

Connect

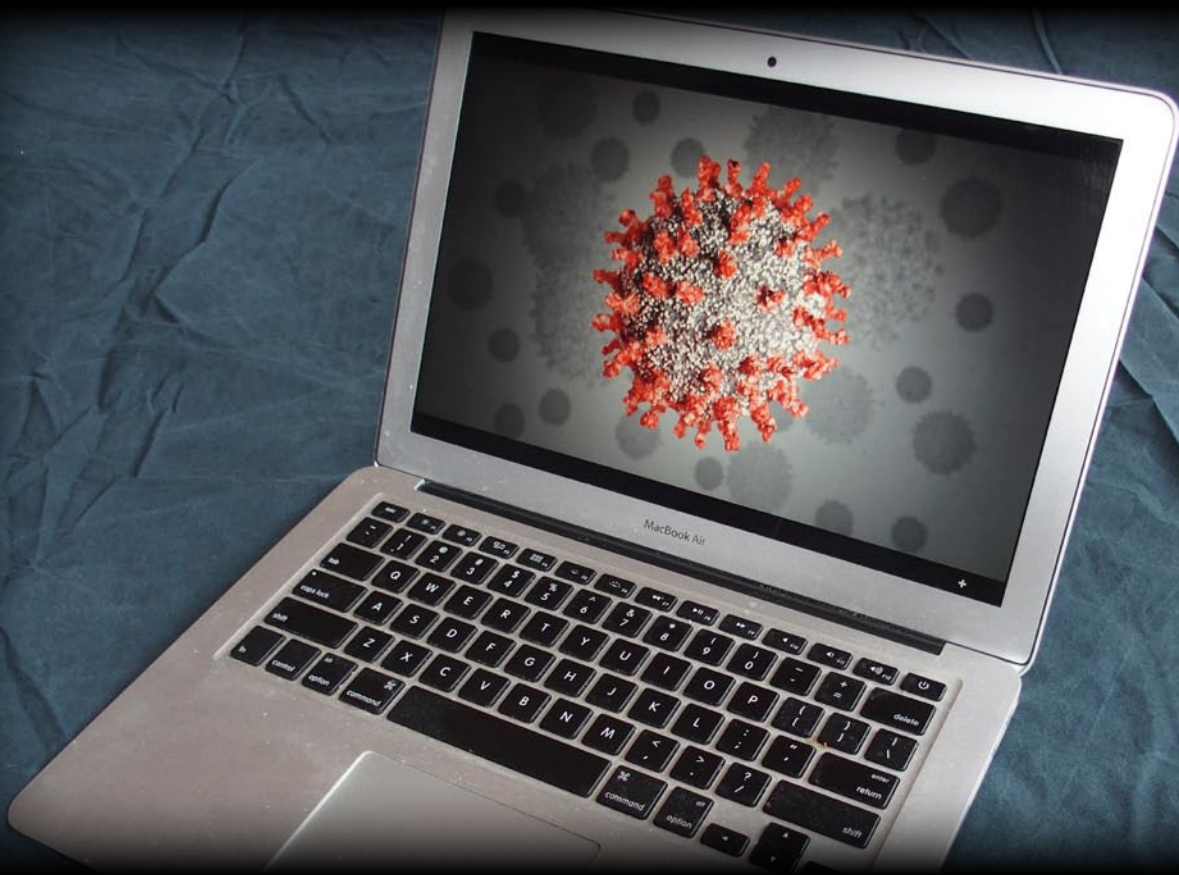
supporting student participation

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On-line, remote, blended, face-to-face: What do we learn about student voice, agency & participation?

Challenges, questions, opportunities:

Reflections & examples of practices

plus

- **Creating new spaces for belonging ...**
- **Family School Partnerships**
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- **Observations of Student Voice in Brazil**
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This Issue:

In the previous *Connect* issue, we started a conversation about how student voice, agency and partnerships were being maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic – with the closure of schools and on-line learning being the norm.



Lots of people responded with stories of school practices – and reflections on experiences. Increasingly, and as schools started to re-open and students (and teachers) began returning to face-to-face learning in classrooms, the discussions turned to the lessons that had been learnt ... and the ways in which education would and should **not** return to 'normal'. This issue of *Connect* was compiled during these changing times – so it remains a 'work in progress'.

There are stories here from students, teachers and others from several areas, both in Australia and internationally. There are also some important resources shared that have been developed over this time.

In particular, can I point to some questions about negotiating learning, either on-line or face-to-face, that I've included on pages 42-43 of this issue.

Fearing that a protracted period of on-line and isolated learning would result in a dominant practice of assigned tasks to be completed by students, with little learner agency (of choice or construction), I began to think about how we might alter the conversations about learning. It was apparent in much of the language about learning, that a 'factory' or 'work task' model of education was still reflected in both student and teacher descriptions: students were given instructions about 'work' to be completed and submitted, and there was less explicit reference to learning.

On the other hand, I know that many students and teachers are also intuitively or explicitly using 'inquiry' approaches to learning. Those classes are vibrant and questioning; students are driving their own education. I was reminded that these 'different' learning processes have a long history here: in STC (the alternative Victorian senior secondary school course of the 1970s and 1980s); in Garth Boomer's 'Negotiating the Curriculum'; in the Middle Years work of James Beane and others in the early 1990s. In these, students' questions drove their control of learning.

But in a situation of remote learning – and now back to face-to-face schools – where there is a danger of reverting to limiting practices – it is useful to remind us of some of these basic questions, particularly when we now talk of 'co-constructing learning'. I hope these questions – and this whole issue of *Connect* – is useful.

Next Issue ...

It's not over yet - and maybe it will never be the same! What are we learning? Let's keep reflecting and documenting and sharing the stories. **We'd all love to hear from you!**

Roger Holdsworth

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Challenges, Questions, & Opportunities:

On-line learning & return to the classroom: Thinking about Student Voice, Agency & Participation

We are going through an extended time of changes in the learning environment, from self-isolation, remote learning, 'blended learning' of on-line and face-to-face learning – and now a gradual return to classrooms, involving some form of 'physical distancing'. Hopefully this also enables us to engage in important self-reflection about the many challenges and new opportunities around student voice and agency.

What are we learning? How will our practices be changed? What have we realised really matters and what matters a little less?

Opportunities

I want to firstly believe that, with any challenge, this situation also poses opportunities and new possibilities that we may not have previously imagined. But we need to articulate what these are:

How can the voices of students be heard, and how can they have meaningful agency in this on-line world and beyond?

Can we – students, teachers, researchers, policy makers etc – think about this: pose further dilemmas, and work together to develop some practical ideas?

The questions we need to ask

I'm trying to set out here some of the **issues of concern** as a start to the next step of brainstorming some **practical ideas**. I'd also suggest that while these issues become more urgent in an on-line environment, they continue to reflect similar issues that are also of continuing

interest within face-to-face and blended classrooms – and that the ideas that we develop will be of interest beyond the current circumstances.

I initially framed these issues as relating to the 'remote' or on-line learning relationships between teachers/schools and students, both individually and collectively, but also have somewhat expanded this to recognise some of the continuing issues associated with parents both as the primary educators of young people, and also with their enhanced role in on-line environments. And the return to 'blended' and face-to-face educational environments opens up further questions and opportunities.

What we learn

Therefore, a key question is about what we can learn during this time, and how this might shape learning when we are back – full-time or part-time – in our varying school contexts.

- How might this experience **change** the nature of schools, learning and education – so that the 'new normal' is not just going back to the way it was?
- In particular, as some students and teachers perhaps have experienced a greater opportunity to explicitly exert agency over their learning

**Returning to school:
10 year old to parent:
'I think I've
learnt school
underestimates me.'**

(even if that is individualised and reactive), how can we further strengthen these opportunities in both remote and face-to-face situations?

- How can we ensure that these changes enable stronger and more inclusive learning opportunities for **all** learners?
- What are the good things that we've had to do/adapt/create as a matter of necessity, but can also see how these practices could enhance our ways of connecting, supporting and facilitating **student voice, agency and meaningful participation**?
- What are some things that we would **not** want to return to and how/why have our assumptions or views about these previous practices changed? What are some things we might want to let go of? What are some things we might want to hold onto? Why does this matter and how will this strengthen agentic opportunities for all?
- What is/isn't working for students and teachers (and families or our school community) and how can school leaders/schools/departments/governments etc seek and respond to this information without additional student/teacher/school burden?

Some concerns around student voice, agency and participation

As more decisions are made *for* students (and for *all* of us: borders close, schools shut or not, events cancelled), students can easily be positioned solely as silent, passive and compliant recipients of information and instruction. It could be seductively 'easy' to make the dominant mode of learning even more one of 'read this chapter/information and complete this exercise' or 'use the internet to find out facts' (*death by worksheet as well as by powerpoint!*).

Assessment could then become an agent of surveillance of students' learning (or a 'check box'/quota approach to learning activities) rather than a shared reflection on and decision about future learning opportunities and needs.

Further, the dominant mode of on-line learning is most easily an individualised one, with the sole relationship being between a teacher (who sets up the on-line classroom and tasks) and an individual compliant student who individually completes the tasks.

How can we ensure students are able to meaningfully connect with one another, contribute and participate in education in **ways and degrees of their choosing** and **without coercion**?

The power relationship in constructing the on-line learning space may also become problematical – where one person is able to mute students or to restrict access. What are the privacy considerations? On the other hand, some students may perceive such an on-line classroom as creating a 'safe space' to contribute their voices.

These changes are difficult for students, teachers and families – and have

places great pressures on them to adapt and change their ways of working. Most schools and teachers have made enormous commitments to ensure that education continues.

What mechanisms for voice and agency are needed to support student and staff wellbeing during remote/on-line/distance and blended learning, particularly when opportunities for regular connection and 'checking in' are more limited and more distant? How can we support families where parents and carers may themselves have challenges in supporting student learning in these new spaces in which they find themselves?

I'm sure that there are many more questions, challenges – and opportunities.

*A summary of some of these challenges is put forward in the attached table. This is based on specific understandings of the meaning of **Student Voice, Student Agency and Student Participation in Decision-Making** (in partnership with teachers, parents and others). It also hints at much practical work that has already been done and documented in these areas.*

The challenge today is about shifting this to an on-line and 'physically isolated' environment or to a 'blended' learning environment or to a situation in which some or all students and teachers return to classrooms, and ensuring that limited and limiting approaches do not become the norm.

The table also emphasises the concern that on-line education where people are physically separated – as also in face-to-face classroom situations – might be seen only as

about individualised learning (eg individual lesson plans; one-on-one communication).

I want to challenge us to think beyond this. Students have indicated that the social environment of classrooms and schools is important and enjoyable – and that they learn in social ways, from and with each other. We cannot lose sight of that within an on-line or blended environment.

*The following are some more specific comments about the issues of **Student Voice, Student Agency and Participation, Students with Real Roles of Value, and the Equity implications of on-line learning.***

Student Voice

Student voice is understood as the expressions that students/young people make of their views and ideas – whether verbally, visually, behaviourally etc. Voice is important in providing feedback to teachers/parents, but only so long as it is **heard, listened to, responded to**, and seen to **result in action and change**. Hence there are challenges, not so much about students expressing their voices, but about whether those expressions result in any outcomes. In the best classrooms and schools, there are ways to enable, support and listen to what students have to say – to recognise their knowledge and wisdom, and their contribution to the learning of all.

- **How does this happen in an on-line environment?**
- Further, how do students **share** voices and views, discuss and argue them, come to agreement or not, and attempt to express collective views?
- How have on-line Student Councils (SRCs) worked: what have been their possibilities and shortcomings?



- How might models of their operation change to reflect an on-line/remote learning world or one in which only some students are physically present and others on-line – and how might students investigate possibilities to ‘own’ such changed approaches?

As in the physical class-room, two-way feedback is important in on-line pedagogy and practice. Being on-line provides opportunities for teacher feedback to individual students, but it also needs to include student feedback for teacher improvement and capacity building; and this develops further into shared decision-making about learning, wellbeing and broader school practices. In a remote learning environment, the same questions can be asked:

- How will teachers seek and use student feedback and respond to what students are saying?
- How might teachers and students collectively engage in dialogue, sharing how they are experiencing learning in on-line spaces?
- Who is speaking, who is listened to, and what forms will ‘voice’ take – now we are in this new environment? When some students are physically present, and others are on-line, are some listened to more than others?
- During and after lessons, how will teachers check in with students and families? How might students check in with each other?
- And how can students initiate ways to provide feedback to teachers about their learning environment?
- What protocols and agreed processes could students, families and schools use for this?

Student Agency and Participation

Student agency and participation is about the degree of responsibility and control that students have for and over their learning. At a minimal level, this might be their **choice** between alternatives provided to them by adults/parents, but this can (and should) be easily extended to more significant ways of influencing their learning (including purpose of learning, content, methods/pedagogy, assessment and reflection/evaluation), through setting of individual learning goals, to various levels of **co-design**, and to self-initiated and student-led learning. Students have always exercised varying degrees of individual agency in their learning (eg students are learning all the time, whether others recognise it or not, and are making decisions about that learning; on the other hand, some students have always resisted adult proposals or directions: “*I won’t do/learn this...*”) – and this form of agency might often be reactive rather than fully intentional.

5-year-old: Mum, I haven’t gotten to do any art today!

Parent: You spent half an hour drawing for your school work, and then another hour after school.

5-year-old: But that’s not what I wanted to do!

Parent: Can you explain what you want to do that’s different?

5-year-old: I want to do art that’s from my heart, not that my teacher told me to do!

Student agency in choosing, initiating, driving and pacing their own learning reflects a strong focus on the development of the **General Capabilities**, including ethical responsibility and intercultural awareness, critical and creative thinking. The area of personal and social capability provides a starting point for the development and recognition of knowledge, understandings and skills around individual resilience, working effectively in teams and developing strategies to manage challenging situations

constructively. A focus on SEL skills, including emotional awareness, the building of empathy, and the ability to view issues from another’s viewpoint, can contribute to a sense of community and participation in social issues beyond the school gate.

However, there seems to be an increased danger of these ideas of agency being individualised – both in classrooms/schools, but now on-line.

- What does building and enabling social and collective agency look like – in a classroom, but also on-line and in the wider community?
- How do we do this when students and teachers – or some students and teachers – are physically separated and isolated?
- What has been the experience of ‘distance education’ and ‘virtual learning’ here ... beyond student voice through some form of on-line SRC?

Real roles of value

Beyond the ‘simple’ ideas of agency over or within one’s learning, there are on-going concerns about the application of learning or, on the other hand, the deferral of outcomes from that learning (ie learning that is solely seen to be useful ‘in the future’). What do students ‘learn’ about their **role as present-day citizens**, if their learning is solely about knowledge, skills and attitudes that are never applied or tested within the ‘real world’ and that never enable them to ‘make a difference’?

There have been many examples in classrooms and schools of approaches in which students carry out **real roles of value** while they learn, and which enable their learning through experience and reflection eg teaching others (tutors/teachers), making media, carrying out real research, developing community resources, and so on. While some of this has, over the years, been carried out on-line (making media, global sharing of individual research, connecting with communities - real and virtual) other examples have been based in face-to-face situations.

- How can we recognise the active social roles of young people (of all ages) in an on-line environment?
- How can we support this when people are physically isolated and 'locked down'?
- In this particular situation, how can we support increased opportunities for all learners to develop agency through their own approaches to this crisis?
- For example, can students (as learners) address and respond to social issues we all face eg in physical distancing?
- Where are the opportunities for students to carry out meaningful research, discussion and action around COVID-19 and possible social responses?
- Do students believe they/we can? Do they/we want to?
- Beyond 'simply' voicing their concerns and fears (and here the current work of Eve Mayes and others around 'naïve hope' and emotion comes to mind), can students analyse community responses, develop their own proposals and initiatives, work out the implications of physical distancing (*what would 1.5 m separation actually look like in our classroom? what size classroom would we need for everyone to be here? how are we going to manage this?*), and become community educators and activists?

We need to recognise that many young people have already been learning – formally or informally – within on-line environments where they are expert.

- Within the models of schooling being developed for on-line learning, are there specific **roles of value** that students can take, that can draw upon young people's depth of experience and comfort with processes – particularly where teachers and educators are learners?

- For example, could students lead in developing on-line platforms and approaches that draw on their knowledge and skills?
- Could some students who are physically attending school, act as on-line discussion group leaders alongside and sharing the on-line roles of teachers?

Equity

There are clear equity issues around on-line learning: access to technology, internet speeds, support resources etc. How can we ensure that all students have access to the on-line learning approaches that they need?

UK teacher:
'My impression, though, is that while much of the world's schools are on Zoom, the UK isn't (except private schools). Our strict safeguarding rules are a major barrier, but also about 1/3 of school children don't have broadband. My guess is that a lot of the more able students are having a wonderful time pursuing their own interests and projects alone or with siblings or friends on-line - but their teachers would probably know nothing about it!'

Beyond that, the on-line environment can quickly become one in which there are dominant modes of expression, communication and learning. There are assumptions about dominant languages; there are assumptions about written communication; there are assumptions about attention spans and ways and speeds of learning; there are assumptions about competing demands for on-line access to resources and for time to learn.

If you have thoughts and ideas – and practical strategies – around these challenges, I'd invite you to mail me at r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au and let's see where this could go.

Roger Holdsworth
May, 2020

(with contributions from: Doug Sandiford, Jenna Gillett-Swan, Gillian Newall, Susan Groundwater-Smith and Larissa Raymond)

How should schools respond to ensure that on-line learning is inclusive of socio-economic needs, of learning needs and of relational/support needs?

These questions and challenges are made more urgent in reference to existing inequities in education – both in terms of provision of resources, and in approaches to addressing learning differences.

How do we support and enable the voices and agency of students whose agency and voices are often already noticeably absent (eg students with intellectual disability, students from refugee backgrounds, students with challenging behaviour, students in juvenile detention, students in out of home care etc)?

How do these challenges play out for different ages/year levels and students whose educational participation and access may be further constrained due to the limits of the communicative mechanisms used? For example, how do approaches support and enable voice

and agency for Deaf communities, or for students with English as a second language?

There are further equity issues around the differential capacity of families to support students: parents and carers who might be struggling with their own literacy; who may be supporting many children, who lack their own technology, for whom English is a second language, or who themselves do not have access to support services.

Summary: the scope of questions to be addressed

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Student Voice</i>	<i>Student Agency</i>	<i>Real roles of value</i>	<i>Equity</i>
Individual Student	<p>How can a student express their views on-line and be heard?</p> <p>How can a student influence and improve the on-line learning approaches?</p> <p>How can an on-line relationship be established between student/s and teacher/s in which the student feels confident and supported to voice views?</p>	<p>How can a student have greater control over their learning on-line (purpose, content, methods, assessment, evaluation etc)?</p> <p>How can a student negotiate their own learning on-line?</p> <p>How can a student negotiate assessment of their on-line learning (ways to show their learning)?</p>	<p>How can a student do socially useful and valuable things on-line based on/in their learning?</p> <p>How can a student initiate such approaches on-line?</p> <p>How can the student receive credit or recognition for such on-line roles and work?</p>	<p>How do we ensure that each student has access to the resources necessary to learn on-line?</p> <p>How do we ensure that each student has access to the appropriate support to learn and thrive?</p>
Individual Teacher/ Parent	<p>How can a teacher, parent or carer listen to – and respond to – a student's on-line comments and views?</p> <p>How can a teacher, parent or carer invite student voices to be expressed on-line?</p>	<p>How can a teacher, parent or carer pose inquiry-type questions that increase a student's agency?</p> <p>How can a teacher, parent or carer negotiate on-line learning within required study designs?</p> <p>How can a teacher, parent or carer assess on-line learning in ways that increase student agency?</p>	<p>How can a teacher, parent or carer initiate such approaches on-line?</p> <p>How can a teacher, parent or carer facilitate such on-line roles?</p> <p>How can a teacher, parent or carer recognise students' on-line learning in these areas, for credit?</p>	<p>How can a teacher, parent or carer adopt inclusive approaches that recognise and enable different economic, social and learning circumstances in on-line education?</p> <p>How can a school meet teacher, parents and carers needs?</p>
Collective Students	<p>How can students share their voices with each other on-line in order to arrive at a collective view - both at a classroom and whole school level eg an on-line SRC/forum?</p>	<p>How can students work together on-line to share decisions about their learning?</p> <p>How can students form classroom teams on-line, to learn together?</p>	<p>How can students work together on-line to create valued roles emerging from and integrated with their learning?</p>	<p>How can school ensure that there are not groups of students who are excluded from access and success because of systemic resources, learning approaches adopted on-line, etc?</p>
School (collective teachers/ parents)	<p>How can teachers and other adults (the school) listen to what students are saying in an on-line environment?</p> <p>How can the school develop individual and collective responses and actions on-line?</p>	<p>How can teachers adopt an inquiry or question-based or dialogic approach on-line?</p> <p>How can the school support teachers, parents and carers to develop such on-line approaches (PD)?</p> <p>How can the school facilitate on-line team approaches?</p>	<p>How can teachers, parents and carers facilitate and support students to have roles of real value within an on-line environment?</p> <p>What are the roles of teachers, parents and carers in such on-line approaches?</p>	<p>How can the school adopt inclusive approaches that recognise and enable different economic, social and learning circumstances in on-line education?</p>

The double-edged sword of remote learning

Here I sit, in front of the desk to which I have been married for four weeks already. Many students would nod in agreement and mutual relatability. **On-line Schooling.** Words that evoke both fear and intrigue in some of us... but for others, enjoyment. Let us examine how students have evaluated the on-line learning experience.

The first trend is that teachers tend to overestimate the amount of work we, as students, are able to complete. An Executive member of the VicSRC, Em, remarks that for her it is like a *"constant stream of homework"* that becomes extremely *"exhausting"*. Bri (also a VicSRC Executive member) expressed similar views, agreeing that the *"workload has definitely gone up"*, and as a result has shifted her *"school-life balance... out of wack"*.

I can definitely sympathise. I totally relate to Bri's overwhelming feeling of always needing to be *"switched on"*. For some of my classes, teachers are leaving endless amounts of homework so that it becomes physically impossible to cope: headaches, exhaustion and the accompanied mental burnout. It could be 11:30 at night and after all homework and revision, I must force myself to read another

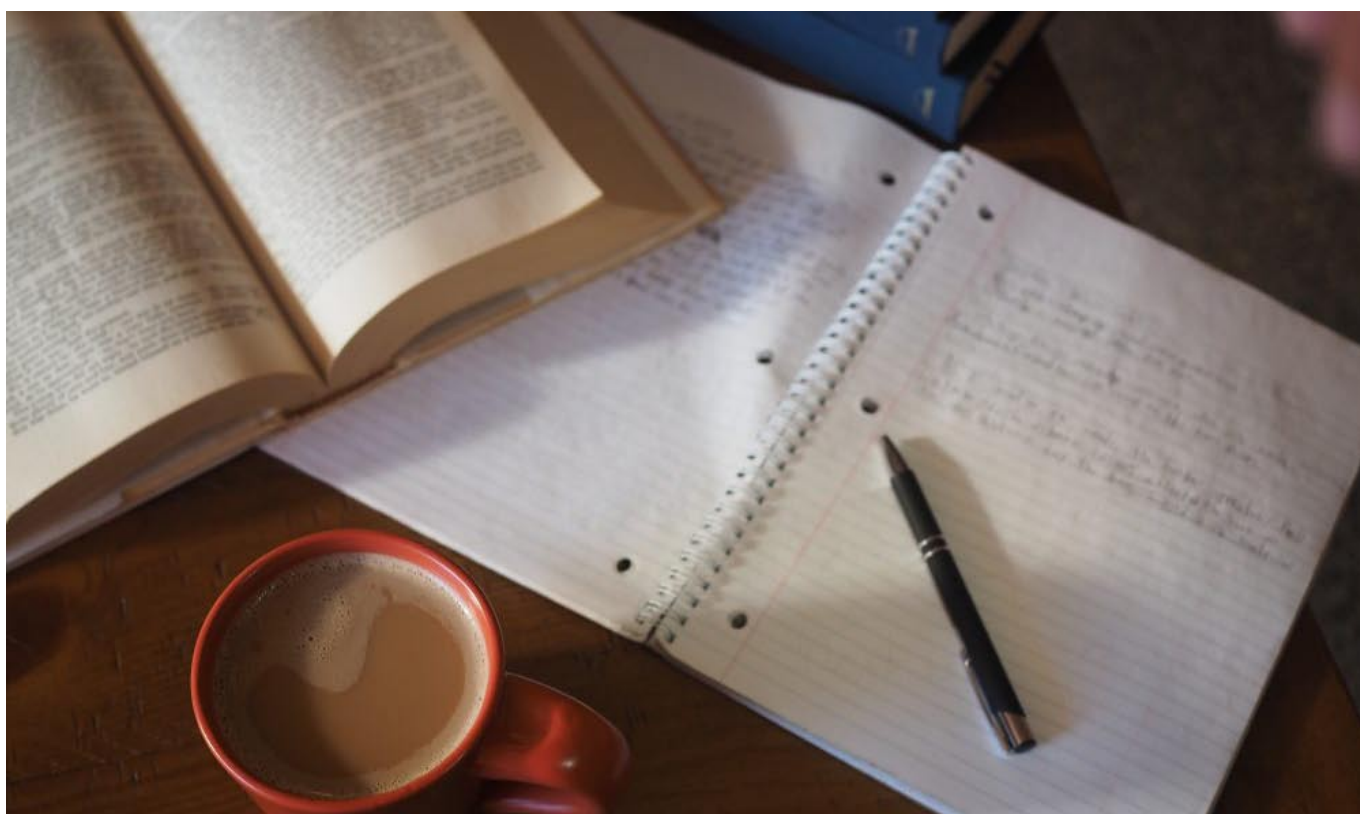
chapter about Japanese Expansionism or review a chemistry chapter because of the sheer speed with which lesson content has been zoomed through.

Another Executive member, Mitch, raised that teachers at times make the comment: *"What else could you be doing? You can't go anywhere!"* Okay, teachers, this is certainly true. However, the exhaustion of being at home all day without a distinct separation from school and home life makes working extremely difficult, overwhelming our minds with an endless amount of information.

In synthesising the data I have collected through Term 1 and Term 2, I found a conspicuous increase in my study hours; almost doubling due to the increased amount of work, and the increased need to become an independent learner due to the lack of teacher support.

Typically, I am an organised and incredibly determined student, and in the school term my study-hours are quite consistent. However, in the transition to on-line learning, I have found that my study-hours have jumped up and down, often in cycles that reflect: **Motivation – Demotivation – Guilt – Motivation.** This results in rapid mental burnout for most of us and, without the typical support network offered at school with your peers and teachers, most students end up feeling alone and trapped in this exact mindset of needing so much to be 'productive' that they do not allow themselves a break. For instance, I am finding that without all my extracurriculars, I have pushed myself to be increasingly productive during these times, and thus am managing to complete more work. Many would relate to this, and consequently feel exhausted and generally burnt out.

With this being said, some differ on the subject of workloads. Michael from the VicSRC for one feels that the *"workload has not increased that much"*, but expresses that remote learning is significantly more challenging due to *"constant sitting at a single desk on a laptop"*. Michael makes a



Doug Sandiford

Catholic Education Melbourne, Victoria

An important part of any review process – including student feedback on their recent on-line learning experience – is that students also have an opportunity to reflect on the data, make comment and suggestions for improvement. Students can, at times, be excluded from the important stage of a review and, rather than having meaningful opportunities as co-contributors for their learning and school wide change, they only act as data sources.

Jade Nebbs

Year 10, SRC Member: Melbourne Girls' College

In the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, the SRC of Melbourne Girls' College has decided to start a weekly newsletter to keep their school community sane during these difficult times. This newsletter, labelled the 'SRC Weekly', is aimed to engage the students of the school with frequent activities that lighten the weight of this pandemic and strive to maintain a positive attitude school-wide.

During their weekly on-line meetings, the SRC team collaborate to assign each member of their group a task to do in order to complete the newsletter, from entertaining crosswords to meme competitions and podcast recommendations. It also includes up-to-date reports on the coronavirus situation and provides the important information in order to keep everyone safe and healthy, as well as bringing to attention the importance of following these guidelines to ensure the wider community's safety.

The Melbourne Girls' College SRC knows how to captivate the school and create a fun environment despite the current on-line learning protocols. Being able to connect to the students is a top priority and, even though it may be easier when actually being on grounds, the efforts of this team have created an interesting and genuinely helpful solution.

Mitchell Sprague

Year 12 student, Victoria

During quarantine, I have improved my productivity. My teachers have been providing us with a greater than usual amount of work, and I am finding that I get that done quicker than I would in class. I think it may be because I don't have to sit around, waiting for things to happen; I just get started and smash it out quickly.

good point by saying that different environments act as 'barriers' for school and home, whether it be travelling to or from the school yard or home. The coalescing of school and home life seems to most of us like just an "endless stream of homework". As a Year 12 student, I have found this incredibly frustrating due to the pervading 'school' atmosphere that has now been associated with home, which is meant to be a getaway from the chaos and stress of school.

Although there is no general consensus on whether workloads have gone up, it seems to be universal that many of us are losing the motivation and determination to do work as assiduously compared to actually going to school. One member of the VicSRC said that doing work individually becomes "unmotivating", but the greater flexibility of time organisation allowed them to become "more in control of work", which can be also seen as a positive.

I definitely agree that on-line schooling has allowed me a greater flexibility in terms of time management; I utilise a technique called 'block scheduling' to organise myself, on the Google Calendar app, where I plan out my entire day the night before, and amend it as the day goes. Without travel times, and the other unpredictable elements of day to day life, I have found it easier to organise a schedule befitting to myself rather than what is happening around me. This is definitely a positive, as I have been managing to do more work and revision. The biggest problem though then, is not whether students are getting enough work done, but arguably, their mental health. I have certainly found it harder to cope through on-line schooling due to putting pressure on myself to be more productive and complete more work.

Furthermore, one recurring theme in the responses received is the changing roles of teachers at schools. The general consensus is that many students agreed that there is a general decrease in meaningful student-teacher interactions. Naufal expressed the difficulty in asking questions remotely as teachers are "only spend[ing] time explaining their presentation and giving work", and the class is over before any meaningful interaction can occur. Some schools still do not permit 1:1 teacher-student interactions, and this is further hindering the ability of students to access help and support readily from their teachers. For me, the teacher-student dynamic is certainly quite different depending on the subject. In some subjects there has been no change, whereas for others there is an increased distance from teacher to student, which has prevented many of us from seeking help where we need it. As an IB student, Term 2 is especially crucial for us, and 1:1 conferencing with teachers and supervisors is vital for the completion of our *Internal Assessments* and external *Extended Essays*; the experience has differed for many of us. Some students expressed that their teachers have been "best described as absent", while others have really been appreciative of the ongoing teacher support.

Overall, the general consensus is that on-line schooling is truly a **double-edged sword**. While on-line learning allows us greater flexibility of time to complete work and extra revision, as students we find that many of us descend into demotivation. Extra support from friends, family and teachers during this time is absolutely crucial, and ensuring a well-balanced life not dominated by too much work or stress is very important to keeping ourselves in check mentally.

Anna Duan
VicSRC Student Editorial Team
from Student Voice Hub:
<https://bit.ly/2Taveqt>



Students responded to discussions on the VicSRC's Student Voice Hub about how student voice, agency and participation was maintained during on-line learning; and what was learnt about returning to school. Here's a selection of comments:

Sienna

At my school, we have been getting both students and teachers to come forward with their stories around student voice and partnership, and we have been publishing them in our newsletter! It encourages others to share their experiences as well as promote ideas in others.

Keenasagreenbean

I think the most important thing is to check in with your student leadership team. If you're able to come together and come up with a plan (it could be doing SRC/leadership team meetings via zoom or a like service, or something different altogether) and then present it together (maybe in an e-mail or ask for a video chat) to the teacher/leader of the program.

J_Rho

My school's SRC has been hosting on-line meetings and focussing more on how we can keep students engaged and help them step away from devices through the introduction of on-line clubs.

We have weekly trivia: the Year 12s have the 'Student v Teacher Cup' (where they do trick shots, bottle flips, lolly catches etc to win points), and we have clubs that are designed to get students away from their devices (Lego club, Knitting Club, book club, debate team, yoga sessions and that's just to name a few).

On returning to face-to-face school:

J_Rho

I'm personally pretty keen to go back to school as I feel like the quality of my work has been decreasing since the beginning of on-line learning. I don't have a stance on whether it is too soon, but I think just having a date to go back to school is really helping students stay motivated because, when everything was up in the air, I know a lot of my peers were like "What's the point?" because there was no end in sight.

My school has given a list of new things we will have to follow such as having to enter classrooms via outside doors, having separate entry and exit doors, mandatory hand sanitiser as you enter classrooms and one person per table, and having classes outdoors when the weather deems that possible. These changes are quite significant and not at all similar to 'just going back to school'. It's going to be very different and it is definitely going to be an adjustment for everyone.

I think students' mental health will be supported by wellbeing teams similarly to how it's been working during on-line learning, as the transition back is just as, if not more, difficult than the transition to on-line learning. My school has daily check-ins via e-mail where your English teacher sends out an e-mail asking how you are going and you can respond however you like (words or emoji etc). There is more of an emphasis of seeking support (because you can't truly support someone who isn't open to receiving it).

My school has breakfast Thursdays for the year 12s which are run by the Wellbeing team and it's a chance to have a quick chat to one of the staff while you're making toast or milo, or even as a group just talking about the stresses and worries you have at the moment. I know my Year 12 cohort is really supportive of the fact that everyone has different issues and we are open to talking to each other about the little daily stresses – which is really helpful for everyone.

I think while you can try and support students, it ultimately won't have any effect if students aren't open to receiving the support that they need – which makes things really difficult. I think it's not just up to the staff to support students completely but rather students support students (and staff) and staff support students and staff ... a bit of a big circle where everyone understands that we are all human and we all have complex lives.

Aaran

I think a big issue a lot of students will face (especially more senior students), is catching up on some of the content that's needed. Sometimes the content that has been covered on-line can't be delivered in the way it would have been face-to-face. So I think it's important that schools support students by not having assessments and tests thrown at students when they return initially and focus on covering content that was delivered on-line. It's good to see a lot of schools are doing this.

John P

I think those 8:55am wake ups will be missed by a lot of us! For me personally, apart from the things already mentioned, the biggest thing I've learnt is how to be accountable for myself and how I learn. It's really taught me how to have agency over my own learning.

More importantly, I think this whole on-line learning experience has taught me how to voice my concerns when teachers aren't accommodating the interests of their students, and I can safely say that I am able to transfer these skills that I wouldn't otherwise have come to learn, coming back to school.

One of the things that really got me down during this time was motivation. On-line learning is very different for every student and for me it took a big toll on my mental health and just wanting to actually get out of bed to do school work was all of a sudden a big ask.

I've always appreciated how valued education is in our country. This experience has definitely enhanced that view and, as of late, I've been coming back to this thought to get me through!

Oh, and having your phone in another room while you learn doesn't hurt too! I think the phone ban has tempted us all by now to use our phones during class one last time.

Returning students demand more say

Is attending school six periods a day, five days a week, necessary?

With school returning for all students shortly, I imagine many are beyond excited to return to classes as they were in a distant, pre-COVID world. It's been a long few months for students across the state. Some of us have had our classes brought, as they were, on-line, while others were given e-mails and assignments in the place of human interaction in the classroom.

Home learning works for some of us; better, even, for some. But it is not the reality for everyone, and at this stage we students haven't had a single say in directing the future of our learning.

When classroom teaching – the biggest commonality among students – was suddenly ripped out from under us, it exacerbated inequalities in the education system. Suddenly the students with poor internet connections aren't just struggling to get work done at home, they can barely attend class.

Those of us who need a routine beyond walking three steps to our desks every day to keep our mental health in check, have been thrown into turmoil. While much of the conversation is focused on ensuring top-performing students are getting what they need to succeed, it seems that those already on the edge of disengagement have been further alienated.

While I commend efforts to alleviate these issues, it's not enough. There aren't enough internet dongles or free study guides in this state to get us all where we were headed when we arrived at our first day of school this year. As schools begin to restart physical classes, much of our focus will be on shifting back to how things were as quickly and seamlessly as possible, and trying to ensure all students are supported. I cannot stress enough the importance of schools engaging with their students on this, as they are the people most directly affected by the changes.

As we move back to physical classes, we should consider and re-imagine how our education can and should look. Hundreds of years of schooling across the world have left us still learning in a way that is almost identical to how it has been. For many, this has been evidence

that sitting through 100-minute classes from 9am until 3pm every day isn't the only way to make schooling work, and it may not even be anywhere near the best. If learning from videos in the comfort of our own homes works for some of us, why isn't it more commonplace for us to do that? Is attending school six periods a day, five days a week, really necessary?

Education is not restricted to one method or pathway, nor should we do ourselves the disservice of pretending it is. There's no singular, static model of schooling that will allow every student to truly flourish. As restrictions loosen, many of us are more than ready to see our friends and teachers, resume many parts of our pre-COVID lives and enjoy what will be our last year of high school.

Direct collaboration between schools and students will be essential in allowing students to have ownership over their education, much of which has been lost since quarantine began. **Let's take what we've learnt, the good and the bad, and move forward.**

Bri Hines

Year 12 student

VicSRC student executive committee member

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Changes to learning and teaching

What a time to be a teacher! Never before have we observed such ferocious and unprecedented changes to teaching and learning practices. Whilst education has played the part of political football during the COVID-19 shutdown, all of us have carried on with a sense of calm and normality to continue supporting students and the school community as we would in any other situation.

Here at **Newbury Primary School**, we have approached all challenges as best we can. Classes are run each day via *WebEx*, whereby students receive targeted and explicit lessons in line with the Victorian Curriculum and the state government's guidelines for on-line learning. Work is posted daily via *Google Classroom* with teachers allowing students to work through tasks at their own pace, while maintaining completion deadlines.

On-line lessons have also provided a great opportunity for students to socialise with fellow classmates, hear others' experience of living in a time of isolation and remote learning, and to continue supporting each other through the learning process. Students have also been given an enhanced platform to voice their concerns and enjoyments around remote learning.

Student feedback

Student feedback to date has largely been positive. While certainly not appealing to all learning needs, students have indicated they have enjoyed the freedom to work at their own pace and in their own time, taking greater responsibility for the completion of work and being able to put

aside work when they require breaks. **Parents** too have commented on their appreciation for the learning process and how it has worked to address the challenges their children face as learners in the current climate.

Student voice and agency

One of the undoubted challenges during this period is to continue to promote **student voice**. As much as possible, we have continued to meet regularly with our **Student Empowerment Leaders** to discuss and enact ways to promote community and connectedness during this time.

Our leaders have devised a range of initiatives to delve deeper into the lives of our students at home, including letter-based scavenger hunts, on-line art shows, show and tell, and bring your pet to school days.

The situation we find ourselves in has allowed students and teachers to see each other in a vastly different light, further building the rapport established at the beginning of the year. Our aim has been to heavily promote this and continue to engage in meaningful ways as we transition back into the classroom environment. Student wellbeing



continues to underpin all that we strive to achieve, ensuring our students continue to be heard and their needs met.

Transitioning back to classrooms

Our greatest challenge moving forward lies in building upon the success of **enhanced agency** created in our on-line environment. *Are the realisations of the past two months of remote learning transferable to the classroom? Can we find ways to allow students to work through tasks at their own pace, picking up and putting down tasks as a means of self-regulated learning, while working within the confines of a regular school day?*

The future holds much excitement for teaching and learning throughout our school, as staff look to incorporate the student-led benefits of remote learning back into the classroom. Utilising technology in enhanced ways to further meet the diverse learning needs of the student community has been fast tracked by recent events. That is certainly the glowing positive to take from the past two months of remote learning.

Dan Wright

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Responding to challenges through innovation: Voice and agency in the virtual classroom

2020 has thrust us into what can only be described as a new era. And together, we're adjusting to this new normal as best as we can. For all of the fear and uncertainty that has plagued this period, I hope that collectively we can take solace in the learning opportunities proffered in recent weeks and months. For me, what I have found to be most impactful is the scope of innovation that this conflict has spawned and, as such, how the very real challenges of our current situation can be harnessed as a means to amplify the voice and agency of our learners.

Admittedly, the first few weeks of remote learning saw me, and I am sure many other teachers, grapple with new platforms of communication, a rethinking of curriculum and, of course, the identification of how I could best support my students as we navigated the uncharted territory together.

At first there was a palpable element of excitement as we engaged virtually, with novelty driving student motivation and engagement in those initial lessons. Before long however, there was a lull and, as a collective, we began to decline in our energies and overall enjoyment of the lessons I had put together, trudging ahead to what seemed like an invisible finish line. Students spoke of their feelings of isolation and loneliness, of the things that they felt had been lost or, in some instances, had unfairly been taken from them in this unwanted era of adjustment. They would ask to stay on-line for just a few minutes longer at the end of class, searching for reassurance that the feelings of frustration that they desperately tried to push aside and filled them with shame, were warranted: that they were allowed to mourn a friend's birthday celebrations, the opportunity for getting their licence, attending their school formal and all of the other exciting things that fill a teenager's life.

Before long this became a conversation that I was having with my students in some capacity each day and I realised that school, as the one continuity through all of the chaos, needed to be the thing that soothed the worried minds of these young people.

Sometimes it can be important to remind ourselves that the voices of our students do not always come through in the ways that we expect or even the ways that we hope for, but it is our responsibility to listen to what it is that they are trying to communicate.

Without a doubt, the commentaries around the state of education in light of COVID-19 have littered the pages of newspapers and social media feeds for months. Many of the narratives have been positive, perhaps even validating

for those in the diverse profession that is education, though we all know that sometimes the voices that hurt the most can often appear to be the loudest. As learning moved out of the bricks and mortar classroom and into the kitchens and living rooms of the family home, a constant trickle of powerlessness filtered into the conversation. **Teachers** were scrambling to adjust resources, **parents** were suddenly thrust into a new realm and in many ways a position of responsibility, and our **students** were left with almost no autonomy in most facets of their lives.

But then, a wonderful thing happened. Our social and cultural context began to shift.

We began to unify in this new virtual landscape through our shared desperation to remain connected, to wrestle back an element of normality and dare I say, *fun*, in a world that was doing all that it could to tell us otherwise.

And thus, the '*iso-challenge*' was born. Our social media feeds and news outlets reflected the rise of a new hashtag era. Whether that be the 394,000 following for *#isolationcreation* or the 62,600 who touted *#lockdownchallenge* and, perhaps



Our Term 1 Voice and Agency Passion Project: Developing a Positive Classroom Culture

most encouraging of all, were the 19,000 people who shared their experience through #lockdownlearning. We were inspired once more and looking to the challenging circumstances afoot as a source of innovation and, with it, we entered a new realm of possibility and grit.

And so, with a greater awareness of this change to the sociocultural landscape I returned to my virtual classroom and put it to my students: *“How can we make this situation work for us?”*

Building on Passion project

I started with my Year 7s. Fresh from a collective ‘*passion project*’ during Term 1, they were brimming with ideas and possibilities, eager to reconnect and collaborate more organically as they had become accustomed to during our face-to-face lessons. Immediately students identified that they were feeling the workload was mounting during remote learning across all classes and they were becoming overwhelmed any time a new task was introduced by their classroom teacher. Other students cited boredom in all areas of their day and indicated that remote learning was starting to make them *“not like school as much anymore”*.

We transitioned into a discussion of things that we did like, what we enjoyed doing, and times where we had had the most fun in recent weeks. We soon found ourselves in the midst of comparing our favourite viral trends, those that had been tried, those that had failed and the others that were yet to be created.

It was in this discussion with my students that the excitement began to bubble away again. They were becoming animated, my laptop screen was tiled with the faces of smiling and laughing teenagers and soon our chat feed was filled with links to their favourite viral videos.

The TikTok Generation

Our current cohort of young people are the *TikTok* generation. They have surpassed the sharing norms of *Facebook* and rewritten the rules of *Instagram* and *Snapchat* and have developed their own sphere, one largely based upon a meritocracy of entertainment.

Planning Tool:

W's	Planning Question	Answer
WHAT	<i>Is the focus of your creative project?</i>	
WHY	<i>Did you choose this focus?</i>	
HOW	<i>Will you be presenting your project?</i>	
WHO	<i>Might be most interested in trialling your project?</i>	
WHAT	<i>Skills are you sharing?</i>	
HOW	<i>Will you know that you have been successful?</i>	

But if we delve into this more deeply, what is glaringly and brilliantly obvious is the inherent **voice** and **agency** that underpins this mode of communication. With each upload of snippet sized content and every time this content is engaged with, a choice is made and, with it, an opportunity to voice our likes and dislikes.

I started to note the differences and similarities in what my Year 7s were sharing and enthusiastically discussing, and began to consider how I could channel the momentum of this trend to develop an instructional writing unit. In my initial planning I began with a consideration of differentiation; it was going to be imperative that students had a multitude of entry and exit points embedded in their learning for this task to be truly engaging, and it also needed an explicit context and purpose.

We commenced our first lesson with a focus on literacy and making sense of written texts; in this case the text was a series of news articles that documented ‘*iso-challenges*’ from around the world. From here, students began an early planning phase that, in many ways, mirrored those early discussions we had on-line around the latest crazes, though with clear scaffolding and opportunities for students to justify (**voice**) their perspectives.

Negotiating tasks

By this point the students had well and truly taken the reigns for their learning, fluidly navigating the overlapping virtual space of our classroom and the possibilities proffered by our digital age. The parameters of the task were negotiated with students through a discussion, and election of the following areas:

- **Format**> the resounding preference here was video or audio clip
- **Subject matter**> entirely student choice providing it was focused on the sharing of a skill
- **Planning**> a planning tool was developed with students using a standard thinking routine (please see visual below)
- **Assessment**> it was determined that there would be both an individual reflection task and an opportunity for peer assessment

The responses were a testament to agentic learning opportunities: students developed fully comprehensive instructional guides that amplified their inherent skills and areas of interest.

The final submissions were of exemplary quality and reflected what we know of students with a greater sense of agency: they worked hard, and they were deeply engaged in the learning process and not just focused on the learning outcome.

The subject matter couldn't have been more varied. Students developed interactive meal planning for families, drawing tutorials, and another student even demonstrated to their classmates how to develop their own hand sanitiser!

Though the impact on the individual student was evident through the ways in which they engaged with and reflected on their practice, it was the flow-on effect to other students that once again reinforced the true potential of agentic learning.

Feedback

As teachers, much of our practice is centred on providing feedback to our students to assist them to continue their growth. All too often, though, the discussion (and misconception) arises in staff meetings, PLCs and offices: *“students don't care about the feedback I give them; they just care about the result”*. By embedding a peer assessment procedure within this task, I was able to learn more about my students based on how they provided feedback to their peers. The mode in which students supplied feedback to their peer/s immediately indicated their own personal preference as to how they like to communicate and, as such, provided me with the insight to better understand the diversity of learning and communication styles in my classroom and ultimately make more informed decisions about best practice as we ready ourselves to transition back to face-to-face teaching.

The quest for authentic voice and agency can, at times, be a challenging one for teachers because it is as much about the journey of the teacher as it is for the students. So much of educational dogma is centred around the belief that the teacher is the greatest source of knowledge in a classroom and that students are merely vessels to fill with this wisdom.



We must rewrite this philosophy and turn it on its head. And what better time to leap into the fray than now, as we all live through a historical turning point. **The status quo has changed and with it so must education.** Remote learning has been the catalyst that we didn't know we needed and, despite its challenges, it has been the source of inestimable opportunity.

Learning from the crisis

As teachers, we wear many hats. We are the **educator**, the **mediator**, the **mentor** and the **critical friend** for all of the young people that we cross paths with. As such, we continually strive to fulfil the needs of our students as best we can.

If this crisis has taught me anything, it is to realise the value that can be gained by **learning from the agency of my students**. For it is through their self-expression that I am able to become a more dynamic teacher, one who is better equipped to rise to the challenges posed by uncertain times and use them as a foundation for more innovative teaching and learning.

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Supporting and promoting student agency during learning in the home environment

At Coburg Special Development School (SDS) in Melbourne's northern suburbs, we strive to empower our students to have voice and agency across their learning. This, at times, presents challenges when working with students with complex communication needs, who are unable to meet all of these communication needs using speech. Now throw in a pandemic and a move to 'learning from home' and you've got yourself a challenge!

Some of the issues we have faced during this time have been consistent with our everyday challenges at school. Key areas of development we felt needed to be addressed were educating and supporting parent and carer understanding in the use of *alternative and augmentative communication (AAC)* and student ownership of their own AAC.

With these unprecedented times have come new challenges, specifically around connecting with our students through an on-line learning platform. When phone calls and video calls were the only options available, it became apparent that this wasn't going to be an easy way for our students to communicate, and that we needed to put measures in place to support this. How we were going to do this required collaboration between students, parents, teachers, education support staff and therapists, as well as thinking outside the box to create engaging educational experiences.

Like we would in the classroom, we have continued to ensure we have used our *PODD* communication books within all of our *Webex* calls to model language throughout the learning.

We have also encouraged parents to ensure their children have their individual *AAC* system with them as much as possible, and with this has come the opportunity to provide a higher amount of support to our parents, demonstrating how we use *AAC* to support student communication, agency and learning at Coburg SDS.

By having our *AAC* supports available during the *Webex* classroom sessions, the students have been able to demonstrate agency by suggesting *choices* within the subject program or teachers asking the student what they want to do during the *Webex* chat.

Teachers have found opportunities for increasing *student agency* within

learning. For example, during a cooking session on-line, one teacher created opportunities for student agency by asking students what ingredients they would like on the pizza, how much of the ingredient, what they should do next, and how they should arrange the ingredients.

During this cooking activity, the teacher was able to incorporate literacy by following the steps to the recipe, maths by working with the students to measure the amounts of the different ingredients, as well as food technology and personal learning skills.

We have also continued to have our weekly *child centred learning team meetings*, where we meet in our transdisciplinary classroom teams (teacher, education support staff, occupational therapist and speech pathologist). We use these meetings to look at where the student currently is within their learning towards their *Individual Education Plan (IEP)* goals, and then to use this information to implement specific strategies that will support them in moving towards the achievement of that IEP. This has continued throughout 'learning from home'. Through teacher discussions with parents, we have been able to suggest strategies that incorporate objects and activities that the students love to engage with at home.

This period of time has reinforced the many different ways that we can create opportunities for student agency within all learning experiences. It has also highlighted the importance of continued education and support for our parents and greater school community around the use of *AAC* supports to build student agency and voice for those with complex communication needs.

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Using one voice to speak for many: Representing the student body as a panel speaker

Over the past six months, I have seen some really positive changes in our school. Teachers and students are learning more and more about building effective partnerships and the importance of amplifying **Student Voice**.

Students are becoming more aware of their power, and teachers are learning the value of it. Our Principal and several members of our staff have actively been involving students in decisions, so we are not just consultants. From meetings and

discussions, we have been able to share our ideas and bring things forward that represent the students' best interests – which is our very role in the school community, and is something we are looking forward to continuing.



When COVID-19 hit, many things were changing and everyone was accepting things as they came. In amongst the chaos of the on-line learning environment, we were all finding out so much about learning. We were encouraged to think about what we want learning to look like after the crisis, something that we hadn't really done before. There was a lot that needed to be said, and thankfully, we were given an opportunity where the entire staff would listen.

Our School Principal invited three students to sit on a panel to talk to all of the teachers at a staff development day. It was going to involve more than 80 teachers listening in to what we had to say via *Zoom*. He asked if we would talk about our on-line learning experiences and how we would like learning to look like in the future.

Our SRC discussed the idea and nominated three members to speak on the panel. We decided as a group that this was a unique opportunity and it would be wasted if we only spoke about our own experiences. The decision was made that the student panel reps would do their best to speak for the whole student body. To do this we needed everyone on the SRC to help gather student voice on the topics.

As well as talking about our experience of on-line learning, our Principal provided us with two driving questions to consider, which were:

1. Imagine the syllabus has disappeared; what would you have in the curriculum?
2. What can we learn about learning from these challenging times?





We all had different methods of obtaining data from the students, and began this process about two weeks before the meeting. I was overjoyed to receive an amazing outcome. So many incredible ideas and contributions came through, as well as a large amount of people who voted to indicate their thoughts. I did most of my sourcing on *Instagram*, through polling and using the 'Ask me a Question' functions, and also direct messages. I spoke about how good of an opportunity it was for us to have a voice and that I would be able to make sure their ideas were heard while I was on the panel. It was made clear that change was coming and that everyone was encouraged to have their say. Members from the SRC provided us with a lot of data and we, the panel reps, collated this with what we had found out.

After gathering the information based on the two driving questions, the next steps were to collate our information, distribute ideas amongst the panel reps and start to structure what we would speak about.

I set up a shared *google doc* for the panel so we could work with each other and see what we were all planning to say. We were given tips about panel speaking from our SRC coordinator and a run-down on how the panel would work on the day. We all had a lot to say; some of it was the same, so we decided to focus on some key messages that each of us could talk about and use our own experiences and the data we had gathered to support the messages.

Our key messages were related to:

- Improving communication with students;
- Having a clear purpose for *Zoom* meetings;
- Providing more flexibility and choice;
- Offering a variety of subjects, teachers and learning spaces;
- Including more Aboriginal perspectives in learning; and
- Considering students' return to school .

Preparing was very exciting and, as the day became closer, the nerves began to creep in. Just before the panel started, we had a short private meeting together with the panel host Jamie Gerlach, Senior 4C Practice Leader and our Coordinator. This was a chance for us to brief him on what we were going to say and to tame our nerves. After that it was show time.

We were each given as much time as we needed to get our ideas across. Our shared *google doc* worked really well because, on the day, one of the panel reps had technical issues and so we could see what they had planned to say and did our best to say it on their behalf, so nothing was missed.

After we'd spoken, we received so much support and congratulations from the staff present, and it was requested that we provide a summary of all that we had said. This became a document that was distributed to all of the teachers. You can use the following link to view the summary of our student feedback:

<https://bit.ly/36xbbn>

I've since heard promising things about the impact of what we shared. I've had conversations about the panel and future directions with teachers, and there was one comment that really stuck with me. That was: ***"We can't promise that you will get everything you asked for, but I can tell you the teachers are starting to see you, and our connections, all in a different way."*** (Kingscliff High School Deputy Principal)

Being on panel and speaking on behalf of the student body was both exciting and nerve racking, but I feel a great sense of achievement, having gone through with it. My advice for those who may have an opportunity like this in the future would be: be prepared, know your purpose, and know the people who are there to support you.

Something that helped me with speaking on the panel was the five things I had written on sticky notes on my computer monitor during the meeting. I have listed them below and it would be great to add to mine or create your own collection of sticky note reminders. Find what works for you!

- This is your chance to speak for you and for everyone: TALK! TALK! TALK!
- Don't you dare be silent instead of challenging.
- Listen for opportunities to share your voice; LISTEN to everyone.
- Pause. Breathe. They haven't heard it many times like you.
- ***"Could I just add to that?/I've got something to say about that"*** (just have quick phrases ready in front of you encouraging you to intervene).

A few other great things that have come out of speaking on panel are that we have been asked to be interviewed by a local newspaper about the challenges we faced with on-line learning and our panel experience.



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Our school is also working with the **Future Schools Alliance** and they asked us if they could share the summary of our student feedback via their social networks.

To be able to speak to all of the teachers at once about issues that are so important to the students was something I am very grateful for, and is a proud accomplishment – for not just the speakers, but for our emerging partnership and our school.

Jadzia Wolff
Year 11 student and SRC President
Kingscliff High School

Student voice, agency and participation in a time of plague

Students at **Dapto High School** in NSW know the value of working with their teachers and the whole school community, especially when times are tough.

Our school has been **Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)** for many years. Moving learning on-line did not present the challenge some schools faced with technology during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. All students have a device (the school issues about 200 free at the start of every academic year) and the teachers had already established tools like *Google Classroom* as routine. It didn't take long to get classes collaborating effectively from home using synchronous video-conferencing technology like *Microsoft Teams* and *Zoom*.

These tools, along with other social media accounts, were effectively employed by students, as well as the staff, to maintain belonging.

The technology, in many ways, is the easy part. Maintaining a sense of **student participation, agency, belonging and connectivity** takes more than a laptop and an e-mail account, as helpful as that might be as a starting point. A collaborative, inclusive culture trumps any strategy (cobbled-together by officialdom) to make everything flow and

meld together successfully, regardless of the challenges.

Here are three ways that students maintained and amplified their voice during the pandemic, when everyone was relatively isolated for two months.

Instagram

We have a **Technology Team** that any student can join. The core of it tends to be the seniors from our **Student Representative Council (SRC)** including members from our **Autism Unit**.

Late last year, this team video-conferenced with *Adobe* product managers based in San Francisco, to learn about branding, in an effort to give the students a more distinct identity from the school/staff at our social media accounts. That was where the idea to have a student-only run *Instagram* account was born.

Students are now in charge of the school *Instagram* account, but NSW state education policy does not permit them to post without supervision. The rule at our school is simple: only students can



grant permission to post to the account, even though a teacher has to push the button. You can see their publications here: <https://shorturl.at/afmy8>

This tool has proven particularly useful during the COVID-19 lockdown. Here is one uplifting video that a student made recently: <https://shorturl.at/blrBG> which was posted with the following message:

"This is a short video to remind every one of the tremendous effort and collaboration that was put into Term 1! School starts back on-line tomorrow! Here's to another solid term of learning, stay updated on all DHS social media platforms."

On-line Celebration Assembly

Each fortnight, our school holds a 'celebration assembly' run by students. There are awards, performances, leadership opportunities and it is highly valued by staff and students. During the lockdown, with a little prodding from students, this continued on-line.

Students came into school, recorded their pieces in the usual (but empty) spaces. Various staff members were also encouraged to celebrate, as we normally would at this assembly. There was one memorable musical performance of a song, loved by all, which really amused everyone greatly. There was also a particularly impressive feat of markswomanship with a bow and arrow to select prize-winners.

A *Sharepoint* was used for everyone to drop photos and video that were



edited into our first **On-line Celebration Assembly** that was enjoyed by the whole community via a *Facebook* stream: <https://shorturl.at/euDjX>; and the second at <https://bit.ly/2XkeBtl>

Student Wellbeing

The **school counsellors** are always sound advocates for **student voice, agency and participation**. When they proposed some ideas to the senior executive about what could be done to support students at home and when they returned for those first weeks back at school, we suggested they ask the students.

A meeting was held on-line using *Microsoft Teams* with the SRC and counsellors. This resulted in a jointly constructed website to support students, which included an on-line referral form: <https://shorturl.at/dHKS4>

This on-line gathering ended up becoming a series of meetings which included the Year Advisors and Deputy Principal, in this case myself, who answered the many good clarifying questions from students about practical policy on return to school after the worst of the pandemic was over.

The students had sophisticated ideas about what may be possible considering the context as well as a good



understanding of the implications for each of them. One challenging issue was how to maintain *'physical distancing'* on return to school but not make that feel like *'social distancing'*. Some fun activities are being organised by the students for recess and lunch with this challenge firmly mind.

Technology has proven to be a great enabler, in a time of plague, for **student voice, agency and participation** at Dapto High. More importantly, the willingness of students to collaborate

with staff to make our whole community feel less isolated, supported and enjoy a host of creative opportunities was uplifting for all.

Darcy Moore

Darcy Moore is the deputy principal at Dapto High School in New South Wales.

Feel welcome to make contact via e-mail: Darcy.Moore@det.nsw.edu.au or social media; he is always active on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Darcy1968>. Darcy has also blogged at darcymoore.net for nearly 15 years.

Rainbows and stuffed toys

As I walked around my neighbourhood during the weeks of lockdown and school closure, I was struck by the number of rainbow drawings and stuffed toys peering out from the front windows of houses. These were obviously done and posted by young children during this difficult time.

A little checking on-line revealed that the 'rainbow movement' to do this may have started in Italy, with the slogan of reassurance: *"Andrà tutto bene": everything will be all right*. However, there are also reports of similar handwritten notes appearing in China with the Cantonese phrase *"jiayou": don't give up, or hang on in there*.

I then pondered how this spread here – how the discussions in homes and perhaps in on-line classes might have gone.

I thought there were two distinct possibilities.

The first and less educative process might have been that adults suggested or directed students to paint and write these – or that students saw a trend and followed by doing this without much thinking about the reasons.



The alternative (and hopefully this happened more often) was that a conversation developed along the lines: *"What do people need in these times?" "Who - which people?" "What can we, as students/children do to meet those needs?"* – and the ideas of students being important in maintaining morale and inspiring *fervent hope*, emerged from such a discussion.

And perhaps, in some cases, that discussion didn't actually result in the students drawing and posting rainbows or putting stuffed toys in the windows at all, but that students started thinking about and inventing other ways to meet current needs - and increased their agency.

Roger Holdsworth

From the classroom to the bedroom!

From the classroom to the bedroom! What a change it has been! This pandemic has impacted us all, especially students.

We are **Grace, Amelia and Matilda**, the College Captains at **St Joseph's Catholic College** in East Gosford in the Diocese of Broken Bay, NSW. We are very privileged at Joeys to be surrounded by so many support systems including amazing teachers and a student body who is beyond enthusiastic and cooperative.

Being leaders, we originally felt helpless not being at school and getting involved, and we are sure that many students felt the same. Missing out on not only school events but seeing our friends and family on a regular basis can be difficult. As leaders, this was a new challenge for us, as the three of us are extremely enthusiastic and love seeing the student body in all aspects of our school. However, being at home has enabled us to use technology to our advantage and establish new virtual initiatives to keep us all connected.

Year 12 have been significantly impacted by this pandemic. Our final year of school was definitely not how we envisioned this. Our Year 12 cohort has stayed connected by conducting virtual peer check-ins with each other to keep us all connected. This year, Year 12 had kickstarted a new initiative called the '**Big Sister Little Sister Program**', in which a Year 7 student would be paired up with a Year 12 student who would act as a mentor, or '**big sister**' and support them throughout the start of their high school journey. While the program had already been successful throughout Term 1, it was invaluable throughout this **Home Based Learning (HBL)** experience. This program has been maintained, as Year 12 students were able to check in with their '**little sisters**' in Year 7 and offer them support, advice and maintain connection through regular e-mails and messages.

This pandemic has not only affected us students; it has also largely impacted our teachers, who have also had to adapt to a new way of teaching. Our teachers have been so phenomenal in preparing our lessons and making this transition

as smooth as possible. Obviously we couldn't be at school to thank them, so Year 12 virtually coordinated a thank you video which was shared to all staff to express our appreciation for everything they have done.

Our leader of wellbeing also created a groovy *google classroom* that has loads of resources and funny videos including the staff *tik tok*. Now that was a laugh! Year 12 has also made a few funny isolation videos to showcase their talent to the younger years and be a positive influence. To help lift the spirits of the students, the three of us started a *padlet* which we update daily with a variety of cool things such as workouts, recipes, uplifting quotes, craft projects and jokes.

Recently, Year 12 have participated in morning fitness classes which are run by our principal over *zoom*. It has been a great way to start our morning off on a positive note. We look forward to continuing this and hopefully having

some special guests from the staff to join in!

As leaders we pondered how we could spread a positive message to our Central Coast community. We reached out to other leaders on the Central Coast and created a video which now was over 150,000 views and was shared by the ABC Central Coast. This enabled our student voice to be heard amongst the wider community.

The biggest lesson we as leaders have learnt is the importance of organisation and independent learning, which we will be taking back into our face-to-face learning. Our on-line learning has most certainly taught us useful skills that will benefit us in the future. In essence, while this time has presented a number of challenges, it has also allowed our school community to connect and support each other in new and innovative ways. We look forward to seeing what the coming weeks brings for both our school and the wider community.

**Grace Talty, Matilda Andrew
and Amelia Webber**
Year 12, College Captains



Remote learning: Was it really that scary?

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed people's lives. Due to the 'social distancing' regulations, schools have been closed and we have to study from home. Since the start of Term 2, we have been undertaking remote learning. This is a totally new way of learning to cope with this unprecedented situation and, so far, we have been doing pretty well.

At home, my workstation is my desk, located in my bedroom looking through a big window that is full of light. A bookshelf is on the wall so I can easily access the books needed for class. I have my brother who has to study from home as well. Thus, sometimes we interrupt each other because of clashing classes, and sometimes the internet is quite slow.

In the morning, I usually wake up at 8am, have breakfast, brush my teeth and get ready for class. I often wear school uniform to make myself feel as if I were at school. We usually study on-line class through zoom, where I can virtually see my teacher and my friends' faces.

For PE, or sport, we get a sheet of physical activities we can do at home to stay active. I often go for a bike ride, or a jog by myself when we have PE or sports. After on-line classes, I spend a bit of time to myself, go out for more physical exercise, entertain myself a bit, and cook something new to keep myself busy while staying at home. After dinner, I often get on with homework I have, or do some extra if necessary.

What we have learnt

So far, from my experience, we are doing quite well when studying from home. I find that, although there are challenges, the thing that we have learnt the most out of this is the **independence** and **discipline** skills, as we have to manage the study ourselves with little supervision from our teachers.

For example, we do the work outlined on *Compass* and upload it by the due date. That way, we are able to have the flexibility of organising our work throughout, which is a very important skill when we eventually go to university and work.



Throughout my remote learning experience, I have been observing and reflecting on how well I have been managing my learning at home compared to how I would manage it in face-to-face classes – which mostly depends on the subjects I have. For some subjects, like Maths, I am actually doing even better than I would on campus, as I was able to finish the work and homework for that day. So I earned myself a bit more time to do more challenging work while the teacher is talking through the contents, since some of them I already know what is being taught. But for subjects that require practical knowledge, such as Chemistry,

I find it more difficult to learn remotely since we don't get to do experiments like at school.

On return

One of the aspects of remote learning that I would love to keep once face-to-face learning is resumed, is the option to learn independently.

During the period of remote learning, everyone has had to take responsibility for their own learning. There was little teacher supervision, so we were able to learn the skills of managing our time and workload.

As well, we were given some flexibility in selecting the learning task we would like to focus on. For example: I am able to choose more challenging exercises for Maths if I already have done the required work.

In addition, because we have had less face-to-face interaction with our teacher during remote learning, for us to study more efficiently, our teachers supported us by outlining the contents of the lesson in the lesson plan on *Compass* and granted students access to the school's resources to help them catch up or prepare for the next class – which we did not have before the lockdown. I would love our teacher to maintain this teaching approach.

In short, though we are doing pretty well, there are still some challenges that both students and teachers face. I myself miss the social activities at school so much. There is good news though, as we returned to school on the 9th June, which will bring the end to the two months of remote learning. While I am very excited to go back to school, to meet my classmates and teachers, the skills that I have developed during the remote learning will continue to be important for face-to-face classes.

This article was developed from my piece of writing, initially for my school newsletter in May. It is important to share with people the meaning of our remote learning experience – which is unique – and how we coped with it.

Dang (Daniel) Vo
Year 9, Camberwell High School

Harnessing flexibility and freedom

Reflections on remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

I have always loved school. I love walking through the hallways and saying hi to my friends. I love going to my music lessons. I love playing sport after school. I love doing science experiments in the laboratories. I love singing in choir at lunchtime. I love going to the library with my English class to choose books to read. I love preparing for a debate and that rush of adrenaline I get when I stand to speak. I love tackling a new problem with my peers in Maths class.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the way we 'go to school'. Now, I say hi to my parents in the hallways of my house. Now, I log onto Zoom for my music lessons. Now, I walk around my neighbourhood for exercise and do home workouts. I watch videos of the Science experiment rather than doing it myself. I don't sing in choir at lunchtime. I pick up my library books from outside my school after 'ordering' them on-line the week before. I don't debate anymore - but I have done a few video speeches for public speaking competitions. To get help for a Maths problem, I go to a dedicated 'Maths Help' session instead, where I get help from a teacher.

Despite these rather 'unexciting' changes, I have enjoyed remote learning. I have cherished the precious time I get to spend with my family, opportunity to dedicate time and effort to other hobbies that are lost in the usual hustle and bustle of the school term, and the chance to reflect and reconnect with passions, hobbies and people.

Freedom and independence

However, my personal highlight is the added freedom and independence we get from on-line learning.

While I still have that set structure of classes from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm, now more than ever I have flexibility. This flexibility gives me the **agency** to prioritise and to choose my activities during spare periods, and time before and after school. While my school already has a blended learning model that allows for increased independence in the senior years, there is an added freedom of being at home, and far more flexibility. I personally have found that,

due to many of my classes being shorter, no commute, and no time moving between classes, that my productivity has increased, and I am sure this is a similar experience for many.

However, one thing that I do miss, and many have mentioned as a downside towards remote learning, is that it is often more exhausting. Not only is it tiring to be in front of a laptop all day, with much shorter 'breaks', every part of our learning needs to be planned or scheduled. We no longer learn 'organically'.

Famous Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, said that *'learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through*

understanding, discussion and reflection'.

In remote learning, students are being presented knowledge and information, but without the critical step of flowing and engaging discussion, unless it is (often painstakingly) organised and scheduled by teachers. Even still, humans being social beings, it is harder to continue those discussions as facial expressions, cues and nuances are passed through many mediums and then need to be translated, thus slowing down the process. This slow-down also means that this discussion is often skipped altogether, which results in the learning being more rote style than experiential.

Student voice

At school, learning is organic and reactive. Teachers assess the moods, progress and interests of their students and are able to bounce off and build on those to create an engaging lesson that caters to the need of the class at that time. These critical assessments are made through the opportunities present for **student voice** within the classroom. For instance, many



Ahelee Rahman and remote learning. Photo: supplied

students find it far less intimidating to talk to a teacher about the challenges they are facing before or after class compared to scheduling a one-on-one *zoom* meeting (which in many schools' cases requires extensive paperwork for safety purposes). It also often rids the opportunity for student feedback and dialogue around challenges and the help they need.

The further lack of student voice within on-line learning may stem from the new power dynamic that exists within the *zoom* classroom. It has been a point of pride that the Australian education system has moved away from the more traditional method of a teacher '*talking at*' students from their stations at the front of the classroom. This method

has been shown to negatively affect student-teacher relationships and create a power imbalance, thus preventing student voice and participation.

The modern Australian classroom now looks at a more active and experiential style of learning, with hands-on and practical experiences being shared between students and the teacher. It is now students and teachers '*talking to*' each other, actively engaging in learning. However, on-line learning has seemingly reset the power balance to the more traditional and imbalanced method, except now it is teachers '*talking at*' a computer screen.

Remote learning also takes away the opportunity for collaborative learning.

In person, a teacher can ask students to get in groups or discuss something with the person next to them. This develops relationships, creates bonds, and fosters a better discussion. However, this is often bypassed during remote learning as it takes extensive effort, time, and is not as successful.

These important aspects of learning are critical for student engagement and participation, and I look forward to experiencing these once again when I go back to school in a few weeks' time. But, I think it is incredibly important to take the lessons we have learnt with us as we make the transition into the post-COVID world.

Students should have the opportunity to take agency with their choices, have independence, flexibility, and the chance to spend time with their families, explore passions and hobbies – these are all openings to learn lessons and skills that will stay with us our whole lives.

I think this COVID-19 pandemic has given many of us time for much-needed reflection, and I sincerely hope that we take away the learnings from these difficult times and apply them to make our education systems better, more inclusive, and more appreciative of the hard work of teachers.

Ahelee Rahman

Year 10, Melbourne Girls Grammar School

*Ahelee also writes a blog at:
www.aheleerahman.com*



Ahelee Rahman and Adam Brodie-McKenzie at the 2019 Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference. Photo: Casamento Photography

Reflection: On-line, blended and face-to-face learning

Agency and responsibility

As a teacher now re-emerging into face-to-face learning, there are two main reflections I have on **student voice, agency and partnerships** in secondary education.

The first is that **remote learning made the entire school sector have to respond to a situation that inescapably made students responsible for their own learning.** This stress-test has provided an excellent opportunity for everyone involved to have an idea about how a particular environment is genuinely geared to accommodate student agency. The second, building on the first, is that it hopefully reminded us all that **schools**

are social places and that they play a vital role in education beyond academic learning. I hope that this acknowledgement might be explicitly supported more as we plan how to do education in the future.

Remote learning meant that students were responsible for their own learning. It was up to them to connect to the *Zoom* call, up to them to complete the questions being asked on-line.

To the chagrin of some teacher colleagues, if students no longer wanted to participate in the on-line class, they could just leave. They tend to not have this opportunity in face-to-face learning; there are walls and people stopping them. Although this unavoidably meant students were responsible for their learning, it made me question whether **responsibility** is the same as **agency**.

I have always liked the definition of student agency proposed by *The Achievement Gap Initiative* at Harvard University, that **agency is the opposite of helplessness** (Ferguson *et al.*, 2015).

For me this cuts through to what matters. In instances of absence or lack of engagement from students, is that arising from helplessness? If so, then it is not an example of agency.

The difficult part in remote learning is that it did also make it more difficult to help students. In conversations I've had with teacher colleagues across school types and locations, I've heard this to be the case. This is because they can only access students remotely. In instances of helplessness, it could be possible to have parents involved. The degree of success in this approach, and the degree to which such an approach worked in partnership with the student, would be largely contingent on the attitudes and behaviour of the parents' and the school's expectations. This is not a new issue with student agency and partnerships in education but does make prominent how schools, parents, teachers and students interact with these ideals in a tangible way. **It made us confront what we preach with our practice.**

Student voice

In our school, **student voice** through **student feedback** increased during remote learning.

Individual teachers had their own feedback mechanisms that they continued, but we introduced whole-school surveys for students to complete, to have a better understanding of how remote learning was affecting students, in terms of academic learning and wellbeing. What has become evident from these surveys is how much student agency related to both the successes and challenges of on-line learning from students' perspectives.

When senior students were asked an open question of what they liked most about remote learning, overwhelmingly the responses linked to increased flexibility in their learning. **They liked that they were in control and were the decision-makers in how they chose to prioritise their learning.**

The biggest challenges to remote learning related to **motivation**. Students struggling to be motivated to get the work done. It was interesting that this was seen as the biggest challenge, as the vast majority of students are getting the work done. Agency, if seen as the opposite

of helplessness, is directly related to motivation, so that they felt challenged by motivation but also got it done is quite promising. It will be important to examine further what about motivation was challenging and whether it related to a lack of voice, agency or partnerships from students' perspectives.

At the same time, the VCE requirements in senior learning create some structural challenges in these areas, as the curriculum is quite prescriptive. **These feedback mechanisms have increased the potential for student voice in our school and will be promoted more as we return to face-to-face learning.**



Adam Brodie-McKenzie at the 2019 Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference. Photo: Ana Maria Ngo

Social importance

Other than creating an environment that inevitably increased students' responsibility for their learning, remote learning has also highlighted the **social importance** of schools.

According to the surveys, students are most looking forward to returning to face-to-face learning to see their friends, and even their teachers. My Year 9 class, who are still remote learning while senior classes have returned to school, were eager to return. A few of them were telling me that they thought they learnt

more from face-to-face learning, but they did more work in remote learning. I said this seemed counter-intuitive and they explained it was because their teachers are able to be with them as they learn and it is easier to collaborate with their peers in face-to-face. One said that face-to-face gave them more time to think about what they were learning and bounce it around with the friends. These students were giving reasons on why being around people is important for academic learning.

However the social learning that goes into being around other people is crucial to human development and has been sorely missed by everyone involved.

The smiles and camaraderie from being surrounded by 25 other people in a room was palpable for my senior classes. **My Year 9s think it's good for academics; I think it's good for wellbeing.**

Community

Remote learning demonstrates how important **community** is to education.

The social part is the main loss from on-line learning, and no degree of on-line collaboration can compare to being in a room with others. For those students who chose to not engage with on-line learning, it emphasised the need for the school to reach out to them more but also to reach out to parents.

Building a connection between parents and schools is difficult in large secondary schools. However on-line learning revealed that partnerships are not limited to students and teachers, but highlighted the crucial role parents can play in fostering student voice and agency.

If remote learning returns in the future, it's important for us to have mechanisms to combat helplessness and encourage collaboration in education. **It's also important for us to realise that ultimately students are also responsible for their learning all of the time and so structures that support them in ensuring they have agency as well as responsibility should be fostered, no matter where the learning is happening.**

Adam Brodie-McKenzie
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The foreign world of remote learning

My name is Wren Gillett. I am a first-year university student and student voice advocate for **Pivot Professional Learning**. I am experiencing first hand the foreign world of remote learning. I haven't even had a class on Campus yet, so everything about this transition has been a major learning curve.

I understand that, while I am transitioning to self-guided learning in the tertiary sense, most young people across the world are having to self-direct and learn mostly autonomously for the first time. Many students are struggling, as are a lot of educators, but that is what is so significant about this shift: we are all learning about these changes at the same rate, and are navigating best practice as a collective. However, despite the collaborative nature of the transition, from my discussions with primary and secondary student groups around Australia, I believe the students' perspective has been significantly overlooked.

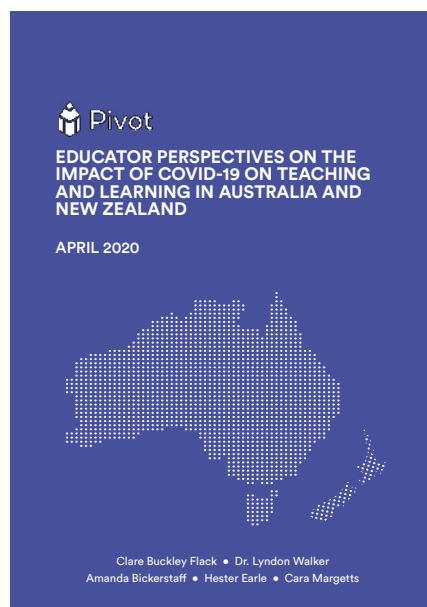
It seems as though many people like to use the phrase '**student voice and agency**', but few understand what this truly looks like.

While each term is multifaceted, true voice and agency goes beyond mere consultation and last-minute feedback. They are systemic structures that incorporate the student perspective at every level of decision making, insofar as the decisions affect the students themselves. Hence the phrase, "**don't talk about us, without us**".

Experts and educators have been coming together to discuss student engagement and wellbeing over the course of this transition period, but I raise the question: **are the students themselves not the real professionals in this case?** The answers students provide aren't theoretical: they are based on personal experiences and performance. Young people know how they learn best. I find it interesting that this perspective has not been involved as extensively as the others.

How many schools truly worked alongside their students when structuring the virtual classroom, or even asked these young people which on-line format would be most engaging?

'Student voice' has become a renowned term that is highly prevalent among recent discussions regarding pedagogy. Though while it is being more widely used, it is so important that 'student voice' does not become tokenised as a checkbox for educational institutions.



White paper

Pivot's recent whitepaper, '**Educators' perspective of the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in Australia and New Zealand**', explicitly demonstrates that teachers want what is best for their students and are most concerned about "**meeting student needs from a distance**" (Flack *et al*, 2020, p 12). We know that teachers truly care about their students and their learning efficiencies, so what better way to improve the learning environment than to work alongside these young people? This is a critical step for educators and, while this may sound like old news for some, the student's voice has been undeniably overlooked in the midst of all the external chaos.

These partnerships between students and teachers are what will improve the virtual classroom and ease the transition back to whatever the new version of 'normal' becomes.

The **Boma New Zealand** 'campfire' discussion for **Youth Voices** on the 5th May 2020, addressed the transition back to school. This interactive youth conference created an open dialogue for young people, aged 16-20 years from New Zealand and Australia, to speak about the state of education.

Students expressed that there is a lot of pressure to "**get up to speed**", so that teaching can continue as per usual once on-campus education resumes. Pivot found that about 80% of educators, in both Australia and New Zealand, agreed that their students will need additional support once everyone is back in the regular classroom (Flack *et al*, 2020, p 12). However, while there is cause for concern around the disruption to student learning capabilities, it is important that our education system pathway to bring students back "up to speed", doesn't create a culture of ongoing stress, especially after what has already been an incredibly stressful start to the year.

Wellbeing

Many young people have shared that their wellbeing has decreased since the isolation restrictions were enforced, and there has undoubtedly been a heightened vulnerability in all demographics and professions over this difficult period.

Most young people aren't feeling their best at the moment – myself included. We need to counter the idea that we must quickly compensate for missed learning opportunities with extra work, as a lot of students are already feeling overwhelmed – without even taking their education into consideration. The limits that define what students can mentally handle at the moment are critically subjective, so what better way to navigate this new pathway than to speak with the students themselves.

Pivot's research shows that teachers care about their student's wellbeing.



Wren Gillett at the 2019 Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference. Photo: Ana Maria Ngo

When teachers were asked to pick their top three concerns about distance learning for students, the most common responses were students' social isolation, a decrease in student well-being, and potential learning loss (Flack *et al*, 2020, P 15).

The volume of learning loss is significant and needs to be addressed. However, this cannot be handled effectively by young people if they are already feeling mentally overwhelmed –they need the support of their educators.

Before additional changes can transpire, students need to feel as though their teachers understand them, and are there to support them. An open dialogue between teachers and students should be encouraged, as this will reduce the feelings of isolation that many young people are currently experiencing.

Additionally, working alongside students to improve the classroom through meaningful feedback and partnerships, will help cultivate engagement, irrespective of whether students are learning remotely or within the classroom. When students meaningfully contribute to the classroom structure and formation, they consequently feel accountable for its success.

Feeling heard during this isolating time could make all the difference. So, encourage your students to speak up, and when they do, don't just listen to them – really hear them.

Wren Gillett
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The Pivot White Paper is available at:
<https://bit.ly/3bXVQBQ>

See more details on page 55 of this issue of Connect.

Real roles of community value

In these times of community isolation and closure of services and businesses, can we develop ways for students to have **real, authentic roles of community value** as part of their learning? The pandemic may offer particular opportunities for this to happen.

One example was documented by the **ABC South West Victoria** in a story by **Matt Neal** and **Steve Martin** in late April: see <https://ab.co/2XDlkz2>

This tells of **Jack Ward**, a 16 year-old student from **Ararat** in Victoria, who has responded to the closure of the town newspaper, the **Ararat Advertiser**, by setting up a local news podcast.

Have a look at the full story at the link. Could you or your students find ways to meet community needs in difficult times - whether on-line or back in school - and make this part of the curriculum?

There will be enterprises or services that are needed as we emerge from lockdown – can students lead these?

Photo of Jack Ward supplied by Jack to the ABC.



Babies, bathwater and on-line learning

Despite the somewhat unfounded criticism from some sections of the media, the way that schools and teachers across the country almost seamlessly pivoted to an entirely new form of teaching and learning - in the space of a few short days, in many cases - is worthy of some acknowledgement. Equally worthy of congratulations are the students, and the families that supported them, who quickly adapted to make the most of these opportunities, in the face of troubling and uncertain times and futures.

Now, as schools begin to consider how they might return to normal in the coming months - which will require a significant amount of extra work from staff and students again - it's worth pausing for a moment to consider what we have learned about teaching and learning, and more importantly, about **student voice and agency** and the role of community partnerships during the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to a newfound appreciation for the work of teachers and the challenges they face every day in the classroom, I think there are two key lessons for educators and their students to reflect upon in the coming weeks.

Firstly, while some have claimed that COVID-19 doesn't discriminate (which I think is not correct), it is clear that there still remain significant **inequalities** in Australia's education system - and the effects of any such disruption are often felt the hardest amongst those section of the educational community that are already disadvantaged.

If anything, the pivot to on-line learning has widened these inequalities. Students who are well placed to manage such a transition might have access to suitable technological resources and tools, including personal laptop devices, webcams, and an internet that is fit for purpose. They might also benefit from having highly educated parents who are able to work from home and assist their children with work that has been sent home. On the other hand, students from less wealthy environments might lack both the physical hardware, being forced to share an *iPad* amongst two, three or even more siblings (if at all), for example, or having to use mobile data, with limited bandwidth or capacity, as well as being able to rely on less support from their parents.

While such inequalities have always existed within Australia's education system, the disruption caused by COVID-19 seems to have only exacerbated them. Some schools seemed well positioned and easily able to translate to an on-line form of learning, making use of supernumerary staff, or on-staff learning designers and developers in order to replicate the classroom experience as much as possible. Such schools didn't need to engage in discussions about access to materials or internet speeds; they could, and by and large did, operate from an assumption that families had the capacity to provide such access.

Other schools were forced to photocopy staff-created worksheets, and send home not only packs of reading materials, but also furniture like desks and chairs so that students had the capacity to study at home. The level of these inequalities is, at least, moderated to some extent within the schooling environment, mostly due to the efforts of some of the teachers at these schools, but outside of school - learning from home - the inequalities become obvious and glaring.

However, there are also some really interesting ideas that, I think, suggest that the transition to on-line learning does not necessarily have to widen the educational gap between wealthy and not-so-wealthy areas. In short, the nature of the learning design is an important factor in addressing the educational divide, and I think that good learning design might even serve to narrow the divide in on-line learning.

There are some examples that reflect this idea: a number of primary schools in Sydney used the school site closure as an opportunity to utilise their

community partners to teach special classes. For example, parents who were engineers and architects and doctors and nurses spoke to students. Other parents took the time to record themselves reading stories, or painting a portrait, or building something out of wood in the shed. Other shared particular skills, and even activities like Yoga routines and workouts.

While a lot of this community support was generated by a desire to do something to assist during a time of crisis, I think that it suggests a possibility for how we might reconsider schools and equity, even when the crisis ends. Such an approach to schooling might begin by recognising that, within a school's community, there are dozens of potential collaborations and partnerships. The power of these collaborations lies in finding ways to share them beyond individual students or small groups, and to a much larger community.

If we've learnt anything, I think that the sudden expertise we've all developed in on-line web conferencing and learning suggests a way that this might be made possible.

I titled this reflection '*Babies, Bathwater and On-line Learning*'. It refers to the well-known recommendation that '*we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater*'. I think that applies in this instance, too.

It would be too easy to return to a traditional model of school education as the danger of COVID-19 hopefully passes. In some ways, that might even be desirable for students and families concerned about their children's education and the interruptions to it. However, I urge educators to consider how they might make use of both the skills and knowledge that they've developed as a result of this disruption, in order to leverage new partnerships that can narrow educational inequality. By doing this, education can become a truly community-based undertaking.

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Why education needs technology

In the current socio-political climate, centralised around the struggle against COVID-19, the overwhelming importance of the implementation of technology into all aspects of education systems around the world is becoming increasingly apparent.

We have been seeing an introduction of web-based solutions to common educational issues in recent years; the use of *SharePoints* for storing accessible information for staff and students alike, on-line logs for homework and extracurricular tasks - such as *Satchel* in the UK - to keep pupils connected to their work from home, and even on-line standardised assessments to track students' learning. Even those less engaged with modern information technology can see a fact that is plain and simple: the efficiency and accessibility of the learning process, especially for young people in education, has skyrocketed since these minor updates.

As a 15-year-old student, I can complete a case study on a formerly alien subject after a quick research session on a website like *Wikipedia* (commonly shunned by teachers for not being 'fact-checked', despite this being quite the contrary) and the utilisation of applications such as *Microsoft Word*. If a teacher told me to complete a fact-file on the Democratic Republic of the Congo back 40 years ago, I would have had to buy the relevant media - most likely a paperback atlas - or search for such in a library. Let's say this takes me a few hours, accounting for transportation to a book shop and my time scrolling through multiple outdated Dewey Decimal systems laid out on shelves. Today, using a phone I carry in my pocket, I am able to find the relevant information in mere minutes.

Modernisation of the education system betters the learning experience of the students within it. Not just through the education itself, but through the tools presented to students in our contemporary society.

Even if education systems around the world refuse to move with the times and the technology that comes with such chronology, it is their duty to arm students with the tools they need to add these innovations to their arsenal

for their development as people and as collectives. Knowledge of social media, communications networks, software development and graphic design not only helps me with my schoolwork but enriches me, enabling myself to engage in extracurricular activities - in my case, **youth activism**.

Skills to organise

The ability to properly scrutinise those with the power to enact change is, I believe, at the top of the list regarding skills young people would like to possess. I argue that this blooms directly from the knowledge of new technologies. They have allowed young people to organise on an unprecedented scale. A prime example? The **Youth Climate Strikes** since 2018. The dramatic, powerful scale it was seen to be, would not be possible without communication between people all around the globe.

The worldwide web lets me correspond with my friends from Cambridge to Kinshasa, Sydney to Shenzhen, about strike dates, resources and all that is needed to get our voice heard. As young people, we have embraced technology. We see modernity for the catastrophe it is, whilst maintaining our open-mindedness. We did not slouch into complacent ignorance; we used what good parts we could from the world we were born into to act and make our home better.

Teach the Future

I am a campaign coordinator for a campaign called **Teach the Future**. It aims to repurpose the education system around the climate emergency and ecological crisis. Since joining earlier this year, I have been employed to help further the campaign and reach our goals; none of my targets

would be achievable without the plethora of applications, webpages and communication networks such as *'Slack'* to connect with my fellow campaigners. We have seen our numbers increase twofold since the implementation of lockdown measures, catching up with each other and sharing updates about our aims every Tuesday evening on *'Zoom'* calls. Recently we collaborated with another climate activism charity, culminating in them giving us a *webinar* on political engagement, which has led to our relations with the UK Parliament blooming. We have drafted and subsequently sent e-mails and letters to nationwide Members of Parliament, including the UK education secretary Gavin Williamson. Our utilisation of technology amidst this challenging time will hopefully have a direct positive impact on our nation and its education system - even internationally - as we draw ever nearer to the postponed **COP26** in Glasgow next November. (Feel free to get in touch with us at hello@teachthefuture.uk and find out more at www.teachthefuture.uk)

Technology can be used for both good and bad, but that is always down to the individual or collective. Technology and the strides towards its progression can be unsustainable and can exploit those with the resources necessary to expand. Nonetheless technology can be used to make a stand for sustainable development and to help disadvantaged communities around the globe. It can lift people from poverty, educate the formerly uneducated and substantially better the quality of life for any population. These facts mustn't be ignored, and we should furthermore be educated on its importance by those who have a responsibility to educate us.

When used for good, technology is an amazing resource, unparalleled in its effectivity.

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TEACH THE FUTURE

Robes, pets, and pronouns: *Snapshots into the practice and practicalities of teaching on-line*

After the infamous 'first year of teaching' threw me for a loop, I had to regroup. I wanted more freedom in what I taught, and I wanted to trust my students to choose what they learned and how they learned it. So, I started teaching on-line, long before it became the new normal.

I am a non-school-based teacher, and run a business called *Fun is a Necessity*. I teach writing on-line, independently and in partnership with nonprofits like *Young Writers Project* (<https://youngwritersproject.org/>).

I work with adults and young people, primarily using a methodology called *Gateless Writing*. I also help host on-line LGBTQIA+ support groups through an organization called *Outright VT* (<http://www.outrightvt.org/>).

Facilitating on-line extracurricular learning has been a joy. I have been able to embrace my original impulse in teaching, which is one of trust: trust in people, and trust that circumstances will unfold just as they're supposed to. I have been learning to trust that what I have to offer is enough; to trust that what my students have to share will be enough; to trust that tech failures are all part of the process, and sometimes have strangely perfect timing; to trust that people are capable of knowing when they need a drink or a bathroom break; to trust that blank stares are sometimes just how people look when they are in front of screens.

Things I have loved about teaching and learning on-line:

- ***A cloak of invisibility/silence:*** I can mute or hop off camera for my own bathroom breaks, for a crunchy snack, for a stretch, or for a disruptively loud yawn.
- ***Space for listening:*** By muting myself and/or others, there can be a space of silence for listening, for processing, for privacy, and an oasis of quiet for people who are sensitive to sensory stimuli, who might otherwise feel overwhelmed in large groups.
- ***Students are often very clever with tech resources:*** Even as a young teacher, I'm noticing that I have a lot to learn from my students. They are experiencing many hours of learning on-line, with

many different facilitators, and bring in great suggestions, making the whole learning process feel more collegial and mutual, something I love.

- ***Geographic and age-mixing:*** When classes can be created and shared with a link, there is a huge increase in accessibility to lots of different ages, from lots of different places. Young people no longer need to rely on adults to drive them to writing groups or support groups.
- ***Names and pronouns by default:*** In *Zoom*, and likely on other platforms, participants can rename themselves and add their pronouns. This is a wonderful opportunity. In most classrooms, and meeting spaces, nametags become less important over time, or aren't used at all. I love that on-line platforms make it easier for me to remember and respect how people would like me to refer to them.
- ***Home and humanity:*** Ideally, home is a safe space, and students can make themselves comfortable while they learn. I notice that I can relax more on-line than I felt like I could as a classroom teacher. I feel like I can be more human when I'm teaching from home. I taught my last workshop, a silly writing party for about a dozen youth, while wearing a fluffy pink robe over pajamas, because that's what felt right, and the whole thing went off without a hitch. Lots of learning, lots of writing, and no sense that anyone needed to be more than they were at any given time.
- ***Pets:*** It can be fun to have pets pop into calls. Again, they make the context feel far more human and delightful, and can be good conversation starters when things get quiet during support groups. Sure, they can be a little distracting, but there are always distractions when teaching, and these ones are often very cute!

- ***Easy show and tell:*** When I'm at home I have access to everything – my whole library, my favorite snacks, my art supplies. I don't have to worry about forgetting anything on my drive to work.

A few things I don't love...

- ***Screen eyes:*** So itchy. So irritating. But I've downloaded *flux* (an app that reduces blue light as it gets darker outside), and I try to limit how long I spend on screens each day.
- ***Tech inequities:*** With all the accessibility benefits of on-line teaching, there are also drawbacks. Some group participants don't have fast internet or high quality tech.
- ***Accessibility issues:*** Some participants have conflicting disabilities – for example, some might really love being able to mute the class, but they might also get migraines from staring at screens too long, or might struggle with access in other ways. Sometimes there are no-win situations, but there are best practices, and I'm still learning them.

Below is a link to a helpful guide about hosting accessible meetings. I found it in realising, as I wrote this article, that I was noticing problems I hadn't bothered making a sincere effort to research and solve. I'll be implementing as many of these guidelines as I can, starting with including accessibility info in class descriptions, and doing access checks, not just on volume, but also on the speed of my speech, when I start meetings. I'm also going to look into using *Google Meet's* autocaptioning abilities.

<https://on.nyc.gov/2LkycEN>

I am constantly learning new tools and strategies for facilitating on-line groups. I hope that some of the things I have shared might help you in your own learning, or make you feel a little less alone in this brave new world of default on-line teaching.

If you have any questions, feel free to get in touch at

www.funisanecessity.com/contact

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Are we there yet? Are we there?

This much-maligned question seems so appropriate for education's recent history. All that was normal, everything that was routine, all of our structures, have been turned upside down and hurled into the wind of COVID-19. From having spoken of a future dominated by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), we have found ourselves living in it. Innovation and creativity became the new normal as we 'Apollo 13' schooling into a model that met the demands of emergency remote learning. The pressure, the workload, the demands on our time and the cognitive load have all been immense, and so it seems fitting to ask "Are we there yet?".

And, just when we think we are getting our heads around this remote learning business, things are changing again. We are going back into face-to-face teaching, albeit under conditions dominated by social distancing, temperature checks and personal protective equipment. Another new normal is on the horizon. But, as Winston Churchill might have stated, this is not the end, this is not the beginning of the end, it might be the end of the beginning, we just don't know. VUCA continues to dominate, and these are indeed post-normal times.

Amidst all our current scrambling, particular patterns have emerged. In the absence of face-to-face dialogue with students, aspects of teaching that might otherwise be minimised or hidden have bubbled to the fore. In the initial rush to emergency remote on-line learning, a plethora of worksheets and on-line learning tools became the norm. The focus was on giving the students something to do, something that allowed them to spend time each day on school-like learning while they remained safe at home.

And then came the videos: teachers recording lessons to be absorbed by learners. Teaching regressed to a time when the flow of learning was unidirectional (from teacher to student) and focused on low-order skills and knowledge recall. It was a little like watching HAL, the supercomputer of Arthur C. Clarke's "2001: A space odyssey" sing *Daisy*. For many, this was a troubling time, and they knew that much of what was good about contemporary education was missing.

As the time of remote learning continued, fresh questions and wonderings began to emerge. The pattern shifted as teachers began to wonder how might we ensure that the remote learning we are tasking our children with, is engaging, empowering and thought-provoking. There were efforts to bring dialogue into our on-line learning environments, and students and teachers once again shared ideas and built connections. Questions such as "How do we translate the dominant patterns of dialogue and deep thinking into remote learning?" and "How do I continue to teach for understanding, and make the thinking of my students visible in this new time?" were pondered.

Now, as we move back into face-to-face teaching, we have the opportunity to reflect on this time and to consider what might have worked and what we might need to tweak. It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. If this is so, what have teachers and students missed most from the version of school that was the norm before COVID-19 became a thing? And, how might we restart the education system in ways that better focus us on the things which matter most?

Absences

As we look back at the early days of remote learning, we notice two things were absent. When we examine what we tried to add back into the mix as the days stretched into weeks, these two things again stand out as missing. Given the close relationship and codependence between the two, it is not surprising that once one went

missing, the other did too. What might these things be? - **student agency and deep and varied thinking.**

Student agency and thinking are natural bedfellows, but they are not always immediately linked. **Student agency** is often associated with opportunities for student voice or choice. In many ways, this makes sense and schools should foster opportunities for these things, but **agency** is more than just a nice way of making decisions about canteen menus. Once we look at how schools might promote agency as a disposition with lifelong value, then we begin to see agency in a different light; one that requires thinking.

Bandura's definition of agency fits well with most contemporary understandings of the term. According to Bandura (2001): "*The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times.*"

This points to agency having an impact beyond what is achieved when a school listens to student opinion. Indeed the power of agency is most needed when individuals confront challenging times as explained by Little, Snyder and Wehmeyer (2006):

"In facing these challenges, an agentic individual is the primary origin of his or her actions, has high aspirations, perseveres in the face of obstacles, sees more and varied options, learns from failures, has a strong sense of well-being, and so on. A non-agentic individual, on the other hand, is primarily the pawn of unknown extra-personal influences, has low aspirations, is hindered with problem-solving blinders, and often feels both helpless and hopeless."

What is clear here is that agency should be a vital measure of the success that our education systems have. Beyond allowing students to play a part in their education, developing student agency will prepare them for life beyond school as empowered citizens able to shape their world.

The link between thinking and agency should become apparent when we consider a definition of agency that values its place as a lifelong disposition. *“As such, agency, like character, can be understood as a disposition—seeing oneself as an agent of change within the designed environs of one’s world.”* (Clapp et al. 2017)

As Ritchhart notes: *“agency’ is the ability to make choices and direct activity based on one’s own resourcefulness and enterprise. This entails thinking about the world not as something that unfolds separate and apart from us but as a field of action that we can potentially direct and influence.”* (Ritchhart. 2015)

This requires us to think about the world in a particular manner: one that allows us to imagine the part we may play in shaping it. It also requires that students are engaging mindfully with the curriculum, that they are investigating ideas and concepts that matter and that as they do so, they are required to think.

“Learning happens when students engage with ideas, when they ask questions, explore, and construct meaning with our guidance and support.... Exploring meaningful and important concepts that are connected to the world often means students want to take action. Providing opportunities and structures for them to do so encourages students’ agency and power while making the learning relevant.” (Ritchhart & Church, 2020)

In this, we see the connection between deep learning and engagement with learning that matters with learner agency. This is the type of learning that we and our students missed when we moved to emergency remote learning, and it is this that we want to ensure is emphasised as we return to face-to-face.

What this type of learning requires is beautifully captured by Mike Medvinsky of Michigan. Mike is a coach in **Project Zero’s ‘Creating Cultures of Thinking’** course and teacher of Music Production at University-Liggett School. He shares his approach to promoting student agency through a culture of thinking as follows:

I truly believe that the ones who are doing the thinking and the talking are the people who are doing the learning. And when I am the one who is talking the whole time and explaining things I’m the one doing

the thinking and learning. It’s truly important that I set the stage, lay the groundwork for the experience and the learners then take the initiative to do the thinking, do the learning, do the talking, share their ideas, reframe their thinking and continue this journey in our learning experience. So the more that I can take a supportive role, rather than a lead role, the learners become the active agents of their own learning. . . . When a learner is truly owning their thinking, it becomes meaningful and relevant to them. When they’re sitting in a class where they’re just getting information and regurgitating it onto a test its not going to be anything that is an enduring understanding.

(Mike Medvinsky.
Secondary Music Production.
University-Liggett School, Michigan)

The sort of thinking that Mike describes does not occur without the right context and culture. Unless thinking is noticed, named and valued, it won’t thrive. Indeed, all of the dispositions we may aspire to develop in our children such as curiosity, imagination, creativity, empathy, critical thinking and indeed agency cannot be taught in isolation as skills to be mastered. We do not benefit from learning about dispositions. *“Dispositions must be enculturated - that is, learned through immersion in a culture.”* (Ritchhart, 2015)

Making thinking visible

A key component in getting the culture right is the act of **making thinking visible**. When we make thinking visible, we are able to create opportunities to notice and name the thinking that we and our students are engaging in and, when we do this, we encourage more of it, such that thinking becomes routine. This process is well served through the use of thinking routines, and the use of such routines can unlock student agency as Erik Lindemann describes: *“The routines build learners’ capacity to engage with complexity while inspiring exploration. As my students begin internalizing and applying these thinking tools, I become a consultant in their ongoing investigations. Curiosity and excitement fuel deeper learning as my students take the lead.”* (cited in Ritchhart, 2020)

So, are we there yet?

What weeks of emergency remote learning revealed is that even where we claim to value agency and a culture of thinking, the reality might need some tweaking. Do we routinely begin the process of planning for learning with these things in front of mind? Are we asking questions that guide us towards enculturating thinking such as: *“What thinking might my students require here?”* or *“What type of thinking might my students most benefit from experiencing now?”*

Are we seeking to enculturate agency by seeking opportunities for student-led inquiry and subsequent action? Or, do we begin our planning process by asking: *“What will I have my students do today?”* or *“What must I explain to them in this lesson?”* When we look back at the learning we planned as an emergency response to COVID-19, **which of these questions are revealed as our go-to response, and how might we change this narrative?**

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Staying connected and creating new spaces for belonging in the learning...

The uncertain and unique situation we found ourselves in towards the end of March 2020, presented both a challenge and an opportunity to *learn in, with* and *from* the experiences of disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.



As the education system transitioned to broad scale remote and on-line learning environments, the **EdPartnerships team** in Victoria worked in close collaboration with the **Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET)**, young people, families and teaching colleagues to consider how we might collectively embrace the experiences of the current disruption.

What emerged, quite quickly, was the necessity and the possibility of reimagining **ways to belong and stay connected** as a learning community, while remotely located across diverse environments, and opportunities to explore ways of **co-designing learning** in these new spaces. This reimagination resulted in a series of co-designed, semi-structured learning conversations and scaffolds for school communities to select from, adapt or create their own.

In embracing the opportunity and challenge of disruption, we strove to open up the possibility for deeply understanding and reflecting on the complexities of our connected and collective experiences with others overtime, and to reveal what might be possible. As Davidovich, Nikolay, Laugerman, and Commodore (2010) comment *“...to embrace dissonance means to wonder – to be an explorer ... to scan the horizon for the next adventurein search for the nugget that refines into gold”* (p 104).

While at times there was uncertainty about what the adventure might hold, the learning conversations and scaffolds offered to learning communities, indeed revealed the gold. The voices of learners and their families, along with teachers and leaders, documented in this article, reveal what was made possible and what is on the horizon when we actively re-imagine learning; how learning might be organised and designed, and by whom; and what it means, from a diversity of perspectives, to belong and to feel connected.

Navigational Aids and Way Finders

The opportunities and challenges of navigating and exploring the possibilities of reimagining learning in uncertain contexts necessitated clear and discerned markers – **way finders** – to guide decisions and stance in the process. The following design principles are way finders. They capture what we valued and deemed to be important:

- Seek to understand young people and their unique contexts, validating and valuing their back- grounds and experiences and what they bring to the learning.
- Seek to understand family partners, their context and unique needs as adults offering learning support at home.

- Create conditions that develop a strong sense of belonging and connectedness for all within a learning community

It was with these principles in mind that we designed a series of scaffolds to prompt reflection and to guide dialogue. As will be evident, these resources were used in multiple ways and adapted to best meet the needs of those across diverse learning communities.

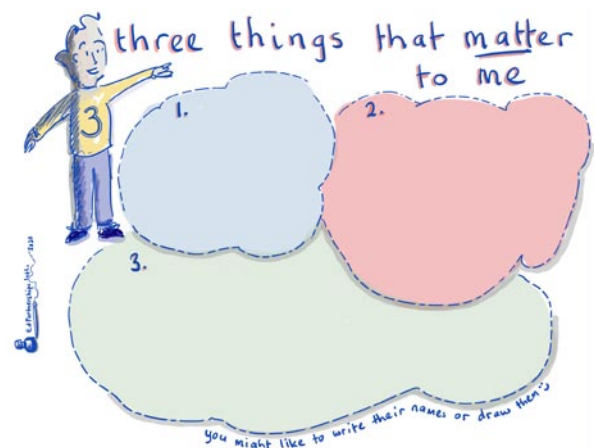
Resource 1: Nine Photos about Me!

Invites young people to take photos in response to one or many of the prompts with the focus firmly on students taking the lead in how and when they respond and with whom. Teachers were also invited to undertake a similar process to share with their learners.



Resource 2: Three Things that Matter to Me!

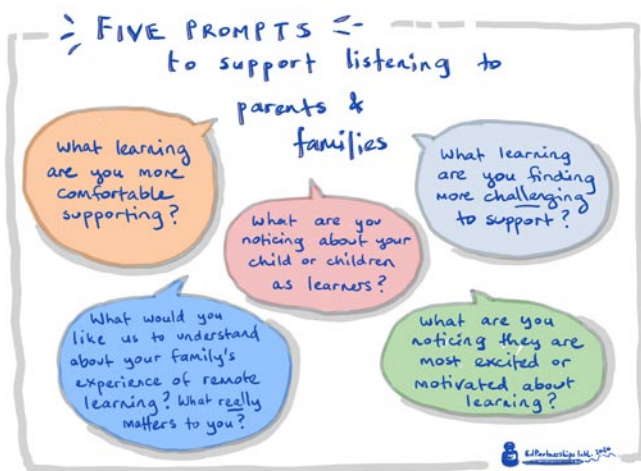
While aimed at younger learners, learners of all ages chose this resource. The prompts invite learners to share what is significant or meaningful to them by finding, holding and ‘talking about’ things that matter to them.



The aim of these first two resources is to deepen understandings of learners and their unique contexts, validating and valuing their backgrounds and experiences and what they bring to the learning. Depending on how the resources are offered and how the responses are shared, understandings may develop from an engagement between the learner and their teacher/s, between the learner and their peers, between the learner, family member/s and teachers. Importantly, and possibly foremost, is the opportunity these resources create for self-understanding.

Resource 3: Five Prompts to support listening to parents and families

This resource supports a conversation with a parent/s, other family members or carers to deepen understanding of family partners, their contexts and unique needs as adults offering support for their child's learning at home.



Overall, these three connected resources support a process of listening to, and learning from, students, parents, carers and families and while strengthening opportunities to partner in learning. The resources were designed with a keen eye on creating the conditions for belonging and connectedness both now – in times of disruption – and into the future. They were also designed to offer clues about how to better design/co-design for learning - for and with young people and their families - and to create the conditions necessary for this learning partnership.

To support the use of the resources, two on-line workshops were offered to school colleagues. These provided an opportunity for learning about the potential of the resources and to uncover the gold!



What was revealed... Young People's insights...

Young people were invited to respond to one prompt or many, choosing the ones they felt comfortable and confident to share within a time-frame that worked for them. Some discussed with whom and how they would like to share their responses, as well as the medium they were most comfortable with. Flexibility and an openness in co-creating these spaces to suit learners and their needs was important.



With time and through unhurried conversations, the following insights were shared in response to the prompt: **'Who I learn most from in my life':**

"...the environmental activist, Wangari Maathai inspires me. She really cared about the environment and I do too. I like to learn about the environment. I want to do science to help me know other ways we can care for the environment. I like to be in nature, it helps me to feel calm and relaxed..."

(Year 7 student)

As one young person propped themselves up ready for a chat with their teacher via Zoom, they carefully laid out their collection of artefacts: the ones that mattered most to them. As they began sharing their artefacts and discussing their learning, they revealed the following insights:



The conversations also led to wonderings about learning, when learning would continue at school:

- *I hope where we work might change, like maybe we get to choose who we get to work next to and things like that*
- *When we go back to school I wonder if maybe we could have more choices in our learning?*
- *I hope we can choose our schedule because we have all been doing the same activity at once.*

'What makes learning easier for me?'

I LIKE BEING INDEPENDENT
AND I LIKE TO DECIDE
ABOUT MY LEARNING

I like to do more
hands on learning and
it is easier for me to
understand things if it is
hands on.

I work better by myself most of
the time, but sometimes I like
to work with other people but
most of the people in my class
are really bossy and they don't
always let me say my ideas.
When I say my ideas, they always
say there is lots of reasons why
it's a bad idea

Parents and carers insights...

Parents and carers engaged with the 'Five Prompts to support listening to parents and families', in various ways: via e-mail, face-to-face conversations, video calls and phone calls. Through listening and following the parent or carers lead, teachers and family members were privileged with opportunities to connect and understand each other in new ways. Sharing their collective experiences and aspirations for learning resulted in a more authentic and agentic partnering orientation. The followings quotes were captured as a result of family members engaging in the various opportunities that were offered:

The conversations on Zoom were an equaliser. Traditionally we (parents) go to information nights or the like, we sit down passively and they (teachers) stand up and talk to us. The school says, 'we are partnering' - that's not partnering... but in this space we were. I could speak freely, the teacher spoke freely, it just felt normal and we could both talk about how we were going, what we were noticing about my daughter and what we thought was important... I live with my parents, so they could join in too...

The flexible part of the children's day has been a real strength. They know the learning experiences they needed to focus on and they have taken ownership of when and how they do them. This has taught them prioritisation skills as well as time management skills... as well as a sense of achievement.

It has felt like the doors to the school world have been opened through this process. It is so wonderful to have had this glimpse and would be a shame if these doors were shut again.

... at times I was surprised by just what my kids could do independently! Times when I needed to leave the kids to their own devices.



We loved observing the things that kids can get up to when given time, space, cardboard boxes and clothes horses.

It is important to note that not all learners or families who were invited accepted this initial invitation and there were many reasons for this. Importantly, this has led to a careful consideration of how conditions are created, and invitations offered, where all are able to achieve connectedness and belonging in the learning. We are currently investigating, with our school colleagues, other ways, other times, and other spaces to connect, and belong together in the learning. The complexities of experience mean that we need to be attuned to emerging ways of listening widely and deeply to all voices within our learning communities.

Teachers, Teacher Leaders' and Principals' insights

The following insights were gained from our co-design processes and conversations in the on-line workshops, where teachers and leaders gathered with the **EdPartnerships team** to learn from each other about what they discovered from offering the resource in their learning communities.



One **secondary school teacher** reflected on a three-way conversation he had with a student and parent, where, in dialogue together, there was a re-framing of relationships.

... it had a humanising effect, the three of us revealing difference and commonality...

"It ended up being this really lovely opportunity to see the mother and daughter asking each other questions and unpacking them together. I was almost just a moderator – I got to see what the mother was thinking about the learning environment and also her thoughts on her daughter's learning ..."

And a conversation with a student:

"What really struck me was one of the students is very enthusiastic ... but she is facing challenges at home where she has to look after her siblings who have some very challenging needs..."

As the teacher came to understand the particular challenges the young person was experiencing, together they were able to co-create new more manageable learning experiences relevant to the learner's needs.

"I see this resource as being a really great way to check in with students. I'll be able to have a check in with a student every so often and see where they're at and how things are progressing for them."

A **primary school teacher** reflected:

"These resources really open up the space for understanding. When we do understand context and the tensions that might get in the way, the passions, the interests, we're better able to have a co-conversation, a reciprocal conversation. It becomes a partnership."

"What I noticed through using the photos and mapping them out was a concept map of shared interests. Students were much quicker to create their own conferences with other students who also shared an intrigue or mystery of interest."

"I'd never really seen that immediacy of coming together and treating each other as experts, figuring out what other people know and currently understand about an issue. The students are having strong, powerful conversations as a genuine sense of coming together because it's initiated by them."

As the students and teacher began to co-design new learning opportunities, the teacher began to contemplate how he and his students might progress their learning together:

"How do we frame our inquiry in a way that is hopeful? As a disposition, how can we be open to change and doing things differently as the world moves on? I think our students are engaged with the world and how it is and I think they want to emerge from this differently than we entered."

A **Principal in a secondary school** reflected on the opportunity these learning conversations provided him and his community of learners, he remarked:

"I'm now learning about things that really matter to young people and they are also discovering new things about themselves ..."

"I think there are some things we perhaps convinced ourselves really matter and now we've discovered maybe they don't."



He went further, adding:

"... we need to listen to the kids with open hearts and minds because there are things that schools and parents hang onto because we think they are really important. But if kids are giving us a different message over and over again then we have to do things differently, I think it's time we listened to young people more ..."

"... as teachers we will always be important, we know we matter, but maybe we don't matter in the same way as we have ... the role of the teacher is something that I think we are exploring a bit more, given these new circumstances ... actually we are thinking more about the role of teacher, the role of the young person, all our roles in the ecology, all the roles that we have to play and how they might be more connected ..."

What did we learn?

Paradoxically, while the period of disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic demanded quick responses and an immediate recalibration of our routines, it has also required us to slow down and to be attentive to our immediate surroundings and interactions. In a myriad of ways there were experiences of dis-order as new patterns began to emerge and become embedded into our day to day. As one teacher leader commented: *"We have slowed down; we are thinking differently; we have a deeper understanding and empathy."* In this 'slowing down' maybe we, as Davidovich *et al* (2010) suggest, lifted our eyes to the horizon and wondered what might else might be possible.

The resources offered by the **EdPartnerships team**, in partnership with colleagues across a range of learning

communities, created the conditions for interactions and experiences anchored in mutual respect. These interactions and experiences also offered kindness and care towards one another. The reflections from learners, family members, teachers and leaders suggest the resources promoted a dialogue that came to be experienced, as Rinaldi (2008) describes, as a **deep listening** to all and for all – listening with our senses and listening for inclusivity and connection.

From these places of greater understanding, new knowledge was created about how learners and their families might be privileged as transformative agents of collective learning. In opening up a space for 'slowing down' and 'deep listening' the everyday habits of schooling and ways of doing things were disrupted, making

possible new and dynamic learning relationships in community. While we have some clues as to how we might further strengthen enduring, action-oriented partnerships, we still need to investigate further and learn with and for more learners and their families.

Larissa Raymond, Jayne-Louise Collins, Kathy Winton, Kelli Simmons, Maureen O'Rourke and Peter Burrows
EdPartnerships International

References:

- Davidovich, R., Nikolay, P., Laugerman, B. & Commodore, C. (2010). **Beyond School Improvement. The Journey to Innovative Leadership.** USA: Corwin
- Rinaldi, C. (2008) **In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning.** Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

The resources describe in this article can be accessed via our website: www.edpartnerships.edu.au

The **EdPartnerships Team** have also designed two on-line mini-workshops to accompany the resource described in this article. If you are interested in exploring this resource further through an on-line facilitated workshop please contact us to express your interest, as we are planning a series of on-line sessions open to a broad range of educators.

In addition to this resource, we have also co-created two other resources and accompanying on-line learning workshops to support the next phase of learning with, from and alongside one another:

- **Co-designing with learners: Navigating, exploring and designing learning pathways together**
- **Reflecting on the landscape of learning: Some considerations for renewing and re-imagining school**

If you are interested in these two additional resources, please contact us to express your interest and we can organise access to the resource along with some accompanying on-line facilitated workshops to meet your needs.

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www.edpartnerships.edu.au

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“It’s the same but different” Student, family and teacher insights throughout remote learning

The Sunshine Family School Partnerships Cluster comprises three Catholic Primary Schools located within the diverse suburban community of Sunshine, Victoria. **St Bernadette’s, St Paul’s and St Peter’s Catholic Primary Schools** have collaborated together since 2010, focussed on ways to strengthen partnerships between families and schools in order to enhance student learning.

A current focus for the cluster is to elevate students’ capacity to lead their families’ engagement in their own learning. Accordingly, throughout the recent period of remote learning, the cluster has actively sought to learn more about student learning through listening to the lived experiences of students, families and staff.

Staff and families’ ideas expressed throughout this article were gathered through formal (*on-line surveys*) and informal (*anecdotal conversations*) means; student opinion was gathered through an on-line writing project between students and school staff.

Student Experiences

Ten students within the Year 5 and 6 level volunteered to correspond with school staff in order to provide an insight into their experiences of remote learning. Many students mirrored a sentiment that there are both pros and cons to remote learning, expressing that **“it’s the same but different,”** to learning from school.

Remote learning created practical changes that many students enjoyed:

‘We are flexible with time so there’s no rush to get up early, put on a uniform and no pressure to arrive at school on time.’

Learning from home means:

‘I feel relaxed and calm,’

‘I get to hang out with my family’
and

‘It’s fun because we are learning in ways more comfortable for us.’

Despite these remote learning perks, the vast majority of students expressed a clear desire to return to school in order to socialise with friends and have face-to-face learning interactions with their peers and teachers.

What are you noticing about yourself as a learner?

The students were asked to critically reflect on themselves as learners throughout the remote learning period. Each student shared unique insights into how their perceptions of learning and approaches to learning were changing. Some students noticed that remote learning circumstances had enhanced their independence, confidence and level of responsibility for leading their own learning.

Students wrote:

‘I have realised that I am more interested in learning than I thought I was,’

‘I am not shy to try new things,’

‘I can work at my own pace’ and

‘I rely on myself more.’

Students also observed ways in which school-based learning suited them better, some noticing that they are motivated by peer interactions and direct instruction from teachers, for example:

‘When we are at school, we learn more together.’

Students also expressed mixed views about technology-based learning, some identifying that this enhanced their ability to self-manage learning, however others found technology to be less efficient for facilitation of learning. Each student expressed impressive self-awareness of their learning styles, preferences and capabilities.

These students have been invited to continue sharing their learning experiences and perspectives throughout their transition back to school.

Family Experiences

Families were invited to complete an anonymous on-line survey (provided in English and Vietnamese). Family experiences were mixed. Many parents noticed that their children were thriving from home-based learning interactions involving a variety of family members (siblings, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents).

Parents enjoyed the increased visibility of their children’s learning, occurring in real-time:

‘I have noticed my daughter wants to learn more, she is becoming more independent and capable with technology.’

Families acknowledged how personal contact and on-line interaction from teachers increased their children’s sense of satisfaction and motivation for learning.

Observations of children’s learning styles, strengths and challenges were shared by parents:

‘My children are quite capable but very easily distracted’ and

‘My son starts strong in the morning but slows down throughout the day.’

Families also divulged real difficulties faced in supporting their children’s learning when juggling their own work commitments, caring for younger siblings and navigating new technologies.

How is your child benefiting from remote learning?

Notably, families’ insights tended to closely reflect the students’ sentiments expressed earlier within this article. Families recognised that their children had further developed technology skills, increased confidence and **‘are able to work to their own strengths.’**

Others, however, felt that remote learning was **‘not the real deal’** and could not replace school-based learning. Families emphasised their respect for teachers and felt that the relationships between parents and teachers had been

strengthened from more frequent phone calls, e-mails and other interactions through on-line platforms focussed on their children's learning and wellbeing.

Teacher Experiences

Teachers have experienced rapid change within their learning and teaching environments, providing truly unique opportunities and challenges for student learning. This article will not delve into the complexities teachers have faced throughout remote learning, however, does share teachers' observations of their students' strengths in order to celebrate how remote learning has, in some circumstances, empowered students to learn in new ways.

What has excited you about students' leading their learning?

A sample of teachers reflected on changes they had observed in their students' learning throughout remote learning. While acknowledging that students' experiences were diverse and not always positive, teachers shared many examples of students demonstrating skills and learning behaviours.

The teachers' feedback is categorised into sub-headings which highlight specific learner attributes demonstrated by students.

Self-directed learning

The shift to learning from home altered school-based expectations that children learn according to specific routines. One teacher shared that:

'At the start of remote learning I was phoning vulnerable students to get them out of bed for a virtual roll call. I no longer have to do this though as every student is now self-managing their own learning.'

Teachers also noticed that students used school-created materials, for example, written instructions and on-line video clips, to direct their own learning. In short, the dynamics of remote learning provided students with the flexibility to prioritise learning tasks, choose how much time they spent on a task and when to upload it to their teacher.

'Students have been able to create their own schedules and work best to the time fraction they choose, which suits their own learning needs.'

Teachers also noticed changes in perceptions of learning, recognising that *'there has been a shift in students' thinking that learning is something done to them.'* Students extending their own abilities with technology and across the curriculum, were seen to be practical examples of increased student agency.

Problem-solving

Many teachers remarked on their students' increased problem solving capacity.

'In the early weeks I got e-mails from students saying "help" or "I'm confused," so I've needed to prompt them to clarify exactly what they needed. Now, however, students are becoming their own problem-solvers or they contact me with very specific requests such as "I don't know whether I have to draw or describe the shape".'

Responding to Feedback

Students' engagement with teacher feedback was noticed to have become more meaningful. One teacher shared:

'In the classroom, when I've written feedback to students about their learning, often they didn't follow it up. Now though students are reading my feedback and responding to it more thoroughly. I'm wondering whether this is because students have more time at home to consider feedback. Or is it that I'm providing students with more timely feedback, so it's more relevant?'

Learning Interactions

Despite the obvious separation between students, teachers and whole classroom communities, teachers gave many examples of students demonstrating resilience in creating meaningful learning interactions:

'Some students who weren't outspoken in the classroom environment due to feeling shy, or perceptions of peer pressure, have become very vocal within an on-line environment. These students are contributing to on-line classroom discussions and through written communications, which really surprised me.'

"We started with children feeling very shy to be talking on the phone, but over time the students began using the time to explain their work and ask questions."

"Students aren't reliant on being literate to contribute their learning, they record themselves talking about their learning and share videos."

"Throughout remote learning I've seen my students demonstrate talents that weren't visible within a classroom setting."

"Remote learning provided a real-life opportunity for students to learn about on-line safety. With the on-line platform that we use, we can monitor how students are using their devices. A few instances of students accessing non-learning related material meant that we've been able to have positive conversations between the student, family and school. We used the conversations as a learning opportunity to help the student understand why their behaviour wasn't safe, in an authentic and relevant way."

Moving Forward

While the experiences of students, families and teachers are demarcated within this article, the reality is that learning is relational, enhanced through connections between home, community and school environments. Distinct similarities are apparent between student, family and teachers' observations of student learning, not discounting that student learning is neither linear nor homogenous. Inherent within the expressed perspectives however, is a call for family school partnerships to continue to grow stronger as a result of our remote learning experiences.

Students can be best supported to lead their learning, through the collaboration of families and teachers.

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Family engagement moving forward *not* back!

COVID-19 and the response regarding isolation and social distancing has presented the community with many challenges. **Amongst these, education has been at the forefront.** There has been considerable public discussion about what schools should do, what missing formal schooling means for children and young people, what missing schooling means for families, communities and the economy and how digital technologies can help school learning.

At times, this commentary and debate has been quite extreme and unhelpful. *"The Prime Minister now says the education of Australia's school-age teenagers and children 'hangs in the balance' (ABC News 15 April 2020)."*

By necessity, efforts to adjust to and implement remote schooling at home have been rushed, involving forced changes to the traditional roles of parents, children and school staff.

It has long been acknowledged that parents, families, and carers are a child's first and therefore, in many ways, their most important teachers. More than 50 years of research from across the world provides evidence of the important role parents play in supporting their children's formal school education. Understanding what parent engagement is, and how important parent engagement in learning is remains a work in progress. There are very different perspectives on this.

The rapid movement to remote schooling at home has required parents, children and school staff to accept and make changes without much discussion, preparation and training.

Children have been expected to *'take more responsibility'* for their own learning. This obviously varies depending on the age of the child, but it is one of the consistent themes in documents and guidance around learning at home. Children are encouraged to try their hardest and to collaborate.

The initial advice was generally about *'having a routine, creating the right environment for learning'* and *'meeting timelines and due dates.'* There was little spoken about having fun, enjoying learning, exploring new ways of learning and completing tasks or being curious or learning by being in the home environment. There is little guidance or

encouragement for engaging with their parents and other family members other than *'asking for help.'*

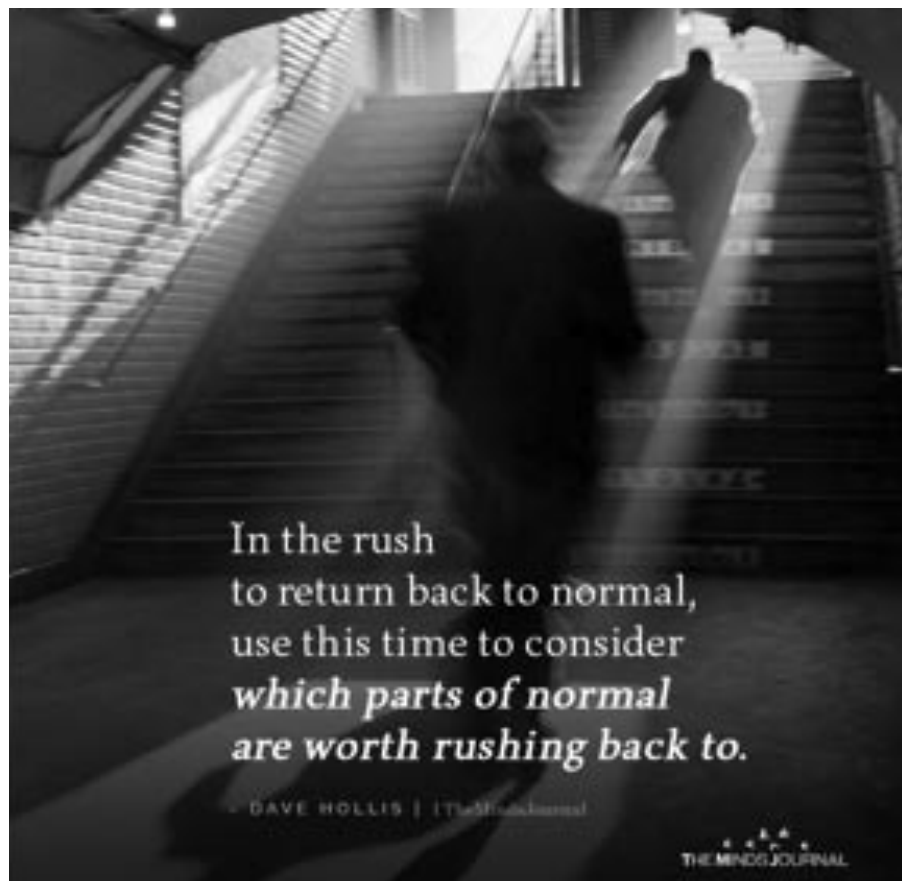
Learning is relational wherever and whenever it happens, and it is particularly relational when the learning is happening in the family home. Learning at home provides a great chance for children to think about what they are learning and how they learn. This critical thinking is required if children are to take more responsibility for their own learning. It is more than just meeting the requirements of the set task but rather thinking about how they might learn best and apply this to each task.

Parents have also had their role changed. Many parents expressed

feelings of being asked to be the teacher. This created anxiety and tension as they tried to work out their new role as they were going. Sometimes the advice was clear: *"The way your child learns at home may be different from how they have been learning at school. As a parent or carer your role is not to replace the teacher. It is to support your child or young person's learning provided by the school"* (<https://bit.ly/3dbvEoA>). But what does this idea of support mean? It is clearly very different from when a child is learning at school. Or is it?

Overall parents have responded exceptionally well to the challenges of this new role. From my work as a **Family and Community Engagement Consultant** in Catholic schools in Melbourne it appears that, whilst many parents were not happy with the expectations placed on them, particularly with little preparation and training, they have done their best and, in many cases, both children and parents have found ways to enjoy the experience.

What is clear now is that parents will not, and should not, be expected to revert to the pre-coronavirus role of parents in school learning. There are parts



of that role that schools would do well not to be 'rushing back to'. Rather schools can embrace parents' new engagement in learning, capture their insights into how their child/children learn, encourage their willingness to explore and learn with their child/children and maintain the new ways they have developed to learn together. Parents have knowledge of, and insights into their child's/children's learning that is unique and must not be ignored. Through this time parents have had doors of understanding opened that create new opportunities for partnering.

The role of **school staff/teachers** has changed during this time also. Again, without much discussion, preparation and training, teachers have been required to embrace digital technologies and use them, learning about them as they go.

Learning during this period has been described as happening remotely. Remote by definition can mean *"(of a place) situated far from the main centres of population; distant or having very little connection with or relationship to"*. This description is different to the way teachers work and engage in school settings, where they have direct contact through sight, voice, touch, hearing and intuition.

Teachers have had to construct learning in different ways, to rethink what they did normally in their classrooms and think with greater empathy about the circumstances and environments of the children and their families. Teachers have reached out to children and families through phone calls, e-mail and video conferencing to listen, ask questions and adapt learning tasks. Teaching has become more visible, publicly accessible and therefore under more scrutiny, particularly, through the media. This potentially leaves teachers feeling vulnerable.

Teachers have had to design learning in ways that enable the child to **take more responsibility** whilst building stronger connections with the parents/carers who were there to support them. This is challenging. This sharing of authority and power is what underpins **'partnership'**. It has provided an unprecedented opportunity to explore what has been learned about partnering with parents, and what is needed to continue to work effectively in close partnership with them.

So, what now?

The first thing is to take time to ask children, parents and school staff in our school communities about their experiences and what has been learnt. The commentaries and the interactions of social media and daily broadcasts should not be accepted as the best source of information or as being representative. School communities should take time to listen, reflect and learn – to build their own understandings, informed by their community.

Everyone has changed during this time of COVID-19. The world has changed. It can never **'go back'** to the way it was. Each person is the product of how they have experienced this time.

Children have grown, and time should be taken to learn about this, to understand and embrace them as they are now.

Parents and carers will have changed. They have had insights into their child's learning. They have had insights into the world of teaching and into what it means to work with their child as she/he learns and experiences formal school learning. Having entered this space, schools need to work out new ways of harnessing that experience of parents, building on it and altering the ways they are partnering with them.

Teachers will have new insights into themselves as educators and new understandings of their craft of teaching. They will have experienced the joys and frustrations of working differently, of working in **partnership**, of working remotely, and of having to rely on factors outside their direct control including technology, home environments, languages, parent perceptions, to name but a few.

What are the Deep Questions to ask and think about?

Children

1. What did you learn about **yourself** as a learner that will help you to engage in your learning more in the future?
2. What did you learn about your **parents/carers** and how they can help you in your learning in the future?
3. What did you learn about your **teacher/s** that will help you to work with and learn from them in the future?

Parents & Carers

4. What did you learn about **yourself** and how you learn that could help you with your child/children in the future?
5. What did you learn about your **child/children** and how they learn that will help you support their learning in the future?
6. What did you learn about **teachers** and teaching that might help you work with your child/children in the future? How might that learning help you to work with your child's teacher/s?

School Staff & Teachers

7. What did you learn about **yourself** and **your approach to teaching** that you want to keep as part of the way you teach?
8. What did you learn about **children** that you want to incorporate into your planning and work in the future?
9. What did you learn about **parents/carers** that you want to incorporate into your planning and work in the future?
10. What did you learn about **leading** school communities to engage with learning?

Leaders

11. What did you learn about **yourself** and how you learn and lead that could help you with the way you lead learning in the future?
12. What did you learn about **children** and how they learn that can inform your approaches to leading learning in the future?
13. What did you learn about **parents/carers** and their role in learning that can inform your approaches to leading learning in the future?
14. What did you learn about **teachers** and their capacity to connect with and engage children and parents in learning?
15. What have you learned about your **community**?
16. What have you learned about **wellbeing** (your own, teachers, parents/families, children, the community)?
17. What have you learned about **connectedness** and **communication** within your community?

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Negotiating & co-constructing curriculum: some simple questions

How can student negotiate and co-construct their learning, rather than just respond to set 'tasks'? Here are some simple questions - using *inquiry* approaches – that could be used by students and teachers in that process. I initially thought about these while many students were working on-line at home – but they are equally valuable in face-to-face learning in classrooms ... as they have been in the past.

These questions draw on existing approaches already used by many teachers in both primary and secondary school classrooms. The wording and content changes according to year levels, needs and contexts. I used similar questions in much of my own teaching and also in the work around *Student Action Teams*. At senior secondary levels, they underpinned the curriculum approaches in *STC* (the alternative Victorian Year 11/12 course that existed in the 1970s and 1980s); they are similar to questions in *Garth Boomer's 'Negotiating the Curriculum'*, and much of the *Middle Years* work of *James Beane* and others in the early 1990s. In each

of these situations, the questions that students generated, or were prompted to ask, drove their control of learning.

Using these

Don't just hand these out as some sort of compulsory '*check-list*' or '*requirement*' for students when you're constructing a course. In fact, it would defeat the purpose to unilaterally set and apply them: to assign them as '*first answer these questions*'.

They are questions that students can ask of themselves individually or in a group. Some language might change depending on how they're used (*here*,

for simplicity, they are posed as questions about what 'we' might do rather than what 'I' might do). Think about the wording too: you can use '*might*' to open up possibilities; and '*will*' to firm up your commitments.

These questions can be used in conversations between students and teachers when you're co-constructing learning. I'd suggest that teachers could copy them into a Word document, and then students and teachers could work collaboratively to select those that are appropriate, change the language to suit the year level or circumstances, and discuss how the answers would help construct the learning purposes, content, approaches and assessment. Add your own questions - I'm sure this isn't an exhaustive list.

Later, reflect on their use, and change them for next time.

Roger Holdsworth



Purpose/Goals: Setting up

- Why do we want to learn (or learn to do) this?
- Why do we care (or are passionate) about this?
- What are others (including young people) passionate about, interested in learning or diving deeply into? Why?
- How might we find out more about others' interests and passions and why they matter to them?
- How might we work with others to design our learning?
- How might we see ourselves using what we want to learn?

If the purpose is to meet external requirements (eg for a credential or of a set syllabus):

- What are the **required** goals?
- Do we **understand** what is required (the language and ideas etc)? (*Who can help us understand it better?*)
- Is it **clear** what we have to do/achieve?
- Can we **re-write** required goals in a way that makes sense to us and is clear about what we need to do or achieve?

Content

- What content or skills is/are **required** to be taught/learnt?
- What do we **want** to know or learn about or learn to do?
- What **skills** do we want to develop?
- What do we **already know** about this or already know how to do?
- What **questions** do we have about this?

[Some of the early Middle Years work started with two 'big questions' that students asked individually, and then compared their answers. This process then determined agreements about the curriculum content:

- *'What questions do I have about the world?' and*
- *'What questions do I have about myself?'*

(eg for one description of how this was used, see: <https://bit.ly/2MjDNvB>)

Methods of learning

- **How** might we approach this? How might we get **started**?
- How do I/we **learn best**?
- What might we **do** to help us learn?
- **Who and what** might help us learn this?
- Who could we **work with** on this?
- How can we **challenge** ourselves to try something **different** or more difficult - to get new perspectives?
- How will we **try out** our learning along the way to help us understand what we need to do/learn next?

Assessment

- How might I/we think about what I/we learnt? (**self-assessment**)
- How will we **know** we have been successful? What do we mean by '**successful**'?
- How might we **show** or present our learning to others? How could we show what we can do or understand?
- **To whom** might we show this? Why?
- What **mistakes** have we made, and what might we still need to learn?
- What did making these mistakes **teach us**?
- What does our assessment show us about our **further learning**?
- How will this assessment help us to work out what we **want/need to learn next**?

Evaluation

- What **happened**? How did it go?
- What went **well**? What could have been **improved**? How do we know?
- What are we learning about the **process** – about this way of working?
- What might we do **differently** next time? Why?
- What would we **tell others** (eg our teachers) about this process?
- How might we map our learning onto **curriculum documents**?
- What **questions** do we now have?

Can students be meaningfully involved right now?

With the pandemic underway worldwide, a lot of schools have resorted to on-line learning. Many are discovering that simply handing computers to students and hoping for the best isn't enough. Learners of all ages need and deserve more.

My research and practice continually shows that the best answer for what ails all schools is the biggest resource available to every one of them: **students themselves**. This article explores five ways to make the positive, powerful potential of students tangible through meaningful student involvement right now.

5 steps to meaningful student involvement in the pandemic

These steps are not silver bullets that will automatically cause students to become engaged, nor are they easy or instantly successful. Instead, I'm sharing them to provide a succinct way for educators to actually, practically and meaningfully involve students throughout education during the pandemic.

Note that these are different steps to those my past writing has emphasised in the traditional educational experience. Here, these steps are adapted for distance learning and the on-line administration of schools. I'm currently working with K-12 schools and districts to identify exactly how these steps are happening.

1. Explore student voice yourself

I define student voice as any expression of any learner about anything, anywhere, at any time related to education. Whether or not teachers acknowledge it, student voice is constantly shared throughout schools with students' actions, ideas, appearance, attitudes and criticisms. This is true with distance learning, too. The question isn't whether students express student voice, it's whether adults are willing and able to really listen to what's being said. Students, teachers, school leaders and others need to take the first step by not assuming they know student voice already, by exploring student voice themselves.

2. Make space for student voice everyday

Students must learn that they have voice. It's essential for educators to give students space and purpose for expressing student voice during on-line learning and in the course of day-to-day virtual classroom time. There are many ways to do this on-line, including creating social spaces, facilitating Q&A sessions, creating student-driven learning opportunities, and providing substantial student-led evaluation activities.

3. Envision the broadest possibilities

Each of us can see as broadly as our imagination lets us. That means the possibilities for broadening the bounds of student voice are merely limited by our imaginations. See the biggest picture of education you can, and help learners understand what they are part of. Create opportunities for students to learn about learning, learn about teaching, and learn about leadership within your classroom, throughout your school, and throughout the entire education system.

4. Build the ability of students to contribute meaningfully

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is credited with the saying: *"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men and women to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."*

In the same way, if you want to foster student engagement, build the capacity of learners to contribute to learning, teaching and leadership throughout education. Like Toto in the Wizard of Oz, educators and school leaders have to pull back the curtain and teach students about



how education works, what their roles can be, and what differences they can make. To build the abilities of students to contribute meaningfully, adult allies have to share knowledge about education and increase the skills of learners to make a difference in schools, too.

5. Take practical action with real outcomes

Starting on the internet in your own classes right now, take practical action with students as partners to make a difference in schools right now. Whether it's engaging learners as classroom planners, education evaluators, teachers, researchers, decision-makers or advocates, it is important to make real strides towards **Meaningful Student Involvement** as soon as you can.

Even though it is almost the end of the school year here in the USA, moving quickly, deliberately and obviously to meaningfully involve students during the quarantine is very important right now. By September 2020, the situation in schools around the world may be different, and different responses will be needed. To learn more about **Meaningful Student Involvement** visit SoundOut.org

Adam Fletcher
SoundOut



Observations of student voice in Brazil

Let me start off by saying that I was only in Brazil for a short time and I was still living through the eyes of an Australian student on exchange. Ten weeks is a dismally small amount of time, compared to the year that I was supposed to stay there for, no thanks to the recent pandemic. Although it was only 10 weeks, I learnt a lot and experienced more than I've experienced in years staying at home.

Prior to my Rotary youth exchange program, I worked closely with the VicSRC on a number of projects and, with their help, curated my love and knowledge for student voice and agency. It was eye opening to see the role or lack thereof that student voice played in my Brazilian education experience.

With another country, another culture, language and lifestyle follow. Although education seems fairly similar worldwide, when you're on the ground living day to day, the differences define your experience. The factors that differentiate people and communities are the ones that form our systems and societal structures. Brazilians are typically expressive, energetic, relaxed and family-orientated and these things, although minor, are reflected in their education system. It is difficult to compare a system that exists almost everywhere but is in a different environment each time.

Uniform

Within my first week in Brazil, I was taken to the uniform shop to buy my school uniform, which is a standard occurrence when attending a high school in Australia. As I was attending a private, inner-city high school much like mine in Victoria, I was expecting a school dress, sweater, blazer and the Brazilian equivalent of black Clarks. I was very mistaken and instead asked: "What colour would you like?" The shirt came in seven different colours; I had to buy one white one, but

the rest was up to me. I still have my blue and red shirt in my drawer.

This newfound choice and voice in what I got to wear every day for a year was liberating. When I walked into school the next week, I was met with piercings, dyed hair, bracelets reaching



Jade Frame and Brian Lee chairing the opening session of the 2019 Student Voice, Agency and Partnerships International Conference Photo: Casamento Photography

halfway up arms, chokers and sneakers covered in glitter. To make Brazilians all wear one uniform would be insanity. Students need to represent and express themselves and the system they have understands that.

Staggered schedule

As a result of an overcrowded schooling system, Brazilian school times are divided, giving three options for students. In public schools there are typically three 'sessions' you can attend: 7am-12pm, 1pm-5pm and 5pm-10pm.

In private schools, the timings work a bit differently. You attend from 7am-12pm every day, and then on certain days, you have afternoon classes. The afternoon session is also reserved for younger students. In some circumstances, this system allows for student voice, however when attending a private school it seems less likely.

Student voice

As for the typical student voice structures – the SRC – it differs from school to school. Most schools have a representative council, much like the ones in primary school. They help arrange and organise things, manage dress-up days and report to the class on the happenings of the school. The representatives are elected by the class, with one boy and one girl representing each class. They report from students to teachers occasionally, but more often than not it is the other way around. In schools my fellow exchange students attended, they said that these representatives would also organise in-class activities: get to know you games and welcome back activities; however at my school this occurrence was rare.

However, this may be where the luxury of choice and voice ends. You are taught the subjects you spend your days dedicated to regardless if you like them or not. Often when we think of student voice, we take for granted the systems allowing us voice that are embedded into education such as the VCE. It is only when you experience a system in which you are forced to study 13 subjects for the majority of your educational lives and then 16 for the last three years, that you realise the beauty of being able to choose six.

As for the classroom dynamic, students have no say in how or what they are taught. Each class follows a structure that is mostly unmoved by student opinions or progression and, although this could seem extreme, I do wonder if its partially due to the culture.

Respect

When I was approaching my exchange friends about the topic of student voice in Brazilian education, many noted the 'unusual' levels of respect between students and educators. Unusual for us anyway.

Could this be one of the reasons their classroom environment seems so stiff? Or could it be to do with a vastly different school system?

Assessment

Whilst being educated, student voice, in my experience, was non-existent and the same may be said for the assessments. Students are given homework for every class whether they want it or not, and educators are very strict on the completion of it. Tests follow the model of their University exams and are often years above their level. They sit in test conditions for hours completing a series of exams in every subject. There are some 'projects' that students are given class time to complete but even they are quite strict and don't allow much room for movement.

Although students may not be given as much agency and voice in their education, I never once heard a complaint or even a request for another way. The structure helps the majority of them learn. They were brought up with this system

and for the majority of them, it may work. They don't appear to have a desire for more control over their learning. In private schools, they pay for this type of education and they seem to be satisfied with what they're served, a good education and results to support it.

Repeating

The school system in Brazil requires a student to pass the year before moving on into the next year. With this approach could come tremendous pressure for the students and teachers and it is likely a contributing factor to the educating style that I witnessed be implemented in Brazilian schools.

For many and most their system works, but in every class, students exist who are repeating this year for the second or third time, unable to grasp the concepts their peers do. This may be where the system has its faults and this could be where student voice is needed. These students appear to be the ones who fall through the cracks and may need agency in their education, to enable their learning.

Our education system allows for an abundance of student voice, more than there is. But in systems like Brazil, it is a bit more difficult. One wrong thing is done or taught too slowly and a student may be in school for a year longer. They have so much to cover in such a short amount of time that student voice, to all stakeholders in education, may seem impossible. However, that doesn't mean it *is* impossible. Even in their tightly regimented system, there may be a space for student voice and agency; however it just about finding and utilising it.

Jade Nisha Frame
Year 10

Audits of Practice

The Audits and Tools that have been developed over the last couple of years, and published in *Connect*, are now available on-line as PDFs from the *Connect* website: <https://bit.ly/2XVfjh1>

You can download these to use with teacher or student groups.

Listening

How do we listen to students?

When we think about listening, we see a lot of attention to the ways in which we can increase the quantity and willingness of students to speak up - how we engage them and how we respond to them. But what about how we increase the quality of their listening? How do we ensure that we are listening to what they have to say and not just what we want to hear?

This resource aims to start a conversation about listening. It can be used for your own reflection, and it can also be used with other staff and students.

This is an audit of what your teachers (and/or students) are doing to support listening. It can be used to reflect on your own practice, and it can also be used with other staff and students.

There are three levels for using the audit: with the students, with the school, and with the wider community. It could be used by student representatives to reflect on their own practice, and it could be used by other staff and students to reflect on their own practice.

This resource was published in *Connect* 235, February 2019, pp 17-21. <https://www.connect.org.uk/resources/2019/02/17/21/>

An Audit of School Practices around: Student Voice, Agency and Participation

- What does 'student voice, agency and participation' mean to you?
- What are you already doing in these areas?
- What should be your priorities for your next steps?

What, Who and Why?

Teachers, students and schools can use this audit to look at what is already happening in your school about student voice, agency and participation. You will also understand what these terms mean in practice, and you will be able to identify the things that you are already doing.

What Next?

If you have been able to identify some of the current practices in your school, you can use this audit to think about what you are already doing, and what you can do next. You can use this audit to think about what you are already doing, and what you can do next.

Completing the Audit

You can work through the whole audit, but it might be better to focus on just one or two areas. You can use this audit to think about what you are already doing, and what you can do next.

This Audit was initially published in *Connect* 236, April 2019.

Student Voice, Agency, Participation: <https://bit.ly/2DhMphT>

The original document that outlined concepts of 'voice', 'agency' and 'participation' was originally published in *Connect* 229, February 2018.

Listening Tool: <https://bit.ly/2rwBnTe>

This reflective tool is about being aware of, listening to, responding to and acting on students' voices. It can be used by teachers or by student representatives. It was originally published in *Connect* 235, February 2019.

Audit of School Practices: <https://bit.ly/2KWjnYZ>

The Audit provides a comprehensive and structured overview of practices around voice, agency and participation at classroom and whole-school levels. It can be used to discuss what you are already doing and what further possibilities exist - and to determine your priorities. It was originally published in *Connect* 236, April 2019.

Student Council Audit: <https://bit.ly/2DhMjX9>

A similar Audit looks specifically at how well your Student Council is operating. It is based on an earlier Audit in the VicSRC's *Represent!* kit, and this version was originally published in *Connect* 237, June 2019.

Student agency, on-line engagement and community partnerships for bushfire education

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) promotes and supports learning about natural hazards, with a focus on local risk, community partnerships and student agency. In schools all over Australia, students are working with community experts to reduce the harmful impacts of bushfires, floods, cyclones, storms and climate change, by investigating the challenges where they live, developing innovative responses and taking protective action. At AIDR, we refer to this area of learning (with curriculum links to Geography, Science and Health) as **'disaster resilience education'**:

In late 2019, **Emerald Secondary College** – located in a high-risk bushfire zone – agreed to collaborate with AIDR and university students from the **Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI)** in Massachusetts, USA, to develop a bushfire education pilot program with a focus on virtual simulation software and integrated with the **Year 8 Digital Technologies** curriculum.

American students from WPI intended to travel to Melbourne and work face-to-face with **Gary Vear (Digital Technology and STEM leader)**, **Emerald Secondary College** students and the **Emerald Fire Brigade** to develop and implement the project. These arrangements had to be reviewed due to travel bans and emergency lockdown measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic. A designated learning website (<https://bit.ly/3gwAG0T>) became the primary mode of course delivery.

The WPI students identified three key factors that contributed to the success of their bushfire education project: **developing knowledge and skills, innovative use of technology,**

and engaging with community hazard experts. Interactive learning tasks included the development of a collaborative disaster map using information from the **AIDR Disaster Mapper** (<https://bit.ly/2X6JAKU>) and the provision of an on-line noticeboard where students posted questions to hazard experts from the **Country Fire Authority (CFA)**.

For the unit assessment, students were provided with a fire scenario and a topographical image of their local area. Applying skills and knowledge developed over the course of the project, students superimposed text and images to identify high and low bushfire risk areas and other features related to emergency response and evacuation. The students posted their projects on-line and received video feedback from **Emerald Fire Brigade. Captain Paul Yandle** reflected on the students' positive achievements and provided further information about the local context and important considerations for the safety of the community in a bushfire event.

Pre- and post-assessments demonstrated a significant increase in students' understanding of disaster resilience. In the post-assessment survey results, students selected a markedly broader range of appropriate actions to reduce the harmful impacts from bushfires. 69.7% of students reported that communicating with community experts helped them to learn, and almost all students (93.9%) said the use of technology supported learning. In the student feedback, the three most popular aspects of the project among participants were **'interactive activities', 'learning a lot'** and **'the simulations'**.

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of **Gary Vear** and **Emerald Secondary College** students, and staff at the **Country Fire Authority** (including the **Emerald Fire Brigade**).

In reflecting on the success of this project, teacher **Gary Vear** highlighted the positive impact of the developers acting immediately on student feedback over the course of the unit to improve the learning experience. **AIDR** hopes that the dialogue that this project facilitated between students and community experts in bushfire risk, preparedness and response, will be of ongoing benefit to the students as active participants in their local community.

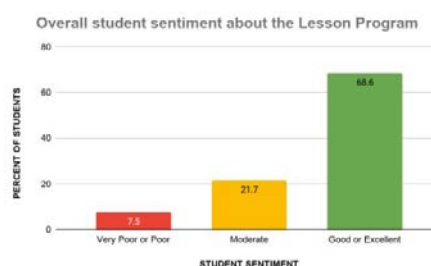
More information about this pilot project and disaster resilience education is available by contacting brigid.little@aidr.org.au or visiting www.schools.aidr.org.au

Brigid Little
Senior Project Officer
Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

SELF-REPORTED BUSHFIRE KNOWLEDGE IMPROVED



STUDENT FEEDBACK: OVERALL POSITIVE SENTIMENT

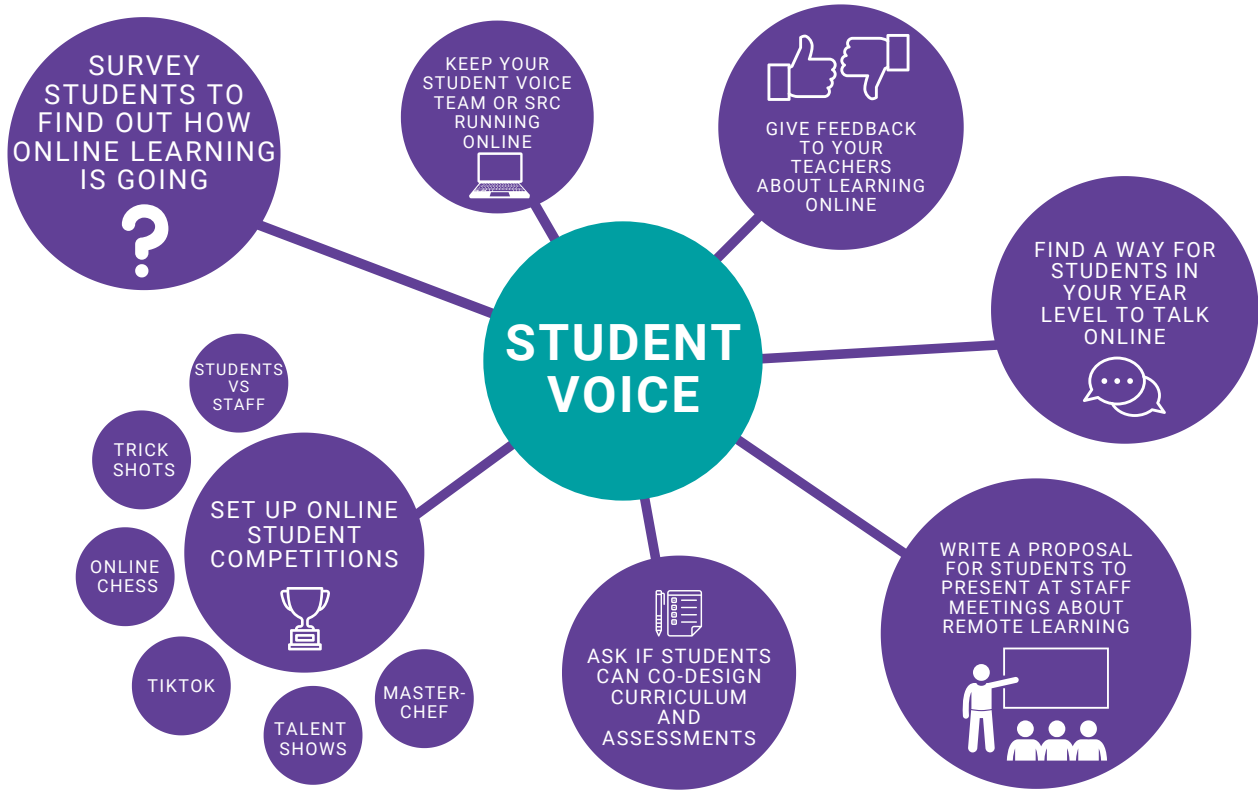




www.vicsrc.org.au

SVH | STUDENT VOICE FROM HOME

Student voice happens wherever you're learning, not just in school buildings.
Here are some ways you can make sure your voices are heard while learning from home!



FIFTEEN YEARS OF
CONGRESS
COMING SOON!

Congress may look a little different this year, but it will still be an explosion of student voice!





LEARNING FROM HOME TOGETHER: INSIDE THE (VIRTUAL) CLASSROOM

Student voice isn't confined to school buildings. Here are some ideas to support student voice and agency while learning from home.



CONTENT & ASSESSMENT

- Use real-world problems to keep learners engaged
- Let learners pick what content to focus on
- Work with learners to create assessments that work best for them and their environment

FEEDBACK

- Use Google or Microsoft Forms to gather feedback from learners every week
- Encourage feedback through other informal methods like daily check ins
- Make sure learners know what you are doing with all the feedback

SCHEDULING

- Work with learners to create learning schedules
- Check in with learners regularly about their workload
- Talk with learners about how far in advance they need to see their learning material

EXPECTATIONS

- Work with learners to create shared expectations about online communication and behaviour during class time
- Set clear boundaries and expectations so learners and educators know when and how to expect learning materials, updates and feedback

“We just need to be human about it and it helps when teachers are understanding about problems or schedules or time constraints we have - Student”



LEARNING FROM HOME TOGETHER: OUTSIDE THE (VIRTUAL) CLASSROOM

School is much more than classroom learning. Here are some ideas to support student agency and your school community to stay connected while learning from home.

Not everybody experiences online learning the same way...so it's really important that educators continually provide support and check up on students! - Student

EMPOWER



- Invite learners to attend and present at school staff meetings or curriculum meetings
- Ask a student voice group to gather feedback on remote learning
- Support groups of learners to create shared expectations about online communication and behaviour
- Give your student voice group a clear way to communicate with staff about how students are feeling about remote learning

SUPPORT



- Check in with learners individually as much as possible
- Students can feel disengaged and exhausted with all the changes, and they (like educators) need a bit of extra support right now!
- Demonstrate good work-life boundaries by not expecting learners to be constantly available, even when they're always at home

CONNECT



- Ask learners to design creative solutions to keep up school engagement from home:
 - Can your House competitions be transferred online?
 - Could you run a teachers vs students online challenge?
- Use fun games or brain-breaks for learners that can be done online - or ask learners to run some!



Congress

Congress is VicSRC's flagship student-led event which generally takes place each year over 3 days in the July school holidays. Students from across Victoria come together to plan action that will help solve the top issues in the education system, as voted by students.



ALTER

ALTER is a series of two interactive workshops, co-facilitated by secondary students and VicSRC staff. It brings students from schools in a local area together in a unique learning space to lead positive collaborative change at school using VicSRC's *ALTER Model of Student-Led Action*.



Teach the Teacher

Designed by students, the **Teach the Teacher** program is a student-led professional development program for teachers that enables students to address issues affecting them. By giving students a greater say in their education, Teach the Teacher aims to create an inclusive culture where everyone's voices are equally heard.



Student Voice Awards

The annual **VicSRC Student Voice Awards** recognise and celebrate student-led initiatives and best practice student voice in schools. Usually held in October each year, nominees submit a two-minute video which is shown on the night, as well as a written application.

Details at: www.vicsrc.org.au

Vic Student
SRC COMMUNITY

Are you a school student in Victoria?

Become a member of the VicSRC Student Community!

FREE for school students!

*As a member of the VicSRC Student Community, you get **discounts** and links to **news** and **resources**.
You belong to a **statewide network**, and vote to **choose the VicSRC Executive***

Join @ <https://bit.ly/2FDrg5m>

Vic Partner SRC SCHOOLS

Thinking about becoming a VicSRC Partner School? Wondering what it's all about? Here's what it means.

Share our vision

Being a **Partner** of Victoria's peak body for school-aged students connects you with a community committed to a student-focused education system.

Together we pursue positive change in our education system through advocacy in schools and communities. We collaborate with schools, students, educators and like-minded organisations to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

Stay informed

As a peak body, we are on the ground every day supporting and empowering student voice in schools, with students and with educators.

We keep our **Partner Schools** up to date with all the latest news, innovations and opportunities through regular communications designed to support you to empower student voice. When we produce new resources and tools, our **Partner Schools** are the first to know.

Add your story

We share best practice student voice. Celebrate your wins and share your learnings with schools across Victoria!

Support student voice

We are a student-led not-for-profit organisation; your support means we can continue to empower student voices in all aspects of education.

FAQs

Are we eligible to be VicSRC Partner School?

If you are a recognised school in Victoria – primary, secondary, P-12, government, Catholic, independent, flexible-learning – then you are eligible!

How much does it cost?

It only costs \$150+GST per year to be a **Partner School**.

We can't afford \$150+GST; can we still be a Partner School?

We are always willing to make our programs as accessible as possible! Send an e-mail through and we'll be very happy to discuss your options: partnerships@vicsrc.org.au

Where do we sign up?

Register as a VicSRC Partner School right here: <https://bit.ly/3avn5Ek> Once you complete the form you'll receive a confirmation e-mail outlining the next steps (please allow 5 business days for confirmation).

"The Student Voice Hub is a place where teachers, students and principals can all come together to collaborate, get resources and talk to people and know what's happening in other schools around the state in regards to student voice."



The **Student Voice Hub**

is designed **by** young people **for** young people!

It is a place for students, teachers and everyone who is passionate about the opinions and ideas of young people. It:

- Showcases examples of best practice through case studies
- Connects schools and organisations passionate about students taking action to improve their schooling experience
- Provides a safe space for stakeholders to discuss issues that matter to them
- Provides resources that support students, teachers and school leaders to take action within their classroom, school and organisation.

Student Membership is Free!

Student members contribute to blogs, forums and polls, as well as access many great resources. Students shape the future of the Student Voice Hub; be part of our community to have a voice and create positive change.

We are working hard to make this a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Currently under Australian privacy laws we require parental/guardian permission for people under 15 to register.

<https://studentvoicehub.org.au/>

The **Student Voice Hub** was developed by the **VicSRC** with support from the Victorian Department of Education and Training.



To sign up to the VicSRC on-line e-newsletter ... visit:

<http://www.vicsrc.org.au/>

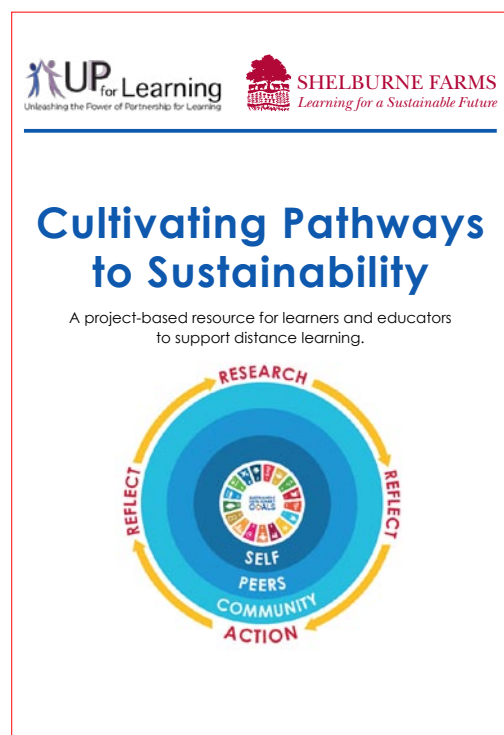
VicSRC Victorian Student Representative Council

The **VicSRC** receives funding support from the **Victorian Department of Education and Training** and **Catholic Education Melbourne**.

It is auspiced by the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)**.

It can be reached on **0436 476 612** or by e-mail: info@vicsrc.org.au

Resource for individual and group action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals



UP for Learning and **Shelburne Farms**, in Vermont, USA, have developed a resource that supports students to learn to take action around the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.

The resource is based on a structure that starts with one's own inspirations, interests and passions around the Goals (**SELF**), then expands to working with **PEERS**, and to partners with others in the **COMMUNITY**.

Each section suggests **research, reflection, action** and further **reflection**, with practical prompts and ideas. It asks, for example: *"Choose one of the Global Goals (SDGs) that is most important to you right now and learn as much as you can about it. Find out what the goal means, why it is necessary, how people in your community can help, and what people are already doing to make a difference."* And later: *"What is one thing you can do now to create change in your community?"* There are games, case studies, examples, links to other resources and so on.

The **Resource** was specifically developed in a time of on-line learning, but is equally applicable as schools return, providing a structure to not just

learn about the **UN Goals**, but to explore and take action around them.

UP for Learning says: "This was designed with the idea that, during this challenging time, we are also seeing the power of the change-making movement. It's time to reimagine a new norm, engage young people as change-making citizens in the solution, and build a new future through collaboration (peer to peer and beyond). **UP for Learning** and **Shelburne Farms** have created this resource for learners and educators and we hope that you will see how the infusion of personalisation, project-based learning and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can create powerful learning."

The **Resource** is available for free download at:

<https://bit.ly/2ZpAwT8>

Coping with COVID: student-to-student survey

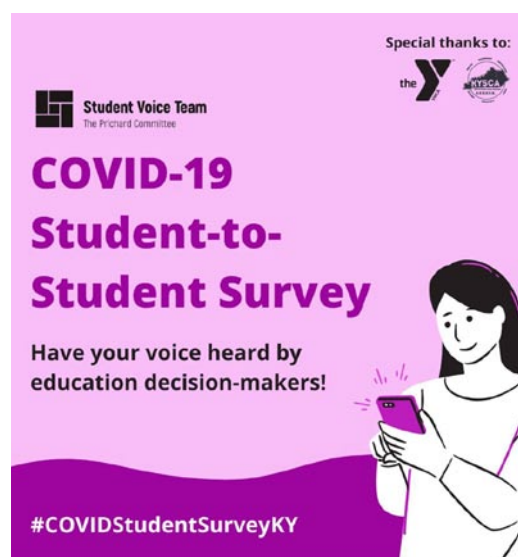
In Kentucky, USA, the **Student Voice Team** released its **Coping with COVID Student-to-Student Survey**, opening it to responses for two weeks. It generated over 1300 responses in just the first few hours!

The survey is part of a larger study using youth participatory action research, one that will include qualitative research targeting more marginalised student populations about how students are navigating school and home during the COVID crisis.

Students designed the study in consultation with research experts and allies. The team will present the preliminary results to the Kentucky Board of Education and the rest of the world to help inform education decision making as we return to the 'new normal' in August.

See: <https://bit.ly/3c6zdLC>

Rachel Belin
studentvoiceteam@prichardcommittee.org



International Journal of Student Voice

A new special issue of the **International Journal of Student Voice** has been published! It can be accessed at <https://ijsv.psu.edu/> and features:

- *Preface: Centering Girls' Voices in Education Policy, Practice, and Activism* by Emily Anderson
- *Organizational Voice in the Girls' Education Space* by Emily Anderson
- *The New Jane Crow: Using Black Girls' Voices to Make Meaning of Disciplinary Interactions in an Urban Alternative School* by LaRhondolyn M. Mathies, Cherie Dawson-Edwards, & Bradley W. Carpenter
- *Identity, Culture, and Iterative Curriculum Development: Collaborating with Girls from Indigenous Communities to Improve Education* by Kayla M. Johnson & Joseph Levitan
- *"Seeds of Sharing": A Feminist Action Research Study of University Student Feminist Activism in Cambodia* by Kelly Grace & Salav Oul
- *Female Immigrant Students' Sensemaking in Toronto Public Schools* by Norin Taj



Student and adult perspectives on COVID-19

US-based PDK International did a major US survey and are providing a series of briefs based on the data around:

- What students want and need during this crisis
- Comparing student voices with adult perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Biggest student stressors and the educator response
- What educators and students are looking for as the school year ends.



If you wish to receive these go to: <https://bit.ly/2X5LLhT>

You may need to register (but not join) to receive them.

Impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning

Pivot Professional Learning, an educational company based in Melbourne, conducted a survey of over 3500 teachers in schools across Australia and New Zealand on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. The survey was conducted between 9th and 13th April 2020, in partnership with on-line platform **Education Perfect**.

The report of this survey has been released and is available at: <https://bit.ly/3bXVQBQ>

Pivot says: "The survey captured valuable and current insights from teachers and other educators across all school sectors – primary and secondary, government and independent—about the new realities and unprecedented challenges of enforced distance teaching and learning.

"With 90% of educators surveyed teaching remotely or preparing to teach remotely, we have a snapshot into the State of Education today. Some key findings:

- Only 50% of teachers think on-line schooling can be as effective as the physical classroom,
- 80% of teachers think students will need extra instruction when they get back to the classroom
- Student well-being and isolation is their #1 concern."

For further inquiries about this paper, contact **Pivot** on:

info@pivotpl.com



2020 International Virtual Summit on Student Voice: Students leading meaningful change: A response to the pandemic

This **Virtual Summit** will be held on **June 23rd** from 10 am to 12 noon USA Central time (*note to Australian readers: this starts at 1 am June 24 Eastern Australian Time*). **Registration is now open (link below)!**

The voices of students are vital in responding to the challenges of the pandemic. This interruption of the *status quo* has opened tremendous opportunities for critical dialogues and innovation with students. This **Summit** and follow-up sessions are designed for students and their adult partners to hear about and discuss models for including the voices of students as you address the needs in your school and/or community.

Please share and encourage students to participate: we want their voices in the discussions.

The topics of this **virtual Summit** are designed to:

- share strategies and resources for fostering student voice in a variety of contexts
- inspire action and momentum to include student voice in schools, youth-serving organisations, agencies, and communities
- establish a network to both motivate and support efforts focused on student voice.

Sponsored by: *Pathway 2 Tomorrow* and the *Iowa Student Learning Institute* and partners including: *Penn State College of Education, University of Minnesota Extension Youth Development, National Youth Leadership Council, Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence/ Student Voice Team, Minnesota Alliance with Youth, Student Voice, UP for Learning*, and numerous individuals volunteering their time in planning this event.

Direct contact for more information: **studentvoicesummit2020@gmail.com**

Plan ahead!

The **International Summit on Student Voice** will be held **June 22-23, 2021** hosted by the *Minneapolis Public Schools* and sponsored by *Pathway to Tomorrow!*

<https://virtualstudentvoicesummit.eventbrite.com>



Student Voice Research and Practice facebook group

www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

This open **facebook** group was initially established by Professor Dana Mitra, and is now supported by the work of academics, practitioners and students throughout the world. It provides a valuable community of people working and interested in the area of 'Student Voice' - in Australia, USA, UK, Italy and elsewhere – as well as access to useful resources and examples, and up-to-date information about initiatives. You can easily log on and join the group at the above address.



*All about Student Action Teams,
including some hyper-linked mini-case studies, at:
www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams*

'Student Councils and Beyond' On-Line! FREE!

We've almost run out of print copies of the first *Connect* publication: *Student Councils and Beyond* (from 2005). And many of the ideas have subsequently been reflected in the *Represent!* kit from the VicSRC (see: www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent).

So we have made all of *Student Councils and Beyond* (a compilation of articles and resources from many earlier issues of *Connect*) available on-line for FREE. It can be downloaded (as one document or in sections) as PDFs from the *Connect* website. Find it at:

www.asprinworld.com/connect



Connect on facebook



Connect has a presence on *facebook*. Find us at:

<http://ow.ly/L6UvW>

We've been posting some news and links there since June 2013, to complement and extend what you see in the on-line version of *Connect*. It would be great if you could go there and 'like' us, and also watch there for news of each *Connect's* availability on-line - for FREE.

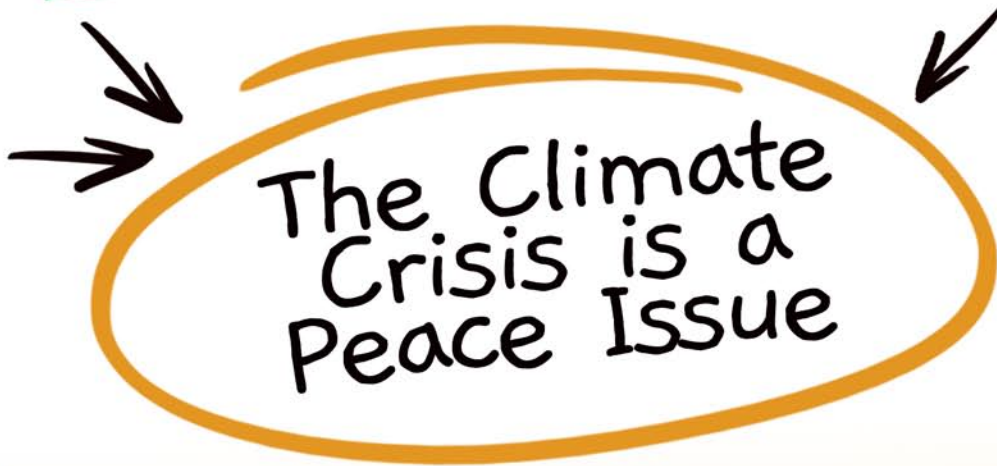
Donate to support *Connect*

Connect now has no income except donations and sales of literature (see page 58). Even though we are now solely on-line, there are still costs associated with publication.

By supporting *Connect* with your donations, you keep us going. To make a donation to the work of *Connect*, use the form in this issue or contact us for bank account details to make an electronic transfer of funds.



YOUTH FOR PEACE AWARD



* Are you aged **12-24 years**, or do you work with young people aged 12-24?

We are inviting teams of **young people** to create a media 'pitch' to inspire more action on the **climate crisis**.

First Prize - **\$1500**; highly commended prizes - **\$750!**

Age will be taken into consideration in judging entries'

CLOSING DATE:
31 OCTOBER 2020

Find out more at www.psychology.org.au/youthforpeace

Connect Publications: Order Form



Tax Invoice: ABN: 98 174 663 341

To: **Connect**, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote VIC 3070 Australia
 e-mail: r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au

**Full Catalogue in
Connect #217**

Connect On-Line Subscription (all 6 issues annually e-mailed to you FREE):

Simply provide your e-mail address (below or by e-mail) and name and phone number (in case of bounces). There is no cost; however donations to support **Connect's** work are appreciated and acknowledged.

I enclose a donation to support the work of Connect.

or: I am already a subscriber to **Connect**.

A: Donation to Connect: \$.....

Connect Publications:		<i>normal price</i>	<i>Connect subscriber price</i>	
... copies	<i>Student Action Teams</i>	\$30	\$25*	\$
... copies	<i>Reaching High (with DVD) §</i>	\$30	\$25*	\$
... copies	<i>Reaching High (without DVD)</i>	\$20	\$15*	\$
... copies	<i>Switched On to Learning</i> (maximum of 10 copies per order)	\$ 6	\$ 5*	\$
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Publications available from Connect:		<i>normal price</i>	<i>Connect subscriber price</i>	
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(§ check availability before ordering; * discounted rate for subscribers to **Connect**)

B: Total for publications: \$.....

NOTE: all amounts include postage/packaging within Australia (GST not applicable - input taxed)

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Connections

Contribute to Connect

Anyone may submit an original article to be considered for publication in *Connect* provided he or she owns the copyright to the work being submitted or is authorised by the copyright owner or owners to submit the article. Authors are the initial owners of the copyrights to their works, but by successfully submitting the article to *Connect*, transfer such ownership of the *published* article to *Connect* on the understanding that any royalties or other income from that article will be used to maintain publication of *Connect*.



ASPRINworld: the Connect website!

www.asprinworld.com/connect

Connect has a website at *ASPRINworld*. The *Connect* section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, index of recent back issue contents (hyperlinked to PDFs) and summaries of and order information for *Student Councils and Beyond*, *Student Action Teams*, *Reaching High* and *Switched On to Learning*.

**Connect is also archived
and available electronically:**

research.acer.edu.au/connect

All issues of *Connect* are archived through the ACER Research Repository: *ACEReSearch*. *Connect* issues from #1 to the current issue are available for **free** download, and recent issues can be searched by key terms. See the *ASPRINworld* site for index details of recent issues, then link to and download the whole issue you are interested in.

www.informit.com.au

In addition, current and recent issues of *Connect* are now available on-line to libraries and others who subscribe to RMIT's *Informit* site – a site that contains databases of many Australian publications. You can access whole issues of *Connect* as well as individual articles. Costs apply, either by a library subscription to *Informit*'s databases, or through individual payments per view for articles.



Articles from *Connect* are also discoverable through *EBSCOhost* research databases.

www.asprinworld.com/connect

&

research.acer.edu.au/connect

Local and International Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us and we'll work something out.

Australian:

Introduction - knowledge-and-ethics: strong curriculum values both, together (Lew Zipin & Marie Brennan, University of South Australia, SA) at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00091-3>

Colouring in the white spaces: The Warrior-Researchers of Kia Aroha College (Ann Milne, Ann Milne Education, New Zealand) at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00092-2>

Ethical challenges: the possibility of authentic teaching encounters with indigenous cross-curriculum content? (Kevin Lowe & Vilma Galstaun, University of New South Wales & University of Sydney, NSW) at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00093-1>

Learning from contemporary student activism: towards a curriculum of fervent concern and critical hope (Eve Mayes & Roger Holdsworth; Deakin University & University of Melbourne, Vic) at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00094-0>

An ethical re-framing of curriculum for sustainability education (Marie Brennan & Helen Widdop Quinton; University of South Australia, SA & Victoria University, Vic) at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00095-z>

Building curriculum knowledge work around community-based 'problems that matter': let's dare imagine (Lew Zipin, University of South Australia, SA) at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00096-y>

All in: *Curriculum Perspectives: Point and Counterpoint*: 40, April 2020

International:

Cultivating Pathways to Sustainability (UP for Learning & Shelburne Farms, Vermont, USA) Project-based resource; May 2020

"Leading Students": Creating a student-run peer reviewed journal (Philip Montgomery, Mazarbayev University, Kazakhstan) *Alatoo Academic Studies* (Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic) No 4, 2016

Update (UP for Learning, Vermont, USA) April, May, June 2020

40 years +
1979 to 2020 ...
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see page 58

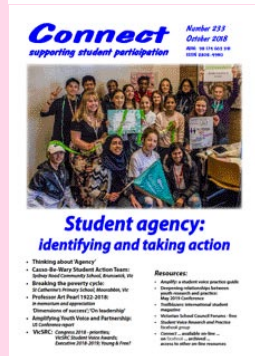
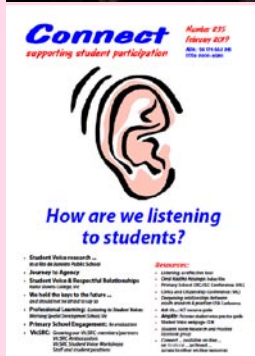
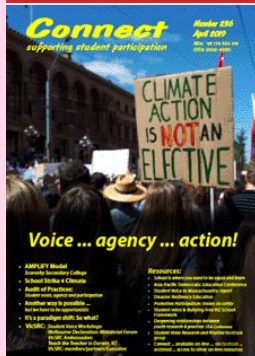
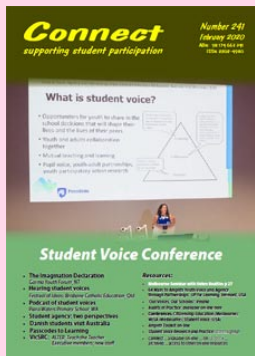
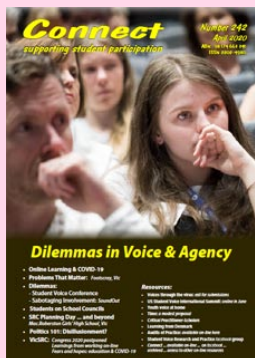
All issues of *Connect* from 1979 to the present (that's over **40 years!**) are freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), all the issues of *Connect* have been scanned or uploaded into the ACER's Research Repository: **ACEReSearch**.

You can find these issues of *Connect* at:

<http://research.acer.edu.au/connect>

The left-hand menu provides a pull-down menu for you to select the issue number > **browse**; the front cover of the issue is displayed, and you can simply click on the link in the main body of the page to download a PDF of the issue. Recent issues are also **searchable** by key words.

Connect has a commitment to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation. We are totally supported by donations!



Let us know

There may be some gaps or improvements necessary. As you use this resource, let us know what you find. (If an issue of *Connect* seems to be missing, check the issues either side, as **double issues** show up only as one issue number.) If you have any ideas for improving this resource, please let us know.

Most importantly, please USE this resource.

All copies of *Connect* are available on-line ... for free!

<http://research.acer.edu.au/connect>