

Conceptions of Student Voice in Research: A Review of the Extant Research in Australia, New Zealand and the United States 2020 – 2026

Purpose

The movement of student voice has gained prominence over the last two decades spurred by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. “Student voice” ranges from student views of their educational experiences through verbal or non-verbal means to active roles in decision-making processes. Our IRN focuses on student voice connected to inclusive education, the process that focuses on learners’ presence, participation and achievement through honoring divergent perspectives, capacities, and approaches to learning. While we are a community of educational researchers, practicing in diverse settings, we understand student voice as a practice that enables student presence and inclusion in schools. Our IRN addresses the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Symposium presenters are WERA Student Voice IRN members. We encompass experienced and emerging scholars focused on student voice in countries across the world (Australia, Austria, China, Cyprus, England, India, Indonesia, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, USA). Our papers reveal student voice engagement in schools with different cultural contexts, mapping student voice research in three IRN countries.

Each research team’s findings report on research completed in their own country context. The three countries’ papers expand what counts as student voice research and active student participation that informs learning designs, educator pedagogies, and reconceptualization of learning supports. Historical perspectives on what counts as learning, how educators understand students’ perceptions of effective teaching, and the press of national curricula factor in the degree to which student voice matters in the assessment and improvement of educational milieus.

Symposium Agenda (90 Minutes)

1. **Introduction:** IRN project overview. Elizabeth Kozleski
2. **Student Voice and Engagement in Australian Educational Research:** Foteini Pasenidou & Deborah Price
3. **The NZ project:** Badhoora Naseer

4. **The Emergence of U.S. Student Voice:** Elizabeth Kozleski

5. **Discussion, Q&A:** Chair/Discussant Missy Morton

Paper Descriptions

Student Voice and Engagement in Australian Educational Research: insights from a Review of Literature (Foteini Pasenidou & Deborah Price)

Despite commitment to inclusive education, student voice remains absent in national attempts of decision-making to include diverse student cohorts in Australian schools (Price & Howard, 2022). This has impacted on the inclusion of students' thoughts, emotions and "their actions for... change" in inclusive education (Messiou, 2019, p. 769). This presentation shares findings from Informit A+ Education peer-reviewed articles (2020 to 2025) to explore how student voice and engagement are evidenced in Australian school-based education research to promote inclusion and equity.

Findings emerging from the eight studies show students are being recruited in research as respondents. Six studies engaged students as data sources, recruited as discussants and active respondents. In contrast, only two studies reported student-driven research with researchers relinquishing control and inviting students to co-create across data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings. Our findings call for further support and/or training for researchers to authentically include student voice and for key actors within the education system to respect and act upon students' voices and lived experiences.

Student Voice – A Scoping Review of Research into Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand

(Badhoora Naseer,* Fiona Ell, Lisa Darragh & Jude MacArthur *presenting author) For almost 20 years the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) signaled aspirations for a more inclusive school system, with inclusive pedagogies that honour students' cultures and perspectives. In a highly devolved system, the interpretation and enactment of these aspirations has been mixed at best.

By 2018, the Children and Young People's Commissioner noted that we had a limited history of including children's voices in policy. He linked this to colonial legacies in which children were expected to be seen rather than heard, and were viewed as "adults in progress," whose perspectives were not fully developed. In recent years, both government and educational researchers have prioritised student voice in projects. These studies form the basis of this scoping review. With few exceptions, student voice has been more consultative than integral to culture and practice across New Zealand schools.

The Emergence of Student Voice in the U.S.: A Vehicle for Educational Policy and Practice Transformation (Elizabeth Kozleski). This presentation examines peer-reviewed studies on student voice in U.S. K–12 settings published between January 2020 and March 2026. The 26 studies span qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and conceptual approaches. The review focused on student voice as it relates to instructional practice, school leadership, policy, and special education.

The central finding is that student voice research has evolved from a normative, advocacy-oriented concept into an empirically grounded, organizationally embedded practice — a shift reflecting growing methodological rigor and the potential for cumulative knowledge-building in the field. Nevertheless, persistent challenges related to power, representation, and implementation capacity continue to limit its transformative potential.