

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.

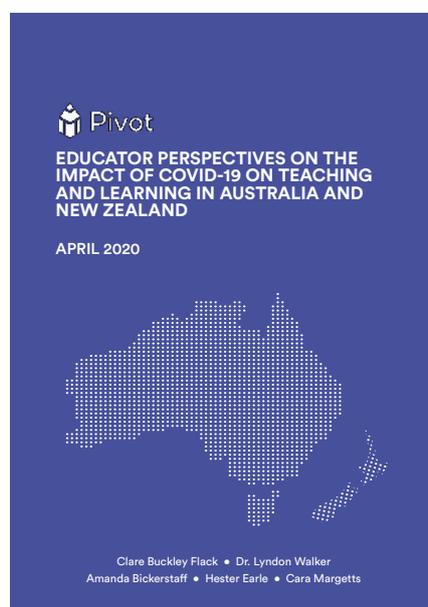
It seems as though many people like to use the phrase '**student voice and agency**', but few understand what this truly looks like.

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.

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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.



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:

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