

SWAP : Student Wellbeing Action Partnership

Promoting Student Connectedness : Using Peer Support during Transition and Beyond

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This paper was prepared for partial fulfillment of the Master of Education (Student Wellbeing), Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, 2007. It has been written in accordance with the ethical standards of confidentiality and anonymity of the persons and organisations involved and has been further modified for online use. The purpose of this paper is to provide educators with general information and examples of issues related to student wellbeing and does not necessarily represent the views of CEOM or the University of Melbourne. CEOM and the University of Melbourne do not accept liability for inaccuracies, misrepresentations, omissions or errors in information referenced in the paper or the citations. CEOM and the University of Melbourne gratefully acknowledges the author for making the action research available for public use.

School Profile

Sector – Catholic

Type – Secondary / Co-educational / multi-campus

Setting – Metropolitan

Size – 501-750 students

Abstract

The purpose of the project was to develop an initiative to improve student connectedness at a large senior campus at a secondary co-educational Catholic college. It became evident from the data collected through interviews, surveys, questionnaires and consultations held with students, staff and parents, that the mix of students transiting into this campus from three junior campuses created a segregated school climate. From doing research on topics such as school connectedness, transition, bridging social capital and the concept of students helping students, a peer support group was developed to work with incoming students during transition to encourage student connectedness.

An initial pilot group of twenty-four students and six staff passionate about the cause, worked collaboratively to create a program for Transition Day. Using a questionnaire to identify the transitional needs of the incoming students, the collaborative group split into teams to develop peer support activities based on these needs. The activities were then evaluated by the incoming students and amended based on the results of the evaluation. After consulting with the Leadership Team of the college, the project was enlarged to cater for the whole school and a total of forty-five students and a larger number of staff became part of the process.

The process of the action research project was highly successful due to the collaboration of the stakeholders, the successful promotion of the project by the change agent and the focus on shared ownership. As a result, the initiative has become 'whole school' earlier than anticipated. Due to the busyness of school life however, more time was needed together with members of the collaborative group so that all decisions affecting the process and the outcome of the action research cycle was truly shared and owned by the stakeholders.

Ongoing data collection, observation and evaluation will need to be done for some time to determine whether peer support improves student connectedness. The successful promotion of change has ensured the longevity and sustainability of the project. Peer support will now be offered next year as an ongoing extra curricular program

within the school timetable. Student volunteers involved in the program will be collaboratively working with staff trained in peer support to assist incoming students during transition and beyond.

Initial Vision and Aim

Commencing a new job at the college's senior campus I found my own transition from one of the junior campuses exciting but overwhelming. Having taught at a junior campus for the past thirteen years I was surprised at how little I knew about the senior campus I was now working in. The lack of interaction between these campuses became very evident.

In my role as the year eleven and twelve coordinator (Cluster Coordinator of 150 students) I surveyed sixty year eleven students in my cluster group consisting of students from the junior campuses. They were asked to identify what they liked about the college and what they missed about their junior school. A small number (15 students) mentioned that they liked the adult treatment they received, the use of a cafeteria and being able to use mp3 players in class. They were happy about having the authority to make their own decisions about subject selection and leaving school early on certain days. Overwhelmingly however, at least twenty out of the sixty (a third) when asked the question, "What do you like about the new school?" answered, "Nothing." These comments prompted me to investigate further.

Conducting interviews with some of these students confirmed my own feelings about the lack of connection. The main reason they disliked their new college was because they didn't know the new students or the teachers (hence they too didn't feel connected to the campus or the people in it). Some comments included:

- "One day of orientation at the end of year ten isn't enough to get to know new people." (Student 1)
- "It would have been good to have had the support of students already at the campus to show us around and talk to us about any questions we had." (Student 2)
- "There is a power struggle between the junior campuses and you need to stick together with your old campus friends so you don't get targeted." (Student 3)
- "I'm just not sure I fit in. The school is so big and busy." (Student 4)

It became apparent that although the college offered a transition program, it wasn't adequately addressing the unique composition of students and the lack of connection. Was improving student connectedness going to become the focus of my action research project?

School Context

After speaking with staff and students, and from research on connectedness, the following ideas to improve student connectedness began to emerge :-

- organizing classes to be in home groups
- organizing retreat programs that involve all the junior campuses so that "building relationships" could occur earlier
- having staff move between campuses to better understand the school cultures
- improving the transition program to focus more on connecting students.

My decision to focus on transition came from viewing the results of the principal's consultations with members of the college community as part of the School Improvement Framework (SIF) program (a Catholic Education Office

Melbourne initiative). By critically reflecting on the five spheres of schooling including student wellbeing, the school looked at developing an improvement plan. Some student wellbeing improvements needed at the school as suggested by a cross section of the whole school community including parents, students and staff, focused on introducing a peer support program for the current year elevens to work with incoming year tens at the end of the year as part of transition.

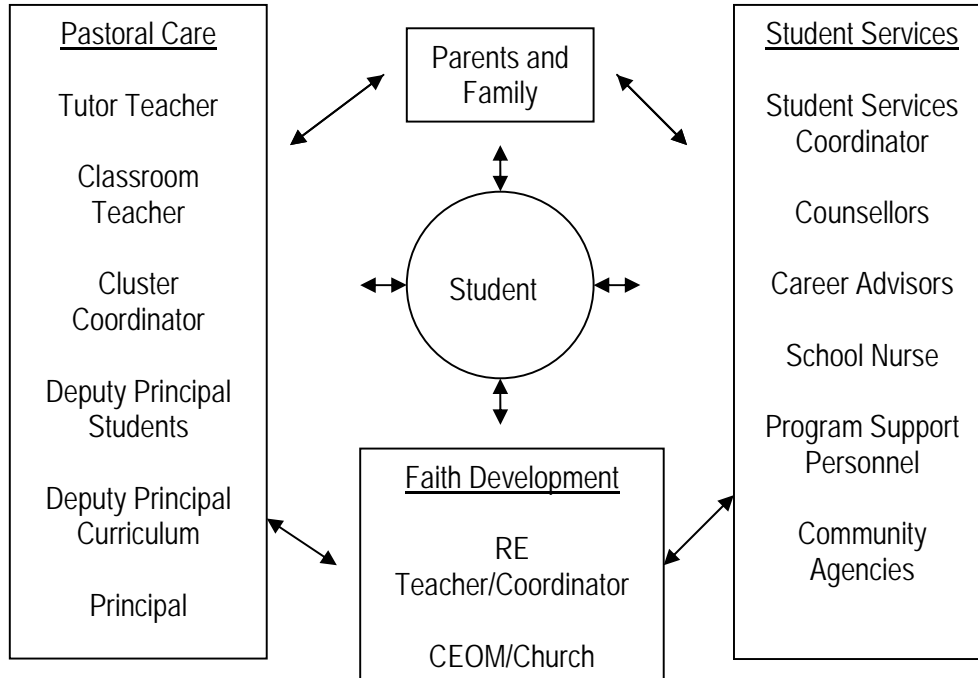
After reviewing and analysing the current situation and practice at the college, the evidence supporting the need for change with the current transition program to improve student connectedness was compelling. Although information about the VCE process and the campus itself was covered well through several information evenings and at transition day, the "Transition Program" also needed to provide ongoing preventative measures to promote school connectedness in order for students to feel comfortable in their new environment.

Background

According to Stoll (1999), although there are some positive aspects of starting in a new school such as excitement and a sense of maturity that comes from being treated more independently, anxiety provoking situations need to be addressed to minimize their affects, preferably before they become issues. Research on transition suggests that as with any change process, students entering a new school can feel shock, anger, denial, depression and then, with much support, acceptance of what cannot be changed (Kubler-Ross as cited in Stoll, 1999). It is therefore important to engage students in preventative activities to ensure that during the transition stage these negative emotions do not magnify creating behavioural and emotional problems.

It became evident that although the college expended a lot of its resources of time and staffing to student wellbeing at the intervention level through the recent development of a new "Student Services Building" and appointment of a "Student Services Coordinator" (Figure 1) as stated in the "Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools" (1998), student wellbeing should also involve, at a whole school level, the promotion of ongoing preventive practices including those relating to student connectedness.

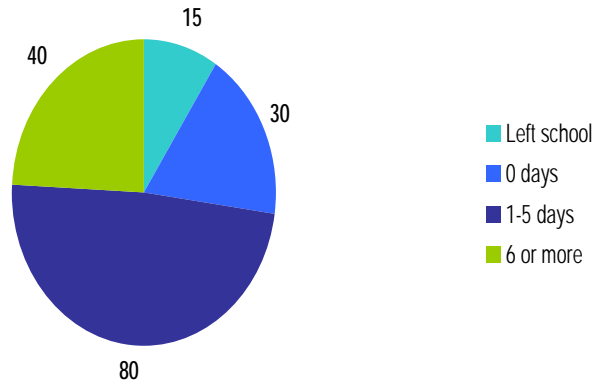
Figure 1
Student Wellbeing Resources



The college has a number of incidents relating directly to the area of wellbeing that are not being adequately addressed using preventative measures. There had been incidents of fighting among students from the different campuses, bullying and harassment, school violence, emotional distress and substance / tobacco use.

I was also able to collect data that indicated a high rate of student absenteeism and early school leaving. In my cluster of one hundred and sixty five students, fifteen left school without completing the year. Out of the one hundred and fifty remaining, only thirty students (one fifth) had not taken a day off school this year. Out of the remaining one hundred and twenty, eighty (two thirds) had taken between one and five days off, and forty (one third) had taken more than six days off this year. (Graph 1)

Graph 1
Absenteeism in Cluster Group



There is evidence to suggest that if student connectedness is improved there will be a significant reduction in absenteeism and early school leaving. As stated in the “Wingspread Declaration” (2004), students are also more likely to succeed when they feel connected to the school.

Stated in the “Journal of School Health” (2004), these negative outcomes are possibly attributed to inadequate environmental provisions in areas including:

- the physical and emotional safety of all students
- the application of fair and consistent disciplinary policies
- the creative trusting relationship that students have among themselves, teachers, staff, and families.

Although the Mission Statement of the College focuses on aiming to provide an environment which creates a positive learning community where each student is valued and feels connected, the evidence would suggest further work remains to be done.

According to Stoll (1999) schools need to educate students on learning how to live together by developing an understanding and appreciation of interdependence with others through participation and co-operation. This can be achieved by developing and enhancing a school’s internal capacity, that is, “the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning [for staff]...for the purpose of enhancing student learning.” (Stoll, p. 506)

A school’s internal capacity can be negatively affected by the social forces at work. These forces can include the particular mix of students which can influence how a school functions, largely because of the cumulative effect of the peer group processes i.e. how the students relate and act as a group (Thrupp as cited in Stoll, 1999). In order to develop a positive climate, the college needs to devote time to programs that establish trust and openness between students. This can be achieved through the promotion of collegiality and teamwork among staff, listening (especially to students) and seeking connectedness.

Examples of projects that focus on this notion include the “Gatehouse Project” (Patton, Glover, Bond, Butler, Godfrey, DePietro and Bowes, 2000) and the “Mindmatters Project” (Sheehan, Cahill, Rowling, Marshall, Wyn and Holdsworth 2002). These initiatives value the importance of developing positive connection with peers and building a sense of security and trust through enhancing skills and opportunities for good social connectedness.

According to Sammons (2006), school effectiveness includes producing a positive culture and an orderly environment. Ineffective schools may be composed of multiple groups formed around cliques and friendship. In order for the college to be an effective school, these groups must be brought together so that the school culture becomes a balance of instrumental outcomes (task achievement and social control) and expressive outcomes (good social relationships and social cohesion). (Hargreaves, 1995)

Putman and Feldstein (2004) suggest that by finding or creating a new dimension of similarity in which bonding can occur is a way of bridging social capital (fostering relationships across social divisions). It's about coming together to argue as well as to share. According to Putman (2000), one way is to create opportunities for meaningful youth contribution and establish mentoring programs that work and by asking youth for solutions.

In an article written by Carr (1996), peers play a crucial role in assisting adolescents with the outcomes of transition. He explains how peers can and do act as positive role models. They can demonstrate appropriate social behaviours. Peers often listen to, accept and understand the frustrations, challenges, and concerns associated with being a teenager. As quoted in Carr:

Peers provide an opportunity for teens to meet their needs, to feel capable, to belong, to be respected, and to have fun.... The peer group encourages autonomy, mutuality, and experimentation with self guided roles....the peer group may often be more accepting of the feeling, thoughts, and actions associated with this search for self-identity. (p.2)

According to Mizelle and Irvin (2000), at a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, transition into senior high school often disrupts friendship networks and can interfere with students' success. Therefore it is important for high school transition programs to provide incoming students social support with activities that give them the opportunity to know and develop positive relationship with older students and other incoming students.

An evaluation of the "Big Brothers/Big Sisters" mentoring program (Barnes, 1992) provides evidence that mentoring programs positively affect young people. The study conducted by "Public/Private Ventures" in New Jersey in 1995 found that students involved in a mentoring program were less likely to be violent or start using drugs and alcohol. Students also improved their school attendance and performance, experienced positive attitude toward completing school work, and improved their peer relationships.

Long and Short Term Goals

Armed with this information my action research project had a solid basis to work from. I decided that my **long term goal** would be to improve student connectedness through:

1. Establishing an ongoing whole school peer support program that promotes student connectedness at the college.
2. Training students to assist with the transition program and work with year 11 students throughout their first year at the College.

My **short term goals** (for the purpose of this assignment) would be:

To work **collaboratively with staff and students** in my year levels (cluster) to:

1. Establish a voluntary pilot peer support group to work with the new students in my cluster entering the college during "Transition Day" in December.

2. Assess the transitional needs of the current year 10 students at the junior campuses.
3. Develop activities to run with the new students on "Transition Day".
4. Evaluate whether the activities created by the peer support group for the transition program would meet the needs of the incoming students.
5. Establish whether the project was a collaborative effort.

Collaborative Group

According to Nodding (2001), to truly "care" about providing the needs of students, it is important to listen to the needs of the one's being cared for. Therefore, the students who formed the peer support group became part of the collaborative group. I also enlisted the support of staff in my cluster (stakeholders) who were directly involved in working with this group during the transition program. I ended up with six staff members (the student services coordinator, a counsellor and four tutor pastoral teachers) who, with the peer support group, became part of my collaborative working party.

I decided that being new to the campus it would be advisable to enlist in the support of longer serving staff members who hopefully had the respect of others. I became a member of the new "Transition Review Task Force" that was implemented by the principal due to the results of the consultations. With the support of this team (consisting of other year level coordinators and both deputy principals) and with my sense of moral purpose and knowledge of the skills of being an agent of change (Fullan, 1993) I was hopeful of developing successful strategies to initiate and sustain the change proposed.

Short Term Goal 1: Establish a voluntary pilot peer support group to work with the new students (in my cluster) entering the college during "Transition Day".

June 26

- Introduced project to the staff and students in my cluster. Explained the rationale and ground work already done in terms of what the community of the college wanted. Asked for students and staff volunteers. Used the example of a recent incident to strengthen the case for the need of this project. (Having moral purpose, Fullan, 1993)

July 20

- Had student volunteers originally for 2 of the junior campuses. Students originally from the other campus were hesitant to get involved because they wanted more information about the project. Marcus (2000) suggests that stakeholders should be involved in planning their own fate. It appears that some students prefer to have structure to alleviate anxiety about the unknown. After being reassured, they joined.

July 23

- Transition Coordinator (Deputy Principal) and Principal were verbally informed about project.
- Principal offered to get special badges for the students involved. Indicator of collaboration and shared ownership of the project. I was hopeful that with top down mandating, the project had a better chance of ongoing success. (Fullan, 1999)

July 26

- Collaborative group of six staff and twenty-four students was established.
- "Short Term Goal 1" achieved.

July 27

- Touched base with Deputy Principal (Transition Coordinator) – member of my validation group. (McNiff, 2002) Keeping the project alive and in the minds of staff at the college through having good continuous communication will help get the project moving (Fullan 1999).

Short Term Goal 2: Assess the transitional needs of the current year ten students at the junior campuses.

August 2

- Meeting Number 1 with the students in the transition team and the collaborative group. All twenty-four students turned up. Indicator of interest in project.

Suggestions made and approved by group: Indication of collaboration and shared ownership:

1. "Let's get the group to go to the junior schools to introduce themselves." (Staff Member A)
2. Staff Member B made a suggestion of putting a questionnaire flier together for the incoming students that explained the concept of the student involvement in the transition team and asked them what we could do to help them with transition. She ended up designing it, indicator of shared ownership. I was consciously making an effort to value the contribution of members in collaborative group.
3. Student 2 mentioned it would be good for the group to wear their uniform so that they would be more recognizable to the year tens. To establish that the collaborative group was indeed working as a team, I asked if they felt like part of the process. The reply was an overwhelming "yes". Maybe my enthusiasm as a change agent was spreading?

August 5

- "Open Day". Questionnaire given to year 10 students asking them three simple questions :-
 1. What are you looking forward to about coming to the senior campus next year?
 2. What concerns do you have about changing schools?
 3. How can the students in the transition team help you with transition?

August 10

- Meeting Number 2 with the students in the transition team and the collaborative group.
- Collation of year ten questionnaire results was done using the "Bin Method" where replies were put into two groups and summarized. Names on questionnaires were removed for ethical reasons although we kept originals for evaluating effectiveness of program next year when these students are interviewed. Results below:

LIKES (about transiting to new campus)

- Meeting new people
- New activities
- New opportunities
- The Darwin Trip
- Having different subjects

CONCERNS (about transition to new campus)

- Traveling to school
- Not coping with the work load and the pressures of VCE
- Feeling isolated
- Not being accepted by others

- Not choosing the right subjects
- Feeling uncomfortable around new people and the new environment
- Getting lost
- Getting career advice
- Losing friendship groups
- Being bullied by students from the other campuses
- Not knowing the teachers and a lot of the students

I was extremely happy with this meeting. Results indicate that the needs of the new students were identified in a collaborative way. "Short Term Goal Number 2" achieved.

August 22

- Staff from collaborative group looked at peer support programs to assist with creating activities such as: "Stride", "Get it Together" (Peer Support Foundation Vic) and support from Roger Holdsworth from the Youth Research Centre.
- We ordered \$200 worth of Rey Carr and Greg Saunders Peer Support resources: "The Peer Counselling Starter Kit"; "The Mentor Program Development Resource Kit"; "The Theory and Practice of Peer Counselling"; "A Peer Counselling Evaluation for a Secondary School" and "The Peer Helping Students for Dropout Prevention".

Short Term Goal 3: Develop activities to run with the new students on "Transition Day".

September 3

- Meeting Number 3 with the students in the transition team and the collaborative group. To apply appropriate ethical standards for running this project, permission slips and contracts we given out to students and staff.
- Teams were created and focus groups planned. Not all students attended because of other school commitments, but of those that did attend, they were enthusiastic and made excellent suggestions. Outcome of this meeting indicates that "Short Term Goal 3" was well on its way to being achieved collaboratively.

Results below:

Staff member A and 5 students will create ice breaker activities and a film with students in the transition team as main actors explaining the way the school operates and all the rules. (Activity 1) Staff member B will organise ID cards for the students in the transition team to hand out to their group of year tens that would have their name, photo, tutor group room and email address so that new students would have access to them throughout next year. (Activity 2) Staff members C and D and 4 students will create a map and tour of the school. (Activity 3) Staff members E and F will organise a question sheet for new students to use and give to students in the transition team if new students have any concerns or questions not answered during "Transition Day". (Activity 4) Staff member G and 4 students will organise lunch for the group and travel buddies for those not comfortable to travel to the college alone. (Activity 5)

Students in the transition team were organized into three groups of eight students that would be tagged to the three new year eleven tutor classes; a ratio of one to three new year eleven students.

Short Term Goal 4: Evaluate whether the activities created for the transition program would meet the needs of the incoming students.

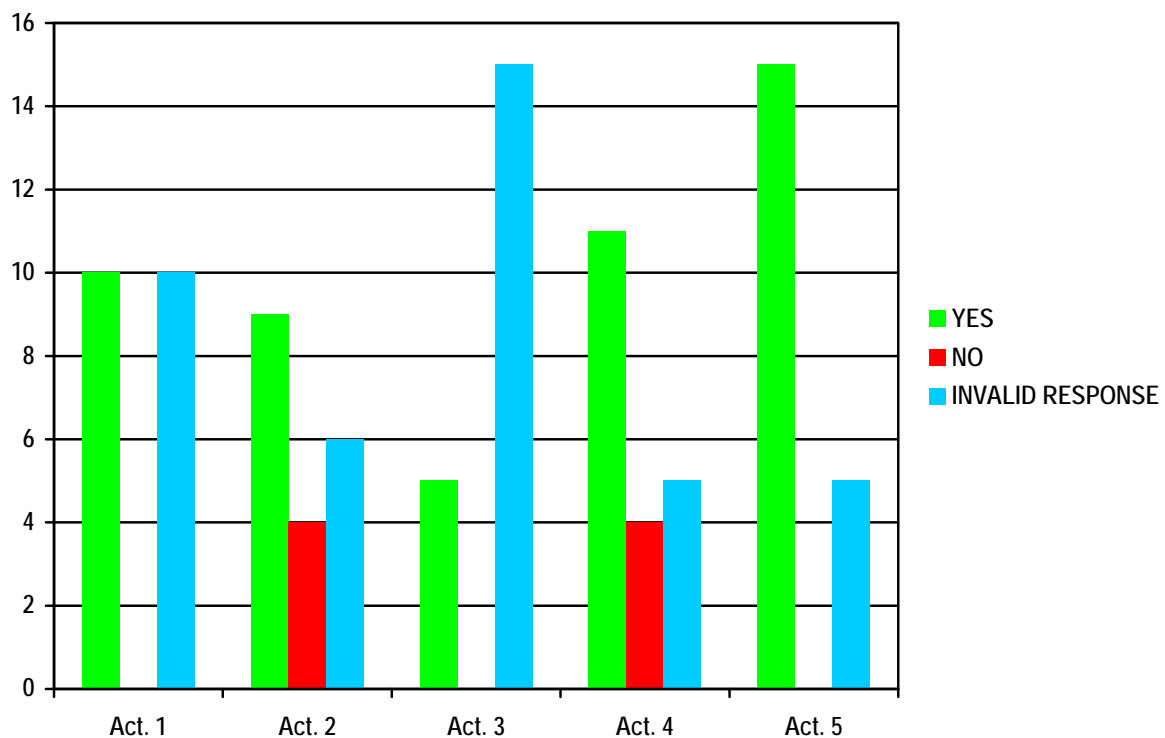
September 5

- Evaluation survey sent to "Transition Coordinators" at the junior campuses. The email explained the purpose of the project and why we needed an evaluation of the proposed activities. We asked them to interview ten students to see whether the activities suggested by the student transition team would meet their transitional needs and what could be added. This questionnaire was piloted with members of the student transition team and students not involved in the project to see if it was easy to understand.

September 19

- Meeting Number 4 with the student transition team and the collaborative group. Evaluation survey results read and assessed. Result of evaluation was not completely useful because students misunderstood some of the questions. Since the interviews were conducted by staff outside the collaborative group, these misunderstandings were not clarified "Short Term Goal Number 4", to some extent, achieved. (Graph 2)

Graph 2
Results of Evaluation for meeting student needs



- From the responses done accurately, it was concluded the activities organized for "Transition Day" would meet their needs as long as we included more information about how the school operates. Two changes were made to the activities as a direct result of the evaluation: the video and tour of the school would now include more information than originally suggested. Short Term Goal 4 achieved.

Short Term Goal 5: Establish whether the project was a collaborative effort.

September 8

- Met with staff in collaborative group and informally asked them how they felt the project was coming along and whether they felt part of the process. Due to time restraints, only staff members in the collaborative group were interviewed. However indicators identified earlier do demonstrate collaboration among students.
- Comments included:
 - " I definitely feel part of the project. We have been actively involved in the decision making process and you have kept us informed of what is going on every step of the way." (Staff member A)
 - "The fact that we are working in small groups to put together the activities shows collaboration." (Staff member B)
 - "I like how my suggestions are taken on board and used. It is great that the students are part of the creating and not just told what to do." (Staff member C)
 - "This is getting bigger than Ben Hur! Definitely collaborative. Everyone is talking about this group. Students from my other classes want to know how they can get involved." (Staff member D)

September 14

- As a result of the principal's request, the Leadership Team was presented with a proposal of the project and the outcomes thus far. Due to school busyness, the proposal was not able to be presented earlier than this time. We were able to work on the project because we already had verbal consent from the principal.
- The principal suggested that staff be trained for peer support and that it be included as part of the extra curricular program being implemented into school timetable next year. Indication of ongoing and long term goal process beginning.
- The Leadership Team suggested that we use the students in the transition team to work with the whole school.

September 17

- Further discussion with the principal took place to clarify the suggestion of expanding the initiative. Issues discussed included :
 1. Ownership of project also belonged to the students in the transition team and they need to feel the benefits of the project. It may be overwhelming for such a small group to work with 470 students.
 2. It will be harder to evaluate if all cluster groups participate. No comparison.
 3. The activities organized may not be as effective if only one of the students in the team works with a group of twenty students.
 4. The project may not be effective in promoting student connectedness if the current students in the transition team who are part of my cluster will now be working with students from another cluster.

The principal believed that the benefits of project should be felt by all and that maybe we should increase the numbers involved.

ACTION PLAN CYCLE 2

Plan: To meet with the collaborative group and revise action needed for expanding the initiative.

Short Term Goal 1: To enlist in the support of more students and staff volunteers so that the project can be expanded to a whole school level without affecting the process of collaboration or the purpose of improving student connectedness.

- Met with Collaborative staff and informed them of the change. We enlisted in the help of Cluster Coordinators to provide us with names of students suitable to join group.
- We organised a training day which was put into the school timetable (October 31st) and a staff meeting (October 9th) where staff will be informed about the project. This way the whole school would be adequately prepared and the chances of success increased.

September 19

- Meeting Number 5 with larger group of students in the transition team and the collaborative group. Gave out permission slip for training session on October 31st to the new group of forty-five students. Goal achieved, but the new members are not all volunteers. I would need to use my skills as a change agent to make them feel part of future action.

September 20

- With the involvement of the transition team at a transition meeting, Student facilitated activities were structured into the Transition Day timetable (see below)

TRANSITION DAY DECEMBER 7TH 2007

9.00 – 10.00am: Whole School Assembly

Introduction of the students in the transition team to whole school body.

10.00 – 11.00am: Ice breaker activities in tutor groups and tour around the school.

11.00 – 11.30am – RECESS (students needing travel buddies to meet with volunteers to offer assistance with travel).

11.30am – 12.30pm: Ice breaker activities in tutor groups and tour around the school.

12.30pm – 1.20pm: LUNCH IN CLUSTERS – Students in the transition team to sit with their group and introduce students to others in the same Cluster.

1.20 – 2.00pm – Assembly in cluster groups –video to be shown at the start of the assembly explaining rules and structure of school.

2.20 – 3.00pm – Students in the transition team to answer any questions in small groups. Cards with contact details are handed out to the students. Dismissal

October 9

- Staff meeting held. The Transition Coordinator and I explained the concept of Transition Day and asked for volunteers to assist with the process. An excellent response; eight staff members volunteered to be involved and others commented on what a great idea it was.

Reflection

In looking back it appears that the process and outcome of the action research project met our expectations and, in some ways, exceeded them. The process of working collaboratively with others was, at times, frustrating because it was difficult to get everyone together. To compensate, special effort was made to catch up with those

that missed a meeting to keep them regularly informed. Although there were indicators suggesting that the short term goals were achieved, the process of obtaining volunteer members (especially when the group was enlarged) was not done based on their genuine interest in the project. Some students were strongly encouraged to get involved due to their leadership credentials or because there was an urgency for more numbers.

It was pleasing to see how the collaborative group were actively involved in the decision making process and the development of the project. Student members felt a sense of importance and ownership of the project when they realized that they were in charge of putting together activities based on meeting the needs of the incoming students.

Although the evaluative process was not done thoroughly (due to time restraints and therefore not checking the survey questions thoroughly for possible misunderstandings) it did, to some extent, provide valuable information and enabled us to amend some of the activities to include more information about how the school runs in the video and tour of the school.

It was evident from the way in which the project changed from an initial pilot trial to a whole school initiative earlier than anticipated that the action research process itself was successful. Although initially concerned that the project would lose its effectiveness and become a token gesture that would not ultimately achieve the aim of improving student connectedness, we were able to initiate a second action cycle to address this.

As suggested in Marsh (2000), through decreasing the restraining forces (limited resources e.g. students, staff and time availability) and increasing the facilitating forces (getting more students and staff involved, organizing a training day for all students and staff involved and increasing awareness of the project through the staff meeting) we were able to eliminate the possible risks of the project being ineffective and failing. After all, if successfully implemented, it will benefit more students and is more likely to become ongoing and embedded into the school program and hence achieve our long term aim of improving student connectedness.

Conclusion

Next year's Transition Day will need to be evaluated by the students and staff involved in the project as and the incoming students will also need to be interviewed about the process. To evaluate the outcome of the long term goal of improving student connectedness (and hence the effectiveness of the action research project) evidence will need to be collected through surveys, interviews and absenteeism statistics to see if student behaviour and anxiety improves within the school. It may be some time before improvement is noticed, if at all.

As an agent of change I have learned that when doing action research nothing can or should be assumed. Ideally having to implement a project of this magnitude with time restraints is not recommended. To truly have a collaborative approach, the "selling" of the project needs time as does the need to facilitate organizational change so that a sense of ownership of the project is spread between stakeholders.

According to McNiff (2002), action research involves learning from colleagues and them learning from you. Your individual "I-enquiry" should turn into a collective "we-enquiry". This has happened to some extent due to my conscious awareness of the importance of collaboration and evaluating what I was doing as a change agent so that the likelihood of collaboration and shared ownership of the project would occur. However it was difficult to have all members actively involved at all times.

It is evident that the project has had an impact on the whole school community. The issue of school connectedness is one that is fresh in the minds of the administration, partly because of the results of the School Improvement Framework surveys, but also partly because of the passion demonstrated by those involved in the project. As a result, many things are changing at the college.

The introduction of a weekly afternoon of activities has ensured that peer support will continue and students will be properly trained by staff to be mentors for the new students each year. Students involved will also be able to get accreditation towards their Religious Education (Community Service) course. Having peer support embedding into the curriculum is a good way to secure continuation of the program. Many staff members have become aware of the importance of student connectedness. As Fullan (1993) suggests, "you can't mandate what matters because there are no shortcuts to changes in systems' cultures. But like-minded people, pushing for change do add up." (p. 143).

In my recent appointment as Director of Student Wellbeing (a new position created partly because of the implementation of this project) and as a member of the Leadership Team I will be in an optimum position to influence the sustainability of this project. I have already booked a PD training session on peer support for myself and other staff interested. Next year I will also be involving students in helping other students with social issues. In organising the whole school pastoral care program I can continue to evaluate, plan and implement student connectedness initiatives. After all, action research never ends.