

Student Action Teams: Phase 2 - 2001-2002

An Evaluation of Implementation and Impact

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Executive Summary

Overview

Student Action Teams have been funded in Victorian schools since 1999. This Report focuses on Phase 2 of the Program, which was undertaken in 2001-2002. It builds on the Implementation Evaluation contained in the Phase 1 Report (Holdsworth *et al*, 2001).

The Program has been supported by *Crime Prevention Victoria* (Victorian Department of Justice) and VicHealth, and has operated as part of the Middle Years Strategy of the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

The Literature and Context

The health and educational literature on connectedness and resilience provides the context for the operation of Student Action Teams. This literature reflects both issues of 'alienation and engagement' in schools, and the notions of 'risk and protection' in establishing young people with strong self-concepts and a focus on on-going learning and development.

Key to the ideas underpinning Student Action Teams is the concept of connectedness - to family, to peers and to school. School programs that successfully enhance factors associated with positive outcomes for young people have three principal factors in their provision for students:

- a sense of meaning or purpose;
- a sense of control or capacity;
- a sense of belonging or bonding.

Program Evaluation: Phase 2

Student Action Teams have been developed in Victoria within a Middle Years of Schooling framework with the intention of addressing these areas. The evaluation question facing us in the 2001-2002 Program, concerns whether these aspects of Program implementation occurred, what outcomes or impact can be observed within participants and schools, and what we learn about both implementation and outcomes.

The evaluation collected Program descriptions from teachers, and data on Program impact from student participants and from teachers. In some cases, pre-Program and post-Program information

was collected from students. This data is analysed in this Report.

In particular, impact data is compared with student reports of Program characteristics, and this is further analysed by gender and team size.

Program Implementation

Thirty-six primary and secondary schools were identified in the Program's Phase 2 and asked to establish and implement Student Action Teams around community themes that they chose. Funding was provided to these schools to meet Program costs. Schools were initially asked to implement approaches in the second half of 2001, but this was later extended to allow further development in 2002.

This Report indicates that there has been substantial diversity in Program implementation within the sample of 36 schools. Practices reported by these schools range from teacher-centred programs to student-centred programs, from school-based to community-based arenas, from relatively passive roles for students to relatively active roles.

This diversity enables the evaluation to sample a range of student descriptors of Program operation. Student descriptions of what they saw as characterising their programs, are able to be compared with student self reports of changes to their connectedness to the school, to teachers and to other students, as well as their perceptions of changes to their own self-esteem and school work. It also enables us to analyse links between these data sets and to use gender and team size as variables for further analysis of impact and of program-impact links.

The evaluation was able to draw upon 23 Final Reports from schools, and 17 sets of Impact Survey data. Concerns around the provision of information by schools have emerged as a major issue within this evaluation.

The principal descriptors by students of Team operation were: "We worked as a team" and "We did something worthwhile". "We got to know each other better" was the least agreed with statement, although 60% of the students said this was true 'quite a bit' or 'lots'. These responses are grouped and a factor analysis of responses provides three strong clusters: "sense of control over the project", "sense of meaning of the project" and "sense of belonging within the

project". This analysis is strongly consistent with the theoretical framework outlined earlier.

There are no significant gender differences on these items or factors, however smaller teams are more likely to experience higher "sense of control" than are larger teams.

Similarly, teachers report that pride in achievement or doing something of importance and value were strong characteristics of Student Action Teams for them. They also report on the skills that students used, consistently rating group-process skills higher than either project-specific or community-linked skills.

Program Impact

Impact surveys asked students and teachers to report on changes in several areas that they attribute to being in Student Action Teams. These areas include students' connectedness to school (as a whole), to teachers, and to fellow students, to students' self-esteem, and to their school work. The items can be examined individually and also grouped into five Impact Scales around the above areas.

The analysis of written and survey information from students and teachers indicates that students and teachers, in self-reportage items and in written descriptions, identify substantial changes to students in all areas of program impact - increases in knowledge, skills, attitude and connectedness - which they attribute to participation in Student Action Teams.

Boys report larger changes in all impact areas than do girls, and these gender differences are statistically significant for all items except "relationship with the Student Action Team teacher" and self-esteem. They are also statistically significant for all the combined impact scales except self-esteem. Greatest gender differences are reported for "felt good about coming to school" and "relationships with other teachers", and for each of three scales that we can construct to summarise students' self-reports of their connectedness to the school, to teachers and to other students.

Differences in impact items are not significant when analysed by team size, though smaller teams tend to score slightly better on all connectedness scales than do larger teams.

The three statistical factors that emerged in student descriptions of program characteristics - "sense of meaning or purpose", "sense of control" and "sense of belonging" - correlate with the impact scales at highly significant levels. The "sense of meaning" factor correlates most strongly with all the "change of connectedness" scales, with "change to self-esteem" and with "change to school work".

That is, those students who describe themselves as experiencing a high sense of

meaning and purpose within their program, also report high changes to their school, teachers and student connectedness and to their self-esteem and school work. Similarly, students rating their programs low on "sense of meaning" are significantly more likely to report lower changes on all impact scales.

"Sense of belonging" also correlates highly with all impact scales, and these correlations are also highly significant. "Sense of control" correlates strongly with school connectedness and somewhat less strongly with (in order) changes to school work, changes to self-esteem and changes to teacher connectedness - though all these correlations are still highly significant.

These correlations are stronger for boys than they are for girls, except for "teacher connectedness" with "sense of meaning", and "student-student connectedness" with "sense of belonging". **We are, for example, able to say that changes to school connectedness, student-student connectedness and self-esteem are all perceived by boys to be more linked to the sense of meaning and purpose in the program than are these relationships for girls.**

In large teams especially, certain aspects of the organisation of the projects result in a high pay-off in impact. **There, a high 'sense of meaning' in the project is strongly correlated with high impact in most areas, but particularly with school connectedness, student-student connectedness and self-esteem. In smaller teams, the strong correlations are between both "sense of meaning" and "sense of control" and school connectedness, and also between "sense of belonging" and self-esteem.** The enhancement of student-student connectedness is not linked with sense of control over the project, particularly in small teams.

Teachers also reported substantial increases in their pride in achievement of something of value, and in connection with students, but claim lesser changes in their behaviour towards students or perceptions of students' behaviour towards them. They report that the Student Action Team's impact was, for them, mainly in the areas of knowing students better and their own sense of reward, rather than regard by peers or students.

Teachers report that the work of Student Action Teams was well regarded by students and staff, was seen as a valid curriculum approach, but was only possible because of the Program support that was provided.

Sustainability

The teachers involved indicate that Student Action Teams are now more likely to become part of their schools' on-going activities, but also strongly indicate that successful continued implementation relies upon financial support or time release.

Teachers report spending between 10 and 160 hours on their project. It is clear that, with such time commitment required, Student Action Teams are **not** sustainable without financial, staffing or appropriate curriculum support. If this approach is to be sustained within schools, there is a need for clear models of and support for the incorporation of Student Action Teams within staffing allotments and on-going curriculum programs.

These models must maintain the characteristics - of meaning, control and belonging - that have been identified in this Report as critical to positive student outcomes. They must also maintain the criteria of Student Action Teams:

- Student engagement with the project focus or topic: either student choice of this, or substantial student decision-making on how to approach it;
- Student engagement with project decision-making and implementation;
- A focus within the community - preferably beyond the school;
- Identification and formation of a student team or teams;
- Processes of research and action by students that intend to make a difference around the chosen focus/topic within the community.

Some curriculum models that would enable Student Action Teams to continue within existing resourcing have been explored in both the Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Program, but require further description and professional development. Without such support, such approaches will continue to be subject to other curriculum and organisational imperatives within schools and the specific criteria of Student Action Teams and the specific characteristics that make them successful may be lost.

Thus the summary of characteristics (following) is outlined for adoption as baseline criteria that describe the operation of Student Action Teams at Program, school and project levels.

Recommendations

Overall

1. That the Department of Education and Training continue to implement and support the operation of Student Action Team approaches within the Middle Years Strategy.
2. That criteria for the operation of Student Action Teams be defined more clearly as:
 - Student engagement with the project focus or topic: either student choice of this, or substantial student decision-making on how to approach it;
 - Student engagement with project decision-making and implementation;
 - A focus within the community - preferably beyond the school;
 - Identification and formation of a student team or teams;
 - Processes of research and action by students that intend to make a difference around the chosen focus/ topic within the community.
3. That the operation of Student Action Teams be guided by the broad operational principles at Program, School and Team level outlined in the attached chart.

Options for Support:

A. Central Operation of a Student Action Team Program:

In supporting any further Student Action Team Program at a central level, the Department of Education and Training:

- Invite schools to apply for support for Student Action Teams rather than simply invite identified schools to implement programs;
- Approve school proposals for Student Action Team processes and projects against the statement of principles and criteria for Student Action Teams, as outlined above;
- Offer Program Professional Development, in response to identified needs, to teachers operating Student Action Teams;
- Offer training for a core group of students in each Student Action Team on a central or cluster basis;
- Provide sufficient notice to schools about support for Student Action Teams, to enable curriculum planning and integration.

B. Cluster Operation of a Student Action Team Program:

In operating a Student Action Team Program at a cluster (eg Innovations and Excellence) level, the cluster:

- Invite schools within the cluster to apply for support for Student Action Teams rather than simply identifying schools to implement programs;
- Approve school proposals for Student Action Team processes and projects against the statement of principles and criteria for Student Action Teams, as outlined above;
- Offer Program Professional Development, in response to identified needs, to teachers operating Student Action Teams;
- Offer training for a core group of students in each Student Action Team on a cluster basis;
- Identify possible local partnerships (eg with Local Government) to enable development of topic focus and financial support for Student Action Teams;
- Provide sufficient notice to schools about support for Student Action Teams, to enable curriculum planning and integration.

C. School Operation of a Student Action Teams:

In supporting the implementation of Student Action Teams at a school or cluster level, the Department of Education and Training:

- Provide explicit information (print and web-based) about the statement of principles and criteria for Student Action Teams, as outlined above;
- Offer Professional Development and program orientation within existing conference and other opportunities to teachers interested to operate Student Action Teams;
- Continue to provide training materials to schools about the operation of Student Action Teams;
- Document and disseminate outcome and process stories of the implementation of Student Action Teams.

Principles and Recommendations: Student Action Teams

Principle	Program level <i>A State or Regional program which:</i>	School level <i>A State or Regional program which:</i>	SAT Team level <i>A State or Regional program which:</i>
Context, Community and Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to local school needs, opportunities and priorities. • Builds capacity in schools and community. • Creates an active discourse within a community of learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies priorities and goals. • Considers contextual challenges and opportunities. • Involves and serves the community. • Enhances social and human capital of staff, students and community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigates local needs. • Identifies contextual challenges and opportunities. • Chooses a focus for action which involves and serves the community.
Collaboration and Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances connections between and within schools and communities. • Collaborates with schools and is informed by seasonal and structural requirements encountered in relation to timing, workload and alignment with school priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports activity with collaborative process. • Ensures ongoing communication between all stakeholders. • Aims to enhance relationships between participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works as a team in an inclusive and supportive manner. • Collaborates and communicates with students, teachers and school community. • Values and seeks the input of all stakeholders.
Choice and Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates school-based choice and control in regard to participation and implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies needs and strategies. • Distributes leadership & responsibility. • Uses supportive accountability processes. • Supports staff to empower student leadership, responsibility and action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chooses a focus. • Explores and selects strategies and actions. • Takes responsibility for producing the results and outcomes.
Contribution, Citizenship and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies purpose of the program. • Adopts processes which facilitate alignment between values and goals underpinning the program and the means and methods of actualising the program. • Supports integrity of program with appropriate level of resourcing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies and values the purpose of the project. • Ensures alignment between project goals, values and processes. • Acknowledges contributions and values service. • Supports integrity of program with appropriate level of resourcing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes clear the purpose of the activity. • Chooses work of value and values the work it does. • Ensures that the project contributes to the school and its community. • Works in ways that ensure an alignment of purpose and process.

Introduction and Overview

Student Action Teams

The Student Action Teams Program was initially set up in Victoria in 1998 as a collaboration between the Victorian Government's Department of Justice (as part of the Vicsafe Community Safety and Crime Prevention Framework) and the (then) Department of Education. In Phase 1, Student Action Teams were established in twenty Victorian secondary schools in 1999, and eleven of these schools continued with their teams as part of the Program in 2000. Subsequently, a further 36 Teams were established in Victorian primary and secondary schools in 2001 (Phase 2).

In the first evaluation report on Student Action Teams (Holdsworth *et al*, 2001), the underlying principles and operation of Teams were described as:

In a Student Action Team (SAT), a group of students identify and tackle a school or community issue: they research the issue, make plans and proposals about it, and take action on it. Such initiatives, as part of the formal or informal school curriculum, engage students in purposeful, authentic activities which are **valued by the students, which have broader community value and which meet or exceed mandated curriculum goals.**

Student Action Teams are based on the following principles:

- that students can make serious and important **decisions** about issues that are important to them;
- that students can **do** important and valuable things: they have skills, expertise and a knowledge of the needs of their community;
- that important action can be undertaken as part of students' **learning** in school: community-focused research and action is an appropriate educational approach for schools to adopt.

SAT Phase 2

The second 'round' of Student Action Teams has operated within the Middle Years of Schooling Strategy and responsibility for the Program's management has shifted to the Middle Years Strategy Team of the Victorian Department of Education and Training. Support continues to be provided by the Victorian Department of Justice, through *Crime Prevention Victoria*, and by VicHealth.

In accordance with the Middle Years Strategy, Student Action Teams in Phase 2 have involved both

primary and secondary schools. Regional consultants were asked to identify potential schools in each Region that would be interested to implement such approaches. These schools were then approached and offered support. Thirty-six schools were selected to form the program.

In an early project newsletter, the evaluators summarised Phase 2 differences:

... the operation of Teams within the Middle Years of Schooling area has extended the age range into the senior primary school; specific schools have been regionally identified and invited to participate; a shortened time frame over Terms 3 and 4 of 2001 has been defined; the number of schools participating has been increased.

A Program briefing and training session was held in Sunshine in August 2001. Teachers from most of the schools were present. This session outlined overall approaches to connectedness and resilience, and introduced the Program. Copies of the 'How To' Manual: **Acting for Change** (from Phase 1: see <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/pdf/SATmanual.pdf>) were presented, and the main steps for establishment and operation of Teams were outlined to participants. Issues about the nature of the local project focus were raised, and schools advised that Phase 2's intention was that schools should form student teams around community-based issues of relevance as identified by the young participants themselves. Similarly, issues were raised about the inclusive nature of team membership.

Subsequently, some geographical grouping of schools with Student Action Teams occurred and, in at least two cases, local training of students was organised.

Schools in the Program were each given a grant of \$2000 to support operation of their team and asked to complete and return a Planning pro-forma outlining intentions for the team, and for use of the grant.

Schools were asked to complete pre-program and post-program testing of students. They were also advised that an impact survey would be conducted after completion of their local project, and that a final report would be required.

The Context of Student Action Teams

This section provides a brief overview of the theoretical, conceptual and research context within which Student Action Teams operate. It provides the guiding ideas for the analysis and discussion of the implementation and of the impact data that is included in this Report.

There are several threads that lead us to an understanding of what is happening to and for young people in the 'middle years' (generally Years 5 to 9) of schooling:

Alienation and engagement

Alienation is described as a key challenge for youth in our times (Bronfenbrenner in Burns, 1996) and can be understood to encompass experiences of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and social estrangement or isolation (Mau, 1992). Elsewhere, the ideas of alienation have been linked with 'deferred roles of value' (Holdsworth, 2000a) in which students do not perceive productive and valued outcomes of their learning. The roles of school in either contributing to alienation (through inappropriate structures and approaches which encourage student passivity) or in engaging students in their learning and in authentic and productive outcomes, has been frequently highlighted (*ibid*). Enhancing student engagement in learning has been identified as a key challenge particularly associated with the middle years of schooling (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1993 and 1996).

Middle Years research has highlighted the need for a focus on relevant, challenging and meaningful **curriculum content**, on an interactive, engaging and purposeful **pedagogy** and on an **environment** of respect, commitment and care. The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (1996), for example, identifies that relevant, challenging practical activities incorporating real life tasks increase student motivation. Genuine consultation with students enhances student and teacher effectiveness. The use of varied approaches and a broad repertoire of learning strategies decrease boredom and enhance engagement in learning. When students believe the teacher cares, they are more engaged in learning (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; ACEE and AYRC, 2001). The classroom teacher has a key role in providing a pastoral relationship, and reducing the number of teachers per student can enhance that relationship.

Building Community - Concepts of Risk and Protection

The social environment is identified in several recent studies as critical to the wellbeing of both the individual student, and of the group or cohort of young people (Burns, 1996; Cox and Caldwell, 2000;

Hughes *et al*, 2000; James *et al*, 2001). The nature and degree of social support provided for young people has a positive effect on their learning and on their physical and mental health. So, for example, communities with high levels of social cohesion have better health than do those with low levels of social cohesion (Stansfeld, 1999). On the other hand, young people's experiences of failure and of bullying or rejection within the school environment place them at increased risk of negative health outcomes (Commonwealth Health and Aged Care, 2000). Those who have experienced bullying are more likely experience depression and other mental health problems (Rigby, 2000).

Supportive and protective school communities have also been demonstrated to enhance the resilience (the capacity to overcome adversity) of young people. The literature around resilience examines the role that healthy communities play in young people's development. Recent research in this field has increased our understanding of the risk and protective factors that can impact on young people's wellbeing and learning. While different authors refer to these factors in different ways, there is an increasing convergence as to the underlying themes.

For example, Benard (1997) outlines three characteristics of supportive and protective school communities as:

- the presence of **caring relationships** which convey compassion, understanding, respect, and establish safety and basic trust;
- **high expectation** messages, which offer guidance, structure and challenge; and
- opportunities for **meaningful participation** and contribution including opportunities for valued responsibilities, making decisions, being heard and contributing to community.

A sense of **connectedness** to school, family or community has also been identified as the key protective factor for young people (Fuller, 1998).

Other research has identified additional protective factors associated with positive school environments to include:

- a sense of **belonging**;
- presence of a **pro-social peer group**;
- required **responsibility** or helpfulness;
- opportunities for **success** and **recognition**; and
- school norms **against violence** (Commonwealth Health and Aged Care, 2000).

However, many students do not see themselves as connected to a supportive community. Nearly a quarter of students (aged 13-14 years) report poor social connectedness at school, 'having no-one to talk to, no-one to trust, no-one to depend on' (Glover *et al*, 1998). Kids Help Line identified that, in 1999, they received 6,000 calls about bullying, with

80% of those calls coming from young people aged 10–14 years. Bullying was the third most common reason why young people in this age group called Kids Help Line (Kids Help Line, 2000).

Thus our first theoretical and practical challenge is: Do the experiences within Student Action Teams enhance a sense of social connection and promote the positive relationships associated with protective school environments?

In addition to the protective school environmental factors associated with enhanced resilience, individual student attributes have also been identified. Benard (1996), for example, identifies the following attributes as being associated with resilience:

- **social competence;**
- capacity for **problem-solving;**
- **autonomy;** and
- a sense of **optimism** and **purpose.**

The Student Action Team approach can provide students with challenge and opportunity at both a communal and an individual level. At an individual level, if the Team provides opportunities for students to utilise their problem-solving and social skills, or to engage in activities that promote a sense of purpose and agency, it can be argued that the experience contributes toward the building of resilience. At a communal level, if the experience offers increased experience of community, belonging and of high expectations of contribution, service or responsibility, it can also be argued that the process builds social capital within the school community.

Thus our second theoretical and practical challenge is: Do Student Action Teams enable students individually and collectively to experience purposeful problem-solving, belonging and responsibility?

School programs also operate within a context of meaning and purpose for young people. Recent literature (eg Newmann et al, 1996; Sizer, 1997; Beane,

1997; Holdsworth, 2000a) focuses on the ways in which institutions allow and encourage young people to undertake tasks that provide them with roles of recognised value as part of their learning. Marginalised and 'at risk' students frequently identify the pointlessness and lack of relevance in school tasks as characteristics of curriculum responses that alienate and fail to engage them (ACEE and AYRC, 2001).

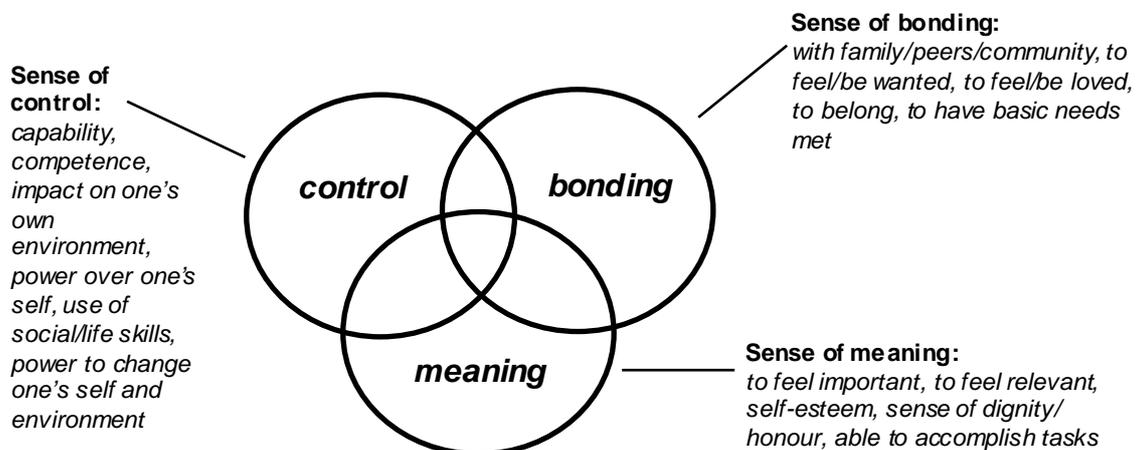
Thus our third theoretical and practical challenge is: Do Student Action Teams enable students to experience activities that they and others see as meaningful and purposeful?

Developing Positive Self-Concept

Educators, parents and health professionals alike are concerned with the development of self-esteem, identifying positive self-worth as critical to both continued wellbeing and learning. Phillips (1992) offers a useful framework for understanding what is meant by positive self-concept. She identifies three interconnected factors as central to the development of positive self concept, including:

- a sense of **control;**
- a sense of **bonding;** and
- a sense of **meaning.**

It is important to understand each of these terms, and see how this provides a framework that draws together much of the above discussion. A **sense of control** comes from experiences of capability, and the capacity to exert power over one's self, to use social and life skills, and to have an impact on one's environment. A **sense of bonding** involves a sense of belonging to or connection with others. It includes the need to feel and be wanted and valued. A **sense of meaning** is created when a young person believes that he or she is significant and has the scope to make a difference or to play a role of use or purpose. These three areas interact as portrayed in the diagram below.



Basic Human Needs and Self-Concept (Phillips, 1990)

This framework can be used to guide an evaluation of student experiences within the Student Action Teams. A Student Action Team may look to measure its effectiveness by seeing what difference it has made in the world. Using this model, the Team experience can also be evaluated in terms of the less tangible social and emotional outcomes that one might expect to see arising from the process. It prompts examination of the following questions:

- Does participating in the SAT enhance a sense of *belonging or connectedness* to school?
- Does the activity conducted as part of the SAT process enhance a sense of *control, responsibility or autonomy*?
- Does the SAT process enhance a sense of *meaning or purpose*?

School Challenges in Implementing Student Action Teams

The school change literature identifies that schools are increasingly experiencing the burden of overload and fragmentation as they attempt to deal with society's increasing tendency to use them as the centre-point of community and as a site in which to intervene on issues relating to youth health and wellbeing (Fullan, 1999). Staff connectedness, knowledge creation and moral purpose are of great importance in sustaining schools in times of challenge. The quality of relationships in schools has been shown to be central to success in dealing with change and challenge (Fullan, 1999).

Questions of sustainability, integration and staff wellbeing arise and are explored within discourses about whole school approaches to student engagement and wellbeing (Stoll, 1999). Integrative frameworks such as that of the Health Promoting School (AHPSA, 1997) are recommended to assist schools to take a whole school approach to enhancing social connectedness and to promote participation in learning (Glover *et al*, 1998; Wyn *et al*, 2000; Holdsworth, 2000b). Recommended strategies include a focus on developing the internal capacity of the school and the teachers as a key resource, whilst acknowledging that the culture, community and organisational health of schools impacts on their capacity to deal with challenge and change (Stoll, 1999). Strategies to enhance the internal capacity of schools include:

- a focus on connectedness and the development of collective responsibility;
- involving students as partners;
- positioning teachers as learners supported by appropriate professional development; and
- organisational structures and developing positive climate within which to conduct activity sourced out of a culture of high expectation in relation to learning for all. (Stoll, 1999)

Thus the final challenge emerging from the literature is to look at the capacity of schools to maintain Student Action Teams as part of their overall core approach to enhancing the social and educational development of students. Attention must be paid to the impact of Student Action Teams on teachers and schools, as well as on students, and these issues are integrally related to the Program structure and management, and the nature of support provided for Program implementation.

Research Approach

Methodology

The Youth Research Centre was contracted to conduct an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Student Action Teams Program. The Centre had conducted the evaluation of Phase 1, as primarily a formative and implementation evaluation. The proposal for the current evaluation noted:

... the focus of the proposed evaluation has changed. Whereas the initial evaluation sought to document processes, to learn about project management and to report on outcomes across a broad range of program indicators (and, indeed, became more focused on formative or 'support' approaches), the current evaluation seeks to look at the **impact** of the operation of Student Action Teams on participants' (students' and teachers') attitudes and perceptions.

Student Action Teams have aimed to promote teamwork, community participation, leadership, skill development, confidence and active citizenship. Within a Middle Years strategy, they aim to enhance students' connection to school and learning, students' experience of self-worth and value within school and community contexts, and schools' abilities to offer meaningful and worthwhile curriculum.

The Program needs to continue to evaluate and document its work, to explore outcomes for participants, and impact upon overall school programs, and to understand what works and what doesn't and why.

This Proposal provides for the collection of pre and post program information on participants, and for the development of instruments to assess the impact of Student Action Teams on schools and participants, through the perceptions of both students and teachers.

The proposal addressed the Program's need for an impact/outcome evaluation within a short time-frame, and posed the research question:

Does participation in a Student Action Team enhance students' connectedness to school, peers, teachers and community?

Because of the decentralised nature of the Program and the short timeline, an approach in which the evaluators prepared instruments and assisted schools with Student Action Teams to collect their own data was decided upon. This information involved:

- student and teacher perceptions of and attitudes to the project;
- students' overall feelings of connectedness to school and local community;
- changes in these areas over a short implementation period;

The evaluators then analysed this information to provide indications of the Program's impact on schools and outcomes for participants.

A mix of quantitative and qualitative data on student outcomes was suggested:

- a **survey of student attitudes** to school and community connectedness for pre- and post-Program use by schools;
- **interviews** with students, teachers, administrators and others individually and in focus groups (as appropriate) in approximately 4 to 6 schools, to gather qualitative information on the Program's impact on school processes and on outcomes for participants, in order to develop appropriate impact tools for use with the Program;
- **impact instruments** to determine student and teacher attitudes towards Student Action Teams and their effect on individuals and institutions;
- a **template** for teachers to describe and evaluate their own projects;
- a **Final Report** summarising and analysing the information gathered and recommending on future Program directions.

In addition, the evaluators developed a Program Planning template, and also circulated information from this to participants through a Program Newsletter.

Comments on Methodology

Considerable difficulties were encountered in maintaining and implementing this methodology:

- The Program Planning template was prepared and circulated to schools by the Department of Education and Training. Schools responded slowly with this information, which was crucial for further contact with them. Finally, at the point of writing this report, five of the 36 schools had not returned this Planning document at all. The information in this Planning document was compiled and circulated to all schools as a Program Newsletter in February 2002.

- By the time the Planning information was returned, many of the schools had also begun to set up and operate Student Action Teams and to implement projects within schools.
- Pre-Program student tests were developed and sent to all schools. Again, there were difficulties in obtaining data returned. Only 15 schools finally had students complete these pre-Program tests and returned these to the evaluators. Of these 15 schools (who completed and returned the pre-Program test), only six reported that they had actually completed this **before** starting the program. The others indicated that they completed these during the project or, in some cases, after completion of a brief project.
- These schools were followed up with information about post-Program tests (a repeat of the pre-Program instrument). However only two of the schools were able to complete a post-Program test. Thus of the population of 36 schools, these were the only two with consistent pre- and post-Program data collection (both secondary schools; one from a metropolitan area and one from a rural area).
- Further, the information from schools indicates the broad and inconsistent nature of the Program 'treatment'. Student Action Teams have been implemented in so many different ways that it is highly uncertain that a pre-Program and post-Program comparison would enable any consistent conclusions to be drawn across schools.
- Based on Program Planning information, four schools (two primary and two secondary) were selected and visited late in 2001. Individual and small group discussions were held with teachers, students and, where appropriate, school administrators. The information from these interviews was used to inform the development of two Impact Surveys: one for teachers, and one for student participants.
- All schools were surveyed in early 2002 as to their Program time-line. Eighteen of the schools (50%) responded. Responses indicated a wide spread of implementation times, with some completing their projects in 2001, some still underway at the start of 2002, and some yet to start their projects.
- This information was used to send (in many cases, several times) post-Program surveys, Final Report templates and Impact Surveys to all schools. Responses were returned slowly through the next months, depending on the timelines operating within individual projects.
- Extensive phone and e-mail follow-up of schools between August and October 2002 resulted in the further return of Impact Surveys and Final Reports from some of the schools. Finally 23 schools returned some Impact Surveys (usually the teacher rather than the student forms) and a slightly different set of 22 schools returned a

completed Final Report. (Two of these schools returned Final Reports and one returned Impact Surveys while this Report was being compiled. Some comments are included from these, but it was not possible to incorporate their results in the overall analysis of data.)

- The evaluators have a complete (though limited) Impact/Final Report data set only from 17 of the schools.

Data Analysis Structure

The evaluation draws upon information from three sources:

- a) the Pre-Program Planning Report and the Post-Program Final Report;
- b) the Student Connectedness Test, administered Pre-Program and Post-Program;
- c) the Student and Teacher Impact Surveys.

The **Student Connectedness Test** has been developed by the Youth Research Centre for use in a range of projects. Its accumulated mean responses are now available for various year levels, to allow responses from any one project to be standardised against broader results. Items on this test have been drawn from student descriptions of what connects them to school, and are designed to assess students' experience in areas of social interaction with peers, in their propensity to seek help from friends, parents and teachers, in the quality of their relationship with teachers, and in their attitude to their schoolwork. Items have been tested for validity and refined over several applications. The answers to these questions are used to create nine scales that measure linked dimensions of students' experiences. These scales assess:

- friend help seeking;
- parent help seeking;
- teacher help seeking;
- schoolyard positive social experience;
- schoolyard negative social experience;
- classroom positive social experience;
- classroom negative social experience;
- teacher relationship;
- schoolwork experience.

Pre-program and post-program comparisons can be made, as can comparisons with the accumulated means from many schools (for specific year levels). These comparisons are also influenced by environmental and non-program school factors (such as selection of group, location, other curriculum structures) but patterns can be observed if there is a sufficiently large sample of schools involved, and if the Program 'treatment' is reasonably consistent. Neither of these situations existed here, and a summary of the data will be reported for interest only.

The **Impact Surveys** were developed specifically for this program and based on interviews

with students and teachers at a sample of schools conducting Student Action Teams. The *Student Impact Survey* consists of three areas:

- a) individual and program demographic information (gender, year level, team size);
- b) program descriptors (student ratings of how often certain aspects were experienced within the program);
- c) program impact descriptors (student ratings of degree of change on several items).

The theoretical positions outlined in this Report informed the structure of these items, both in terms of the nature of connectedness and in terms of areas of possible program descriptors.

In analysis of these surveys, we then have a model where linkages can be tested between the three levels of data:

a. Respondent demographics

- gender
- year level
- team size

b. Program characteristics:

student reports of frequency of:

- sense of meaning
- sense of control
- sense of belonging

c. Impact variables:

self-reported changes to student:

- connectedness to school
- connectedness to teachers
- connectedness to other students
- self-esteem
- school work

We note that these impact variable are not complex or inferred scales: we are asking students directly to tell us about the degree of change (negative, none, positive, large) that they think occurred in each of these areas because of their participation in the Program.

Year level of teams became unusable as a variable as many of the teams reported mixed age levels. However all other connections are explored and further details are provided in the Implementation and Impact sections of this report.

The *Teacher Impact Surveys* similarly consists of items describing Program implementation (including student skills addressed) and teacher-reported scales on the Program impact on students and teachers. Because of the size of the teacher sample, this information is only able to be analysed descriptively.

The **Final Reports** provide written descriptions by teachers of Program implementation

and also of reported impact on students, teachers, school and community. This information is used to amplify upon and explain the analysis of the Impact Surveys.

Changes to Methodology

In compiling this Report, the evaluators have drawn primarily upon qualitative data from the Final Reports (where available) and analysis of quantitative data from the Impact Surveys.

A summary of the information from the two schools that returned pre- and post-Program test results is presented here; however it is regarded (in light of the numbers involved, and the inconsistencies outlined above) to have little weight.

Schools and Projects

Describing the Schools

There have been 36 schools involved in Phase 2 of the Student Action Teams program. Of these, 11 are primary schools, 23 are secondary schools and two are P-12 schools. Thirteen of the schools are located in the Melbourne metropolitan area, a further three on Melbourne's urban fringe, five in regional centres and 15 in smaller rural centres.

Describing the Student Action Team Projects

The evaluation looked at the information provided by schools both in planning and in their Final Reports, and classified their project focus into the areas indicated below. It was possible that a project fitted within more than one theme, thus the figures below add to more than the total number of schools.

Table 1: Student Action Team project focus

Focus	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
Transition	14 (45%)	10 (43%)
Health and personal development	7 (23%)	5 (22%)
School facilities	5 (16%)	4 (17%)
Recreational facilities	5 (16%)	5 (22%)
Social safety	6 (19%)	4 (17%)
Road and traffic safety	7 (23%)	3 (13%)
Environment	4 (13%)	3 (13%)
Other	4 (13%)	3 (13%)
	<i>(police, drama, literacy, CCE)</i>	<i>(drama, literacy, CCE)</i>

Describing the Teams

At the start of Phase 2, schools reported (in their Planning documents) that approximately 675-700 students from the 31 schools/programs would be involved, an average of around 22 students per school (median 10-12 students). In their Final Reports, 23 schools reported that 560-570 students had been involved, from 25 schools/programs¹ - an average of around 24.5 students per school (median 15 students).

1. One school operated three projects and reported on these separately.

At the start, 35% of the schools expected teams of less than 10 students, 35% of schools expected teams of 10-20 students and 29% of schools expected teams of more than 20 students. In the Final Reports, 30% of teams had less than 10 students, 26% of teams had 10-20 students and 43% had more than 20 students involved. The meaning of some of these figures is a little more uncertain, as in some schools small core teams then involved larger numbers of students - and schools may have reported on these larger figures. This perception is supported by the Impact Surveys - completed by 137 students from 15 schools.

Team members were drawn from a range of year levels:

Table 2: Year levels of Student Action Team members

Year Level	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
Grade 3	1 (3%)	2 (9%)
Grade 4	3 (10%)	3 (13%)
Grade 5	7 (23%)	6 (26%)
Grade 6	11 (35%)	9 (39%)
Year 7	11 (35%)	5 (22%)
Year 8	13 (42%)	5 (22%)
Year 9	12 (39%)	11 (48%)
Year 10	2 (6%)	4 (17%)
Year 11	4 (13%)	4 (17%)
Year 12	0 (0%)	1 (4%)

Schools were also asked to report on the location of their teams - the form of organisation used to form the Student Action Team: whether students came from an existing class, a new class, a 'co-curricular' structure such as a Student Council, or formed a team in an ad hoc way (usually meeting out of class time). Again, schools could pick more than one option:

Table 3: Location of Student Action Teams

Year Level	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
Student council	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Existing class	18 (58%)	11 (48%)
New class/elective	3 (10%)	2 (9%)
Extra-curricular	17 (55%)	12 (52%)
Other	1 (3%)	7 (30%)

The 'other' category principally involved teams that met or worked in an intensive way for a short period of time, across the whole school, were taken out of other classes, or met at another school.

Further comments are included in a later section about the selection and make-up of teams, and their operation within or outside of the curriculum.

Student Action Team Descriptions: What Schools Did

The following table summarises what occurred in these schools:

Student Action Team Schools Phase 2: Summaries

School	Focus	Project	Year level	#s
A (P-12)	Road and traffic safety	Research into traffic conditions around school; community seminar on road safety; achieved speed reductions in neighbouring streets; then organised Youth Week activities	9	22
B (Secy)	Transition	Developed an information pamphlet about the school for primary school students; visited and linked with primary school students in feeder schools	8 (5-6)	50
C (Secy)	School facilities	'At risk' students in a separate school unit; carried out building and other practical projects in and around the school	9	21
D (Secy)	Health and Personal Development	Staff ran a one-week personal development program for students and organised community service activities to be carried out by students	9	34
E (Prim)	Health and Personal Development	Teachers ran a personal development day for students; professional development for staff on self-esteem and learning styles	3-6	80
F (Secy)	Health and Personal Development	Health class decided to conduct research on bullying within the school and reported results within school and to primary schools - recommended on further action	8	24
G (Prim)	Social safety	Established a Junior School Council; the Council recommended establishment of a Social Skills Program and reward system; this was implemented	3-6	12 + whole school
H (Secy)	Transition	Joint primary-secondary team produced a video about transition from primary to secondary school; surveyed students on transition	7 (+ 6)	8
I (Prim)	Transition	As above	6 (+ 7)	4
J (prim)	Civics and Citizenship Education	Students developed and presented a unit on Local Government to other primary school students using role plays	6 (+ 7)	20 (+ 10)
K (Secy)	Transition	Formed a student transition team to visit primary schools and present activities; initially a breakfast program for primary students	7-12	20 (8 + 12)

L (Secy)	Road and traffic safety	Developed and created a road safety awareness mosaic within school grounds; worked with a community artist	8-9	8
M (Prim)	Road and traffic safety	No information formally, but were looking at traffic safety near school; also playground safety	5	10
N (Secy)	Health and Personal Development	On-going Peer Drug Education; students trained to deliver activities and discussions to younger students in the school	10-11	24
O (Secy)	Personal safety	Classes worked on safety themes: with kindergarten children on personal safety; posters and personal awareness on their own water safety	7	100
P (Prim)	Community recreation facilities	Students focused on safety issues about a new skate park in the community, and were involved in the opening ceremony	4/5/6 (9)	9
Q (Secy)	Environment	Safety issues related to waterways in the area: project didn't proceed	8-9	22
R (Prim)	Transition	No formal information provided, however we know they produced a booklet on transition to secondary college after interviewing primary and secondary school students	6	4
S (Prim)	Environment	Built an environmental walk and running track for student and community use	5-6	10 + class
T (Secy)	School recreation facilities	Students provided playground equipment for the Junior School - researched need and design and presented proposal to Principal	9	10
U (Secy)	Transition	Worked with students from the Secondary College to produce a magazine for grade 6 students about transition to secondary college	6	4
V (Secy)	Environment	Established a regional walk, involving re-establishment of foreshore vegetation etc. Also developed environmental awareness day for primary school students.	9	6 +
W (Prim)	Road and traffic safety	Surveyed local traffic (vehicle counts etc) and wrote to Shire Council about the need for a roundabout near the school.	5	6
X (Secy)	Transition	Worked with Primary School students about transition issues; produced a video about transition to the school	7	4 +
Y (Secy)	Drama, Literature, Transition	Three projects: students presented a play within the Drama program; wrote a story book for primary school students; lunch-time Christian club presented recreation activities at primary schools	9 10/11 9/10/11	27 15 5-10

Note: the descriptions included here are summaries by the evaluators, based on project descriptions provided by the school.

Program Implementation

Focus

As noted earlier (Table 1) almost half the schools in the sample worked on issues relating to transition. In most cases, this focus took students beyond their own school and into the broader community in only a limited way: through visits between secondary and primary schools. Many of the other areas of focus were contained entirely within schools. It is notable that only three final reports were of schools dealing with road or traffic safety. A search of all relevant data fields indicates only 8 schools mentioned the words 'safe' or 'safety' in their final reports (11 schools had used these words in their Planning documents). However it is recognised that some schools may have been working on 'social safety' issues without using the term explicitly.

An examination of schools' Final Reports also indicates that in many cases the Student Action Team program supported existing initiatives (six schools) or approaches within continuing school programs (a further six schools). This occurred to varying extents within over half the schools returning information. It is surmised that, in some of these situations, schools did this intentionally in order to address issues of continuity and sustainability of Student Action Team approaches.

The issue of Program focus, of compliance with program directions and of appropriation of the Program to existing priorities will be discussed in a later section of this Report.

Completion Rate

Of the 23 schools for whom final information exists,

- 6 began and finished their project in 2001,
- 5 began in 2001 and finished in 2002,
- 3 began in 2001 and have yet to finish,
- 5 began in 2001 and the project is indefinitely on-going,
- 1 began and finished in 2002,
- 1 began in 2002 and is still to finish, and
- 2 began in 2002 and are part of an on-going project.

There is no data at all from five schools about what they intended to do or did. A further 8 schools returned no information about what was finally done.

When asked if Student Action Team approaches and projects are on-going within schools,

16 of the 23 schools indicated that they were, while a further two schools were uncertain. Only five schools indicated that their teams weren't on-going.

Curriculum

Earlier information (Table 3) described the location of the Student Action Teams within the curriculum of these schools. Many of the schools used a mixture of existing class time and extra-curricular approaches (ie lunch, recess or after school). An examination of schools' final reports indicate that six schools seem to have fully incorporated Student Action Teams within classroom approaches for whole class groups (in Social Science, Drama, Health or English classes or cross-curriculum programs).

Others operated within class time, but withdrew smaller groups of students for Student Action Team activities.

Credit arrangements

Some of the schools provided information about ways in which students' work was acknowledged or credited (though none volunteered information about formal academic credit):

Documents:

"Certificates of Achievement."

"School references and certificates."

Public recognition including media reportage:

"The whole school and the wider community were invited to the launch by the Minister of the Environment."

"Both projects were acknowledged at whole School assemblies, in the College newsletter and in the local paper."

Direct feedback from stakeholders:

"Three letters of appreciation were sent to the school by organisations concerned: Lions Club, elderly people's hostel and the Pony Club."

"Thankyou letters from primary schools and students."

Comments from staff and others:

"They have been praised by staff who previously may have had negative experiences of them in their classroom."

"The students were given excellent positive feedback through written and verbal praise from the students and staff at each school."

Team Formation

Schools were asked to indicate who the students were. The form in which this was asked varied between their Planning Report and the Final Report, as the evaluators probed for further information about who was being selected or targeted (more than one response possible):

Table 4: Status of Students

Status of Students	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
Volunteers	15 (48%)	12 (52%)
Selected for ability		7 (30%)
Selected for risk		11 (48%)
Whole class	15 (48%)	10 (43%)
Elective class	4 (13%)	
Cross-age group	4 (13%)	4 (17%)
Other	7 (23%)	2 (9%)

In some cases, where schools indicated that a 'whole class' was involved, this also included formation of a smaller 'steering group' who then worked to involve the whole class in secondary activities.

Schools amplified on this data and talked about the criteria used to select students (where they were selected):

All or whole class groups:

"Year 9 students were selected as the program fits in perfectly with the 'Time-Out' Program we have developed. This involves students having a special program for one week per term, not involving normal curriculum."

"Health class: Outgoing students, co-operative, imaginative and enthusiastic; wide variety of skills and not afraid of an audience; would benefit from participating in a project of this sort; interested in making a difference within the College."

Volunteers or by application:

"Students first become involved in the project at Year 10 level. All Year 10 students were invited to express interest. All those who expressed interest were invited to Peer Drug Education Training."

"Students were required to apply for inclusion via a letter of application and a CV which had to outline past levels of involvement in different community and school based activities. They also had to try and determine what they believed they would get out of the project."

At risk:

"Students who were, at times, disillusioned and disengaged within mainstream classes, and demonstrated energy to put into a positive project."

"Students were identified by staff as at risk due to learning/literacy problems, social problems or through

their lack of engagement at school, school refusers, behavioural, academic. Students and their carers had to satisfy REAL staff of their desire to improve their skills and participate."

High achievers:

"Interest level, academic ability and a responsible attitude in representing the children of their grade."

Mixed ability:

"The students were selected by the grade 6 teacher and by the Junior sub school in the case of the year 7 students selected. We were looking for students from two basic groups: a) some gifted and talented students who may have encountered some difficulties in fulfilling their potential; and b) Students with low self esteem and social difficulties."

"Combination of high achievers and low achievers."

Leadership:

"Leadership potential. One representative from each team. Gender balance."

"Specific students were asked if they would like to be involved. All volunteers were accepted into the Action Team with some individuals given extra encouragement to take on responsibilities. The students asked demonstrated leadership qualities."

We are able to look at these descriptions and classify them (again, more than one response was possible):

Table 6: Selection of students

Selection of Students	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
All	5 (16%)	7 (30%)
Apply	5 (16%)	9 (39%)
At risk	13 (42%)	10 (43%)
Best	3 (10%)	4 (17%)
Mixed group	11 (35%)	7 (30%)
Leaders	9 (29%)	5 (22%)
By topic	8 (26%)	1 (4%)

Process of Selection

Where schools selected students, they reported on the processes used. Two typical examples are:

"A list of names was constructed of students who fitted the categories and whose class teachers thought would benefit. This list was then discussed by the junior sub-school and a final list agreed upon. The student's parents were contacted and the students were offered a position."

"The students within the 5/6 area were briefed on what the SATs were, then asked to write an application if they were interested in being a part of the team. The final four were chosen by their classroom teachers and myself."

Team Operation

Meeting frequency

Schools indicated how often their teams met:

Table 7: Frequency of team meeting

Frequency of Meeting	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
Daily	0 (0%)	2 (8%)
More than once a week	6 (19%)	3 (13%)
Weekly	18 (58%)	12 (52%)
Fortnightly	3 (10%)	4 (17%)
Monthly	0 (0%)	1 (4%)
As needed	0 (0%)	5 (22%)
Other	5 (16%)	3 (13%)

Amount of time spent

In the Final Report, schools were asked to make an estimate of the amount of time that Teams had spent on their project, and the amount of teacher time involved. It is suspected that the figures provided (by 20 schools) underestimate both amounts. (One school simply replied 'lots', while others were uncertain because of staff changes.)

Estimates of Team time ranged from 12 to 80 hours (mean of 32.2 hours; median of 20 hours). Estimates of teacher time spent ranged from 10 to 160 hours (mean of 43.0 hours; median of 30 hours).

Processes

The processes of operation of Student Action Teams, as outlined in the Final Reports from schools, indicate how they arrived at their topic, and also processes by which they addressed this topic: through extensive brainstorming, discussions within the team, discussions with stakeholders within the schools and community, and presentation of decisions to others.

Some talk of teacher initiation of the topic:

"The nature of the project was chosen because we saw an area of concern in our year 6 transition. We have up to 13 feeder primary schools and are apprehensive about the move to Secondary School. This was seen as an excellent issue for the team of students from the a primary and secondary school to tackle."

"We had several meetings to work out how best to approach the unit and referred to Democracy at Work and the folder we received from our PD with AEC. We then came up with the idea of a role play and then tutoring within it to ensure understanding and learning."

while others indicate a process by which students identified the topic:

"The students met with the coordinator and brainstormed ideas of community issues. The team then determined the issue they wished to develop into an action research project."

"We had an in-service day with the Mansfield Primary and Secondary schools and John Stafford. The children talked to others and brainstormed a range of ideas and strategies they could use as the project focus. The students all agreed they wanted something that was related specifically to their age group."

Others mention on-going initiatives within the school that this Program built upon:

"This was negotiated between the middle school team and the identified students, building on the Year 9 'Breaking out' Program in 2000. It also links closely with our charter goals and Middle Years Action Plan."

"The original project came about due to two students from our school being killed in a car accident so the need was there to educate the community and school about road safety. The second and third project were a result of the need for more engagement between staff and students outside of classrooms, and the need for students to take more of a leadership role around the school."

Once a focus was decided, schools talk of the group processes to arrive at action:

"Negotiation and consensus were used to define tasks, timelines and activities. These were then submitted to curriculum and administration for endorsement."

Decision-making

The schools' responses also tell about something of the ways in which decisions were made within teams. The responses were grouped to indicate whether teachers saw decision-making as being largely by the students, as shared between students and teachers, as being largely made by the teachers, or as being located outside the team (eg in the community). Students were not asked about this (except very generally in terms of their Impact Survey responses) - in retrospect it would have been interesting to gain a direct comparative response as to how both students and teachers saw this happening.

Table 8: Student Action Team decision-making

Decision-making	Start (n=31)	End (n=23)
Students	9 (29%)	6 (26%)
Shared	17 (55%)	17 (74%)
Teachers	12 (39%)	8 (35%)
Community	0 (0%)	1 (4%)

Note: more than one response possible, so numbers and percentages total more than n and 100%.

Some of the descriptions of the processes amplify on the forms of decision-making:

Students:

"As far as possible, students involved in making key decisions. Important for them to maintain ownership of the project."

"Decisions were made at Class Meetings which were already established and are run by the students."

Shared:

"Group/team discussion, consensus. The teams, whether they be students or combinations of teachers and students decided what, how, where and when things were done and achieved."

"Once the initial planning and decisions were made the children were directly involved in all aspects of the unit. They planned with the teachers, developed their own characters, did all of the administration work and had a say in the direction of the project."

Teachers:

"Decisions were made by all teachers involved in the program because we were well down the planning stage when the SAT proposal arose. Students had input into the range of activities to undertake."

"The teacher was given the project brief and direction on the skills the students would need. She then set her lesson plans. She and the Coordinators met regularly to discuss the SAT and plot future directions."

Description of Processes from the Impact Survey

Impact Surveys were provided to schools to administer at the end of their Student Action Team projects. Because of the timing (particularly with primary schools that involved Grade 6 students in 2001 and then received this survey in 2002), some schools were unable to complete student versions of this survey.

Fifteen schools returned student responses: 137 student responses were received (ranging from one student at one school to 31 students at another school), with two schools presenting 'group responses'. The student sample was 47% male and 53% female, and students ranged from Grade 5 to Year 11. The students also reported on team sizes from 4 to 29 students.

Table 9: Students: "In the Student Action Team..."

	not at all (1)	a little (2)	some (3)	quite a bit (4)	lots (5)	mean value
I got to have a say	2 1.5%	6 4.4%	32 23.5%	54 39.7%	42 30.9%	3.94
I felt proud of what we achieved	2 1.5%	15 11.0%	11 8.1%	58 42.6%	50 36.8%	4.02
I felt proud of the way we worked together	1 0.7%	10 7.4%	25 18.4%	59 43.4%	41 30.1%	3.95
We worked as a team		2 1.5%	15 11.0%	63 46.3%	56 41.2%	4.27
We were the ones who did the work	1 0.7%	7 5.2%	30 22.2%	49 36.3%	48 35.6%	3.98
Everyone got a chance to be heard	1 0.7%	12 8.9%	29 21.5%	36 26.7%	57 42.2%	3.98
We decided what happened in this project	6 4.4%	12 8.9%	25 18.5%	51 37.8%	41 30.4%	3.78
We overcame difficulties as they came up	1 0.7%	7 5.2%	28 20.7%	61 45.2%	38 28.1%	3.92
We worked together even when we disagreed	1 0.7%	7 5.2%	50 37.0%	47 34.8%	30 22.2%	3.70
We improved our team work and cooperation skills	1 0.7%	9 6.6%	22 16.2%	56 41.2%	48 35.3%	4.04
We chose something we thought was important to work on	5 3.7%	12 8.9%	23 17.0%	50 37.0%	45 33.3%	3.85
We did something worthwhile	4 3.0%	7 5.2%	14 10.4%	50 37.0%	60 44.4%	4.12
We got to help others in our school or community	5 3.8%	9 6.8%	27 20.3%	38 28.6%	54 40.6%	3.87
We got to know each other better	19 14.1%	16 11.9%	19 14.1%	37 27.4%	44 32.6%	3.50

Both students and teachers were asked, in the Impact Survey, to rate various aspects of the processes of Teams (Table 9, opposite). The options here were drawn from comments by students and teachers in interviews. The students were, for example, were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale of 'not at all' to 'lots', how much various statements described what happened in their teams.

These responses can be summarised into a mean score for each item, or reduced to a two-level simplification (grouping 'not at all', 'a little' and 'some' together, and 'quite a lot' and 'lots' together). It is then easier to look at this information to see if gender or team size make differences (Table 10, below):

Table 10: Student descriptions of programs by gender

	male	female
	Quite a lot/lots	Quite a lot/lots
I got to have a say	40 66.7%	46 71.9%
I felt proud of what we achieved	48 80.0%	53 82.8%
I feel proud of the way we worked together	43 71.7%	48 75.0%
we worked as a team	54 90.0%	54 84.4%
we were the ones who did the work	45 75.0%	44 68.8%
everyone got a chance to be heard	45 75.0%	39 60.9%
we decided what happened in the project	38 63.3%	44 68.8%
we overcame difficulties	44 73.3%	46 71.9%
we worked together even when we disagreed	33 55.0%	40 62.5%
we improved our team work and cooperation skills	49 81.7%	46 71.9%
we chose something we thought was important to work on	42 70.0%	44 68.8%
we did something worthwhile	47 78.3%	54 84.4%
we got to help others in our school or community	43 71.7%	41 64.1%
we got to know each other better	39 65.0%	34 53.1%

In general, gender differences are not statistically significant. Where they tend towards significance (eg 'we got to help others in our school or community'), there is a slight indication that the boys rate this as a description of teams more highly than do the girls.

A similar analysis is possible on team size. The only variable which displays a significant association with team size is "everyone got a chance to be heard".

If we treat the choices as a metric scale (1-5) then we can compare means for responses by team size:

Table 11: "Everyone got a chance to be heard" by team size

TEAMSIZ	Mean	N
small team	4.46	39
large team	3.82	96
Total	4.01	135

If the item is then treated as a dichotomous (yes/no) variable based on 'quite a bit'/'lots':

Table 12: "Everyone got a chance to be heard" by team size (dichotomous)

	small team		large team	
	Count	%	Count	%
no	7	17.5%	37	38.1%
yes	33	82.5%	60	61.9%

Composite variables were then constructed through factor analysis of the items, producing three factors. When one looks at the items that cluster to make these factors, it is possible to name them in line with the themes emerging from the literature:

- "sense of **control** over the project": principally items b7, b11, b6, b12
- "sense of **meaning** of the project": principally items b13, b5, b2, b8, b3
- "sense of **belonging** within the project": principally items b4, b9, b1

These factors will be used for later analysis of impact.

No significant associations with gender were found. However, there was a significant association between team size (small versus large teams) and the "sense of control in the project" factor: team size has a significant effect upon the likelihood that the participants will feel in control of the project.

Table 13: Teachers: Student Action Team processes

In a Student Action Team:	not at all	a little	some	quite a bit	lots
I got to do something I thought was of importance and value			3 9.7%	13 41.9%	15 48.4%
I felt reinforced in my belief in the capacity of children/students		1 3.2%	6 19.4%	10 32.3%	1 45.2%
I felt pride in what we achieved		1 3.2%	3 9.7%	7 22.6%	20 64.5%
I felt supported by my peers		3 9.7%	10 32.3%	8 25.8%	10 32.3%
I felt supported by the school leadership	1 3.2%	2 6.5%	3 9.7%	7 22.6%	18 58.1%
I felt supported by the students			3 9.7%	13 41.9%	15 48.4%
I behaved differently towards the students	7 23.3%	4 13.3%	7 23.3%	8 26.7%	4 13.3%
The students behaved differently towards me	3 10.0%	5 16.7%	8 26.7%	10 33.3%	4 13.3%

Teachers

Teachers involved in supporting Student Action Teams also completed Impact Surveys. These were of a different form to the students' surveys, and asked more indirectly about student processes within the team, but more directly about teacher processes and an inventory of skills.

Responses were received from 31 teachers from 18 schools. In most cases (10 schools), one teacher was involved in responding, but in other schools, up to 4 responses were received from a school. Because numbers are relative low, responses are simply reported descriptively here, without further analysis.

These responses firstly describe processes for teachers (Table 13, below).

The teachers were also asked to indicate whether certain skills were used 'not at all', 'some' or 'a lot' (Table 14, opposite page).

Table 14: Teachers: Skills Inventory of SATs

	<i>not at all</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>a lot</i>
brainstorming	1 (3%)	10 (33%)	19 (63%)
contributing ideas		7 (23%)	23 (77%)
seeking others opinions or expertise		10 (33%)	20 (67%)
cooperating with others		4 (13%)	26 (87%)
working out how to agree	1 (3%)	6 (20%)	23 (77%)
solving personal difficulties	1 (3%)	19 (63%)	10 (33%)
helping solve problems		12 (40%)	18 (60%)
providing encouragement for others	1 (3%)	12 (40%)	17 (57%)
helping others to join in	1 (3%)	10 (33%)	19 (63%)
establishing priorities	1 (3%)	13 (43%)	16 (53%)
working out action plans	1 (3%)	12 (40%)	17 (57%)
devising timetables	2 (7%)	13 (45%)	14 (48%)
developing practical skills		9 (30%)	21 (70%)
obtaining quotes on expenses	14 (8%)	10 (35%)	5 (17%)
devising budgets	14 (48%)	12 (41%)	3 (10%)
engaging in fund raising activity	21 (70%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)
taking responsibility for getting things done		10 (33%)	20 (67%)
writing minutes	17 (59%)	11 (38%)	1 (3%)
writing letters and documents	6 (20%)	15 (50%)	9 (30%)
using IT skills	3 (10%)	14 (47%)	13 (43%)
engaging with others outside the school	1 (3%)	8 (27%)	21 (70%)
making phone calls to community members	13 (43%)	10 (33%)	7 (23%)
devising media strategies	16 (53%)	10 (33%)	4 (13%)
public speaking	5 (17%)	15 (50%)	10 (33%)
interviewing or surveying	6 (20%)	13 (43%)	11 (37%)
analysing and presenting data	5 (17%)	13 (43%)	12 (40%)
presenting their case to others	2 (7%)	16 (53%)	12 (40%)

These can also be presented in order of popularity of choice by teachers (Table 15), through a calculation of the mean of scores (where 1 = 'not at all', 2 = 'some', 3 = 'a lot'). (This means a nomination of 'a lot' is worth twice as much as a nomination of 'some'.)

These skills are further classified in the Discussion section of this Report.

Table 15: Teachers: Skills Inventory: In order of popularity

	Mean
cooperating with others	2.87
contributing ideas	2.77
working out how to agree	2.73
developing practical skills	2.70
seeking others opinions or expertise	2.67
engaging with others outside the school	2.67
taking responsibility for getting things done	2.67
helping others to join in	2.60
helping solve problems	2.60
brainstorming	2.60
working out action plans	2.53
providing encouragement for others	2.53
establishing priorities	2.50
devising timetables	2.41
using IT skills	2.33
presenting their case to others	2.33
solving personal difficulties	2.30
analysing and presenting data	2.23
public speaking	2.17
interviewing or surveying in school or community	2.17
writing letters and documents	2.10
making phone calls to community members	1.80
obtaining quotes on expenses	1.69
devising budgets	1.62
devising media strategies	1.60
writing minutes	1.45
engaging in fund raising activity	1.43

On-going Programs

Finally, schools were asked in their Final reports to indicate whether Student Action Teams were part of an on-going program in the school. Responses may indicate a specific continuation of current initiatives, or may refer to an intention to maintain the type of initiative.

Multiple answers were possible ie "some of the work" would be classified both 'yes' and 'no'. A large majority of schools responding indicated that they would be continuing such initiatives (86%), while over a quarter (29%) said no; one specifically indicated they were uncertain.

Similarly, in the Teacher Impact Survey, teachers were asked to comment on statements about the on-going nature of Student Action Teams under the heading of 'sustainability of the model'. While almost two-thirds indicated that Student Action Team approaches were already part of the school's approach, almost three-quarters now indicate that there is a desire or intention for Student Action Team approaches to be an on-going part of the school's activity. However, an even larger proportion indicate that this is dependent on financial resources and almost two-thirds indicate that effective future operation will depend on time allowances being allocated:

Table 16: Teachers: Sustainability of Model

	<i>true</i>	<i>false</i>
SAT is already part of the school's approach	19 61.3%	12 38.7%
SAT will become part of ongoing school activity	19 73.1%	7 26.9%
SAT will only operate in the future if a budget is provided	22 84.6%	4 15.4%
SAT will only operate in the future if a time allowance is provided	16 64.0%	9 36.0%

Program Impact

This evaluation is primarily interested in the impact of participation in Student Action Teams on students, on teachers and on schools. Impact information is drawn from three sources: a comparison of pre-Program and post-Program student tests (of school connectedness factors), post-Program Impact Surveys of students and teachers, and specific responses to questions within the schools' Final Reports.

Pre- and Post-Program Tests

It was initially intended that the 'connectedness' survey would be used to provide a pre-program and post-program comparison. However, as noted in the earlier section on Methodology, returns from schools and timing of administration of these surveys has left the evaluators with only two schools where this information is available.

Results of this analysis indicate that there was little consistent movement of results between the tests in the two schools, and that almost all the differences (apart from 'schoolwork experience' and 'classroom positive experience' at one school) were not significant. In one school, in fact, where the Student Action Team focused on bullying, test results indicate increased 'schoolyard negative experience' and 'classroom negative experience' at the project's completion (though differences are not statistically significant); this might be linked with increased student awareness of and sensitivity to these issues which were associated with their project's focus.

Thus assessment of the Program's impact will rely on the self-reportage of change (student and teacher) contained in the Impact Surveys, and on school comments in their Final Reports.

Impact on Students

Schools were asked, in their Final Reports, to specifically point to outcomes for students. They identified:

Increase in knowledge:

- both topic specific (4 schools) and
- of change processes (2 schools).

Increase in skills: specific areas of skills highlighted by schools were:

- decision-making, team work, leadership (9 schools);

- speaking in front of audiences, communication, listening, articulation (7 schools);
- media production (3 schools);
- meeting deadlines, project oriented skills (2 schools);
- methodology - survey etc (2 schools); and
- problem solving (1 school).

Improvement in attitude and behaviour: specific areas highlighted were:

- self-confidence/self-esteem (10 schools);
- cooperation (3 schools);
- resilience/dealing with problems (3 schools);
- responsibility (2 schools); and
- assertiveness (1 school).

School reports also point to increased 'increased community pride' and 'pride in achievement' (6 schools), 'school connectedness' and 'ownership' (3 schools), 'engagement with their own learning' (3 schools), 'continued involvement in school decision-making' (1 school) and 'improved retention' (1 school).

Several point to an impact on 'enthusiasm' and 'enjoyment' (4 schools).

The schools made these sorts of comments:

"All students have gained in self confidence especially in speaking in front of audiences. They have found they have greater ownership of their school and have greater pride of their community. They feel proud that they have been the ones to change the speed limits. The students have gained a great knowledge of road safety and the protocols and processes involved in local government."

"All evaluations showed the students enjoyed the program. Students really enjoyed helping members of their own community, which increased students' connectedness to the community. It helped increase student "ownership" and respect of community property."

"The project was a very positive experience for the students across the two schools. This was due to many reasons, but in particular the ability to be involved in working on an authentic community issue."

"The students learned new skills, they improved their confidence and general assertiveness and established new and lasting friendships. The project has helped this group of students to develop their decision making skills also."

“The students’ self-esteem improved as well as their attitude towards school - particularly the boys. This was displayed in their attitudes and efforts at school. They felt part of something special which also helped their motivation.”

Some students commented within schools' own evaluations:

“The skills that I improved on were working in a team, being heaps more confident, speaking in front of an audience and setting up surveys.” ... “The best thing about being involved was meeting new people and having a feeling of responsibility.” ... “I think I’ve developed a few skills while part of the Student Action Team. One of them was learning to present information in an informative and understandable way, such as the video.” (students)

But do we know (beyond teachers’ and students’ comments) whether involvement in Student Action teams has had an impact on students? It is possible to analyse the Impact Survey’s self-reportage data from students. In the Impact Survey, students described both **how** they worked in Student Action Teams (and this information has been reported previously) and also described **perceived outcomes** in terms of changes happening to themselves.

The information from 137 students in 15 schools will be initially reported and then analysed against gender and students’ descriptions of team processes (Table 17, below).

These responses can be allocated scores and then listed in order of mean responses:

Table 18: Student Outcomes ranked in decreasing order

	N	Mean
relationship with student action team teacher	136	2.94
ability to work with others	135	2.92
ability to communicate with others	135	2.86
feelings about myself	136	2.65
relationship with other teachers	135	2.65
felt part of the school	135	2.65
felt good about coming to school	136	2.62
felt important around the school	136	2.59
work in other classes	136	2.49

It should be noted that all these means are in the range of 'much the same' to 'got better'.

Students were also asked to indicate how often they experienced two further possible outcomes of Student Action Teams, that related to impact on the school, and impact on other students.

Table 17: Student Outcomes:

“Because I was part of the Student Action Team, these things changed”	got worse	much the same	got better	got a lot better
felt good about coming to school	3 2.2%	70 51.5%	39 28.7%	24 17.6%
felt important around the school	2 1.5%	74 54.4%	38 27.9%	22 16.2%
felt part of the school	2 1.5%	70 51.9%	36 26.7%	27 20.0%
relationship with student action team teacher	1 0.7%	46 33.8%	49 36.0%	40 29.4%
relationship with other teachers	1 0.7%	65 48.1%	49 36.3%	20 14.8%
feelings about myself	4 2.9%	66 48.5%	39 28.7%	27 19.9%
work in other classes	5 3.7%	79 58.1%	32 23.5%	20 14.7%
ability to communicate with others	2 1.5%	48 35.6%	52 38.5%	33 24.4%
ability to work with others	2 1.5%	45 33.3%	50 37.0%	38 28.1%

Table 19: Students:
"Because I was in the Student Action Team..."

	frequency	percent
not at all	2	1.5
a little	13	9.6
some	27	19.9
quite a bit	40	29.4
lots	54	39.7
Total	136	100.0

When this item is correlated with the Program descriptors outlined earlier, we see a high link with "I felt proud of our achievement", "we helped others in our school and community" (as we might expect) and "we did something worthwhile". It is less correlated with "we decided what would happen", "we had a say" and "everyone got a chance to be heard".

b) "Other students told me they wished they could have been part of the team"

	frequency	percent
not at all	25	18.5
a little	17	12.6
some	35	25.9
quite a bit	24	17.8
lots	34	25.2
Total	135	100.0

This item is less strongly correlated with program descriptors though it appears that "we got to know each other better", "we helped others in the school and community" and "we chose an important project" are more likely to be seen by students to be attractive to other students. Again, issues of "we decided what would happen", "we did the work", "we worked together despite disagreements" and "we overcame difficulties" were seen as the program descriptors least attractive to others - perhaps because they all have implications to do with extra work and experiencing problems.

Associations with Gender and Team Size

Student outcomes can then be analysed by gender. To portray this more clearly, in Table 20 the responses 'got better' and 'got a lot better' are amalgamated as the response 'improved'.

Table 20: Student Reports of Outcomes by Gender

	Male Improved	Female improved	Signif.
felt good about coming to school	38 63.3%	20 31.3%	.002**
felt important around the school	32 53.3%	21 32.8%	.032*
felt part of the school	33 55.9%	23 35.9%	.026*
relationship with student action team teacher	45 75.0%	35 54.7%	.067
relationship with other teachers	38 64.4%	24 37.5%	.005**
feelings about myself	32 53.3%	28 43.8%	.132
work in other classes	30 50.0%	17 26.6%	.023*
ability to communicate with others	46 76.7%	35 54.7%	.027*
ability to work with others	47 79.7%	33 51.6%	.012*

** Significant at the .01 level.

* Significant at the .05 level.

(Significance of the differences is assessment by asymptotic 2-tailed Mann-Whitney tests.)

On all items, boys reported greater changes in their school experience, and this difference is significant (at various levels, as noted in the table), particularly for “felt good about coming to school” and “relationships with other teachers”.

Five composite variables for the student outcomes data were constructed, which can be seen as:

It is possible to use these scales for further analysis of the data.

As would be expected, given the individual item associations reported above, these scales show significant effects of gender. Males are found to score significantly higher than females on all except self-esteem.

Connectedness to school (school link):	c1 + c2 + c3
Connectedness to teachers (teacher link):	c4 + c5
Connectedness to other students (student link):	c8 + c9
Self-esteem:	c6
Schoolwork:	c7

Table 21: Outcome Scales by Gender

		<i>school link</i>	<i>teacher link</i>	<i>student link</i>	<i>self-esteem</i>	<i>school work</i>
male	Mean	8.4	5.9	6.2	2.8	2.7
	<i>N</i>	59	59	59	60	60
	<i>Std. Devn</i>	2.02	1.27	1.34	0.85	0.84
female	Mean	7.4	5.3	5.5	2.6	2.4
	<i>N</i>	64	64	64	64	64
	<i>Std. Devn</i>	1.97	1.36	1.53	0.77	0.72
total	Mean	7.9	5.6	5.9	2.7	2.5
	<i>N</i>	123	123	123	124	124
	<i>Std. Devn</i>	2.04	1.35	1.47	0.82	0.79
	<i>Sig.</i>	.003	.008	.009	.132	.023

Similarly, these scales can be analysed by team size (as defined earlier):

Table 22: Outcome Scales by Team Size

		<i>school link</i>	<i>teacher link</i>	<i>student link</i>	<i>self-esteem</i>	<i>school work</i>
small team	Mean	8.2	6.0	6.1	2.7	2.5
	<i>N</i>	39	39	39	39	39
	<i>Std. Devn</i>	1.84	1.42	1.35	0.76	0.85
large team	Mean	7.7	5.4	5.7	2.6	2.5
	<i>N</i>	96	96	95	97	97
	<i>Std. Devn</i>	2.14	1.34	1.58	0.86	0.77
total	Mean	7.9	5.6	5.8	2.7	2.5
	<i>N</i>	135	135	134	136	136
	<i>Std. Devn</i>	2.06	1.39	1.52	0.83	0.79
	<i>Sig.</i>	.062	.025	.135	.517	.994

Differences are much less significant; students from small teams score somewhat significantly better on "teacher link".

Having set up factors earlier that summarise students' descriptions of the way in which they

worked in teams (page 28), it is now possible to look at relationships between these factors and the five Outcome Scales constructed above. These can be presented as correlations in Table 23 (Pearson Correlations; using 2-tailed test of significance):

Table 23: Students: Description Factors by Outcome Scales

		School link	Teacher link	Student link	Self-esteem	School work
sense of meaning factor	Pearson Correlation	.638	.532	.576	.620	.500
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
	<i>N</i>	127	128	128	128	128
sense of control factor	Pearson Correlation	.467	.288	.197	.315	.319
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.001**</i>	<i>.026*</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
	<i>N</i>	127	128	128	128	128
sense of belonging factor	Pearson Correlation	.451	.481	.487	.424	.438
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
	<i>N</i>	127	128	128	128	128

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

All these factors and scales show significant correlations though some are relatively weak (eg 'student-student connectedness' with 'sense of control'). The 'sense of meaning' factor is most strongly correlated with all outcome scales.

It is also possible to examine differences in the correlations between these factors and scales on the basis of gender and team size.

a) Gender

Table 24: Students: Description Factors by Outcome Scales by Gender

GENDER			School link	Teacher link	Student link	Self-esteem	School work
male	sense of meaning factor	Pearson Correlation	.703	.516	.646	.652	.575
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
		<i>N</i>	55	56	56	56	56
	sense of control factor	Pearson Correlation	.510	.292	.251	.311	.426
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.029*</i>	<i>.062</i>	<i>.020*</i>	<i>.001**</i>
		<i>N</i>	55	56	56	56	56
	sense of belonging factor	Pearson Correlation	.598	.579	.519	.544	.500
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
		<i>N</i>	55	56	56	56	56
female	sense of meaning factor	Pearson Correlation	.621	.552	.554	.612	.423
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
		<i>N</i>	62	62	62	62	62
	sense of control factor	Pearson Correlation	.491	.229	.170	.309	.184
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.073</i>	<i>.186</i>	<i>.014*</i>	<i>.152</i>
		<i>N</i>	62	62	62	62	62
	sense of belonging factor	Pearson Correlation	.391	.388	.572	.363	.490
		<i>Sig.</i>	<i>.002**</i>	<i>.002**</i>	<i>.000**</i>	<i>.004**</i>	<i>.000**</i>
		<i>N</i>	62	62	62	62	62

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In general, the impact of the Student Action Team on the aspects of their experience is greater for males than it is for females (exceptions are 'teacher connectedness' and 'sense of meaning', and 'student-student connectedness' and 'sense of belonging' where the impact is stronger for females).

For both males and females, the 'sense of control' does not have as large an effect on the outcomes, compared with the effects of 'sense of meaning' and 'sense of belonging'. There are substantially higher correlations for boys than for girls on the 'sense of belonging' factor with 'school connectedness', 'teacher connectedness' and 'self-esteem' - where boys report a high sense of belonging, they also report high outcomes (and vice versa), and this effect is greater than for girls.

b) Team size

Table 25: Students: Description Factors by Outcome Scales by Team Size

TEAM SIZE			School link	Teacher link	Student link	Self- esteem	School work
small team	sense of meaning factor	Pearson Correlation Sig. N	.527 .001** 37	.394 .016* 37	.286 .086 37	.461 .004** 37	.438 .007** 37
	sense of control factor	Pearson Correlation Sig. N	.528 .001** 37	.425 .009* 37	.001 .994 37	.277 .097 37	.282 .091 37
	sense of belonging factor	Pearson Correlation Sig. N	.380 .020* 37	.423 .009** 37	.513 .001** 37	.538 .001** 37	.454 .005** 37
large team	sense of meaning factor	Pearson Correlation Sig. N	.654 .000** 90	.571 .000** 91	.644 .000** 91	.663 .000** 91	.523 .000** 91
	sense of control factor	Pearson Correlation Sig. N	.439 .000** 90	.197 .061 91	.227 .030* 91	.343 .001** 91	.355 .001** 91
	sense of belonging factor	Pearson Correlation Sig. N	.426 .000** 90	.486 .000** 91	.452 .000** 91	.377 .000** 91	.412 .000** 91

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In large teams especially, certain aspects of the organisation of the projects result in a high pay-off in outcomes. There, a high 'sense of meaning' in the project is strongly correlated with high outcomes in most areas, but particularly with school connectedness, student-student connectedness and self-esteem. In smaller teams, the strong correlations are of both 'sense of meaning' and 'sense of control' with school connectedness, and also of 'sense of belonging' with self-esteem. The enhancement of student-student connectedness is not linked with

sense of control over the project, particularly in small teams.

Examining correlations of all of the Implementation variables with all the Outcome variables (including the extra variables of "left a positive mark on school or community" and "other students wished to be part of the team") indicates that almost all items show good correlations, with particularly strong correlations between:

- 'felt proud of our achievement' and 'feeling good about coming to school';
- 'felt proud of our achievement' and 'we left a positive mark on the school/ community';
- 'everyone got a chance to be heard' and 'felt important around the school';

- 'improved teamwork and cooperation skills' and 'feelings about myself';
- 'improved teamwork and cooperation skills' and 'ability to communicate with others';
- 'we chose important project' and 'feelings about myself';
- 'we did something worthwhile' and 'we left a positive mark...';
- 'we helped others in school/community' and 'we left a positive mark...'; and
- 'we got to know each other better' and almost all the outcome variable.

Low correlations (where choices on one variable do not seem to be associated with a particular pattern of choice on the other) are observed between:

- 'we decided what would happen' and 'ability to communicate with others',
- 'left a positive mark...'; and
- 'other students wished to be in the team'.

Impact on Teachers

Student Action Teams are also expected to have an impact on the teachers involved, and both the Final Report Template and the Teacher Impact Survey asked about this.

The teachers completing the Final Report (almost always the teacher who had worked with the Student Action Team) reflected about the changes they had experienced and a summary is presented here.

Some teachers found it difficult to specify changes to them, but in describing what they had done or what students had gained, implicitly commented on changes to their roles:

“As one of the three main developers, my role as I saw it was to ensure that as many aims were achieved as possible. Ensuring everyone knew what they were doing and why they were doing it. Making sure that the children were comfortable with what was required of them and that they enjoyed themselves and felt a sense of achievement.”

Others talked in general terms about **satisfaction** with their participation:

“A positive reinforcement that you were actually making a difference to the education and their lives.”

“The coordination of the team project led to a focus on how the College could maximise the benefit to the students completing the project, as well as the wider school community. From my professional standpoint it was fulfilling to see a positive outcome.”

Frequent comments mentioned increased **communication with** or **knowledge of** the students:

“Increased interaction with students as a team member; Discussion with fellow staff members both on a social and professional level; Insight into students’ behaviour on a more social level; Improved confidence to approach the local community and communicate with them; Insight into my professional approach to teaching while participating in a project of this type (increased workload, working to a timeline, meetings, etc)”

“The project established my connections with the grade 5/6 students and increased my confidence, organisation and coordinating skills.”

Other comments reflect learnings about **project management**:

“This was a valuable lesson for me as a new Assistant Principal, new into the secondary education system. It was a project that, on reflection, I can see I had no hope of implementing in the way that I tried. A team of teachers should have been given responsibility for the project, but despite inquiries, no members of staff wanted to be involved. My workload and staffing changes did not allow me to commit the time and effort that the project required.”

“Made me aware of the necessity to structure program and information in very concrete terms.”

Finally, a couple of comments talked about changes to the **professional roles** of the teacher involved:

“Assisted to broaden the role of SWC.”

“Being only my second year in the profession, it gave me responsibility which I had to work at fulfilling. There was also recognition from peers, which was positive.”

One teacher comment indicates that work in supporting Student Action Teams is no different from other aspects of teaching:

“Part of the job!”

Teacher responses to the Impact Survey also describe processes and outcomes for teachers (see Table 28, next page).

When we allocate values to these items, we are able to see that, in order, teachers ranked the following as important aspects of the processes of teacher participation in Student Action Teams:

	<i>Mean</i>
I felt pride in what we achieved	3.5
I got to do something I thought was of importance and value	3.4
I felt supported by the students	3.4
I felt supported by the school leadership	3.3
I felt reinforced in my belief in the capacity of children/students	3.2
I felt supported by my peers	2.8
The students behaved differently towards me	2.2
I behaved differently towards the students	1.9

Table 27 (next page) reports changes identified by the teacher, which occurred ‘because of the Student Action Team’. These items are a mix of outcomes for teachers and for students and have been re-grouped in the table to associate similar items.

Table 26: Teachers: Processes

In the student action team:	not at all	a little	some	quite a bit	lots
I got to do something I thought was of importance and value			3 9.7%	13 41.9%	15 48.4%
I felt reinforced in my belief in the capacity of children/students		1 3.2%	6 19.4%	10 32.3%	14 45.2%
I felt pride in what we achieved		1 3.2%	3 9.7%	7 22.6%	20 64.5%
I felt supported by my peers		3 9.7%	10 32.3%	8 25.8%	10 32.3%
I felt supported by the school leadership	1 3.2%	2 6.5%	3 9.7%	7 22.6%	18 58.1%
I felt supported by the students			3 9.7%	13 41.9%	15 48.4%
I behaved differently towards the students	7 23.3%	4 13.3%	7 23.3%	8 26.7%	4 13.3%
The students behaved differently towards me	3 10.0%	5 16.7%	8 26.7%	10 33.3%	4 13.3%

Table 27: Teacher: Outcomes

“Because of the student action team, these things changed:”	got worse	much the same	improved	big improvement
knowing these students		2 6.5%	16 51.6%	13 41.9%
my belief in students' capability		10 32.3%	17 54.8%	4 12.9%
my professional skills		10 32.3%	18 58.1%	3 9.7%
regard by my peers		21 67.7%	9 29.0%	1 3.2%
regard by the student population		15 48.4%	16 51.6%	
regard by school leadership		13 41.9%	14 45.2%	4 12.9%
my power to contribute to the school		9 29.0%	17 54.8%	5 16.1%
reward for my efforts		12 38.7%	15 48.4%	4 12.9%
these students' behaviour towards me		11 35.5%	16 51.6%	4 12.9%
these students' behaviour towards others		9 29.0%	19 61.3%	3 9.7%
these students' work in other classes	1 3.7%	11 40.7%	14 51.9%	1 3.7%

We can again allocate a score to these items (this time -1 for 'got worse', 0 for 'much the same', +1 for 'improved' and +2 for 'big improvement') and compare their ranking.

	Average Score
knowing these students	1.4
my belief in students' capability	0.8
my professional skills	0.8
regard by my peers	0.4
regard by the student population	0.5
regard by school leadership	0.7
my power to contribute to the school	0.9
reward for my efforts	1.1
these students' behaviour towards me	0.8
these students' behaviour towards others	0.8
these students' work in other classes	0.6

The only items on which teachers report more than some improvement are 'knowing these students' and 'reward for my efforts' – and that reward may be in terms of satisfaction with achievement as indicated earlier. Teachers see improvement in students' behaviour, both to themselves and (slightly more) towards others, but see less change in these students' work in other classes. Regard by peers, students and school leadership is also regarded as having changed less than expected; perhaps those teachers who get to organise Student Action Teams are already held in reasonably high regard by all these groups.

Impact on Schools

The evaluation is also interested to look at whether the operation of Student Action Teams has had an impact on school processes, structures or ethos. Schools were asked to comment on this in their Final Reports, and some items from the Teacher Impact Survey provide further information.

Student Action Teams have an impact through the example they provide of a way of engaging students:

"This project has been a good example to other teachers and students that a project with a community focus is a good way to engage students. Hopefully more community projects will occur in the future."

"The lack of response of staff was an indication of the work which needed to be done with staff in the area of student engagement and teaching and learning. This has become a priority in the school's PD plan and I believe the response from some staff would be quite different now. I believe we can develop and implement a program next year."

They also are seen to endorse existing directions:

"... fits directly into Charter and Priorities (engagement and leadership).

"Continues an ethos of empowering students."

In some schools, the specific Team focus or project has had an impact on school operations:

"Other Year 9 classes have been more effective, (REAL students were in the past often a disruptive and negative influence). General discipline at Year 9 has also shown improvement - indicators are less suspensions, detentions and Time Out. Its success has prompted proposal to extend program into Year 8 as well as continuing with another group in Year 9 in 2003."

"Possible implementation of Peer Mediation; introduction of Year 8 bullying program; surveying of Years 7, 9 and 10; interviewing of student offenders identified by the surveys; further work to be done by the bullying committee."

or on the standing of the school in its community or in relation to other schools:

"The project increased closer links between the (name) Primary School and (name) Secondary College. This has benefited students and staff from each school."

At the same time, teachers reported concerns of others within the school, and some of these served to limit what Student Action Teams could achieve. These concerns centred on:

- the withdrawal system;
- the impact on other teachers' class time (though some schools commented that this was not an issue);
- a lack of staff engagement with the issue or the approach; reluctance of staff to be involved;
- lack of forward planning (need for early planning and curriculum integration);
- the amount of work involved.

In the Impact Survey, teachers reported on how Student Action Teams were regarded in the school, both in their current operation and as a model for further initiatives (see Table 28, next page).

Comparative scores on these items indicate a very positive regard for the work of Student Action Teams within the school, with students more positive than staff, a strong commitment to seeing the work as valid for students and staff, but a recognition that the level of resourcing available had a substantial influence on the capacity of the school to undertake such a model:

SAT work was :	Average Score
• well regarded by students in the school	3.2
• well regarded by staff in the school	2.8
• seen as a valid use of student time	3.2
• seen as a valid use of staff time	3.1
• only possible because of the budget provided	3.1
• only supported because of budget provided	2.3

A similar picture is provided by the analysis of teacher responses to the sustainability questions outlined earlier (see page 30).

Table 28: Teachers: Attitudes to the work of the student action team

	not at all	a little	some	quite a bit	lots
SAT work was well regarded by students in the school		2 6.7%	3 10.0%	12 40.0%	13 43.3%
SAT work was well regarded by staff in the school		3 10.0%	7 23.3%	13 43.3%	7 23.3%
SAT work was seen as a valid use of student time		1 3.2%	3 9.7%	15 48.4%	12 38.7%
SAT work was seen as a valid use of staff time		1 3.2%	6 19.4%	12 38.7%	12 38.7%
SAT work was only <i>possible</i> because of the budget provided		3 9.7%	7 22.6%	6 19.4%	15 48.4%
SAT work was only <i>supported</i> because of the budget provided	3 9.7%	7 22.6%	8 25.8%	6 19.4%	7 22.6%

Impact on the Community

The Student Action Team's impact on the community encompasses both the outcomes of the work that it has done, and the regard with which the Team (and the school, by implication) is held beyond the school. To varying degrees, schools report on their own evaluations of project outcomes: whether they achieved goals, and whether students made changes within their communities.

The schools, in their Final Report, talked of both the aspects of tangible outcomes and of regard, with examples such as:

"The reduction in speed limits has been of a great benefit to the community. The area around the school is now much safer. The people that the seminars/workshops have been delivered to, have been greatly impressed with the commitment and work output of the young students involved in this project."

"The students have a different profile in the community and the school population is moving from that of one where achievers are put down, to one where achieving is the norm."

"Student presentation to District Welfare Staff has led to other schools taking on similar projects. Our students have been involved in training of students from other schools. Program evaluation shows that key goals (were) achieved – young people reporting that they have more information about, and are changing behaviours, to decrease risks associated with drug use."

"Other students in the school benefited from a student magazine that gave them a first hand insight into the goings on of high school life."

Other responses from some schools in their Final Report extended on the nature of feedback and responses received from their communities:

"Primary teachers thought it was terrific. Mums and dads asked for a pamphlet to put in their child's CV. Pamphlet very well received - but process to get there much more vital and recognised as such by many in the community."

"The staff and students of the other schools involved enjoyed being involved and were impressed with the level of information that was conveyed to them. The other Principals were very impressed with what the children had achieved and the way they had taught it to their students. Some voiced interest in being involved again this year."

Discussion and Issues

In this section of the Report, we revisit the data presented in the previous sections and draw attention to some issues arising. While our principal interest is to comment on the impact of the Student Action Teams in 2001-2002, we cannot separate that from a discussion of implementation issues. It is necessary to know what has **occurred** in a program before we can move to make sense of the impact or outcomes of that program. Owen and Rogers (1999) draw attention to the need "to check on the extent of program implementation in order to explain the pattern of outcomes. Thus an examination of program implementation can be an integral part of an impact evaluation." (p 270)

We need also to recognise that, in this program particularly, the nature of the implementation is a variable. We are able, through student responses and descriptions of what happened - the program characteristics - to compare these with their reports of outcomes.

Program Implementation

Obtaining a consistent and complete picture of program implementation in Phase 2 has been beset by extensive difficulties. The lack of data returned, the differing time frames and the inconsistent treatment all make a 'neat' evaluation impossible. The following issues have been outlined earlier:

Compliance

Schools were selected for the Program and provided with implementation funds. We have noted that a significant number did not return program plans and that rates of return of data declined steadily. Even with personal phone calls, information about what was finally done was not provided.

It needs to be recognised that the Program structure - the method of school selection (see below), the limited program support from regional consultants, and the provision of pre-funding - all mean that the Program will 'lose' schools and that the information base about what happened will be incomplete. Further, the Program structure means that there is little or no capacity for Program Managers - or evaluators - to ensure compliance with Program reporting.

Selection of Schools

As noted earlier, schools were identified by regional Middle Years consultants, approached and offered financial support to be in the Program. Such a process was deliberately chosen over an advertisement and application process.

The positives of such an approach are that it should build upon known 'strong' schools with a history of action in the general area, that it should ensure rapid Program implementation (advertisement and application can be a slow process), and that it can ensure strong central control of a school sample that is balanced - for example, regionally and between primary and secondary schools.

The negatives of such an approach have become particularly evident in this sample: a lack of prior understanding of and commitment to the Student Action Team approach, a low awareness within the schools of being part of the Program (some Principals we spoke with seemed unaware that the school had a grant, or what it was for), the production of post-hoc program intentions that were not well thought through.

Focus

The method of selection, together with the initial statements requiring rapid Program roll-out, also contributed to schools choosing approaches and projects that were part of their on-going work or of other imperatives - sometimes irrespective of definitions of what Student Action Teams were supposed to be or achieve.

An examination of the descriptions of schools Student Action Team projects indicates that most carried out within-school projects around continuing priorities such as primary-secondary transition, core curriculum or school resources. While it is noted here that such decisions were influenced by the method of school selection and the timelines under which school were asked to operate, such decisions also are a consequence of the 'blurring' of required focus from 'community safety' to 'community action', and of the focus on 'resilience' at the orientation briefing.

In Phase 1, schools took some time to understand what 'community safety' might mean but the process of discussing and debating this centrally and at school level, was a productive one. It was

suggested in the previous Evaluation Report (Holdsworth *et al*, 2000a) that the choice of such a focus is both critical and empowering. It scaffolds the work of the Team; it recognises the source of Program support; it assures teams that someone external to the school regards their work as of importance.

The nature of 'community' remains problematic - and the definitions apparent in this sample of schools vary widely. Some were directly concerned with a focus on local road safety, some on community recreation facilities, some on community environmental issues. Some, however, apparently understood community as being contained entirely within the school and its teaching and learning, or extending only to the transition relationship between associated primary and secondary schools.

Very few (if any) schools formed partnerships with non-school organisations in the work of their Student Action Teams.

Team selection and formation

While there was a focus on 'at risk' students in several of the schools, most of these recognised a danger in isolating ('ghetto-ising') the program to such students. Hence schools took specific measures to involve a mixed group of students, either around ability or behaviour or marginalisation.

Schools may also have used whole class groups, either as a larger project team, or in some form of broader involvement. The data from Impact Surveys indicates issues associated with this: "everyone got a chance to be heard" is significantly more likely to describe processes in small teams, and this flows through to overall sense of control and sense of belonging. Team size particularly has a significant effect on the likelihood that participants will feel in control of the project and this, as we see here, is strongly and positively associated with a range of student connectedness outcomes.

Decision-making

It is clear from school descriptions and from student Impact Survey responses that most projects involved some decision-making by students in project processes. (It is perhaps disappointing that, under a Student Action Team heading, some schools report minimal student decision-making.)

It is generally reported that decision-making is shared with teachers, and this is particularly evident within primary schools in the sample. A small number of secondary schools specifically built in high levels of student decision-making into their project processes and reported that outcomes of this were valuable even if processes were slower and more frustrating.

It is recognised that a high level of student participation in project decision-making is time

consuming, both in its establishment and in its maintenance. Under external pressure to choose a topic or form a team or get outcomes quickly, teachers will frequently step in to make the decisions. The timelines of many of the projects that have a high level of student decision-making reveals a series of stop-start processes, in which the learnings about group processes and ownership are as important as (or more than) the project outcomes.

Appropriation

We have drawn attention to the extent of appropriation of the Student Action Team Program (and terminology) to support existing school directions and requirements, the largest cluster of which was around transition issues. This is perhaps not surprising given the identification of schools through Middle Years consultants: the perception was then that this was a 'middle years program'. However the interpretation tended to take a 'reductionist' approach to middle years issues: student visits from primary to secondary schools (and vice versa) and the development and provision of written or visual information to primary school students about their secondary school. The choice by schools to use the Student Action Teams Program to enable them to fund and structure information for the transition process was also encouraged by the timing of the program (in the second half of the school year) and by the initial request that the program be completed within that year.

From an external evaluation perspective, it would appear that other schools took the opportunity to use the Student Action Team Program to support the production of a play within the drama program, the teaching of students in the area of Personal Development, and the formation of a Junior School Council.

The positive side to such appropriation has been the recognition by schools of the need to 'mainstream' Student Action Teams - to make them sustainable within the school's curriculum approaches. However, without explicit support, discussion, examples and professional development on how this might occur while still maintaining Student Action Team principles, some schools implemented 'mainstream' curriculum projects that bore little similarity to these principles.

Criteria

Thus the following evaluation questions arise directly from this discussion of Program implementation. What was implemented? Were they Student Action Teams?

To address this, we need to distinguish the characteristics of Student Action Teams. Since the Program is in a relatively early stage, there has yet to be such an explicit statement, however the following criteria appear to emerge from the

literature, from the Student Action Teams Manual (provided to schools) and from the operation of Phase 1 of the Program:

- student engagement with the project focus or topic: either student choice of this, or substantial student decision-making on how to approach it;
- student engagement with project decision-making and implementation;
- a focus within the community (geographic, social or cultural) - preferably beyond the school;
- identification and formation of a student team or teams;
- processes of research and action by students that intend to make a differences around the chosen focus/topic within the community.

Using these criteria, the work of these schools can be analysed. Of the 23 schools where information is provided or known (and interpreting this information liberally), only **nine** schools met three or more of these criteria. In some cases, teachers delivered a course to students, or arranged for them to do community charity work; in other cases, an in-school curriculum project was conducted. However, in other cases, schools formed a student team, supported and trained its members to choose a focus within the constraints of the Program, provided time for them to meet and decide, engaged them in research beyond the school, and enabled them to propose and/or take action aimed at changing something within their community.

So what was finally implemented may not always have been 'Student Action Teams' as initially described in the previous report and outlined in the manual. Rather, what was implemented was a range of student-centred and student-active practices within schools around issues that schools already had identified, or which, in some cases, students identified. This is not to say that many of these initiatives weren't useful educational practices; however many were not Student Action Teams.

On first consideration, this then leaves the evaluation of outcomes with a substantial difficulty. If Student Action Teams were not uniformly implemented, what is being evaluated?

Program Outcomes

Because of the varied nature of what was done, there is however a positive side. The data we have available from students and teachers describe their perceptions of both the **outcomes** of what they did, and their descriptions of what was important as **process**. It was mentioned at the start of this section of the Report that we can regard these implementation descriptions as variables, and analyse outcomes against these descriptors. Students relate a range of experiences of student ownership

and decision-making, achievement of community goals and team-work in their Impact Surveys - they describe the implementation variable - and these descriptions can be compared with their reports of outcomes.

So we are able to use this data to provide some insight into links between how students see these projects and how they see outcomes. We are able to correlate perceptions of the way that teams worked, with perceptions of what was gained.

Overview

Before we comment on this analysis however, it should be strongly noted that both the qualitative data and the more quantitative information on student and teacher perceptions indicate that both students and teachers see that there were **substantial improvements** for students from the work of Student Action Teams - whatever that was. Respondents point to improvements in:

- individual self-attitudes (self-esteem, confidence etc);
- relations between students and teachers, students and schools, and students and other students; and
- academic outcomes in other classes (to some extent).

In short, they generally point to improvements in a wide variety of measures of **connectedness**.

It should be noted that a very small minority of students self-report that their work in other classes got worse: perhaps these instances are related to processes of withdrawal of students from other classes to be part of the Student Action Teams.

While the quantitative data shows linkages between outcomes and elements of practice, this cannot attribute causality. However, written comments from schools are clearer in linking the two; teachers and students say things such as: "because of their/our participation in Student Action Teams, certain outcomes are evident for students".

Gender

These improvements are generally seen as being more pronounced for boys than for girls, with differences significant on all items except 'relationships with the Student Action Team teacher' and 'feelings about myself'. These gender differences are also represented in composite outcome scales: there is greater self-reported impact for male students than for female students in all areas except for self-esteem. (Perhaps issues of familiarity with processes of self-reflection influence these differences.)

Team Size

Team size has less of an impact on reported outcomes (some on teacher connectedness) but given the range of ways in which teams were formed and the

uncertainty about what team size actually meant for the operation of teams, there is some uncertainty about the meaning of these figures.

Sense of Meaning, Control and Belonging

There are particularly strong links between student reports of projects that have a high level of 'sense of meaning' (that is in which there was an aim to achieve purposeful outcomes) and all outcome areas: school connectedness, teacher connectedness, student-student connectedness, self-esteem and school work. Where students see that what they're doing has meaning and value - they're achieving something seen to be worthwhile - this is strongly linked with improved connectedness and other outcomes.

The other implementation factors of 'sense of control' and 'sense of belonging' are also positively

linked with connectedness outcomes, but less strongly.

The strength of these findings has strong implications for the nature of program development. If Student Action Teams are to deliver connectedness outcomes, they must particularly ensure that students work on authentic projects, while also attempting to maximise student control over what they are doing, and provide inclusive and supportive team processes.

Students saw the important aspects of Student Action Team processes as working together as a team, and working on something which was worthwhile and in which they could feel pride in achievement. Structuring student descriptors of their Student Action Team processes in choice order (from Table 9), we see:

	<i>Mean</i>
We worked as a team	4.27
We did something worthwhile	4.12
We improved our team work and cooperation skills	4.04
I felt proud of what we achieved	4.02
We were the ones who did the work	3.98
Everyone got a chance to be heard	3.98
I felt proud of the way we worked together	3.95
I got to have a say	3.94
We overcame difficulties as they came up	3.92
We got to help others in our school or community	3.87
We chose something we thought was important to work on	3.85
We decided what happened in this project	3.78
We worked together even when we disagreed	3.70
We got to know each other better	3.50

Similarly, teachers reported on how they saw the importance of Team processes:

	<i>Mean</i>
I felt pride in what we achieved	4.48
I got to do something I thought was of importance and value	4.39
I felt supported by the students	4.39
I felt supported by the school leadership	4.26
I felt reinforced in my belief in the capacity of children/students	4.19
I felt supported by my peers	3.81
The students behaved differently towards me	3.23
I behaved differently towards the students	2.93

Again, the strong items have to do with 'sense of meaning' (purpose or value) and 'sense of belonging' (or support). It is interesting to note that, while students see relationships with their Student Action Team teacher as improving, teachers are less likely to say that they now behave differently towards these students or that these students behave differently towards them.

Skills Acquisition

In Table 17, we reported the skills that teachers identified as being addressed within their Student Action Teams. These were listed in order of frequency of choice. If we then classify these skills roughly as those involved with group or team processes, those associated with project implementation, and those associated more broadly with community linkages and presentation, we see an interesting pattern:

	Mean	Group process	Project implemn	Comm unity links
cooperating with others	2.87	•		
contributing ideas	2.77	•		
working out how to agree	2.73	•		
developing practical skills	2.70		•	
seeking others opinions or expertise	2.67	•	•	
engaging with others outside the school	2.67			•
taking responsibility for getting things done	2.67	•	•	
helping others to join in	2.60	•		
helping solve problems	2.60	•		
brainstorming	2.60	•	•	
working out action plans	2.53		•	
providing encouragement for others	2.53	•		
establishing priorities	2.50		•	
devising timetables	2.41		•	
using IT skills	2.33		•	
presenting their case to others	2.33			•
solving personal difficulties	2.30	•		
analysing and presenting data	2.23		•	•
public speaking	2.17			•
interviewing or surveying in school or community	2.17		•	•
writing letters and documents	2.10		•	•
making phone calls to community members	1.80		•	•
obtaining quotes on expenses	1.69		•	
devising budgets	1.62		•	
devising media strategies	1.60		•	•
writing minutes	1.45		•	
engaging in fund raising activity	1.43		•	•

These skills cluster substantially, with those relating to group operation being more frequently addressed than those involved with project implementation, and skills associated with community linkage and presentation are generally least frequently recognised as being addressed.

Program Sustainability

Issues of sustainability were substantially addressed in the Phase 1 Evaluation Report (Holdsworth *et al*, 2001) and it is not intended to repeat that discussion here. However, the information available from this evaluation enables us to make some estimate of the amount of time involved in implementation of a school project. Schools estimated that between 12 and 80 hours of student/class time was allocated, and estimates of between 10 and 160 hours of teacher time required. On average, 43 hours of teacher time per school was involved.

It is clear that such time allocation makes Student Action Teams un-sustainable without some form of continued support or integration into 'normal' curriculum processes.

In turn, the ability of schools to integrate such approaches into their curriculum is dependent on Program timing and support. Schools need:

- sufficient lead-time to plan for how they will operate Student Action Teams within their curriculum structures;
- advice about and models for appropriate integration (both organisational and curriculum);
- financial support that provides teacher time within allotments;
- flexibility to adapt models to curriculum structures and local circumstances;
- support in developing possibilities for student credit arrangements.

In Table 18, direct teacher comments about sustainability issues are reported. Many schools acknowledge that Student Action Team approaches are already part of their approach (though, given the range of actual practices, we might suspect that responses are referring to student-centred or student activity approaches). Even more indicate that such approaches will now be part of their on-going program - over a 10% increase.

However there is very strong agreement that such approaches are only sustainable with financial and, to a lesser extent, time allowance support.

Summary and Recommendations

The health and educational literature on connectedness and resilience leads us to understand that school programs that successfully enhance factors associated with these outcomes have three principal components in what they provide for students:

- a sense of meaning or purpose;
- a sense of control;
- a sense of belonging.

Student Action Teams have been developed in Victoria within a Middle Years of Schooling framework with the intention of addressing these areas. The evaluation question facing us in the 2001-2002 Program, concerns whether this occurred, and what we learn about both implementation and outcomes.

This Report indicates that there has been variation in Program implementation within the sample of 36 schools funded within the Program in 2001-2002. Practices reported by these schools range from highly teacher-centred programs to student-centred programs, from school-based to community-based arenas, from relatively passive roles for students to relatively active roles.

This variation can be turned to good effect within the evaluation, for the data gathered enables us to compare student descriptions of what they saw as characterising their programs, with student self-reports of changes to their connectedness to the school, to teachers and to other students, as well as to their own self-esteem and school work. It also enables us to analyse links between these data sets and to use gender and team size as variables for further analysis of impact and of program-impact links.

This analysis indicates:

1. That students and teachers, in self-reportage items and in written descriptions, indicate substantial change in all areas of program impact - increases in knowledge, skills, attitude and connectedness - which they attribute to participation in Student Action Teams. It is not possible to test these changes statistically for significance.
2. Boys report larger changes in all impact areas than do girls, and these gender differences are

statistically significant ($p < .05$) for all items except "relationship with the Student Action Team teacher" and self-esteem. They are also statistically significant ($p < .05$ or better) for all the combined impact variables except self-esteem. Greatest gender differences are reported for "felt good about coming to school" and "relationships with other teachers", and for all of the three scales that summarise students' self-reports of their connectedness to the school, to teachers and to other students.

3. Differences in impact items are not significant when analysed by team size, though smaller teams tend to score slightly better on all connectedness scales than do larger teams.
4. Three statistical factors emerge in student descriptions of program characteristics. These can be substantially aligned with the three items in the theoretical model: "sense of meaning or purpose", "sense of control" and "sense of belonging". That is, when students describe what did or did not happen within their teams, items within these three factors are rated consistently with each other.
5. Correlation of these descriptive factors with outcome scales are all significant ($p < .05$ at least) and all but one are highly significant ($p < .01$).
6. The "sense of meaning" factor correlates most strongly with all the "change of connectedness" scales, with "change to self-esteem" and with "change to school work". That is, those students who describe themselves as experiencing a high sense of meaning and purpose within their program, also report high changes to their school, teachers and student connectedness and to their self-esteem and school work; similarly, students rating their programs low on "sense of meaning" are significantly more likely to report lower changes on all impact scales ($p < .01$).
7. "Sense of belonging" also correlates highly with all impact scales and these correlations are also highly significant ($p < .01$).
8. "Sense of control" correlates strongly with school connectedness and somewhat less

-
- strongly with (in order) changes to school work, changes to self-esteem and changes to teacher connectedness - though all these correlations are still highly significant ($p < .01$).
9. These correlations are stronger for boys than they are for girls, except for "teacher connectedness" with "sense of meaning", and "student-student connectedness" with "sense of belonging". We are, for example, able to say that changes to school connectedness, student-student connectedness and self-esteem are all perceived by boys to be more linked to the sense of meaning and purpose in the program than are these relationships for girls.
 10. In large teams especially, certain aspects of the organisation of the projects result in a high pay-off in outcomes. There, a high "sense of meaning" in the project is strongly correlated with high outcomes in most areas, but particularly with school connectedness, student-student connectedness and self-esteem. In smaller teams, the strong correlations are between both "sense of meaning" and "sense of control" and school connectedness, and also between "sense of belonging" and self-esteem. The enhancement of student-student connectedness is not linked with sense of control over the project, particularly in small teams.
 11. Teachers also reported substantial increases in their pride in achievement of something of value, and in connection with students, but claim lesser changes in their behaviour towards students or perceptions of students' behaviour towards them. They report that the Student Action Team's impact was, for them, mainly in the areas of knowing students better and their own sense of reward, rather than regard by peers or students.
 12. Teachers report that the work of Student Action Teams was well regarded by students and staff, was seen as a valid curriculum approach, but was only possible because of the Program support that was provided.
 13. Teachers report spending between 10 and 160 hours on their project. It is clear that, with such time commitment required, Student Action Teams are **not** sustainable without financial, staffing or appropriate curriculum support.
 14. If this approach is to be sustained within schools, there is a need for clear models of and support for the incorporation of Student Action Teams within staffing allotments and on-going curriculum programs. These models must maintain the characteristics - of meaning, control and belonging - that have been identified in this Report as critical to positive student outcomes. They must also maintain the criteria of Student Action Teams:
 - Student engagement with the project focus or topic: either student choice of this, or substantial student decision-making on how to approach it;
 - Student engagement with project decision-making and implementation;
 - A focus within the community - preferably beyond the school;
 - Identification and formation of a student team or teams;
 - Processes of research and action by students that intend to make a difference around the chosen focus/topic within the community.
 15. Some curriculum models that would enable Student Action Teams to continue within existing resourcing have been explored in both the Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Program, but require further description and professional development. Without such support, such approaches will continue to be subject to other curriculum and organisational imperatives within schools and the specific criteria of Student Action Teams and the specific characteristics that make them successful may be lost.
 16. Thus the summary of characteristics (page 68) is outlined for adoption as baseline criteria that describe the operation of Student Action Teams at Program, School and project levels.

Recommendations

Overall

1. That the Department of Education and Training continue to implement and support the operation of Student Action Team approaches within the Middle Years Strategy.
2. That criteria for the operation of Student Action Teams be defined more clearly as:
 - Student engagement with the project focus or topic: either student choice of this, or substantial student decision-making on how to approach it;
 - Student engagement with project decision-making and implementation;
 - A focus within the community - preferably beyond the school;
 - Identification and formation of a student team or teams;
 - Processes of research and action by students that intend to make a difference around the chosen focus/topic within the community.

-
3. That the operation of Student Action Teams by guided by the broad operational principles at Program, School and Team level outlined in the attached chart (next page).

Options for Support:

4. Central Operation of a Student Action Team Program: In supporting any further Student Action Team Program at a central level, the Department of Education and Training:
- Invite schools to apply for support for Student Action Teams rather than simply invite identified schools to implement programs;
 - Approve school proposals for Student Action Team processes and projects against the statement of principles and criteria for Student Action Teams, as outlined above;
 - Offer Program Professional Development, in response to identified needs, to teachers operating Student Action Teams;
 - Offer training for a core group of students in each Student Action Team on a central or cluster basis;
 - Provide sufficient notice to schools about support for Student Action Teams, to enable curriculum planning and integration.
5. Cluster Operation of a Student Action Team Program: In operating a Student Action Team Program at a cluster (eg Innovations and Excellence) level, the cluster:
- Invite schools within the cluster to apply for support for Student Action Teams rather than simply identifying schools to implement programs;
 - Approve school proposals for Student Action Team processes and projects against the statement of principles and criteria for Student Action Teams, as outlined above;
 - Offer Program Professional Development, in response to identified needs, to teachers operating Student Action Teams;
 - Offer training for a core group of students in each Student Action Team on a cluster basis;
 - Identify possible local partnerships (eg with Local Government) to enable develop of topic focus and financial support for Student Action Teams;
 - Provide sufficient notice to schools about support for Student Action Teams, to enable curriculum planning and integration.

6. School Operation of a Student Action Teams: In supporting the implementation of Student Action Teams at a school or cluster level, the Department of Education and Training:

- Provide explicit information (print and web-based) about the statement of principles and criteria for Student Action Teams, as outlined above;
- Offer Professional Development and program orientation within existing conference and other opportunities to teachers interested to operate Student Action Teams;
- Continue to provide training materials to schools about the operation of Student Action Teams;
- Document and disseminate outcome and process stories of the implementation of Student Action Teams.

School/project recommendations

In their Final Reports, schools were asked to make recommendations about project processes, particularly within schools. The recommendations are strongly positive, with several saying "Go for it!"

Several schools emphasised the need for a clear and achievable outcome:

"Make sure your students are regular and reliable. Allow the students to make the decisions and run the meetings. Choose an achievable outcome."

"Allow more time than you think you'll need. For primary children, choose something with a result that can be seen at the end. Have support ie time release for writing up final report etc."

Others talked specifically of maximising student decision making:

"Probably include students more in the planning stage – it will give them a wider range of skills."

"Firstly being aware of your clientele is important to establish how you are going to approach the topic. The type of children and the number of children will dictate how you set up and run your activity. For example, ensuring that those most in need of personal and academic self-confidence are given the opportunity to improve in these areas is of paramount importance. Then in the case of our unit of work mixing them with the more confident, instils consistency and confidence in those less able students."

"You also need to have the confidence in the students themselves that they will complete the activity successfully. The more responsibility you give to them the better they will respond to the challenge, and will then as a consequence enjoy what they are doing and feel that they have real ownership of the activity."

Principles and Recommendations: Student Action Teams

Principle	Program level <i>A State or Regional program which:</i>	School level <i>A State or Regional program which:</i>	SAT Team level <i>A State or Regional program which:</i>
Context, Community and Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to local school needs, opportunities and priorities. • Builds capacity in schools and community. • Creates an active discourse within a community of learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies priorities and goals. • Considers contextual challenges and opportunities. • Involves and serves the community. • Enhances social and human capital of staff, students and community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigates local needs. • Identifies contextual challenges and opportunities. • Chooses a focus for action which involves and serves the community.
Collaboration and Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances connections between and within schools and communities. • Collaborates with schools and is informed by seasonal and structural requirements encountered in relation to timing, workload and alignment with school priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports activity with collaborative process. • Ensures ongoing communication between all stakeholders. • Aims to enhance relationships between participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works as a team in an inclusive and supportive manner. • Collaborates and communicates with students, teachers and school community. • Values and seeks the input of all stakeholders.
Choice and Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates school-based choice and control in regard to participation and implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies needs and strategies. • Distributes leadership & responsibility. • Uses supportive accountability processes. • Supports staff to empower student leadership, responsibility and action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chooses a focus. • Explores and selects strategies and actions. • Takes responsibility for producing the results and outcomes.
Contribution, Citizenship and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies purpose of the program. • Adopts processes which facilitate alignment between values and goals underpinning the program and the means and methods of actualising the program. • Supports integrity of program with appropriate level of resourcing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies and values the purpose of the project. • Ensures alignment between project goals, values and processes. • Acknowledges contributions and values service. • Supports integrity of program with appropriate level of resourcing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes clear the purpose of the activity. • Chooses work of value and values the work it does. • Ensures that the project contributes to the school and its community. • Works in ways that ensure an alignment of purpose and process.

"Finally it is important that the teachers do know where the project is heading. It would be unfair to leave the children in the dark and allow things to be too vague as this would be counter productive to what is being attempted."

"Important to, at all stages, involve students in key decision-making so that they have ownership of the program and hence their enthusiasm and commitment is maintained."

"Plan carefully and well. Allow for as much student participation as possible. Be adaptive and encouraging. Enjoy the experience along with the students."

Some talked of project size and processes:

"Keep it small and attainable and make sure there is timetable time for the students to work on it. Regular meetings and plenty of publicity within the school community helps. Be flexible as anything can put a spanner in the works (eg our master plan) and ultimately let the students run the program not the teacher."

Several schools identified the need for a team of staff to be involved, for time release or other incorporation into regular school processes or curriculum:

"While it was an extremely positive experience for both the students and myself, it was extremely time consuming and too much work for a single teacher and a single class to embark on, at the same time trying to cope with teaching and learning the curriculum. If I were to participate in this project again, I would recommend a group of teachers to co-ordinate the project with several classes involved. Each class could be responsible for a different activity, which they are to implement into the college, this would reduce the workload for both students and teachers and make it easier on all to cope with the teaching and learning of the curriculum without too much interruption and extra work to do."

"The major considerations should be:

- A thorough selection process for the students to complete the project;
- A long term view including what withdrawal or class time structure will work in the long term;
- An enthusiastic, skilled, committed teacher to lead the group. This person needs to be paid or the project be put into their allotment;
- A direction in which the project take that would benefit the College or wider community."

"The co-ordinator needs to have the time and energy to pursue the project. A team needs to be developed to share the workload. The students need to select the area they are to work on. Small groups work better."

"Seek a group of teachers willing to be involved - don't try to run the project with only one teacher."

"If possible, incorporate into existing curriculum due to time demands. Most worthwhile."

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Appendix: The Schools

Apollo Bay P-12 College
Ballarat High School
Carrum Primary School
Castlemaine Secondary College
Donald High School
Donald Primary School
Doncaster Secondary College
Drouin Primary School
Drouin Secondary College
Drouin South Primary School
Drouin West Primary School
Erinbank Secondary College
Fawkner Secondary College
Flora Hill Secondary College
Geelong High School
Herne Hill Primary School
Kealba Secondary College
Korumburra Secondary College
Mansfield Primary School
Mansfield Secondary College
Merbein Secondary College
Monmia Primary School
Moonee Ponds Central School
Mornington Park Primary School
Mornington Secondary College
Mount Waverley Secondary College
Numurkah Primary School
Numurkah Secondary College
Patterson River Secondary College
Sale College - Guthridge Campus
Swan Hill North Primary School
Taylors Lakes Secondary College
Tyrrell College
Upfield Secondary College
Upper Yarra Secondary College
Western Heights College