

**0026**

**Youth participation in evaluation: Young people should be seen and heard!**

C.S. Bell, Dr P.K. St Leger

*The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia*

This paper reports on the evaluation of two Victorian educational initiatives that involved a high degree of student participation in the evaluation process. Both evaluations involved capturing student perspectives through photography, in order to portray their understandings of the relationship between leadership and the potential to create change in their communities.

The first example is an evaluation of a philanthropic youth program run in many Australian schools that aims to develop young peoples' leadership skills to enable them to make changes in their communities, with an emphasis being on 'change not charity'.

The second example is an evaluation of a pilot program that aimed to deliver innovative and high quality leadership and enterprise educational programs to secondary school students.

Real and significant youth participation involves young people taking an active part in all stages of decision-making on issues that affect them. In terms of educational programs, young people can play a meaningful role in program evaluation through the key stages of program development.

The challenge for educators and evaluators is to create genuine opportunities whereby young people are empowered to share their knowledge, are listened to, and taken seriously. Some of the ways in which young people can enrich the evaluation process are put forward in this paper with two examples of student-led evaluations in Victoria.

The paper will also explore issues and challenges that surround youth participation in the evaluation of educational programs.