2. commitments students have regarding such things as exams, study, part-time jobs, family holidays;
3. school procedures for endorsing student out-of-school procedures.

8. Transport

All young people face severe restrictions of transport including legal and financial limitations and dependency on restrictive public system or on parental chauffeuring. As well, there is the contrast of positions of students to all others in education regarding travel allowances for in-services and committee attendance.

Students should receive full financial support for travelling arrangements to and from school/home and committee meeting place. In order to support individuals and families and for reasons of safety, no student should be *expected* to travel alone.

Action:

The committee concerned will have to accept responsibility for action here, although some School Council responsibility may be appropriate here. Funding for taxis would seem a likely arrangement.

9. Legal Liability

Obviously legal liability problems can severely restrict any student out-of-school-time activity. This has been a worry for some time now, particularly for TEAC programs, and the whole issue is under investigation by the Education Department. The (Victorian) Director General's memorandum 'Supervision of Students' dated December 8th 1983 is important to note.

Provision for legal liability should protect, not restrict, student participation on committees.

Action:

The situation with respect to legal liability and student participation on committees needs to be clarified to all parties concerned and resolved in line with the above principle. The committee would have to liaise with the current Education Department investigation into legal liability with the above action in mind, and specific instances referred to TEAC personnel currently investigating liability issues, cases and policy.

10. Payment

Paid student representation on committees is a possibility in the same way that we sometimes have paid parent and teacher representatives. While students usually do not have an income and participate on committees on a voluntary basis, adults usually have responsibilities for committee work as part of their paid employment. As the Participation and Equity Program has stated aims to investigate combinations of schooling, training and work, the issue of payment for students becomes especially important.

Professor Ken Polk (University of Oregon, at VISE during 1983) includes the issue of payment in his check points for youth action programs:

... What I am suggesting is that when we think about work experience and work-oriented programs, if we think in terms of youth involvement or youth participation along the lines of problem solving and service, we can begin to give young people a real sense that they have something to contribute.

... If possible, see if you can get pay for young people. There are lots of reasons for this. An important one is motivation for the young people. Pay provides an initial reason for their participation. However, the most significant reason is that we need to develop models of responsible employment activities for kids. The pay issue forces the participating institutions to think differently about young people. Youth affairs, youth service agencies should consider having a very significant part of their budget for the employment of young people so that their employment policy can be a model for the rest of the community. The community needs to know how to involve young people and employ them.⁵

Favourable consideration should be given to the issue of payment for the committee work of student representatives.

Action:

When committees arrange for student representation, the issue of payment will need to be included in the negotiations and supported by committee (and other) funds where this is seen as appropriate given the above principle.

The committee concerned will need to plan for possible payment to students, structure this into their financial arrangements and negotiations for representation, and investigate appropriate awards and employment contracts.

References

1. James S Coleman (1972) **How do the young become adults?** Baltimore: Center for Social Organisation of Schools, Johns Hopkins University (Report No 130, May)
2. Tony Knight (1980) **Why Youth Participation Programs?** *AdVise*, No 13: July
3. Peter Cole (1981) **'Why the Concept of Youth Participation?' in Youth Participation Projects.** Melbourne: Advisory Services and Guidance Branch, VISE (Occasional Paper No 3, April)
4. Greg Thorpe (1983): student at St Albans High School and member of the Western Metropolitan Region Student Participation Working Party: **Paper to the Working Party.**
5. Ken Polk (1983) **Hope.** *Connect* No 21: June: p 29

Students on Committees: For Students

Introduction

If you're on a committee, you might wonder what support the committee or your school should be giving you. This paper tries to give some ideas of what could happen. After all, it is Government policy that students **should** be on committees.

What sort of committees?

At a **school** level, the most likely one (in Victoria) is the School Council. In secondary schools, there should be at least two students on this Council. But there are also other groups: Curriculum Committee, management committees for various funds (Supplementary Grants, Transition Education, School Improvement etc), perhaps committees in faculties, year levels or sub-schools.

In the Education Department **Region**, you might be on the Regional Education Board, on Supplementary Grants Area Committees, on TEAC Regional Committees and so on.

At a **central** level, students are represented on the Committee of the Participation and Equity Program and could be on a whole lot of other groups (TEAC, Supplementary Grants, State Board of Education etc).

When you're on these Committees, some questions come up, like:

- **why** are you on the committee?
- how much **influence** will you have? will you be listened to?
- will you have a chance to **learn** what the committee is doing?
- **who** do you represent? **how**?
- what **support** will you get?
- will you **understand** the meetings?
- will you miss out on **school work**?
- will you be **allowed** to attend by the school?
- how will you get to meetings? will it **cost** much?
- will you be able to **legally** attend?
- will you get **paid**?

Here are some ideas on these questions that we think committees need to think about. You probably have views on them too. Maybe you, too, could insist that you and the committee talk about these ideas.

Why are you on the committee?

A committee should give you a clear reason why **they** want you on it. But you, too, should know what you and other students will get out of it. All of that should be talked about by both you and the committee.

For example, one school has adopted the following list of reasons:

- to represent their homegroups on decisions made which affect the whole mini-school;
- to give students a voice in all matters which affect the mini-school;
- to make students equally responsible for decisions which are made;
- to give students practical experience in government;
- to give students the chance to work with adults on a shared basis.

The following paper is a re-write of the 'Students on Committees' paper, directed to students. It is also from 1984.

How much influence will you have?

You should be listened to in the same way as all other members of the committee are. That will only happen if you really represent other students and take reports back to them.

It will also need to be checked up on by the committee - it is too easy to overlook you or not really listen to what you say. So the committee should work out ways of checking how it behaves.

It may also be necessary to give money to help you hold the meetings of students and build a student organisation.

How will you learn what the committee is doing?

You should have a chance to meet with students from other areas and from other committees, to find out what they're doing and what they're interested in.

You should also have chances to work with other committee members on a whole range of matters. That means you should be able to be on sub-committees on all sorts of things, not just on 'student affairs'.

Money should be made available for you to meet with students and others.

Who do you represent?

You should be elected by students, not appointed by others. That probably means that students will have to be able to meet to talk about representatives and to choose them without interference. The type of meeting will depend on the committee. For example, if you're talking about a representative on the School Council, the meeting (or 'forum') would be just in that school. On the other hand, if you're asked for a representative on a Regional committee, it would be necessary to try for a meeting open to students or student representatives across the Region. At the moment it is hard to set up Regional or State-wide meetings, but these could be developed in the near future.

One school has suggested: *Students represent their homegroups. They are the spokespersons for their homegroup and should strive to represent these people in a fair and honest way.*

Once representatives have been elected, they should also be able to report back to meetings of students to give information, get ideas and advice etc.

It is important that enough students are elected to committees so you have support and influence. It is also important that representatives do match the type of students who elect you - particularly in things like sex, range of ages, ethnic groups etc.

What support will you get?

You are the voice of the people whom you represent. It is important that you are given **time** by your school or your teachers to talk to those people (to report back to them about what is happening in committee meetings, and to hear the views of the people you represent).

If the committee meets during school time, your school or teachers should allow you to attend meetings. If the committee meets outside school hours, you should expect that transport or money for transport might be arranged. This should also apply if the meeting occurs outside the school.

You should expect that other committee members will be prepared to assist you if you are having trouble understanding what the committee is doing.

Will you understand the meetings?

Most committees at present are made up of adults who seem to have made up their own language. For you to have an input into the meeting, it's vital that you understand what is being talked about. If you don't, you have the right to ask questions and to expect an answer.

If there are other students on the committee, you should talk to them about things you don't understand.

You should request that an agenda be made available well before the meeting so that you know what is going to be talked about at the meeting. This way you will have time to find out information you will need to know at the meeting and talk about the issues which will be raised in the meeting.

Will you miss out on school work?

Obviously, being on a committee requires a certain commitment from you to give up some time. This should be taken into account **before** you join the committee. You have to think, "Is being on this committee important to me, or for my school? Is it as important as other work I have to do?"

One way of dealing with the problem is to say, "OK, I'm on this committee. That means I probably have to put in some extra time to catch up on my work I might be missing out at school." This side of the issue is your responsibility.

On the other hand, because (in some cases) you are representing the school, the school **should** give you some credit for the work you do on their behalf. You would expect that your involvement with the committee should be mentioned in your final report or certificate. You should at least expect that your teachers are clearly aware of your involvement on the committee, and be prepared to make some allowances. Your committee should support you on this issue, and if necessary make contact with individual teachers to come to some arrangement.

Will you be allowed to attend by the school?

Most committees which operate **outside** the school (Regional TEAC, PEP, Supplementary Grants etc) will have approached your school first to ask for someone to be a student representative. So your school will probably give you permission to attend.

In many schools, you have to turn up to a minimum number of classes in a subject in order to satisfy the requirements of your course. You and your committee may have to talk with the school or your individual teachers to work this out.

Committees which meet **within** your school should consider all committee members' other duties when they're arranging suitable times for meetings.

How will you get to meetings? Will it cost much?

Committees operating outside the school or outside school hours should be responsible for making sure you can get to meetings, either by arranging transport or by giving you funds for you to be able to attend by public transport.

Will you be able to legally attend?

Your Principal should have a copy of a memorandum from Dr Norman Curry, the Director General of Education (dated 8.12.83). This document states that if you are leaving school without a teacher supervising you, the school must have a record which includes this information:

- a description of the activity to be undertaken, including locations;
- the names and ages of the students involved;
- the time of leaving and return to the school.

It is recommended that prior written approval of parent or guardian be obtained before students are allowed to leave school environs without direct supervision of a teacher or other adult.

Will you get paid?

There is no official policy which says you should get paid for being on a committee. However, when the committee is arranging for students to be represented, they should consider the possibility of paying you and build this into their financial arrangements.

The committee should recognise that by paying you they will be encouraging you to take your work more seriously, and you would have a stronger commitment to do a good job.

It is worth keeping in mind that most of the adults on the committee are there because it is part of their job (for which they are getting paid). You, as a student, however, have few real rewards for your work, and payment for your services on the committee is one way of making certain that you get something back for all your efforts.

We hope this paper will answer some of your questions and that it will give you an idea of how to approach your work on the committee. It's quite possible that the committee will not have considered all these issues. If not, don't be afraid to bring them up yourself.

Good luck.

Graeme Fletcher and Roger Holdsworth, 1984

Inclusive Committees Procedures

Introduction

The Schools Commission PEP Guidelines for schools should equally apply to the procedures adopted on Program Committees:

3.40 Parents and students are too often involved in token ways ... The establishment of formal participatory structures is necessary but not sufficient for real participation to occur; resources must also be provided to develop the capacity of young people and inexperienced parents to contribute to school planning and policy ...

These suggestions are a first attempt to define steps that could be taken to achieve this. As a Committee attempts to implement this, further needs will, no doubt, become obvious and these too should be documented.

A. Before the meeting

1. A detailed agenda should be sent out, giving (where possible) recommendations to be moved;
2. Meetings should be held before the meeting to go over the agenda and main business. For example, students could meet with other students and with an advisor, to talk over what is likely to happen;
3. Meetings beforehand could be held with other committee members where they explain to students what they aim to do in the meeting and how they will do it;
4. In particular, experienced committee members who will act as in-committee 'tutors', should meet with students before the meeting;
5. Pre-meeting meetings should be seen as part of committee members' commitments. In particular, accurate time commitment information should be given to students when approaches are made;
6. A support person should be allocated to meet with students before the meeting and, where possible, to sit with students during the meeting;
7. The meeting should be held at a time when student representatives can attend with minimal disruption to their studies.

B. At the start of the meeting

1. An experienced committee member should be nominated as a 'tutor' to each student member for each meeting. This role could rotate between members, with attention paid to positive gender roles;
2. All members should be introduced and identified, for example, with a place name. This should show both the name and the organisation represented;
3. All documents should have a face sheet summarising the main ideas or recommendations.

The third paper is a first draft (from 1984) of some ideas about changing committee procedures to encourage the participation of students.

While it [was then] particularly written about students on the Participation and Equity Program Committee, it has wider relevance to other representatives and other committees.

C. Procedure of meeting

1. The meeting should stop before decisions are made, to allow time for students to:
 - talk with each other;
 - talk with committee tutors;
 - talk with any support people present;to make sure they understand the issues;
2. Motions should be written out and, where possible, copied for all members of the Committee;
3. There should be a clear statement about the **style** of each part of the meeting - identifying 'brainstorming' or 'formal' times;
4. Arguments and discussion from subcommittee meetings should not be repeated in committee meetings;
5. At the end of each item of business, the chairperson should summarise the decisions on action to be taken and clearly indicate responsibility for action.

D. Language

1. All members should avoid forms of jargon:
 - initials should be avoided except where they're explained in documents;
 - other groups, committees or individual roles should be explained fully;
 - an attempt should be made to put motions and discussion in direct language;
2. Any member should be able to query the use of a name, word or phrase and have that query treated seriously.

E. After the meeting

1. At the end of the meeting, the chairperson or Executive Officer should summarise the major decisions made, especially indicating what **action** is to be taken, by **whom** and by **when**;
2. The committee tutors and/or support person should meet with the students to talk over what happened in the meeting. This should also be regarded as part of the meeting commitment.



We exist to empower all student voices
to be valued in every aspect of education.