

enhancing effective 33 CURRICULUM APPROACHES Student participation

A: *Peer Teaching and Support*

Peer and cross-age tutoring or teaching

Arrange for students to teach or tutor other students as part of their subject work, or as an elective subject (eg Teaching Studies). It's relatively easy to arrange within the school, or with a neighbouring school, and there's a large body of research evidence of its benefits for both tutor and 'tutee'. Tutor selection can focus on students with need of responsibility, or of revision of more basic ideas, or with specific language skills that can be matched with tutees' needs.

Examples: see **Connect** #2 for examples at Brunswick Girls HS, Princes Hill HS, and Thomastown PS; #3 for programs at Ballam Park TS, Lalor Park PS, and Sunshine HS; and other examples at Princes Hill (#90), the Monterey network (#81), Marian College (#21, #22/3), Exhibition HS (#24), Princes Hill PS (#30) and in science (#85).

Peer information

Organise for school and community programs to commission students (and other non-student young people) to provide information to other young people. Programs could involve face-to-face or telephone advice or the production of written information for other young people. This has frequently occurred in health-related areas, including smoking, alcohol and other drugs, sexuality etc, but has sometimes extended into areas such as science or vocational education.

Examples: see **Connect** #76 (HIV/AIDS); #84 and #85 (Science shows); #65/66 (smoking)

Peer mediation

Train students to be able to mediate in disputes around the school and in the community. This could occur around resolution of conflict generally, around sex or race based issues, or around instances of bullying or harassment. Some programs have used the phrase: "intervene to reconcile".

Examples: see **Connect** #71, #75 and #99; also see #83 for an example of mediation work in the area of harassment.

Peer support

Set up a 'buddy' system in which older students form groups to support younger students in the school and in the community. This can occur around discussion of specific issues and extend to more general 'connectedness' to the school, particularly for new students.

Examples: Peer Support Foundations have supported and trained students in these roles (see **Connect** #71, #99).

There is no shortage of useful things that need to be done within communities. And students have the skills and abilities to do these. Their learning, as well as meeting course objectives and requirements, can be authentic and productive and have outcomes of real, external and recognised value.

At the same time, these approaches enhance the recognition of the present, active citizenship of young people - as they are given substantive and important roles within their communities.

This article outlines some possibilities; each is based on actual programs that have operated in primary and secondary schools in Australia and elsewhere. As well as a brief description, further reference is made to specific examples and documentation in back issues of **Connect**. (Neither these possibilities, nor the examples cited, come near to providing a comprehensive list of all that can happen; a further list of community-based project suggestions is included in **Connect** #98, page 9.) While it may be possible to pick up some of these descriptions 'intact', the particular strength of such approaches lies in their responsiveness to local needs and situations.

Some of these examples might be 'projects', done discretely within schools; others might be more 'ongoing approaches' that characterise how a class goes about its work. In each case, the critical descriptor is that outcomes are seen to be valuable - by the students, by the wider community, by the school.

All are developed through considering the questions: 'what needs to be done?', 'what student skills do we have?', 'how can we extend learning into productive outcomes?'

Community Education

Link with community organisations to develop opportunities for students to work as community educators around social and environmental issues. This might integrate with existing programs or set up new possibilities with 'city farms', 'heritage areas' etc.

Examples: In one example, primary school students organised regular environmental tours of a 'city farm' for other students and for older members of the community; see **Connect** #89 and #90.

Curriculum Organisation

Consult with students to establish structures and opportunities through which they can take responsibility for their own and others' learning. They could organise specific and special events to meet learning goals, or set up structures to address learning needs.

Examples: In a group of neighbouring schools, students with learning difficulties set up 'Literacy Committees' which communicated by fax and e-mail, organised an annual 'Literacy Camp' and wrote a 'How To' manual about their initiatives; see **Connect** #84.

B: Community Research

Researching Community Issues

Research skills are basic to many subject areas ... and there are important and vital research tasks to be carried out in all communities. Arrange for a community organisation or local government, for example, to commission a specific research study. This should involve the production of a report or results that can be presented to an 'outside audience'.

Examples: students have carried out real and purposeful community-based research on issues such as youth homelessness (**Connect** #73, #77), work (#82), use of railway stations (#35).

Researching Youth Needs

The research skills of students can be used within the wider community to carry out studies of youth needs - recreational, health, transport etc. If such a local youth needs survey is proposed, support a class to bid for the contract to carry out the research, either alone or in association with other consultants. Or initiate an approach to the local Youth Development worker to find out whether such a study would be useful.

Examples: such studies have been carried out by and with young people in various localities.

Physical Environment

Undertake local scientific and environmental studies to examine and report on the state of the local physical environment. These can be carried out with local or state-wide community groups. Student research can also extend to participation in international studies on topics such as water pollution or destruction of the ozone layer. The I*EARN organisation has set up on-line conferences to support and share the results of such local research.

Examples: see **Connect** #84 for an example of a local Crustacean study; primary school students undertaking environmental research, education and action in **Connect** #65/6; information about I*EARN in **Connect** #95.

Researching Education Issues

The school provides a valuable base for investigation of education issues. Organise a class to carry out a 'destination study' of school leavers (following up students through informal contacts to look at movements over several years).

Examples: A group of students researched local education options and responses to these (**Connect** #56); in another study, truanting students were employed to carry out research on truancy (**Connect** #24 and #91).

C: School Development

Review and Evaluation

Invite students to undertake a review and evaluation of aspects of the school's courses, learning approaches, or other areas of education. This can be conducted as a research project or as part of the quality assurance process.

Examples: students have carried out a review of a school's social science curriculum (**Connect** #93), have been included in Quality Assurance teams looking at professional development issues (see **Connect** #93), and have surveyed whole systems of education (see **Connect** #115).

Curriculum Organisation and Support

Request support from students with specific skills and interest to play a vital role in the organisation and maintenance of specialist school facilities such as computer networks.

Examples: Students have been central to the operation of Information Technology in several schools, where they have maintained equipment and worked as program support staff; see **Connect** #95 for two different models.

Curriculum Materials Production

Extend students' own studies in particular curriculum areas by supporting them to develop resources for use by other students. These can be training materials eg the Anti-Violence Kit, curriculum packages such as a Plastics Materials kit for purchase and use by schools throughout the state, or reading materials for young students.

Examples: see **Connect** #105 and #110 for information about the Anti-Violence Kit; **Connect** #76 for details of the development of the Plastics Materials kit; **Connect** #83 for production of reading materials.

Curriculum and Governance

Student participation within schools must link curriculum and governance approaches. We can draw an analogy with the stability of a 'three-legged stool' or 'tripod', in which the legs are:

- **student representation on school decision-making bodies;**
- **student-run organisational structures;**
- **participatory approaches within the curriculum and classroom.**

Without any of these aspects, the model 'falls over'. This article suggests a range of those curriculum approaches; it must be linked with governance approaches that enable students to share in making these curriculum decisions, and with the support for structures within which students can discuss, debate and decide on issues of importance.

School Communications

Arrange for students, either individually or as a class group, to take responsibility for aspects of communication within the school or between schools. They can compile information from various sources, work out the most effective communication strategies, and implement them.

Examples: a group of students at one primary school produced a newsletter for a network of Junior School Councils (**Connect** #91); on some schools, students publish the school newsletter as class work; there are many examples of students use the school loudspeakers to run an in-school 'radio station' (see **Connect** #89); students have been contracted (paid) by a local Council to convey information to students within their school (see **Connect** #79).

School Facilities and Environment

Apply studies in various areas to the construction of useful resources around the school. Students' studies should look at need, design, materials, cost and implementation - and actually result in the production of a resource.

Examples: students have taken part in school landscaping (**Connect** #90), in shade areas (#85); in an interactive Music Garden (#84); in development of Seating Areas (#83).

D: Community Media Production *(often as a second step for presentation of results of above)*

Newspaper in Community

Produce a community newspaper, dealing with community issues. Investigate current community papers, needs and gaps.

Examples: the student-run 5-language paper *Ascolta* operated from a group of schools for over 10 years (see **Connect** #1); in many other areas, the school provides a centre for production of community news (see **Connect** #1, #4, #8, #11)

Book production

Students collect student and community writing, either generally, or around a theme, and publish a book as a community profile and resource.

Examples: books such as **The Golden Shaft** (**Connect** #2, #90), **As We See It** (#8), **Wind in the Wimmera** (#26), **What My Mother Told Me** (#39), **Momentum** (#46/7), **Writing from the Edge** (#84), **From the Edge** (#112).

Radio

Approach local community radio for an occasional or regular time slot for presentation of a student program. Students carry out interviews in the school or community around themes and compile a radio program.

Examples: many schools (primary and secondary) have arranged their own programs eg the *Ascolta* Radio Group (**Connect** #10, #21, #46/7) and the Goulburn Valley network (#89); have taken part in the 'Talk Back Classroom' project (#112, #113); or have set up their own radio studio or station (#6/7, #15, #113). Two special issues of **Connect** (#12, #13/14) focused on this topic.

Television/Video

The advent of community television provides a similar outlet for student video productions. Approach groups associated with community television to negotiate access for students both to broadcast of school-made videos and to involvement in overall production. Set up a 'video-magazine' with items from school and community groups - produced by students.

Examples: see **Connect** #68, #72 and #80 for documentation of early initiatives around Channel 31 in Melbourne.

Internet

Publication through the World Wide Web enables low-cost dissemination of useful student research, writing and production. Negotiate with local organisations (eg Tourist Office) to produce, review or supplement web pages. Students would need to investigate local facilities, needs and gaps - and decide on the 'image' they wished to project.

Examples: see **Connect** #95 and #97 for students' electronic publishing on gender roles and on alternative power sources.

Music/CD

Link with local musicians to write and publish a music CD. This can build on issues such as cultural diversity or environment, and both present musical accomplishments within the school, and also provide a productive focus for consideration of pertinent topics.

Examples: see **Connect** #103 for a local example, and #106 for an international example.

E: Consultation and Advice

Youth Forums

Organise a local forum of young people (possibly from several schools) to discuss, debate and decide on issues affecting young people. Ensure that the outcomes of this forum are presented to appropriate local or state or federal authorities and followed up with action or on-going participation in decision-making structures.

Examples: see **Connect** #110 for information about the 'New Generation' forum; #112 for the 'Teenroar' forums; #114 for the Reconciliation forum.

School Governance

Have a Politics, Civics or SOSE class examine the decision-making structure of the school, and organise to set up structures or processes to increase student participation in this area.

Examples: the Politics class at one school established the Student Representative Council (see **Connect** #40); Civics and Citizenship Education initiatives provide many current examples and possibilities.

3-Way Test of Value

Any project needs to be able to show that:

- it has value to students - that students chose or constructed it and see its relevance to their interests;
- it has wider value in the community - that it is meeting real and purposeful community ends;
- it has educational value - it meets or exceeds mandated curriculum objectives and involves learning.

Demonstration of these outcomes is a joint responsibility of teacher and students before a project can proceed.

Conference Support

Arrange for students to attend an appropriate local (or state or national) conference in a support role. Students could take minutes, produce a conference newspaper, establish a conference web page, report on the conference for radio etc.

Examples: students have been involved in Australian Curriculum Studies Association Conferences as reporters; see **Connect** #94.

F: Local Service Development **Resource Guide around specific issues**

Community Futures

Challenge students to consider and recommend on future directions for their communities. This would involve a class undertaking a local study: investigating, researching, interviewing; and then presenting results in a public forum, proposing and taking action, and monitoring outcomes.

Examples: see **Connect** #108, for a description of such processes as part of a 'Justice and Democracy Project' - particularly in Ararat.

Intergenerational support

Organise for students to spend regular time working within the community providing support for older or younger generations. For example, students could work in nursing homes, creches, child care, community centres. Such interaction can be developed to become 'two-way' with students both providing personal support, but also developing oral history documentation, reading resources etc.

Examples: the Student Community Involvement Program (SCIP) operates in various areas to support and train students for such involvement - see **Connect** #36, #56, #101.

Disability services

Organise for students to work within disability services to provide personal support and also develop resources.

Examples: through their Graphics and Manual Arts classes, students have been contracted to develop community resources to provide wheelchair access (see **Connect** #20, #22/3); students have written large print books for other students (#83).

G: Community Resource Production

Oral History Documentation

Collect local oral histories and publish them, either in a one-off publication (which can be sold, for example, through a Tourist Office) or through a regular publication. Alternatively, use community and oral history research to develop a mural portraying the community, or establish a local museum.

Examples: the **Foxfire** program in the US has provided an on-going example of such a curriculum program (see **Connect** #54/5, #63 for substantial descriptions); other local examples have been documented at Apollo Bay (#57), Nathalia (#67, #71), and Bright (#77/8); a community mural using local history was painted in Lalor (#11) and at West Wyalong (#32).

Documentation

Remember that a project has not been finished until it has been reflected upon, evaluated and documented for use by others!

Many other forms of community resources can be developed from local studies. Challenge students to look for productive

outcomes of studies through publication and dissemination of leaflets, handbooks, guides, source books etc. It is relatively easy to extend a process of 'finding out' by students, to one of 'telling others'.

Examples: community health resources can be documented and the information disseminated through youth-directed pamphlets (see suggestions in **Connect** #113, page 9); students worked for the local Shire Council to re-document lost information about burials in the local cemetery (#104); students published a guide to local leisure options (#84).

Which Students?

It is important that those students who have been otherwise excluded from success and value, be the particular participants in such approaches, whilst avoiding the stigma of programs specifically labelled as for 'at risk' students.

Selection of only the 'best' students to positions of responsibility and to 'represent the school', are anti-educational, self-defeating and do nothing to alter existing or past inequities.

H: Job/Work Creation & Enterprise Education *(can be linked with all the above)*

Environment

Consider how meeting environmental needs can become an on-going productive outcome of studies. In one example, students gathered seeds, grew native plants and sold these back to communities as part of re-forestation initiatives. This developed into an on-going school-based job creation program.

Examples: see **Connect** #5 and #17 for details of the Moreland School-Work Program.

Catering

Set up a small catering enterprise from the school. For example, deliver sandwiches to local factories and businesses. Programs such as 'Earn and Learn' build such initiatives into structured classroom approaches.

Examples: the Youth Action Program set up a restaurant (**Connect** #26); the Moreland School-Work Program catered for local education conferences (#17).

Art

Arrange for Art classes to lease painting to local businesses and community groups; provide art work for community newsletters and reports.

Examples: see **Connect** #80 for initiatives in Tasmania and #84 for a program at Mornington.

Industrial Arts

Look for real community productive outcomes for Manual and Industrial Arts classes - production of community resources, commercial applications.

Examples: see information about Youthcraft at Cobden Technical School in **Connect** #17, #20, #25, #30, #43 and #76; examples of enterprise education approaches generally in **Connect** #59 and #80.

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