Student Leadership: A Review of Effective Practice

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Suggested citation

Black, R., Walsh, L., Magee, J., Hutchins, L., Berman, N., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (2014). Student leadership: a review of effective practice. Canberra: ARACY.

Acknowledgements

This What Works for Kids evidence review was the result of a collaboration managed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth with Monash University and the Foundation for Young Australians.

ARACY thanks Professor Robyn Broadbent, College of Education, Victoria University, and Professor Stephen Crump, School of Education, University of Newcastle for their review of the paper.

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Executive summary

This review presents an overview of the existing evidence on the topic of student leadership in educational settings. In addition to a high-level literature review of effective interventions, it includes an overview of the broad policy and theoretical trends over the last ten years in both Australian and international contexts. Enablers and barriers to the implementation of effective practices of student leadership and their implications for Australian schools are identified. A case study is also featured which provides a useful example of the various limitations and barriers encountered when applying student leadership practices in the school environment.

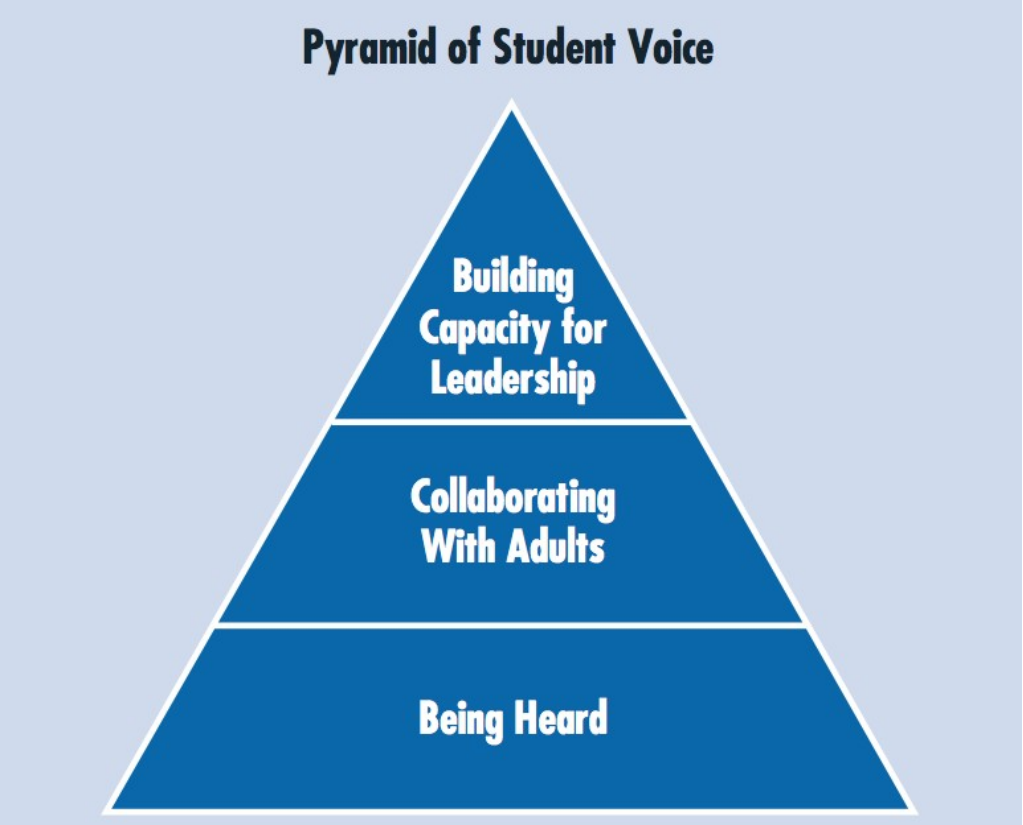
Current theory, policy and practice

The concept of student leadership is often used interchangeably with the terms student agency, student voice, and student participation. Researchers tend to identify a spectrum of activities and practices that constitute student voice and leadership. For example, Holdsworth has proposed a spectrum of student voice, participation and leadership that ranges from young people "speaking out" to "sharing decision-making (and) implementation of action" (2000, p.358). Fielding has constructed a typology that ranges from young people serving simply as a source of data for school and system processes to acting as active researchers who drive change within their schools (2001), while Mitra's pyramid of student voice ranges from merely "being heard" to "building capacity for leadership" (2006, p.7, Figure 1).

The necessity of participation and freedom of expression is explicitly stated in the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls for signatories to "assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (UN General Assembly, 1989). Student leadership practices emerge from this rights-based concept, reflecting the potential and importance of young people's capacity to play a role in making the decisions that affect them.

As noted in ARACY's The Nest action agenda, "evidence suggests young people's participation may ... have a range of important benefits for the individual, for organisations and for the broader community" (ARACY, 2014). Specifically within the educational context, participation and decision-making practices can afford students with the skills necessary for active participation as engaged citizens.

Figure 1: Mitra, D. (2006). Pyramid of student voice, from Increasing student voice and moving toward youth leadership, The Prevention Researcher, 13(1), p. 7.



The past two decades have seen a global shift within education policy towards incorporation of student leadership. Nationally and internationally, policy has increasingly expressed the intent to encourage students to take greater ownership of their learning, to play a greater role within the decision making and change processes of their schools and, ultimately, to have an active role in the democratic processes and structures of civic society. This reflects the longstanding recognition that schools are ideal institutions for transmitting social norms such as civic leadership and participation and for developing the skills and knowledge required to meet these norms. It also follows a longstanding policy tradition that frames schools as institutions that serve a set of agreed public purposes, including the development of young people's ability to participate as citizens and as leaders in their schools and communities.

In practice, student leadership can take a number of forms – from classroom-based practices through to engaging students as co-researchers or leadership

of community-level activism. The report outlines the benefits of this broad conceptualisation of student leadership, particularly as the evidence suggests that traditional leadership models – such as the Student Representative Council – tend only to benefit those who are directly involved, rather than working to build the knowledge and skills of all students.

Table 1: Opportunities for student leadership

In the classroom:

- Encourage students to develop and share their own opinions about current issues and to engage in debate, discussion and critique of those issues
- Engage students in conversations and decisions about class rules and behavioural boundaries and expectations
- Engage students in conversations and decisions about teaching, learning and assessment

In the school:

- Engage students in the governance and decision-making bodies of the school, such as the School Council
- Engage students as school ambassadors or representatives beyond the school
- Engage students in peer support, buddying, mentoring or coaching programs
- Engage students as prefects or in other forms of traditional student leadership within the school
- Engage students as members and participants in key school processes such as staff or school leadership appointment panels
- Invite and enable students to develop and implement projects to change and improve school operations, culture, climate or practices
- Invite and enable students to undertake research and consultation about aspects of the school operations, culture, climate or practices that may need change or improvement
- Engage students in school change or reform processes

In the school system:

- Invite and enable students to act as key informants in research processes designed to assess or develop school and system practice
- Invite and enable students to act as key informants in system reform processes

In the community:

- Invite and enable students to develop and implement community-based projects, possibly in partnership with other agencies, to enhance and support learning
- Invite and enable students to engage with local government and the wider community

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

The review identifies a number of factors that enable effective implementation of student leadership practices in the school environment. The key enablers are to do with the values and attitudes that underpin leadership cultures and practices in each school context. These values and attitudes influence the extent to which student leadership is considered a priority and the capacity of the school to engage effectively with student priorities and perspectives. Key enablers include:

- A belief that schools have a role to play in facilitating and fostering student leadership capabilities, and a belief in the legitimacy and validity of student perspectives.
- An understanding that there is a spectrum of student leadership and that the most ubiquitous models do not necessarily represent effective or promising practice.
- An understanding of the positive outcomes that can be fostered through effective practice of student leadership. This will change the perception of leadership opportunities as no longer 'supplementary' to schooling but integral for student development.
- School culture, including school management culture, which is accepting of 'disruptive' student leadership influences from the classroom to the school system and community level.
- Policy frameworks that enable and promote student leadership.

Table 2: Enablers of student leadership

Policy and systems-level enablers

- Providing policy frameworks that encourage and support innovative student leadership practice
- Embedding leadership skill development and civics education in the curriculum
- Communicating desired outcomes and ideal practice model/s
- Supporting information sharing, knowledge exchange and access to research and practice examples
- Providing training, professional development and implementation support to increase knowledge and foster behaviour change
- Investing in evaluation research and support school-university research partnerships

Community enablers

- Supporting and utilising partnerships between schools and community
- and other agencies
- Willingness to example the potential of structured models to promote school-wide leadership practices
- Supportive environments and opportunities for student leadership outside the school context.

Soft skill enablers

- A curriculum that enables the development of the 'soft skills' that underpin leadership
- A commitment to identifying opportunities for students to engage with social and political issues where it serves the educative purpose and is consistent with curriculum objectives
- Supporting the development of leadership skills through ongoing training and continuous learning

Pedagogical enablers

- Enabling students to make connections between knowing and doing: model democratic processes, learner ownership, student voice and student-centred approaches
- Building classroom cultures which encourage participation
- Providing opportunities for all students to have a voice
- Encouraging students to explore and debate issues

Curriculum enablers

- Including civics and citizenship in the curriculum to build knowledge and
- competencies for student leadership and social participation
- Explicitly linking student participation in school governance to issues around civics and citizenship
- Encouraging leadership through service learning and volunteering

The barriers to student leadership also include values and attitudes that are not supportive of student leadership and more expansive conceptualisations of student voice, but also include existing systems and structures that inhibit more comprehensive models of student leadership.
There is also no shared understanding of what ideal models of student leadership look like, or shared belief about the extent to which schools can or should promote the development of leadership skills and provide leadership opportunities for all students.

Table 3: Barriers to student leadership

Policy and system barriers

- Complex and competing priorities, including a potential for the
- emphasis on standards, performance and accountability to come at the expense of opportunities to develop student skills more holistically
- Lack of consensus about what student leadership is and lack of clarity about ideal and most effective form, purpose and outcomes
- A construction of young people as lacking decision-making capability
- Traditional school hierarchies do not consistently support student leadership

School governance barriers

- Students identify a lack of opportunities to participate in school

- governance, in spite of a willingness to do so
- A gap between broader community models of youth engagement and opportunities for participation within schools.

Practice barriers

- Challenges in enacting 'democratic' models in practice, including in
- classroom practice
- A gap between broader community models of youth engagement and opportunities for participation within schools
- Teachers do not consistently support student voice initiatives and can resist the introduction of alternative pedagogical approaches

Exclusive leadership model barriers

- Current models, particularly the SRC, are inherently exclusive and only
- confer benefits on a small proportion of students
- SRCs can be dominated and structured by adults, rather than led by students
- SRCs represent one type and form of leadership and may marginalise other expressions of leadership
- Exclusive models of leadership can contribute to and compound the exclusion of more marginalised students.

Key findings

Key findings and considerations emerging from the review include the following.

- Empowering students to have a discernible impact on their school environment is an optimal outcome of student leadership.
- Ideal student leadership models are inclusive rather than exclusive – the benefits of student leadership models accrue only to those who are directly involved in them.
- Traditional school leadership structures can be reimagined to promote inclusivity and encourage participation by marginalised student groups. The most effective programs will be those that foster meaningful participation and experiences by modelling democratic processes and privileging student contributions in decisions about school governance, policy and pedagogy.
- Professional training and support for teachers to encourage student leadership practices and such practices can be embedded within school curricula and culture. Rather than viewing student leadership as a threat to traditional teaching practices, classroom teachers can provide teaching and learning environments in which students are actively encouraged to learn skills that will ready them for active citizenship and in which those abilities students exercise outside the classroom are recognised.
- Community agencies, universities and other organisations can be a source of fresh ideas, models of practice and resources, and can provide linkages between school and community.
- Investing in evaluation of existing programs is key to better identify effective or promising practice models. There is limited outcomes data for student leadership practices, therefore limiting ability to assess their effectiveness. Further evaluative research of program implementation is vital to ensure identification of best practice moving forward.

Introduction

This review of effective practice in student leadership provides an overview of broad policy and theoretical approaches in relation to student leadership and includes an evidence review of effective leadership policy and practice.

This report outlines key policy and theoretical trends over the last 10 years, featuring both Australian and international thinking and examples. It also includes a scan of the ideas of student participation, student agency and student voice where they relate directly to the core focus of effective practice in student leadership.

Drawing on Australian and international findings, this review discusses the enablers and barriers to the implementation of effective practices of student leadership and their implications for Australian schools, systems and policymakers. The review considers promising initiatives emerging from Europe and the United Kingdom (UK) and their curriculum focus on democratic citizenship practices. Reference is also made to the United States (US) and Canadian systems. The focus of the Australian evidence review is on New South Wales (NSW), Queensland, South Australia (SA) and Victoria, all states that have publicly available policy papers and theoretical documents that underpin student leadership approaches.

Finally, the question of "what works?" is considered, both through a theoretical lens incorporating prominent student leadership and student voice typologies, and with reference to evaluated initiatives. While formal evaluations of effectiveness are not available for most initiatives, relevant evaluations are discussed in the 'best practice and evidence of effectiveness' section of this report. An Australian case study is included to illustrate the complexity of student participation in aspects of school governance. The evidence analysed through the review and case study findings indicates initiatives that empower students to design their experience of leadership within their school and social contexts have the most meaningful impact.

An overview of current practices is included in the Appendices. Appendix 1 provides a description of the different types of initiatives and practices identified from schools and systems within Australia and internationally. The practices are then listed in Appendix 2 and 3, and are grouped according to their stated aims and descriptions with other like initiatives. Initiatives are presented under two headings: 'being heard' and 'creating change'.

Current levels of evidence

There has been a substantial volume of research conducted in the area of student leadership across Australia and internationally over the last several decades. The concept of student voice became prominent in the 1960s and has persevered, fostering a range of student leadership initiatives both within and outside of schools (Mager & Nowak, 2012, p. 39). While there is an emerging body of literature on student leadership, and student leadership structures in the majority of schools, there is very little robust evidence of policy and program effectiveness. Other significant gaps in the literature include the immediate and longer-term impact of leadership opportunities on skill development, learning outcomes, workforce participation or ongoing civic participation; youth perspectives on leadership; and the types of approaches and strategies for strengthening leadership that are the most effective.

The majority of literature drawn on for this report is grey literature or small-scale studies with limited sample sizes. More rigorous forms of research, such as longitudinal or quasi-experimental studies, were not identified in this review, and where program evaluations are available, they tend to be process evaluations grounded in qualitative data. These yield useful findings and enable the identification of common themes and emerging better practice examples, but without studies that measure impact and outcomes, firm conclusions about 'what works' are challenging.

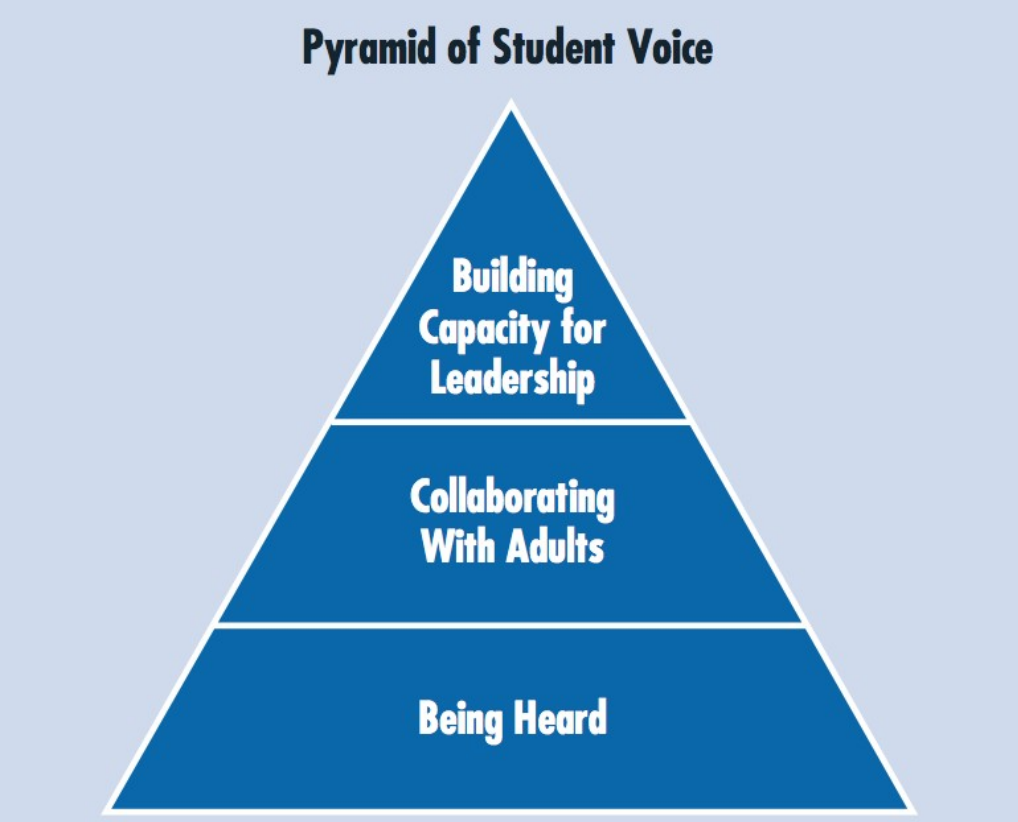
Definition of terms

Despite growing policy efforts designed to foster student leadership, there is little consensus about what the terminology 'student leadership' actually denotes, the purposes it should serve, how it should be fostered or even how it should be named (Black, 2012). Instead, a range of other terms such as 'student voice', 'student participation', 'active citizenship' and 'democratic schooling' are all used within the literature, often interchangeably with 'student leadership'. To inform analysis of what works in student leadership, this high level review included policy and research documents, grey literature and evaluations made public. Given the multiple and often ambiguous definitions attached to the term student leadership, 'student voice' and 'student agency' were also included as search terms.

Some theorists have attempted to bring greater clarity to this field by formulating typologies or models of student voice, participation, agency and leadership. These frequently distinguish between forms of activity that are deemed to be in the student's own interest and those that are not, between forms that are designed to inspire change in the student's experience and those that are not, and between forms that enable or require the

transformation of school practice and those that support the pedagogical status quo (Black, 2012). Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' (1992) is the best known and most widely cited of these typologies, but others are also useful. For example, Holdsworth has proposed a spectrum of student voice, participation and leadership that ranges from young people "speaking out" to "sharing decision-making (and) implementation of action" (2000, p.358). Fielding has constructed a typology that ranges from young people serving simply as a source of data for school and system processes to acting as active researchers who drive change within their schools (2001). Mitra's pyramid of student voice ranges from merely "being heard" to "building capacity for leadership" (2006, p.7, Figure 1). As these typologies suggest, the purposes and outcomes for which student voice, participation and leadership are fostered remain extremely varied.

Figure 1: Mitra, D. (2006). Pyramid of student voice, from Increasing student voice and moving toward youth leadership, The Prevention Researcher, 13(1), p. 7.



Internationally, one of the best-established arguments links young people's opportunities for participation to their human rights. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was seminal in establishing the right of children and young people to such actions as freedom of thought, freedom of expression,

and the right to an education that will "encourage responsible citizenship" (United Nations, 1989). As Lansdown notes, the impact of the Convention has been so considerable that "for many people, children's rights have become synonymous with participation" (2010, p.11).

There are many other definitions and interpretations, however, including those that link student voice, participation and leadership to the improvement of schooling and society. A large body of literature, for example, advocates students' active role within school decision-making as a means of informing school reform and restructuring processes including improvements to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment (see, for example, Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003). It describes the benefits which accrue from students contributing to whole-school decision-making processes as well as their capacity to co-create curricula with their teachers and to shape the nature of the learning occurring in the classroom (Ruddock & Flutter, 2004).

An equally extensive literature positions student participation as a precondition for greater student engagement in learning, recommending that schools "allow students to become active participants in their education, including involvement in decisions about what and how they learn, and how their learning is assessed" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009, p.10). This literature suggests that the experience of participation gives students a stronger sense of membership within the school and a stronger sense of themselves as learners (McInerney, 2009). In particular, it advocates participation and leadership as a means of improving the educational engagement of those young people most likely to become disengaged from school (Stokes & Turnbull, 2008). Critical literature defines student leadership as a means of driving school and even social change, a means of achieving the "democratization of the school" as a precursor to the "democratization of society" (Freire, 2006, p.97). It seeks to educate students to be "critical actors and social agents" (Giroux, 2003, p.10) capable of envisioning a better society and acting to create the conditions for such a society.

Other useful definitions come from the youth development sphere. These include the definition developed by the British Commonwealth Youth Development Index, which describes the importance of strategies that "enhance the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life" and that "enable young people to contribute and benefit from a politically stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries" (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013). They also

include the framework developed by the Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne for the Australian Department of Defence. This recommends that initiatives to foster young people's voice, participation and leadership should "recognise the whole person across physical, social, emotional, spiritual and mental dimensions", seek to develop young people's "social skills, leadership, decision making, team work, healthy lifestyles, community service, responsibility, identity building, self-esteem and resilience" and recognise and value "the significance of young people's connection with and contribution to communities" (Wierenga & Wyn, 2011, p.3).

Each of these definitions and purposes represents a strong current of policy, thought and practice, and each is implied and reflected in our discussion in this paper. For the purposes of this review, the term student leadership encompasses many of the ideas and intentions that are often described as student participation, student agency or student voice. As such, the term student leadership is taken to refer to these together to describe education principles and practices that:

- Recognise that students have legitimate perspectives and opinions on issues that matter: in the classroom, in the school, and in the community.
- Within the classroom and the school, give students an active role in influencing decisions about such issues as well as in the implementation of those decisions.
- Within the community, enable students to participate as active young citizens.

The practice of student leadership

The practices of student voice, participation and leadership implemented by schools are as diverse as the ideas and intentions that underpin them. It is not the task of this paper to describe all of these practices, but we suggest they may be understood in relation to the four spheres or domains: the classroom, the school, the school system and the community. What follows is an indication of some of the forms these practices might take.

Table 1: Opportunities for student leadership

In the classroom:

- Encourage students to develop and share their own opinions about current issues and to engage in debate, discussion and critique of those issues
- Engage students in conversations and decisions about class rules and behavioural boundaries and expectations
- Engage students in conversations and decisions about teaching, learning and assessment.

In the school:

- Engage students in the governance and decision-making bodies of the school, such as

the School Council

- Engage students as school ambassadors or representatives beyond the school
- Engage students in peer support, buddying, mentoring or coaching programs
- Engage students as prefects or in other forms of traditional student leadership within the school
- Engage students as members and participants in key school processes such as staff or school leadership appointment panels
- Invite and enable students to develop and implement projects to change and improve school operations, culture, climate or practices
- Invite and enable students to undertake research and consultation about aspects of the school operations, culture, climate or practices that may need change or improvement
- Engage students in school change or reform processes

In the school system:

- Invite and enable students to act as key informants in research processes designed to assess or develop school and system practice
- Invite and enable students to act as key informants in system reform processes

In the community:

- Invite and enable students to develop and implement community-based projects, possibly in partnership with other agencies, to enhance and support learning
- Invite and enable students to engage with local government and the wider community.

Overview of student leadership policy

The past two decades have seen a global shift within education policy towards incorporation of student leadership. Nationally and internationally, policy has increasingly expressed the intent to encourage students to take greater ownership of their learning, to play a greater role within the decision making and change processes of their schools and, ultimately, to have an active role in the democratic processes and structures of civic society. This reflects the longstanding recognition that schools are ideal institutions for transmitting social norms such as civic leadership and participation and for developing the skills and knowledge required to meet these norms. It also follows a longstanding policy tradition that frames schools as institutions that serve a set of agreed public purposes, including the development of young people's ability to participate as citizens and as leaders in their schools and communities.

The international context

The goal of increasing student leadership and participation in decision making is evident in many education systems across the globe. There are particularly strong examples emanating from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member states, some of the most promising of which are outlined in this report. While there is an abundance of student leadership initiatives existing both within and external to school systems internationally, there is little evidence that these have been widely embedded in education policy. Examples from Europe and the UK appear to be an exception to this, with student leadership initiatives connected to democratic approaches codified within curriculum policy.

As noted in the Introduction, the United Nations (UN) provides an overarching international policy context for the incorporation of student leadership into education policy through the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention provides the foundational direction for engaging students in decision making, with Article 12 stating that signatories "shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (UN General Assembly, 1989). This notion engenders the provision of opportunities for children to participate in making decisions on issues that matter to them. With children spending a large proportion of their waking hours in formal education, it stands to reason that schooling, education and their multifaceted connections with the community are all matters that affect children and are therefore matters that young people should be empowered to influence. Some UK and European policy approaches in particular appear to be significantly shaped by a meaningful recognition of this convention.

Indeed, while school systems internationally approach this responsibility in a number of different ways, it is common across several systems in Europe and the UK to locate student leadership practice within a framework of citizenship education. A 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study found that citizenship is a topic commonly explored as part of the curriculum across a diverse range of developing and developed countries (Ainly, Shulz & Friedman, 2009). However, the Council of Europe's (CoE) Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education identified student participation at all levels of education as being of central importance to advancing democratic citizenship, embedding the impetus for student leadership initiatives at the supranational level (Council of Europe, 2010). The CoE's Charter has informed student participation policies across Europe and in

this sense provides a greater degree of centralised cohesion than is evident in other nations, including Australia.

National approaches within Europe reflect this supranational direction. For example, the 2010 Austrian School Instruction Act requires schools to establish democratic committees, which must include students, parents and teachers in decision-making processes (Ainly, Shulz & Friedman, p. 34). Norway's national curriculum also requires the active promotion of student leadership as part of two mandated civics and citizenship subjects (Ainly, Shulz & Friedman, p. 317). Similar initiatives are evident in the curricula of Denmark and Sweden (Hannam, 2001, p. 5). This consistency in student participation across Europe is reflected in the establishment of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), the official representative for school student unions, including 20 countries in its membership base. As a supranational organisation, OBESSU holds a prominent position in European student leadership.

Education policy in the UK also supports democratic student participation in schools to an extent, with the national curriculum stating that young people should “play an active role in the life of their schools” (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007, p. 27). The UK Education Act requires local education authorities, governing bodies and schools to listen to student perspectives and involve them in a process of democratic decision-making (UK Department of Education and Skills, 2003, p. 3). Echoing this, the UK Department of Education’s school policy aims to “encourage young people to have their say on issues which matter to them; and decision-makers at local and national levels [to] listen to them” (Gove, Laws & Hurd, 2013), suggesting there is at least some support for young people to have influence over their educational experiences through meaningful, democratic student leadership practices.

The student leadership approaches of the US and Canada, conversely, are more decentralised and lack the supranational cohesion of European models. This means there is a lack of overarching policy uniting the sometimes disparate approaches taken by states in a federalist system, particularly as student leadership policy is typically the domain of the school districts in the US system. District-level policy, however, can influence state education policy, as was demonstrated when the Boston Student Advisory Council advocated for a constructive feedback policy between teachers and students (Youth on Board and the Boston Student Advisory Council, 2013). This policy was eventually embraced by the district and integrated into teacher evaluation practice in Massachusetts, illustrating a grassroots approach to central policy

reform. This represented an important shift in the treatment of student voice in decision-making.

There have also been significant inroads made in developing student leadership and participation in decision-making across education systems, something that is reflected by the increasingly strong presence of American and Canadian student leadership and advocacy bodies on international social media platforms. In the absence of a supranational framework for student leadership initiatives, a more decentralised network of approaches tends to emerge, at the school and community level. The Australian experience more closely resembles this model.

The Australian context

While education policy has traditionally been the purview of the states and territories in the Australian federalist system, the increasingly significant role of the Commonwealth in education is reflected in the student leadership space to an extent.

National action

The potential of the curriculum to foster young people's democratic competencies was identified by a series of Senate inquiries, committees and reports commissioned by the federal government during the late 1980s and 1990s. These culminated in a report by the Civics Expert Group that recommended the development of a national curriculum to improve the democratic literacy of young Australians (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994). With federal funding, a formal curriculum for citizenship education was introduced in 1997, first in the form of the Discovering Democracy curriculum, and later as the national Civics and Citizenship Education program. The role of the curriculum in fostering young people's citizenship is also reflected in a number of more recent policy documents that describe the competencies students are expected to acquire and demonstrate as a result of this curriculum. They have made it clear what role Australian schools are expected to play in enabling young people to participate in society.

The Australian Government's Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship, for example, described a set of skills and knowledge that included:

- an understanding of, and commitment to, Australia's democratic system of government, law and civic life;

- the capacity to clarify and critically examine values and principles that underpin Australia's democracy and the ways in which these contribute to a fair and just society;
- the knowledge, skills and values that support active citizenship and the capacity to act as informed and responsible citizens; and
- an appreciation of the local, state, national, regional and global rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic life (Curriculum Corporation, 2006, p. 2).

The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools articulated a vision for Australian schooling that included the development of "student responsibility in local, national and global contexts" (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, p. 3). Its Nine Values for Australian Schooling expected that students should be equipped through their schooling to "enjoy all the rights and privileges of Australian citizenship", "pursue and protect the common good where all people are treated fairly for a just society" and "contribute to society and to civic life" (2005, p. 4). As an adjunct to these national statements, the secondary school curriculum frameworks of all Australian states and territories have included some form of expectation that students be equipped with the knowledge and skills for participation in democratic processes (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009).

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, for example, provides Australian schools with a clear brief to foster students' voice, participation and leadership. Released in 2008 and endorsed by all state, territory and Commonwealth ministers of education through the then Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), it represents a blueprint for Australian schooling until 2018. Its authority is bolstered by the accompanying MCEETYA Four Year Plan, which was endorsed by all ministers in 2009 and is aligned with the work of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (MCEETYA, 2009a).

The Melbourne Declaration sets out two key goals as part of its vision for schooling in Australia for the next decade. The second of these, that "all young Australians become: successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8), is particularly relevant to the current review. It was the view of state and Commonwealth ministers that learners "play an active role in their own learning" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8), allowing for the integration of effective student leadership practices into the core business of teaching and learning across the country. In addition, the Melbourne Declaration's goal of creating

active and informed citizens has been recently reflected in the Australian Curriculum's Civics and Citizenship learning area (awaiting final endorsement) (ACARA, 2014), mirroring the international focus on citizenship education.

The emerging Australian Curriculum describes citizenship not only as "the condition of belonging to social, religious, political or community groups, locally, nationally and globally" (ACARA, 2012, p.2) but as a condition that expects this feeling of belonging to be translated into practice and action.[1] The Shaping Paper for Civics and Citizenship makes this emphasis explicit:

> Over the past two decades in Australia and internationally, there has been a broadening of the concepts, processes, and practices in Civics and Citizenship education. In particular there has been an increased emphasis on the role of active citizenship, both as explicit content and as a key outcome of Civics and Citizenship education (ACARA, 2012, p. 3).

The establishment of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standards for Teachers provided practical guidance for teachers against the backdrop of the Melbourne Declaration. The first of the professional standards, 'Know how students learn', emphasises the importance of teachers drawing on research and workplace knowledge about how students learn to effectively shape their teaching practice (AITSL, 2014). The professional standards are part of AITSL's core work and are unlikely to be affected by the May 2014 announcement that funding to AITSL will be reduced in the four years to 2017. The emphasis on students has been further supported by AITSL's Student Voice project, which aims to demonstrate "the value of meaningful learning partnerships with young people" through video demonstrations shared via an online platform (AITSL, 2013).

State-based action

While the Australian student leadership policy framework features increasingly apparent national elements, work in this area has traditionally taken place at the state and territory government level. A scan of publicly available literature has revealed that states including New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia have meaningfully engaged with the evidence surrounding student leadership, embedding this into policy to varying extents.

[1]The current review of the Australian Curriculum may have implications for the roll out of the Civics and Citizenship learning area.

The New South Wales Government has developed an Effective Student Leadership model to underpin a range of related initiatives and opportunities for students. The model draws on best practice research to advocate for significant student input into the construction of their learning experience in order to grapple with meaningful issues in collaboration with teachers, peers and communities (NSW Government Department of Education and Communities (DEC), 2012). Further, the DEC (2012) also developed a charter for Student Representative Councils (SRCs) that is informed by the model and supports students to "contribute to and participate in decision-making in their school" (DEC). The Charter continues to support SRCs, demonstrating centralised policy support for school- and community-based practices.

The Victorian Government has also embedded student leadership into its policy platform through its Principles of Learning and Teaching, a collection of guidelines for teachers to effectively support student learning and student agency to influence their learning environment. Principle 2.1, "the teacher encourages and supports students to take responsibility for their learning", is intended to give students greater power within the classroom to shape how they are taught (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2013). The Victorian Department of Education, Office of Learning and Teaching contributed to the body of literature relating to student leadership in 2007 with the publication of Student Voice (Office for Education Policy and Innovation, 2007), an issues paper that canvassed relevant theoretical work in the field and sought to connect this with concepts including interdisciplinary skills and individualised learning plans for students, demonstrating both engagement with the literature and the embedding of evidence into practice.

The Queensland Government has also established the importance of student leadership in policy by embedding student voice into its Inclusive Education Statement (Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE), 2005). The statement emphasises the need for students to "have the knowledge and skills for positive participation in a just, equitable and democratic global society" (DETE, p. 1). To this end, specific reference is made to student voice as an indicator of inclusive education, which seeks to recognise students "as partners in the teaching/learning process" who have opportunities to help construct their learning environment through experiences including "negotiating curriculum and assessment" (DETE, p. 3).

The South Australian Government has engaged with theoretical literature around student leadership, producing the issue paper Involve Me (SA Department of Education and Child Development (DECD), 2005) and

Promoting Student Voices (Hattam, McInerney, Smyth, & Lawson, 1999) to support its more decentralised approach to student leadership. As with the Victorian Student Voice publication, these focus on canvassing the available literature and building a rationale for embedding student leadership models at the school level. These publications have not typically sought to build an argument for a centralised model of student leadership at the state level beyond the development of key principles that can guide teachers and schools in the establishment of their own student leadership initiatives and practices tailored to their local contexts. This is a legitimate approach, given "it is the classroom that constitutes the dominant daily context and most important site of the realisation of the school's core purpose, namely teaching and learning" (Fielding, 2012). While there are examples of states embedding student leadership into their education policy platforms, this tends to be in support of schools and communities developing their own models of student leadership that draw on central guidelines while being tailored to the local context. Indeed, available evidence suggests that a decentralised approach to embedding practices is far more prevalent in both the Australian and international context.

Enabling student leadership

Enabling student leadership: policy and systems

The inclusion of student leadership in policy frameworks articulates an expectation that schools should drive action to enable student leadership. Australia's national curriculum makes this explicit in the Shaping Paper for Civics and Citizenship, which states "students in schools are citizens but they need opportunities to build their knowledge and understanding and experience to become active adult citizens" (ACARA, 2012, p. 5, our emphasis). It describes the role of the school in enabling young people to be "active and empowered citizens" who "apply democratic principles, practise behaviours and ... actively engage in practical citizenship activities within schools, in the community and online" (ACARA, 2012, p. 5).

The Shaping Paper also raises the deeper and more complex question of what impact policy actually has on school practice in relation to student voice, participation and leadership. In many instances, schools' adoption or development of strategies to engender student voice, participation and leadership appears to be a school-based and school-led decision, one that may be made without any clear link to, or influence by, education policy.

However, government can play a significant enabling role in supporting implementation of policy expectations that is crucial to underpin efforts within schools, for example, by establishing system-level incentives and promoting best practice and evidence-based programs to translate policy goals into practice.

Government and policy practices to enable effective implementation of student leadership initiatives are primarily in support of the actions of schools. The concept of student leadership is embedded in the curriculum documents, however, in order for cultural shift to occur, schools and teachers need to be supported by the system. This entails clear communication of desired outcomes, and provision of advice about current and emerging practices.

Another role of government in enabling student leadership will be the development of mechanisms for schools to share 'what works'. The example of the Boston Student Advisory Council is a good model for the role of district and state-level adoption of local practice. Reflexive practice, wherein central policy reform can adapt to incorporate grassroots approaches, will ensure schools are supported in their efforts. Government support for inclusion of student leadership concepts in teacher training and professional development is another avenue for policy and systems-level action to foster behaviour change.

Table 4: Enablers of student voice: policy and systems

Policy and systems-level enablers

- Providing policy frameworks that encourage and support innovative student leadership practice
- Embedding leadership skill development and civics education in the curriculum
- Communicating desired outcomes and ideal practice model/s
- Supporting information sharing, knowledge exchange and access to research and practice examples
- Providing training, professional development and implementation support to increase knowledge and foster behaviour change
- Investing in evaluation research and supporting school-university research partnerships

Enabling student leadership: curriculum, pedagogy and soft skills

Giving students a role in school governance is the most visible way in which schools seek to engender student voice, participation and leadership. Typically this is through the Student Representative Council (SRC) or equivalent, a trend discussed later in this paper. Another and perhaps more important way for students to participate is through the curriculum and pedagogy of the classroom.

Curriculum

Schools are key sites in which knowledge and competencies for civics and citizenship and student leadership can be taught and cultivated. Traditionally, civics and citizenship education has been concerned with the instruction, study and learning of citizenship and its associated rights and duties. Its curriculum has focused on providing information about the historical development of national identity, civic life, politics and government. How civics and citizenship education that is effective works in practice is contested and open to interpretation; nevertheless, Mellor (2003) rightly asserts that "[w]ithout civic knowledge and a disposition to engage, a person cannot effectively practise citizenship".

A useful distinction to make in relation to civics and citizenship education is between citizenship as knowing and citizenship as doing. Encouraging students to understand the foundations and institutions of democracy and related areas such as Australia's legal framework – the most conventional form of civics and citizenship education – can be classified as knowing. The practice of power sharing described above may be conducive to exposing students to democratic structures, but is not necessarily synonymous with student leadership unless the learning is applied and in practice. Enabling students to make meaningful connections between knowing and doing is a potentially powerful way to develop leadership, participation and voice.

Ideally, students should therefore have opportunities to experience, practise and develop these competencies in school. A study of civic attitudes and knowledge found that schools modelling democratic processes produce students who are more likely to have positive civic attitudes. Just over half of students surveyed reported learning in school about the importance of voting in elections and showed an understanding of democratic systems, including the role of criticism in democratic process, the function of elections, civil rights, and the influence of media (Mellor, 2002).

Effective curriculum for participation engages students by drawing on their own experience, enables them to make connections between their current life

circumstances and wider social and economic processes, and involves them in decision-making in the classroom, the school and the community through negotiated learning processes. Reflecting on the development of the new Australian curriculum, Allan Luke (2010, p. 59) has suggested that "any official curriculum ... comes to ground (or not) via an enacted curriculum of teaching and learning events 'lived' by students and teachers". He argues for "visible connections of school knowledge to everyday civic, cultural, political and social life" (Luke, 2010, p. 61).

There are some examples of distributed leadership models that actively incorporate input from students (Walsh & Black 2011). One example is the Lumiar Institute in Brazil, in which "Democratic decision-making forms a vital part of Lumiar students' education. A typical school day begins with students collectively deciding how to divide up space and resources at the school (there are no classrooms) in order to accommodate all of the projects" (Hampson, Patton & Shanks 2011, p.11).

There are also practical examples of curriculum frameworks that explicitly seek to foster community engagement. The International Baccalaureate's Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) component of its Diploma Programme, for example, seeks to develop students who are "aware of themselves as members of communities with responsibilities towards each other and the environment... Service requires students to understand their capacity to make a meaningful contribution to their community and society. Through Service, students develop and apply personal and social skills in real-life situations involving decision-making, problem solving, initiative, responsibility, and accountability for their actions" (IB 2014). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for students to experience a disjunction between their experience in these programs and their experience in schools.

The most recent Australian review of civics and citizenship education suggests that schools that provide greater opportunities for student participation show higher average achievement in the citizenship curriculum than other schools, and that individual students who participate to a greater degree achieve better than those who participate to a lesser degree (MCEETYA, 2009b). Students who had the opportunity to participate in school governance bodies and processes, for example, showed a consistently higher mean achievement within in the citizenship curriculum. The same review also suggested that older students (such as those in Year 10) experienced fewer opportunities for participation or leadership than younger students (such as those in Year 6). But there is much room for improvement in engaging young people in participatory activity during their time in school (Print & Saha, 2009).

Table 5: Enablers of student voice: curriculum

Curriculum enablers

- Including civics and citizenship in the curriculum to build knowledge and competencies for student leadership and social participation
- Explicitly linking student participation in school governance to issues around civics and citizenship
- Encouraging leadership through service learning and volunteering

Pedagogy

It is widely recognised that the climate of the classroom is pivotal in fostering the skills and dispositions for citizenship and participation. One of the strongest messages of the international literature is that isolated student leadership initiatives do not "suddenly make schools into democracies" (Davies et al., 2009, p. 35). Instead, for schools to become more democratic spaces, the classroom climate needs to change in ways that encourage and enable teachers to adopt a more democratic form of classroom practice. Over the past decade, Australian schools have had access to a rolling series of approaches that foster this kind of practice. These include inquiry-based and constructivist approaches characterised by high levels of student decision-making; authentic or productive pedagogies which emphasise the connectedness of the curriculum to students' lives; community-based learning that locates education in the environment in which students live; and negotiated learning, where the curriculum is planned collaboratively by teachers and students. Through the work of such educationalists as Boomer (1992), these student-centred approaches to teaching and learning have been woven into the pedagogical practice of numerous teachers and schools. In some instances, they have also been adopted as significant reform strategies designed to change the culture of the school (Black, 2007).

Good pedagogy informs practice and can be a driver of cultural change within schools. However, it should not be conflated with the practice of student leadership. Rather, it establishes the foundation for student leadership, expression of student voice and other forms of participation to take place.

Internationally, there has been a shift in thinking about student learning which has potential implications for this review. An influential Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report proposes a radical overhaul of educational practice in which:

> The learning environment recognises that the learners in them are the core participants. A learning environment oriented around the centrality of learning encourages students to become "self-regulated learners". This means developing the "meta-cognitive skills" for learners to monitor, evaluate and optimise their acquisition and use of knowledge... It also means to be able to regulate one's emotions and motivations during the learning process (OECD, 2010, p.14).

The OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) Innovative Learning Environments project, for example, makes a strong case for a new focus on learning. It looks at the role of emotions, technology, collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning and organisational routines to embed innovative learning in daily practice (OECD, 2012). From this, it recommends that effective learning environments:

- Encourage engagement,
- Enable learners to come to understand themselves as learners,
- Ensure that learning is social and often collaborative,
- Are attuned to learners' motivations (Istance, 2011, pp.5-6).

According to this approach, effective learning environments are learner-centred, in which the environment needs to be highly focused on learning as the principal activity, and personalised so the learning environment is acutely sensitive to individual and group differences in background, prior knowledge, motivation and abilities, and it offers tailored feedback. In addition, the project promotes learning that is fundamentally inclusive and includes the weakest learners, working from the assumption that learning is effective when it takes place in group settings, where learners can collaborate and when there is a connection to community (Istance, 2011, p.6). The Finnish National Board of Education has promoted a similar focus on learner ownership, where learners have strong agency in learning and shaping learning environments (Finnish National Board of Education, undated).

Similarly, learning ownership is a core feature of the 'Education 3.0' approach developed by Cisco, which seeks to draw from "the insights of learners themselves who, for the most part, have [previously] been treated as the objects rather than subjects in the process of learning. Learning opportunities involving co-construction and deep engagement by learners pay enormous dividends in terms of improved outcomes" (Hannon, Patton & Temperley, 2011, p.13). Hannon, Patton and Temperley (2011, p.3) provide the characteristics of learning ownership: "Schools which harness the power of

learner ownership to transform their approach to teaching and learning are likely to feature more project- or enquiry-based learning, greater and more meaningful student voice, and peer-to-peer teaching and mentoring".

Table 6: Enablers of student voice: pedagogy

Pedagogical enablers

- Enabling students to make connections between knowing and doing: model democratic processes, learner ownership and student voice and student-centred approaches
- Building classroom cultures which encourage participation
- Providing opportunities for all students to have a voice
- Encouraging students to explore and debate issues
- Distributed leadership models

Soft skills and literacies

Another dimension of this approach involves the development of soft skills and literacies that provide a foundation for participation and school leadership. Beyond literacy and numeracy, numerous competencies, skills and literacies are important to developing resilience in young people. Many students, especially those facing disadvantage and exclusion, do not perceive their schooling to have provided them with the necessary skills for work. One key area of development taking place via a number of initiatives throughout Australia (in particular South Australia, see Kahn et al., 2012), and in countries such as the USA and Great Britain, is to develop 'soft skills': literacies and competencies in students to improve their capacity to navigate changing worlds of work, and resilience in general. These 'soft skills' are also important for leadership development. For example, the Young Foundation in the UK has done some important conceptual work via its SEED (social intelligence, emotional resilience, enterprise and discipline) skills framework, which incorporates social intelligence, emotional resilience, enterprise and discipline (Roberts, 2009). These capabilities include affective and cognitive skills, such as communication, empathy and the demonstration of self-confidence.

Development of soft skills and literacies may encourage environments in which student voice, participation and leadership can flourish. Such

environments allow content transmitted through the curriculum to acknowledge and reflect students' experience, identities, values and concerns beyond the classroom walls (Prosser et al, 2008). Ideally, students would learn in an environment in which they are encouraged to explore and debate social and political issues and, potentially, to assume leadership to address them (Torney-Purta, 2004; Walsh, 2008); an environment in which students can engage in forms and arenas of participation that are intended to give them "presence, power, and agency" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363).

An early review of student leadership practices in NSW schools found that while many schools provided explicit leadership training for identified student leaders (i.e. SRC members), this training tended to be 'one off', rather than supporting students through a continuing learning process (Buscall, et al, in Lavery and Hine, 2013, p. 46). It is unclear the extent to which leadership training is currently provided in schools, and whether it continues to be targeted at identified leadership groups or extended more broadly.

Evidence of impact on skill development

Student leadership activities are widely considered to confer positive benefits on participants. Student leadership researchers identify a range of skills that student leaders may acquire through leadership roles, including "public speaking, decision-making, organisation, time management, interpersonal communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution strategies" (Hine, 2012, p. 233). These traits are echoed in qualitative studies (Thompson, 2012; Dempster, Stevens and Keefe, 2011), however, there is little evidence of robust empirical testing in the student leadership literature.

One Chinese study randomly allocated students to leadership positions, and found that "leadership service increases test scores, increases students' political popularity in the classroom, makes students more likely to take initiative, and shapes students' beliefs about the determinants of success" (Anderson and Lu, 2014). The authors suggest that the study may indicate that leadership opportunities develop and strengthen capability, rather than simply reflecting pre-existing skills.

Table 7: Enablers of student voice: soft skills

Soft skill enablers

- A curriculum that enables the development of the 'soft skills' that underpin leadership
- A commitment to identifying opportunities for students to engage with social and political issues
- Supporting the development of leadership skills through ongoing training and continuous learning

Enabling student leadership: the role of community actors

During the last decade in Australia, there has been an emergent trend toward community-centred models of schooling designed to maximise the contribution of the school community to its governance and operating structures and engage the wider community in the work of schools (Black, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Black & Walsh, 2009). As part of this trend, a range of not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations have emerged that seek to develop student leadership. Organisations such as The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), High Resolves and Hands on Learning seek to build in students the resilience, the competencies and predispositions to engage in learning and life.

Non-school agencies, actors and approaches are also often utilised to complement existing student leadership structures within schools. Melbourne Girls' College, for example, has developed an innovative youth philanthropy initiative that emerged from the student executive and that links student leadership to agencies within the community (Walsh and Black, 2011). The ruMAD? Or Are you Making A Difference framework, developed by FYA and adopted by numerous schools, is another initiative that uses the SRC as a vibrant focal point for student voice and participation (Black, 2012). The ruMAD? model has been adopted by Tasmanian schools since its administration by The Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning. There are a number of initiatives conducted or mediated by non-school agencies that provide opportunities and support for the exercise of student leadership. A number of these programs are included in the Tables at Appendices 2 and 3.

The role of many of these non-school or community actors and agencies also extends to providing contexts and opportunities for student leadership outside the school walls. The area of student leadership that links young people to the

local or wider community, and to key actors within it, represents one of the most promising areas of practice. Engaging students in a range of democratic activities within the community can improve their attitudes toward their future political engagement (Print, Saha, & Edwards, 2005). Initiatives in which young people work with the community to take or lead action for change can also build their sense of themselves as current active citizens (Black, 2010; Holdsworth, 2007). The evidence is, however, that this potential is seldom realised. While service learning or community volunteering programs are increasingly adopted by Australian schools, the evidence from both the local and international literature is that such programs tend to overlook young people's capacity to direct or initiate their own involvement in the community (Biesta et al., 2009) and that they are frequently only weakly connected to the core curriculum (Print, 2007).

Other contradictions are also evident in the Australian context. The Australian component of the Civic Education Study conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) found that while responding Australian principals believed their schools prepared young people to participate in the community, responding teachers disagreed that it was their role to enable young people to do so (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood. 2001). This is despite the stated desire of many young people that their schools better connect them to the world outside the school gates (Harris & Wyn, 2009).

There is no publically available evidence that even state-based initiatives – such as the Student Action Teams initiative, which has been implemented in New South Wales schools with the support of the Department of Education and Communities and in Victoria as a collaborative project between the Victorian Departments of Justice and Crime Prevention and Education and Training, or the Advance program conducted by the Victorian Department of Human Services – have had a lasting impact on many schools' practice. In the following section, we consider some of the factors that may account for this lack of lasting impact, including both policy and systemic barriers to practice and barriers that play themselves out within the curriculum and pedagogy of individual schools.

Table 8: Enablers of student voice: community

Community enablers

- Supporting and utilising partnerships between schools and community and other agencies
- Willingness to demonstrate by example the potential of structured models to promote school-wide leadership practices
- Supportive contexts and opportunities for student leadership outside the school context

Barriers and challenges to enabling student leadership

Policy and systems barriers to student leadership

Policy documents such as the Melbourne Declaration explicitly articulate how schools are expected to develop active citizenship and participation. As noted previously, however, there continues to be a lack of consensus within schools about the form that student participation should take, the purposes it should serve and the outcomes it should deliver. There is also a tendency to overlook the prevailing culture and political nature of schooling and the ways in which these effect how – and indeed if – schools enact their mandate, or the degree to which schools are realistically enabled to enact their mandate, given the constantly shifting and competing priorities that schools are expected to accommodate.

Opportunities for meaningful participation and experiences of democracy in action are delimited by the hierarchical ways in which schools and classrooms operate. This begins with the top-down 'authorising environment' of schools and education systems. It permeates classroom settings in the physical ways that classrooms settings are typically organised, through to the professional privilege over knowledge held by teachers. The effect of this is not confined to students; these structures can delimit opportunities for teachers and principals to experience 'democracy' and participate in non-hierarchal ways.

Another challenge relates to how 'youth' is defined. The culture of schools and schooling is shaped by a set of prevalent beliefs about young people. On the one hand, schools may have a strong protective orientation towards their students that is explained by the principle of duty of care. Within this, however, students can be denied the opportunity to exert their own influence

and demonstrate their own capacity for decision-making based on their own values (Cobb, Danby & Farrell, 2005).

Numerous studies show that young Australians – including those of school age - care about a range of social, political, economic and environmental issues. These include issues that affect them directly such as drugs, depression and personal safety (Mission Australia, 2013) as well as wider issues such as global warming, the environment and poverty (Whitlam Institute, 2008). The research shows that young people value the opportunity to have a voice on matters of concern to them (Eckersley et al., 2007) and prefer opportunities for participation that give them real agency and where they can see tangible results (Collin, 2008).

The irony for education systems is that this participation is more likely to take place outside the school context than within it. Young people as a collective are engaged in numerous activities and forums that seek to influence social change. Mission Australia's most recent (2013) national survey of Australian youth, for example, involved almost 15,000 young people aged 15-19 years. More than half of these (55.6 per cent) attested to participating in volunteer activities in the community. In fact, voluntary work was the third most popular activity for young people, following sports (either as a participant or as a spectator). Around four in ten young people reported participation in student leadership activities (43 per cent), one third had participated in youth groups and clubs (33.9 per cent) and religious groups or activities (32.6 per cent), and one quarter had participated in environmental groups or activities (24.7 per cent) over the past year. By contrast, the evidence is that fewer Australian students participate in school-based leadership structures such as the SRC compared with the best international comparators (The Allen Consulting Group, 2006). The role of the SRC is considered in greater detail later in this paper, but given that it – or similar structures – remains the most common way in which schools enable students to participate in leadership or decision-making about schooling, these trends are of concern.

While the culture of Australian schools is necessarily diverse, depending on such factors as school systems (Government, Catholic or Independent), jurisdictions and local influences, the overall culture of schooling in Australia has been accused of failing to recognise the changing nature of youth and young people's experience. This shows itself in the way in which many schools remain strongly influenced by a developmental conceptualisation of youth, which sees it as a transitional stage on the way to adulthood rather than a period in which young people are already active agents within their own lives. Growing concerns about the safety and wellbeing of young people

and the litigious environment that has sprung up around these concerns have only added to an environment in which schools act as 'caretakers' of young people (Raby, 2008, p. 78). This infantilisation of young people sits oddly with their experience outside the school, where a growing number are engaged in part-time work that requires and assumes high levels of responsibility and autonomy (Wyn, 2009). It also sits uncomfortably with their experiences at home, where decisions that affect young people are frequently made jointly with their parents (Danby & Farrell, 2004).

The current culture of schooling in Australia overall still reflects a view of young people as future rather than present citizens

This points to a recurrent tension within the policy literature between a discourse that emphasises young people's agency as members of society and a discourse that strongly infers their developmental status as 'adults in waiting'. This tension was evident within key documents such as the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, which lists a range of qualities students should possess "when they leave school" as a basis for their "potential life roles as family, community and workforce members" (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, p. 2).

It is notable that the New South Wales statement on values education has a greater emphasis on young people's current capacity to participate: its inference is that young people can be "proactive and productive individual and group member[s], having pride in and contributing to the social and economic wealth of the community and the nation" while they are at school (Department of Education and Training, 2004). On the whole, however, rather than seeing students as "leaders of today not just tomorrow" (Edwards, Johnson & McGillicuddy, 2003), the current culture of schooling in Australia overall still reflects a view of young people as future rather than present citizens (Wyn, 1995), who have "no value except in terms of what they will become" (Holdsworth, 2001). This is certainly evident in the historic failure of key school reform processes to include students as any more than "the recipients of reform or... objects of education" (Luke et al, 2003).

A further implication of such statements is that democratic participation is conditional on the acquisition of a specific set of skills and capacities and that, simply because they are young, young people lack these skills and capacities. This discourse creates a normative construction of young people's citizenship that excludes young people from their current and present rights and responsibilities as members of society because it defers these rights and

responsibilities until some future time, namely the time when they complete their school education. It excludes them from any current membership as citizens because it overlooks any existing forms of participation or social action in which they may already be engaged: the educational interventions inspired by this discourse, such as citizenship education, are based on a presumption that their purpose is to enable young people to make the transition from a "predemocratic" state into a state where they qualify for democratic participation (Biesta, 2010, p. 124). This construction of young people is out of step with the numerous ways and arenas in which many young people are not only participating but seeking to influence society, drawing on both formal and informal strategies, organisations and sources of knowledge.

Another systemic barrier to the capacity of schools to better recognise and support students' democratic participation may be the numerous other demands and expectations being placed on them by systems and jurisdictions. In an era where schools are under increased pressure to meet a host of policy and bureaucratic requirements, there is a danger that they adopt, enact or else adapt student participation initiatives simply to comply with policy expectations. Even schools that have a demonstrated commitment to young people's participation are challenged by the need to navigate competing agendas and accountabilities. In schools with a lesser level of commitment or with higher levels of pressure to demonstrate their performance against state and national targets, student participation can readily degenerate into another means of increasing young people's attendance, engagement and compliant behaviour (Thornberg, 2009).

Australian schooling policy, like that of other OECD nations, is characterised by an increasing emphasis on standards, performance and accountability. M.W. Apple links this trend to the creation of what he deems 'audit culture', which, he maintains, leads to a "dedemocratization" of schools and schooling (Apple, 2004, p. 618), and which has numerous implications for schools' capacity to foster and encourage student voice, leadership and participation. This is partly because a more centralised educational policy environment has a constraining effect on the school's ability to provide the sort of curriculum and pedagogy that is conducive to students' social participation. It also has a constraining effect on the school's ability to reflect the value of that participation through measurement and assessment. It is also partly because an educational policy environment that is gravitating towards more rigid or closed measurements of educational success leaves little room for the more transformative interpretations of students' participation and leadership potential.

Table 9: Barriers to student leadership: policy and systems

Policy and system barriers

- Complex and competing priorities, including a potential for the emphasis on standards, performance and accountability to come at the expense of opportunities to develop student skills more holistically
- Lack of consensus about what student leadership is and lack of clarity about ideal and most effective form, purpose and outcomes
- A construction of young people as lacking decision-making capability
- Traditional school hierarchies do not consistently support student leadership

School-based barriers to student leadership

There are also more specific, school-based barriers to student leadership. These play themselves out within the curriculum and pedagogy, and within the leadership structures, of individual schools. Opportunities for young people to experience and develop civic competencies in practice are limited by the institutional structures of schooling, which have traditionally discouraged student participation in decision-making. A combination of the institutional fabric of schools and certain conventional forms of pedagogic practice render many schools unconducive to active participation and the broader democratisation of school life. Describing Australian schools more than a decade ago, Holdsworth noted that students are “encouraged to have a ‘voice’, but no more” (2000, p. 358), and Wilson concluded that student participation was not an “entrenched characteristic” of Australian schools (2000, p. 31). Johnson observes that teaching about democracy often occurs "within school contexts where undemocratic practices abound" (2004, p. 6). This largely remains the case.

Exclusion from school governance

Despite the explicit acknowledgement of student participation in policy, young people remain routinely excluded from real participation in the operation or governance of their schools. This is not because they are complacent or uninterested in having such a role. Australian students, in particular, strongly believe that they could make a beneficial contribution to the operation of their schools but do not feel that their participation is well supported (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003). This is by contrast with some of their international counterparts, who seem unaware that the potential exists for their participation. A Canadian study, for example, found that even having a say in

school decision-making was unimaginable for students, whose participation was described as ranging from “dismal” to “sparse” (Raby, 2008, p. 83). A New Zealand study produced parallel findings: of 66 students asked to describe how they might participate in their school, only one recognised that this could include participation in the school’s decision-making processes (Taylor, Smith & Gollop, 2008).

The evidence suggests that dominant practice in Australian schools still clusters around the lowest rungs of the ladders of typologies of participation described earlier in this discussion. Initiatives to support young people’s participation are burgeoning across numerous non-educational contexts (Kimberley 2010; Taylor 2010a, 2010b), but schools appear to be lagging behind. Cole (2004) has rightly suggested that “what we are doing in schools is becoming increasingly out of step with what our young people value and what is needed for them to function effectively in a rapidly changing society”. Schools are not providing genuine opportunities for participation or leadership (Arvanitakis & Marren, 2009). This is striking given that while students are the most important stakeholders in any school, they remain the group that is least frequently invited to share in the governance or decision-making processes of their schools and whose role within these processes is most limited.

Table 10: Barriers to student leadership: school governance and organisation

School governance and organisation barriers

- Students identify a lack of opportunities to participate in school governance, in spite of a willingness to do so
- A gap between broader community models of youth engagement and opportunities for participation within schools

Civics and citizenship curriculum: knowing vs doing

The qualities, predispositions and capacity for student leadership are unlikely to be developed through the teaching of civics and citizenship as a purely theoretical curriculum. Its effectiveness is limited unless it is accompanied by opportunities for active student engagement in issues and contexts that matter to them. In addition, civics and citizenship education has, in the past, been relegated to the periphery of the core curriculum as an add-on, which sits oddly with the apparent policy enthusiasm for the use of the curriculum to engage young people as active citizens and some of the approaches of the Australian Curriculum. Civics and citizenship education has consequently

struggled to capture the imagination of young people and to connect with their lived experience, values and priorities. It has also, arguably, struggled to capture the imagination of some educators.

Within the hierarchical, didactic environments of most classrooms, students learn that democracy is important but do not experience it in practice

The conventional structure of classrooms compounds this disconnect. Print (1996) has long argued that citizenship education needs to be "based on positive views of student learning through participation", yet within the hierarchical, didactic environments of most classrooms, students learn that democracy is important but do not experience it in practice. Civic education programs that offer young people limited agency can have the reverse effect than intended (Collin, 2008). The research concludes that “schools-based civic education programs have failed to equip young people with the tools, knowledge and experience that promote and encourage active citizenship”(Arvanitakis & Marren, 2009) and recommends that all civics education curricula incorporate action-based learning to encourage a sense of agency and ownership in students.

Many students feel that their schools are not interested in their views or experience (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2008). Some have reported feeling limited in their freedom to express their opinions when they differ from their teachers, to generate their own views or to state these views within the classroom (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003). This is in sharp contrast to their experience outside school, where many young people regularly communicate and debate their views with a wide online community. One study notes that “even in nations such as Australia, where changing youth civic identity and learning styles have been recognised, educational institutions often prove resistant to change” (Bennett, Wells & Rank, 2008, p. 5).

Teacher resistance is often cited as an obstacle to student voice, and there is certainly evidence that not all teachers support student leadership practices. Some actively oppose the introduction of student participation practices because they are sceptical about its purposes or its relevance to the educational project, or because they are concerned about its potential to change the nature and dynamic of the classroom (Davies, 2009). Others adopt a stance of more passive resistance. In some cases, this may mean that they enact student participation practice because it is mandated by the school but remain unconvinced of its value. In other cases, it may mean that they agree with or subscribe to the principle of student participation as an abstract

notion without enacting it in practical or effective ways within the classroom (Cleaver et al., 2005).

Teacher ambivalence about student voice in the classroom can be based on real and valid concerns about their professional identity and purpose. For many teachers, the adoption of new pedagogical practice can be seriously challenging (Black, 2007). An illustration of this ambivalence arose during a pilot study conducted for the development of Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership's National Professional Standards for Teachers (SiMERR, 2012). The study explored the effectiveness of student voice in shaping teachers' understandings of the Standards. Conducted by the SiMERR National Research Centre at Australind Senior High School in Western Australia, it used the following questions to focus its study of the Standards for Teachers:

- How can students contribute to improved teaching and learning?
- How can student feedback data assist schools to improve practice?
- How can students contribute to improved teaching and learning?
- How can student feedback data assist schools to improve practice? (SiMERR, 2012, p.18)

Questions arising during the course of the study included:

- Are we passing too much power over to students?
- Can students assess how well a teacher is performing?
- Can students be trusted to answer surveys respectfully?
- Are we exposing ourselves to scrutiny by students?
- Will students intentionally give negative feedback to teachers they did not like?

These questions reflect the challenges to teachers described above.

Table 11: Barriers to student leadership: practice

Practice barriers
• Challenges in enacting 'democratic' models in practice, including in classroom practice • A gap between broader community models of youth engagement that offer genuine participation and opportunities for participation within schools • Teachers do not consistently support student voice initiatives and can resist the introduction of alternative pedagogical approaches

Current leadership models: exclusivity and tokenism

Arguably, the lowest or most tokenistic forms of student participation remain the most common practice in schools. For example, while Australian teachers view the SRC as an important means of building students' capacity to participate in the life of the school (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood, 2001), many SRCs operate in a superficial way that is clearly not intended to have a significant impact on school processes. In fact, schools' persistent preference for channelling student participation through SRCs may indicate the attractiveness of what is both an adult model and one that can be constrained by adults. In many of its incarnations, teachers determine the shape of the SRC, both in its organisation and conduct and in the issues that it addresses. This is in preference to structures that reflect the issues that students care about and the way in which they may want to address these issues (Cairns, 2001).

This adoption of an adult-centric model of youth participation is prevalent in schools. As some commentators suggest, schools are reluctant to give students a genuine role in their decision-making processes in case their perceptions and suggestions are too challenging to the status quo (Gunter & Thomson, 2007). Presumably as a result, few Australian students recognise their SRC as a means of achieving change, even within the fairly limited context of the school itself (Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005).

The SRC framework is only one way in which students can demonstrate leadership. Across a range of activities both within and outside of school, such as sporting activities, music, part-time work, through local church and community activities and as family carers, many young people routinely demonstrate leadership. While schools sometimes recognise and celebrate this, there is often a disconnect between how young people's participation is recognised in school and in society in general (Walsh 2012).

The inherent selectivity of the SRC is also problematic. It has been shown that SRCs provide opportunities for too few students: one review concluded that only four per cent of Australian secondary school students are members of their SRC (Collin, 2008). SRCs tend to engage those students who are already confident, articulate or recognised leaders, but overlook those who are not. In the words of one group of young people interviewed by Silva, they are well aware of which students represent the "squeaky wheels" whose voices are privileged within the school (2001, p.95).

Table 12: Barriers to student leadership: exclusive leadership model

Exclusive leadership model barriers

- Current models, particularly the SRC, are inherently exclusive and only confer benefits on a small proportion of students
- SRCs can be dominated and structured by adults, rather than led by students
- SRCs represent one type and form of leadership and may marginalise other expressions of leadership
- Exclusive models of leadership can contribute to and compound the exclusion of more marginalised students

Compounding exclusion

There is a strong suggestion that schools and school systems operate in a way that values some students and their contribution above others and that the most disengaged students are the least likely to be heard: as Fielding and Rudduck note, “there are many silent or silenced voices - students who would like to say things about teaching and learning but who don't feel able to without a framework that legitimates comment and provides reassurance that teachers will welcome their comments and not retaliate” (2002, pp.2-3).

In particular, students from low socio-economic backgrounds suffer from a deficit of opportunities to participate. They typically demonstrate less civic knowledge than their more affluent peers (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) and are less likely to achieve well in civics and citizenship studies (MCEETYA, 2009). They are less likely to volunteer (Lerner, Alberts & Bobek, 2007), less likely to have the opportunity to belong to youth organisations that provide the experience of participation (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), less likely to have faith in civic and political institutions (Anderton & Abbott, 2009), less likely to engage in the behaviours that facilitate participation (Brown, Lipsig-Mumme & Zajdow, 2003) and less likely to participate in their community (Spring, Dietz & Grimm, 2007). They are less likely to have a strong sense of agency and control over their own lives or to believe that their actions can make a difference (Benton et al., 2008) and more likely to be excluded from opportunities to make key decisions in relation to their lives (Wierenga, 2003). They are also less likely to have access to the kind of learning opportunities through their schools that would promote their participation (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Schools can be key sites that can provide opportunities for young people who have limited or no social capital to build networks, connections, understand worlds of work and post-compulsory study.

It is important that opportunities, structures and resources are made available to those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. Schools can be key sites that can provide opportunities for young people who have limited or no social capital to build networks, connections, understand worlds of work and post-compulsory study. Those who have a greater awareness of the options post-school often fare better in life, and student leadership can open up opportunities to remove barriers to education and open up opportunities for those whose options may be more limited.

These trends also show themselves in relation to young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Fifty-six per cent of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2013 were engaged in volunteer activities in the community compared to 49.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. The difference between these levels of participation is not great, but it is present. The evidence is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as well as other groups of young people can readily be marginalised in relation to their opportunities to participate. These include young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people; and young people with a disability (Taylor, 2010a, 2010b). Bridging the gap for such young people through schooling requires the conscious development of strategies that promote inclusiveness and recognise the diversity of the student population (Wierenga & Wyn, 2011). It also requires school practices and programs that enable young people to address issues in ways that respond to their own priorities, interests and needs while maintaining a safe environment for their efforts, particularly where the issues being addressed through these efforts are personally confronting or challenging (Black et al., 2011; Taylor, 2010a, 2010b).

A need for new models

One challenge for schools is "to move beyond venerating exceptional young individual leaders to a system that empowers many students to lead change in their schools and communities" (Waters-Lynch, 2008). Another is to do so in ways that are genuinely engaging and respectful of students. As Mitra and Gross (2009) warn, poorly implemented efforts to increase student leadership

efforts in situations where students feel excluded risk having the opposite effect; they risk increasing students' disengagement, distrust, and alienation from the school and the learning process. Fielding (2004) has suggested that any efforts to promote student leadership should be informed by a series of critical questions that evaluate the purposes and quality of the experience being offered to young people. These include such deceptively simple questions as:

- Who is allowed to speak?
- To whom are they allowed to speak?
- What are they allowed to speak about?
- What language is encouraged / allowed?
- Who is listening?
- Why are they listening?
- How are they listening?

Answering these questions in satisfactory ways may mean addressing other issues, including the nature of classroom practice and the authorization that teachers have to change this practice. Giving students a new role in the classroom and a new voice within the school may require the creation of a new pedagogical identity for the teacher. On top of the considerable pressures that come with the acquisition of new practice, teachers may also feel that their previous or existing practice has been rendered unsatisfactory or incomplete (Bragg, 2007). This cannot be treated lightly: if schools are to become places that foster real student participation, teachers have to have the professional training and support they need to make this happen. Where teachers are frequently seen as 'the gatekeepers of change' (Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 280), it may be that, particularly within the current culture of schooling, many have less autonomy than this suggests.

The peripheral nature of much student participation practice represents a significant barrier to its capacity to influence the broader school practice and culture

The importance of principals and school leaders

A number of studies have argued that the official endorsement of the school leader is instrumental in enabling youth participation within Australian schools and that teachers who wish to instigate participatory practices within the school depend on their school leaders for approval and support (see, for

example, Comber & Nixon, 2009; Down et al., 2008; McInerney, 2009). The same studies have also suggested that tensions are likely to arise if teachers proceed without that approval. Practice that is not supported by school leadership may also remain isolated on the fringes of the curriculum. Mitra's detailed study of youth participation initiatives in United States schools highlights the importance of sustainable school structures which give such initiatives adequate time and space within the curriculum and the timetable (2008). Black's study of Australian schools shows the same (2012). Both studies suggest that the peripheral nature of much student participation practice represents a significant barrier to its capacity to influence the broader school practice and culture.

Principals and school leaders are key drivers of change, culture and climate in schools. Their approach to leadership sends powerful signals to school communities about the ways and degrees in which participation, voice and student leadership is valued. One of the main claims made for distributed leadership is that it can significantly build capacity in schools and drive school improvement. Students have a perspective to contribute, and have expertise that can be leveraged. If, as one study suggests, "the greater the total amount of leadership exercised, the better off is the organisation" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1998), then the exercising of student leadership within the school must contribute to its efficacy and effectiveness. Some commentators argue that school leadership should be reinterpreted to include the expertise and contribution of all members of the school (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006; Kayrooz & Fleming, 2008). Yet on the whole, the literature usually overlooks the potential of students to share responsibility for the leadership of their school community.

Ideally, a whole-school approach seeks to integrate a range of programs and partnerships into the daily life of the school. A major aim of these partnerships, community projects and related programs such as work experience, should be to ensure that disadvantaged students are not left behind.

Principal perspectives on student leadership

Lavery and Hine (2013) explored issues around student leadership with Catholic school principals in Western Australia. They found that principals approached questions about student leadership from two perspectives:

- Programmatic and organisational: opportunities for students, the structure and organization of student leadership programs, specific goals for student leadership within schools, key staff to mentor and work with students, and the impact of student leadership upon school culture and identity (p. 50); and
- Vision and ethics: a model of servant leadership, with a strong focus on putting the needs of others first, empathy and alignment with Christian values (p.54).

Lavery and Hine note that the majority of principals talked about student leadership systems in relatively traditional ways, a Student Representative Council-type model, while also articulating the desire to foster a school culture that enabled all students to develop leadership skills and exercise leadership.

Principals discussed the role they play in fostering leadership in terms of modelling leadership and mentoring, designing leadership opportunities, valuing leadership and communicating school values, and creating and sustaining a vision for leadership (pp. 56-59).

Best practice and evidence of effectiveness

While the literature on student leadership has flourished over several decades (Mager & Nowak, 2011, p. 39), robust evidence of policy and program effectiveness against important measures, including educational and wellbeing outcomes for students, is lacking. While it is not possible to present individual evaluations of each of the initiatives outlined in the appendices, it is possible to draw on existing evaluations to establish what “best-practice” in student leadership is likely to look like. In their 2012 meta-analysis, Mager and Nowak explain “no systematic reviews of the effects of student participation in school decision making have been conducted so far” (2011, p. 39). Their study identified 52 instances of student participation in school decision making in the international literature, which included initiatives and structures

considered in the previous section such as school councils and school working groups and action teams.

The study found that students involved in these groups (though not other students within the school) experienced a number of personal effects as a result of their participation, including: 'developing life skills' (reported in more than half of examined cases); 'developing/improving self-esteem and social status' (reported in more than one-third of examined cases); 'developing democratic skills and citizenship' (reported in more than one-third of cases); and 'improvements in learning and academic achievement' (reported in almost one-third of examined cases). Only four cases 'showed a positive association between student participation and health or health behaviour' (Mager & Nowak, 2011, p. 39). Eleven cases reported some negative effects including 'disillusionment, disappointment and frustration' (p. 44) as a result of their participation in school leadership structures including (but not limited to) school councils and working groups.

Similarly, the AITSL literature review Student-centred schools make the difference (Harris et al., 2013) drew on research suggesting that opportunities for students to input into their own learning experience within the school environment can result in positive personal effects (Harris et al., 2013). Babcock et al. (2011) also identified research that showed student leadership within the school environment can increase student engagement and motivation which, in turn, may lead to an increase in academic performance (Lerep, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Toshilis & Nakkula, 2012). Further, AITSL drew on research from Fielding (2010) to suggest that these positive effects may be stronger for students who have traditionally experienced marginalisation within the school environment, building a case for leadership structures that do not consistently privilege the same group of students (Fielding, 2010). As with Mager and Nowack (2012), AITSL's literature review included in-school initiatives such as student councils in their consideration of the positive implications of student leadership on student outcomes, though they drew on Fletcher (2010) to concede that student leadership "may take many forms, such as the active engagement of students as planners, researchers, teachers, trainers and advocates" (p. 19). Indeed, while there is support in the literature for existing student council models, there is evidence to suggest that "students need greater agency in schools, leading initiatives, leading research teams and participating on staff panels" (Fielding, 2012, p. 15).

Notwithstanding the lack of publicly available evaluations of student leadership initiatives like those identified in this current scan, it may be possible to approximate the magnitude of the impact of particular student

leadership policies and initiatives by evaluating them against best practice frameworks. Fielding's (2012) assertion that students need greater agency in schools to shape and lead internal leadership structures themselves is underpinned by a consensus in the international literature that there are different levels or different types of student leadership. Fielding's own typology Patterns of partnership: how adults listen to and learn with students in schools outlines six different categories of interaction between students and adults within a school systems from:

- 'students as data source', where students might provide information via a student opinion survey for adults to utilise as part of their decision making; through to
- 'students as active respondents' who respond to invitations to join in discussion with adults;
- 'students as co-enquirers' who support staff to take a lead research role;
- 'students as knowledge creators' supported by staff;
- 'students as joint authors' participating in decision-making alongside staff; and
- 'intergenerational learning as lived democracy' where there is a shared responsibility between staff and students to pursue the common good (Fielding, 2012).

Fielding's (2012) observation would suggest that student leadership structures that support agency would have a greater impact on participating students, perhaps in the ways described by Mager and Nowack (2012). This emphasis on agency is reflected in best practice frameworks for youth participation in decision making generally, such as Wierenga et al.'s (2003) model of 'meaning, control and connectedness'. Prominent typologies of student leadership and student voice including Mitra's (2006) pyramid, the Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP, 2012) and Hart's (1992) ladder of participation were also reviewed as part of this study. While these take different approaches to the categorisation of student leadership, voice, interaction and participation, they each place student-led action or design at their pinnacle or end point.

The effectiveness of student-driven leadership structures is often evidenced through case studies. To give one example, Hannam's (2001) report to the UK Department for Education and Employment found a link between schools that

encouraged and integrated student participation and a number of key outcomes. Hannam's definition of student participation set a high bar which was reached by only 16 schools from an initial shortlist of 50, involving students:

> learning to collaborate with others (peers and/or adults) in the identification of needs, tasks and problems within the schools or the wider community, to ask appropriate questions and gather appropriate information, to discuss and negotiate possible courses of action, to share in planning and decision making, to share the responsibility for implementing the plan, to evaluate/review/reflect upon outcomes and communicate these to others (Hannam, 2001, p. 7).

Schools operating under this definition of student participation, which represents a relatively high standard of student leadership under any of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, reportedly experienced significantly fewer permanent exclusions, significantly higher student attendance and significantly higher levels of academic attainment than other like schools that did not operate under this definition.

On the basis of this scan and case study evidence, it appears that policies that support student agency to influence their own educational and social context are more likely to produce meaningful outcomes.

As an illustration of the complexity of student participation in aspects of school governance the following case study may be seen, not so much as exemplary, that is to say one that is an embodiment of 'best practice', but rather as an example that demonstrates the challenges and dilemmas associated with an authentic attempt to draw students into the ways in which schools manage their affairs.

Case study

School Students as Co-researchers: Leadership for Learning through Systematic Inquiry

The 'Students as Co-researchers Project' has now completed its fourth year in a co-educational comprehensive secondary school located in metropolitan Sydney (Mayes & Groundwater-Smith, 2010; Mayes & Groundwater-Smith, 2011; Mayes, 2013). The school faces a number of difficult circumstances for a variety of reasons including families living in poverty; a high proportion of young people for whom English is a second language; and a number of recently arrived refugees from West Africa and Afghanistan. There are also noticeable gender differences with boys outnumbering girls 3:1.

A concern for the self-esteem of students has been a long-term matter for the school. It is the hope of the school that its young people will be more fully engaged in their learning both intrinsically and through a variety of strategies that the school has adopted. The school has been working to address the significant literacy and numeracy needs of its students. To assist in this work it has been supported by a program known as the National Partnerships for Low Socioeconomic Schools. The partnership program has granted significant amounts of funding to eligible schools with the monies extending over a number of years, in this case four.

Among the aims of the school's development of the program has been the desire that the school should not only consider strategies for the academic achievements of its students, but also seek to 'reform' a number of its established practices, an important one being the nature of the relationships between students and their teachers and the extent to which they can be enhanced and improved through student leadership. This aligns with the desires of the NSW DEC that argues that "student leadership and participation is an important part of the culture and structure of its schools" arguing that:

> Effective student leadership practices provide opportunities for students to:
>
> feel in **control** of their learning. This means significant input to rules and procedures, establishing learning goals and tasks, deciding how to work.

> feel **competent**. This means investigating and responding to issues of survival and quality of life, solving real problems, creating real products.
>
> feel **connected** with others. This means cooperative and collaborative learning, peer support, community linkages, mutual respect." (ARACY, 2014:4)

In designing the project the school was mindful that these relationships were at greatest stress during the middle years of secondary school, that is to say Year 9, when a number of students were disengaged, even antagonistic with classes noteworthy for noise and disruption. Thus dialogue was seen as central to the reform. This project was concerned with student agency, it was designed to enable participants to build and voice their own views of schooling. They were to participate through their activities as members of a social rather than academic group. Nonetheless this is no easy matter because they also had to live with and alongside their teachers who may hold very different views to their own.

Thus many teachers have felt conflicted as to the question of listening to and consulting their students. This reticence stands in contrast to Hattie's research (2008, p.252), which found in relation to student achievement, "if the teacher's lens can be changed to seeing learning through the eyes of students, this would be an excellent beginning".

The participation of students was not just about teachers 'allowing' them to offer their perspectives, it also involved the young people having a place and space to challenge adult assumptions about their ability to speak and to make decisions about issues that concern them – a manifestation of leadership that was unfamiliar and uncomfortable for some.

While unspoken, there was an agenda in this project, of interrupting the deficit discourses that were dominant in the school. There are many deficit messages, low expectations and a focus on teacher control and surveillance of students that have been well documented and which require extraordinary efforts on teachers' parts to resist and transcend them (Munns, Sawyer, & Cole 2013). There was a definite policy in developing the students as co-researchers to be inclusive of students with not only a range of abilities but also those who were to be seen as resistant and unorthodox.

The design of the project

The project with which this case study is concerned was first established in 2010 (Mayes & Groundwater-Smith, 2010). Its intention was to build

opportunities for a selection of students (approximately 20) from Year 9 (14 year olds) who would be apprenticed into becoming participant-researchers investigating an aspect of the ways in which the school went about its work over a whole school year. This group became known as 'The Steering Committee' – an important metaphor for its work, since it had little executive power in the school, but could inform the steering of reform and change. The project also had the potential to develop the students as leaders outside the more predictable structure of the Student Representative Council.

The focus of the inquiry for 2010 was 'The school I'd like'. In 2011 a new cohort of students, also from Year 9 addressed 'The teaching I'd like'. In 2012 attention was paid to 'The learner I would like to be'. 2013, the last year of the project, included students from Years 7–11 with an interest in 'What I would like to learn'.

In each year students engaged in a series of research workshops conducted by teaching staff and a university-based partner who provided ongoing evaluative feedback. The workshops were organised to serve a dual purpose: to familiarise students with research methods, and to provide conditions where students could also express their own feelings and orientations to their schooling. Thus the workshops were structured to both develop the confidence and insight that might be seen to be desirable requisites for school leadership.

Commensurable with the research workshop objectives to enable students to voice their responses to various aspects of their schooling, the focus was upon qualitative, open-ended methods. In each year students became (were intended to become) competent in: conducting focus groups; developing and analysing surveys based upon focus group findings; using visual methods (for example, photographing aspects of the school environment); constructing scenarios using projective strategies such as cartooning, puppetry; and, observing and interviewing teachers at work. Workshop sessions were designed so that students evaluated and commented upon the various methods and how they might be best employed to address the key focus for that year.

In the case of observing and interviewing teachers, this strategy was undertaken 2011 – 2013 (with 2010 being seen as a pilot year) and also involved visiting other schools.

Critical moments in the development of students as co-researchers

In this account of students as co-researchers a selection of moments have been reported, one per annum, among many that might be seen to be critical.

2010: PBIS & KERF: A teacher's response

During the first year of the project students explored the kind of school that they would like to attend. At the same time the school was developing its Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (PBIS) strategy. There was a concern that the work of the Steering Committee would be directed, as a key reference group, to following the procedures required to develop that strategy thus appropriating its purpose in that there would be little encouragement for the students to evolve their own agenda. However, by the end of the year the students had their own acronym and had clearly taken the initiative: KERF: Know students, Encourage them, Respect them and have Fun. At a staff meeting they presented to the staff their findings in relation to each of these. A small sample is reproduced here:

Knowing students

"First day of the term – [a good teacher] asks the class what the students like- they get to know you – know what you like, what you don't like and how you want to learn."

"If you've got your head on the desk, you want them to ask you if you're ok, not get angry."

"If a student does something wrong, it doesn't mean that they're going to be wrong for the rest of the term. The teacher shouldn't treat that student differently. Next day is a new day. The next day have a little talk: 'yesterday was a bad day. Now is a new day.'"

Encouraging students

"Saying, 'well done,' 'good work,' 'excellent' – makes you feel proud of yourself and you like the classroom better, try harder."

"In maths, my teacher saw my book and said, 'I'm going to change your report because I can see it's good.' I was encouraged to keep doing homework because he noticed."

Respecting students

"Talk to you nice – treat you as their own. Reward you. Don't shout at you."

"Don't talk down to you – makes you feel inferior – makes you want to act out/ retaliate."

Having fun:

"Teachers should start the lesson with something fun like games".

> "To make you interested and have more fun – relate it to normal life, connect it to what's important to you (they need to ask and find out from you what's important to you). Teachers needs to think of why the knowledge is important in the real world".

Some teachers found the student presentation quite confronting. Soon after the meeting, one teacher encountered a challenging student in class and publicly asked a steering committee member, "so, you know all about respect, what do you do now?" In this instance the steering committee member felt that the presentation had fallen on deaf ears. It is argued here that this is a critical moment because it interrupts the relationship between teachers and students. Evidently, the teacher was frustrated by the students' claims that they deserved to be respected, while dealing with what was seen as a moment of disrespect.

2011: Observing teachers at work

With the focus for the 2011 on 'The teaching I would like' students were afforded opportunities to observe volunteer teachers, having first solicited their 'informed consent'. Together they designed a letter that respectfully sought permission to visit classes, observe and subsequently interview a small group of students about the teaching and learning.

The steering committee students then de-briefed with the teachers regarding the ways in which the lesson was taught and how it fitted into the teachers' normal repertoire of practice. They discussed such matters as: teachers connecting to their learners by building strong relationships and caring about them as individuals; teachers 'knowing their stuff'; teachers helping students to find more than one way to solve a problem; and teachers trusting their students.

This work could be represented as "risky business". Many teachers find themselves uncomfortable when being observed by their peers, let alone by students. However, both teachers and students found the conversations helpful and revealing with students believing that they developed greater empathy with their teachers when they had a sense of what it was like to "be on the other side of the desk". Normally their acquaintance with teaching only comes from being on the students' side of the desk.

2012: Visiting other schools

To facilitate continuity and development, previous Steering Committee members were invited for the first four weeks of the year to mentor incoming members. This enabled them to explain what they had been responsible for

and how they had proceeded. The new committee was particularly interested in the notion of interviewing staff members and since their focus for the year was upon “the learner I would like to be” they looked forward to being provided with an opportunity to visit another school and identify how young people saw themselves as learners in a different environment. Subsequently, they made two visits, one to a co-educational secondary school and the other to a primary school in an affluent ‘leafy suburb’. In the first case they recorded a number of observations that they made of student responses to three specific lessons and used these as a basis for discussion about their own learning. Just as they noted some students “did not concentrate or seem interested in the lesson and others spoke among themselves” they came to see how disruptive this was to learning. In their discussions the students imagined which of these teachers would most facilitate their learning and how they acted in comparison to teachers in their own school. They also wondered about the impact of disengaged behaviours upon the student learning of others. Following the visit to the primary school there was an animated discussion regarding the notion that the young people that they encountered were universally enthusiastic about school. They were reported to have said how much they enjoyed their learning and the student researchers wondered why it was that such a positive orientation might be drained away as they progressed into secondary school.

2013: The focus for the year

In its submission to the school’s executive regarding the final year of the project it was argued:

> The Steering Committee’s aim for the past 3 years has been to support the development of student outcomes through encouraging students to have an active role and voice in the operation and issues of the school. Additionally, through facilitating more active communication between teachers and students it has been hoped that these relationships would strengthen.
> The implementation of the National Curriculum affects all students in every school across the nation. Conventionally, staff are the only stakeholders to read, deconstruct, workshop, discuss and then make decisions upon the implementation of the document in the classrooms. Once again, students are the consequential stakeholders in this process bearing the consequences of decisions made on their behalf.

The subject to be selected for student inquiry into curriculum decision-making was the history component of the Human Society and its Environment key learning area. Access to “behind the scenes” decision making was to be not

only via interviewing the Head of Department and the teachers but also by observing a departmental staff meetings where decisions were to be made and by perusing the documents from which teachers were working.

Questions of sustainability

This project is a significant one in a state government disadvantaged school context, spanning four years and supported by funding that provided teacher release and the assistance of an academic partner. One teacher has become a doctoral candidate and is working with a theoretical focus to explore the meaning of student voice and school reform (see, for example, Mayes, 2013). In 2014, two young people who became active and prominent as the project developed in 2011 are now the school captains, noted for their responsibility and leadership skills. Nonetheless, with the cessation of the National Partnerships resources there are serious matters regarding sustainability that will need to be considered. The school has made clear that it cannot afford the teacher release time that a continuation of the project would require, nor the assistance of an academic partner.

Thus a proposal was put forward to the school to develop an elective strand within the school, extracts from which appear below and which could well be perceived as a template for developing student leadership through a process embodying students as researchers.

A Year 9-10 Elective

- An elective about research inquiry with students designing their own research.
- Year 9 – research inquiry could be more whole class oriented facilitated more explicitly by the teacher
- Year 10 – students writing their own inquiry question, designing and carrying out their own research (potentially in groups)
- Research could be within the school, but could also be in wider community
- This elective could be a model for other schools
- Elective would be teaching students critical research tools
- Elective to be within the HSIE faculty as it aligns with the Higher School Certificate Subject, Society and Culture, but teachers could come from other faculties to teach this elective

Even this modest proposal was considered to be one that the school found difficult to entertain. The proposal for developing an elective embedded in the school curriculum would have appeared to be the most cost effective way of ensuring the project “Students as co-researchers” could be sustained. Finding other sources of funding is difficult in these times of government budgetary constraint. Busy teachers in schools generally do not have the entrepreneurial

capacities to seek out funding from alternative sources. Commercial learning companies such as Pearsons, with their school improvement models have certainly had an impact upon teacher professional learning in countries such as England but with mixed results (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; Ball, 2012). It may well be that, with the trend for charitable trusts and the like to make greater inroads into education, employing authorities such as the NSW DEC will need to advise teachers of alternative sources of funding and ways in which they may be accessed. For example, Social Ventures Australia conducts a number of programs such as Growing Great Teachers, but these are not widely known.

Case study conclusion

Sustainability in innovation is no easy matter. Is the innovation seen as an opportunity for growth and development, or a threat to the existing school ethos and the ways in which members of the school staff construct their professional identities? Clearly this project was variously received being both applauded and rejected. In many ways it takes us back to the very purposes of schooling such as: the kind of society that we want; how schools can contribute positively; what are the consequences of disparities of power and how are teachers and their students to learn and live together and, finally, how can young people as leaders, facilitate authentic dialogue and reflection.

Conclusions

Despite a strong policy emphasis on the role of schools in fostering young people's voice, participation and leadership, there is very little literature available mapping current practice; exploring the perspective of students, principals or teachers; identifying models of effective practice; or conducting rigorous research about program effectiveness, longer-term impacts of particular student leadership models, and the impact of leadership experiences on skill development and outcomes. Yet the literature clearly reflects a belief that school-based leadership opportunities have the potential to be extremely beneficial to young people, and the role of schools in facilitating the requisite skills, knowledge and development opportunities is a theme in national policy frameworks.

The available evidence suggests that 'traditional' student leadership models only impact those who are directly involved, and the current literature advocates for student leadership models that extend the assumed benefits of leadership opportunities more broadly. That is, for inclusive rather than exclusive models of student leadership. The models that emerge from this position extend from expanding and building on current SRC-type models through to including students in school governance and reform initiatives and include alternative pedagogical models that embed 'student voice' into everyday classroom practice.

There is a need for greater consensus about the purposes and outcomes for which student voice, participation and leadership are fostered. Participation in the life of the school and the community is an important means of fostering the development of critical soft skills and literacies that provide a foundation for young people's wider active citizenship while also meeting more specific educational purposes such as improved student engagement and learning (Walsh & Black, 2009, 2011), but it must happen in ways that genuinely value that participation and which are seen by young people as efficacious.

These proposals require a whole-of-school approach that may require stronger support mechanisms for school leaders, a focus on the development of underpinning skills and knowledge, and changes in curriculum and pedagogy. In contexts where student voice, participation and leadership are poorly connected to the priorities that drive school leadership and to the authorising policies of school systems, they are effectively occurring in a vacuum. It cannot be hoped that such practices will become more widespread simply by osmosis. The reverse is more often the case: practices are readily

lost within the dominant school culture if they are not embedded within the school ethos and such structures as the curriculum and timetable.

The creation of genuine and powerful opportunities for student voice, participation and leadership could also be enabled by the greater involvement of non-school agencies and actors who could inject fresh ideas, models of practice and resources into schools and better connect student leadership to the community. This is an underdeveloped area of school practice that offers great scope for development.

Beyond these specific approaches and opportunities, a stronger relationship between the policy rhetoric of student leadership and the practice and culture of education policy is also needed. In 2002, Bentley suggested that "young people themselves are probably the greatest untapped resource in the process of educational transformation" (p. 15). The evidence is that little has changed. Australia is currently pursuing significant education reforms that purport to educate young people for an active citizenship, but there are few mechanisms by which young people can contribute to these processes. Instead, they are still typically perceived as the passive recipients or objects of educational practice and reform.

Evidence from previous studies suggests that young people are likely to become cynical about democratic processes and structures, both within the schooling context and beyond it, if the promise of participation does not translate into the kind of experience they are led to expect (Walsh & Black, 2011; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Earlier in this paper, we listed some of the critical questions which Michael Fielding has proposed should be asked about the nature and purposes of student voice, participation and leadership practice in schools. Fielding also proposes that more far-reaching questions be asked, such as: do the cultural norms and values of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? The answer to this question, and the responses and solutions when the answer is in the negative, lies with school systems as much as with schools.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

This review has identified a number of factors from the research literature that enable effective implementation of student leadership practices in the school environment. The key enablers are to do with the values and attitudes that underpin leadership cultures and practices in each school context. These values and attitudes influence the extent to which student leadership is

considered a priority and the capacity of the school to engage effectively with student priorities and perspectives. Key enablers include:

- A belief that schools have a role to play in facilitating and fostering student leadership capabilities, and a belief in the legitimacy and validity of student perspectives.
- An understanding that there is a spectrum of student leadership and that the most ubiquitous models do not necessarily represent effective or promising practice.
- An understanding of the positive outcomes that can be fostered through effective practice of student leadership. This will change the perception of leadership opportunities as no longer 'supplementary' to schooling but integral for student development.
- School culture, including school management culture, which is accepting of 'disruptive' student leadership influences from the classroom to the school system and community level.
- Policy frameworks that enable and promote student leadership

Table 2: Enablers of student leadership

Policy and systems-level enablers

- Providing policy frameworks that encourage and support innovative student leadership practice
- Embedding leadership skill development and civics education in the curriculum
- Communicating desired outcomes and ideal practice model/s
- Supporting information sharing, knowledge exchange and access to research and practice examples
- Providing training, professional development and implementation support to increase knowledge and foster behaviour change
- Investing in evaluation research and support school-university research partnerships

Community enablers

- Supporting and utilising partnerships between schools and community
- and other agencies
- Willingness to example the potential of structured models to promote school-wide leadership practices
- Supportive environments and opportunities for student leadership outside the school context.

Soft skill enablers

- A curriculum that enables the development of the 'soft skills' that underpin leadership
- A commitment to identifying opportunities for students to engage with social and political issues where it serves the educative purpose and is consistent with curriculum objectives
- Supporting the development of leadership skills through ongoing training and continuous learning

Pedagogical enablers

- Enabling students to make connections between knowing and doing: model democratic processes, learner ownership, student voice and student-centred approaches
- Building classroom cultures which encourage participation
- Providing opportunities for all students to have a voice
- Encouraging students to explore and debate issues

Curriculum enablers

- Including civics and citizenship in the curriculum to build knowledge and
- competencies for student leadership and social participation
- Explicitly linking student participation in school governance to issues around civics and citizenship
- Encouraging leadership through service learning and volunteering

The barriers to student leadership also include values and attitudes that are not supportive of student leadership and more expansive conceptualisations of student voice, but also include existing systems and structures that inhibit more comprehensive models of student leadership.

There is also no shared understanding of what ideal models of student leadership look like, or shared belief about the extent to which schools can or should promote the development of leadership skills and provide leadership opportunities for all students.

Table 3: Barriers to student leadership

Policy and system barriers

- Complex and competing priorities, including a potential for the
- emphasis on standards, performance and accountability to come at the expense of opportunities to develop student skills more holistically
- Lack of consensus about what student leadership is and lack of clarity about ideal and most effective form, purpose and outcomes
- A construction of young people as lacking decision-making capability
- Traditional school hierarchies do not consistently support student leadership

School governance barriers

- Students identify a lack of opportunities to participate in school
- governance, in spite of a willingness to do so

- A gap between broader community models of youth engagement and opportunities for participation within schools.

Practice barriers

- Challenges in enacting 'democratic' models in practice, including in
- classroom practice
- A gap between broader community models of youth engagement and opportunities for participation within schools
- Teachers do not consistently support student voice initiatives and can resist the introduction of alternative pedagogical approaches

Exclusive leadership model barriers

- Current models, particularly the SRC, are inherently exclusive and only
- confer benefits on a small proportion of students
- SRCs can be dominated and structured by adults, rather than led by students
- SRCs represent one type and form of leadership and may marginalise other expressions of leadership
- Exclusive models of leadership can contribute to and compound the exclusion of more marginalised students.

Examples of promising practice

Schools are more likely to adopt innovative student leadership models, where they have a potential guide to follow. Below are two examples of how student leadership models have been effectively disseminated throughout a region:

- **Teach the Teacher** by the Victorian Student Representative Council (VIC SRC): A model for student-led discussions about classroom learning between teachers and students, which can be implemented by any SRC in their school. The discussions are not only a forum for students to voice their opinions, but also a form of professional development for teachers as they receive valuable feedback. The model has been piloted at 10 Victorian schools.
- **Participation with Effect** (Mitwirkungmit Wirkung) by the German Children and Youth Foundation. A peer education program where students facilitate workshops on how to tackle school challenges as a student body. Student leaders (aged 15-18) deliver workshops at several different schools regionally and teach peers how to enhance democracy in schools by increasing opportunities for student participation in school decision-making.

Summary of findings

What does the literature say about the knowledge and support schools need?

- **Commitment to student leadership**: Schools require information and encouragement to maximise the potential of their student leadership activities and investment. Although national policy frameworks support the important role of schools in fostering students' voice, leadership and 'soft skills', it is not clear that all teachers and schools regard this as a core priority – not least because of the complex and competing range of demands schools are required to address. Research indicates that building the knowledge and commitment of teachers and principals to student leadership is an important pre-condition for effective practice.

- **Evidence of impact**: Schools would be better placed to make decisions about student leadership models if they had access to evidence about the impact of different models on learning and wellbeing outcomes, as well as the relative effectiveness of different models and practices around student leadership. Sharing of information and research on outcomes across and within jurisdictions would support schools in this process.

- **Examples of better practice and available models**: In the absence of high-quality evidence about effective practice, information sharing about different models and approaches that are available can help schools explore a range of options and identify the most appropriate model for their context. In particular, information about the continuum of student leadership practices (as suggested by the spectrum of activities outlined below), and what is involved in moving along this continuum, could support culture and practice change over time. For example, current student leadership structures need not be dismantled and rebuilt. A cost effective and productive first step may be to improve existing student leadership structures, such as SRCs, by shifting their emphasis so they align with effective practice (i.e. greater inclusivity and decision-making power).

Table 13: Continuum of student leadership approaches

Continuum of leadership approaches
• Engaging students as prefects or in other forms of traditional student leadership within the school
• Engaging students as school ambassadors or representatives beyond the school
• Engaging students in peer support, buddying, mentoring or coaching programs
• Engaging students in the governance and decision-making bodies of the school, such as the School Council
• Engaging students as members and participants in key school processes such as staff or school leadership appointment panels
• Inviting and enabling students to undertake research and consultation about aspects of the school operations, culture, climate or practices that may need change or improvement
• Inviting and enabling students to develop and implement projects to change and improve school operations, culture, climate or practices
• Engaging students in school change or reform processes

- **Information sharing and knowledge exchange:** Opportunities to share successes and challenges and learn from other school experiences can help drive better practice.

- **Implementation support and action research**: Providing information and, where appropriate, coaching and support to enable schools to implement new structures and ways of working may better equip schools to improve their student leadership practice. Implementation science refers to the analysis of program effectiveness, transferability and packaging to ensure effective on-the- ground delivery. It provides a useful framework for assessing needs, identifying appropriate strategies, monitoring progress and evaluating impact, especially for the implementation of new ways of working and initiatives that involve culture change. Action research provides another useful framework, especially given the paucity of high-quality research to guide decisions about appropriate models. An action research approach can contribute to the building of the evidence base and the development of a continuous quality improvement approach.

How else can schools be supported?

- **Current practice and needs analysis**: Given the lack of high-quality research on student leadership, schools would benefit from examples of good practice and a detailed analysis of their support needs.
- **Knowledge exchange**: Opportunities for information sharing. This could take a number of forms, including virtual models (newsletters, web forums, webinars) and in-person approaches (conferences and seminars, inclusion in PD programs, leveraging existing meetings and networks).
- **Implementation support**: Providing schools with advice and support around implementation and culture change processes, with a focus on continuous quality improvement and action research. Changed practice is unlikely to occur in isolation from broader capacity building and information sharing, however, examples of practical and achievable pathways from their current practice to models more closely aligned with good practice may assist.
- **Enabling policy frameworks**: Policy frameworks that encourage and enable student leadership at local levels. This involves identifying system-level levers to improving student leadership, and incorporating them into overarching policy frameworks that recognise and promote student leadership.

What additional support might assist schools?

If schools decided to focus on improving opportunities for student leadership and participation then the following are worth considering:

- undertaking an audit of current practices
- increasing awareness and understanding of the benefits and importance of student leadership and participation
- establishing opportunities for internal and external information sharing
- the provision of professional learning
- evaluation of the implementation and impact of student leadership and participation initiatives

- measuring the effectiveness of student leadership and participation initiatives for and on students.

Consideration could also be given to exploring:

- the perspectives of students, families, teachers and school leaders about appropriate and desirable leadership models;
- the impact of introducing new approaches to school leadership on the individuals involved and other school-based factors (attendance, retention, classroom environment, student self-efficacy, etc.); and
- the longer-term impacts of alternative student leadership models, both on individuals and schools.

A range of indirect measures could also be considered, including:

- Class disruptiveness, measured by the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey
- Student engagement and motivation at school, measured by the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment
- Student attitudes towards school, assessed in Victoria by the annual Attitudes to School Survey
- Retention rate of students for each school

- More appropriate, specific measures of student leadership and voice should be investigated and constructed.

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Appendix 1: Overview of student leadership initiatives

This appendix provides a description of the different types of initiatives and practices across schools and systems within Australia and internationally.

The practices listed in Appendix 2 and 3 are grouped according to their stated aims and descriptions with other like initiatives. The practices are indicative only and the lists are not exhaustive. Initiatives are presented under two headings: 'being heard' and 'creating change. This typology is underpinned by Mitra's (2006) pyramid of student voice (Figure 1), which presents a three-tiered continuum to categorise student voice: being heard, collaborating with adults and developing a capacity for leadership.

Initiatives that fall under the 'being heard' banner are characterised by adults, including teachers and school administrators, soliciting student opinion for use in decision making. 'Collaborating with adults' refers to initiatives and practices that facilitate the collaboration between students, their peers and with adults to make decisions and effect change, though adults would typically steer decision-making. 'Developing capacity for student leadership' "includes an explicit focus on enabling youth to share in the focus of the student voice initiative", empowering students to take a leading role in focusing their efforts and making decisions.

Separating practices and initiatives between 'collaborating with adults' and 'developing a capacity for leadership' would typically require an examination of student experience and the role that students and staff respectively played in each iteration of each initiative. For the purposes of clustering like initiatives on the basis of their publicly available aims and content, Mitra's 'collaborating with adults' and 'developing capacity for student leadership' have been collapsed into a single category called 'creating change'. It is acknowledged that many of these initiatives across both categories may represent limited examples of student leadership.

Being Heard

Initiatives that solicit student opinion and experience to inform decision making are common practice in Australia and internationally. These initiatives can take many forms, including student surveys, online forums, conferences and advisory positions, each of which empowers student leadership to varying extents. Even in situations where students are invited to speak at conferences or sit on advisory boards, however, adults retain decision-making power in these examples.

Surveys

The most basic form of consultation can be seen in initiatives that gather student feedback to improve classroom teaching. Student surveys provide a dataset on student experience, providing students with a limited opportunity to share their perspective.

Forums

Other opportunities for students to be heard exist through online forums, which tend to rely on student-driven participation more so than traditional school-based surveys.

Conferences

Engaging student voice is also regularly achieved through conference events. Conference events provide students with opportunities to meet decision makers and face to face as well as share ideas with their peers and participate in capacity building activities. However, they are infrequent and it gives students a limited time frame in which to share their perspectives.

Similar to the conference style are events where students are key speakers and presenters of ideas. These events place greater leadership responsibility on students to present their ideas, but still locate decision-making power with adults.

Advisory positions

Permanent advisory positions in support of adult decision makers also provide a platform for empowering student voice. Advisory groups give students greater input into decision making behind the scenes, but are limited by only including small numbers of students.

Multifaceted initiatives

There are also initiatives that combine the above styles of online forums, conference and showcase events and advisory groups. The ACT government's Youth InterACT program (ACT Community Services Directorate) and the Alberta Government's Speak Out program (Alberta Government) in Canada are two examples of multifaceted initiatives aimed at engaging student voice.

Creating Change

Initiatives that go beyond listening to student perspectives and give decision-making power to students are also evident in the Australian context and internationally. While the extent to which students are empowered to make decisions depends on each specific context, student representative bodies, leadership development models and student action teams all provide the

scope for this possibility to be realised. A determination about whether or not this goal was actually realised would require individual initiative evaluation.

Student representative bodies

Student representative bodies in schools are well established across education systems and regularly share decision-making power with school staff. However, these student bodies can be limited in their capacity to influence change and represent students. In Australia, such bodies have faced criticism for being elitist, unrepresentative and paying lip service to student leadership by dealing primarily with trivial school issues (Holdsworth, 2013). As such, the extent to which student councils democratically engage with meaningful issues should be questioned.

Leadership and citizenship activities

Outside of the internal structure of schools, there are initiatives that build the leadership capacity of students allowing them to promote their voice. There are several long term initiatives aimed at developing the leadership skills of students.

School change

Alongside leadership development, students have sometimes had the opportunity to identify problems within their school and identify opportunities to enhance their learning, which locates them at an important stage in school change.

Community change

Many leadership initiatives also evolve into students creating their own projects for change in their local community. This can include identifying issues, design and implementation of change activities.

Appendix 2. 'Being Heard' – table of program examples

Category	Program/Initiative	Description
Surveys	Australian School Survey tool	Developed by Education Services Australia on behalf of the Department of Education. Schools create their own survey to solicit student and parent opinion on schooling practices
	Indiana University's Survey of High School Engagement	Gathers student opinion on engagement and school climate. This has been conducted across 40 US states, and from 2013 onwards has become a survey model for schools to deliver themselves
	Attitudes to School Survey (VIC)	Collects data about the opinions of students for Years 5 to 12 to assist schools with planning, developing curricula and supporting students
	AITSL's Student Voice forum	Students and teachers share their opinions via video, with the aim of demonstrating the "the value of meaningful learning partnerships with young people"
	The NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People's Online Classroom	Aims to consult student opinion of key policy areas. Focus topics have included mental health and emotional wellbeing

Online forums	Consultation initiative	
	Gungahlin College Youth Forum (ACT)	This video conference gave students from seven schools the opportunity to pose questions relating to youth to politicians and experts
	National Youth Week	A joint initiative of the Australian federal and state governments. Engaging approximately 10,000 young people nationally in 2012 through events and forums, the focus of National Youth Week this year was the impact of young people's voices on decision making
Conference Events	NSW DEC's The BIG IDEA Session	Held as part of inter-school and state SRC conferences, student teams pitch their ideas for improving student life, then vote on which ideas are chosen for action.
	YMCA's Youth Parliament program	Held in every state and territory with the exception of the ACT, the program allows young people to identify issues and present them to relevant Ministers
	World Vision's Global Leaders Convention	Year 10-12 students gain insight into global issues, listening to student speakers and developing ideas for change in teams
	United Nation's Youth Voice	A public speaking competition where students present solutions to global issues to

Youth-led Conference Events		a judging panel
	NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People's Participation Showcase	Adults co-presenting with young people about their experience of including young people in decision making
	Principals Australia Institute's Student Principal For A Day	Students gain leadership skills by acting as principal for a day, and engage in online discussion with other students about school issues that affect them
	The Victorian DEECD's Listen2Learners event	In 2010, students presented to adults the ways in which technology is enhancing their learning, giving educators a better insight into how students learn
Youth Advisory Groups	The Young People Advisory Group to the NSW Commissioner for Children Young People	The group includes 12 students regularly meeting and researching to present ideas to the Commissioner
	Involve Committee for the Victorian Minister for Youth Affairs	The group of 19 young people consult with the wider community of young Victorians, and regularly advise the Minister

Hybrid programs (utilising combination of online forums, conferences and advisory groups)	ACT government's Youth InterACTprogram	The program engages young people aged 12-25 to have their say about youth issues in Canberra. The program includes: • An Advisory Council that consults with the wider youth community • A 'Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Award' • An Annual Youth Conference • Interactive website for young people
	The Alberta government's Speak Out program	This youth engagement initiative has several elements including: • Online discussion boards and a 'Speak Out Blog' • Local events such as the 'Speak Out Forums' which are essentially focus groups with young people • An Annual Speak Out Conference • A Minister's Student Advisory Council

Appendix 3. 'Creating Change' – table of programs

Category	Program/Initiative	Description
Student Representative Bodies	Victorian Student Representative Council	A network of secondary school students across Victoria. Auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria.
	Inter-school Student Representative Councils	Operating across NSW as peak student leadership consultative and decision making forums and supported by the NSW Department of Education and Communities.
	Student Trustees in Ontario, Canada	Every school board is mandated by legislation to have one student trustee or 'pupil representative'. These individuals have come together to form the Ontario Student Trustees Association
	Student Councils (USA)	Student councils operate across the majority of US states. They are represented nationally by the National Association of Student Councils (NASC)
	St Joseph's Primary School (VIC)	A student created newspaper called "The Students' Voice" was designed and edited by members of the school's SRC consisting of school work, school events, what had happened around the school and a community section.

Leadership Building Programs	Langhorne Creek Campus (SA)	Students are formally involved in the planning and development of school facilities and resources through a SRC and an Environment Committee.
	Willung Primary School (SA)	An executive committee of 10 students and a series of other committees allow students to coordinate & support the school with fundraising, community events, school transitions, ICT equipment and facilities.
	The High Resolves global citizenship and leadership program	A three year leadership program for year 8-9 students, delivered within Australian schools
	UN Youth Australia's School Ambassador Program	A multi-week leadership course run in the ACT, SA, and QLD
	NSW DEC's Leadership in Middle School Program	A student participation and leadership program for year 5-8 students
	The Victorian DEECD's School for Student Leadership	A residential education experience for year 9 Indigenous students, run across three regional campuses.
	Distance Education Centre Victoria's Student Voice and Leadership	A student participation and leadership building program for years 5-12

Student identifying school issues and challenges	Curtin University's Sir Charles Court Young Leaders	A leadership development camp for year 10 students
	The NT Department of Education's IMPACT program	A three-year engagement program for year 10-12 Indigenous students
	The Victorian SRC's Teach the Teacher program	A model for improving student-teacher relationships that can be delivered by schools
	NYC Department of Education's Student Voice Collaborative	Students are able to act as evaluators of student participation at local schools, as well as investigating student participation at their schools.
	Nanango State High School (QLD)	Year 10 students created their own evaluation of science teaching practices in their school.
	Portland Secondary College (VIC)	The program "Students Teaching Teachers" provides students with the opportunity to develop and implement lessons where they ask teachers questions around what is working in the school and learning environment.
	Mornington Secondary College (VIC)	Over 30 students have established a group called 'Look Who's Talking', which runs discussion groups and forums to identify areas they want to be more actively involved in at school.

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