"A Child's Voice" Research Report

The perspectives of children and young people on the role value plays in their lives.

Dr. Madeleine Dobson | Curtin University School of Education

Dr. Vicky Absalom-Hornby | Child Australia

Valuing Children
— INITIATIVE —

child
Australia

Contents

Executive summary

The "A Child's Voice" project invited children and young people from Kindergarten to Year 12 at a school in Perth, WA to take part in a research survey asking for their voice and views about our world, their perception of being a child, how they are valued, and how they can add value within their community. This executive summary speaks to the key findings, with each theme illuminated by a quote from a child participant.

Key findings

The key findings of this study are arranged into overarching themes which speak to prominent perspectives voiced by the participants through the survey instrument (see Appendix 1).

"Be beside me": The value of connectedness and belonging

Participants focused extensively on their need to be connected to their fellow children & young people, their families, and their educators. They identified ways for other people – particularly adults – to practice caring and to create a sense of connectedness and belonging.

"They care and they give us some playtime": The value of play

Participants in Early Childhood and Middle/Upper Primary spoke extensively and adamantly about play and its value in the lives of children and young people. Focus was given to their enjoyment of play, its importance to their wellness, and the significance of spaces where play was possible. Apparent through many of the responses was how much the creation of play opportunities by adults, in terms of provision of time and space, was cherished by the participants and identified as an act of care.

"We can speak out together": The value of respect, recognition, and being heard

Participants were focused on the value of their voices and views, and expressed a desire to be respected and recognised by their peers, by adults in their lives (e.g. family members and educators), and by broader systems (e.g. government). Many participants expressed gratitude and appreciation regarding the opportunity to engage in research explicitly focused on their voices and views.

"We could all unite together, and together we could all make a change": The value of making a difference

Participants were invested in the idea of children and young people making a difference in their communities. Extensive focus was given to environmental matters, with participants advocating for sustainability and the protection of nature and animals, and raising concerns about the climate crisis. Participants did not always feel supported or able to make a difference – where this was apparent, they identified adults, schooling, and their own personal issues as barriers to making a difference.

Recommendations

This report presents recommendations for the school leadership and school community to consider in their future planning, learning, teaching, assessment, and relationship-building. These recommendations are summarised below and explored in detail on p. 27 of this report.

1. Make student voice and views visible and embedded at all levels and an integral part of the school's strategic direction.
2. Ensure play has a strong emphasis within the whole-school culture, inclusive of all students and extended to the staff cohort.
3. Create, sustain, and communicate methods of support for all children of different ages, needs, and identities throughout the school.
4. Design projects in partnership with students aimed at connecting with their community, and facilitate their safe participation in enacting change.

About the Valuing Children Initiative

Established in 2016, the Valuing Children Initiative is a not-for-profit culture and attitude change advocacy project based in Western Australia. Driven by a passion for the wellbeing of children and young people, the Valuing Children Initiative strives to ensure that all children and young people are valued, prioritised and heard. Through research, education, and advocacy, the Valuing Children Initiative promotes a shared understanding that the wellbeing of children is essential to building a stronger society, and that child wellbeing and safety is everyone's responsibility. As a wealthy country, Australia has the capacity to ensure that all children are given the supports and opportunities they need to flourish, however, outcomes for many Australian children are unacceptably poor across a range of indicators. As such, identifying and addressing the systemic and attitudinal barriers that prevent children from reaching their potential is a key focus for the Valuing Children Initiative. Understanding adult attitudes is important because attitudes inform behaviour towards children and sit behind policies, programs and services that directly and indirectly impact children. It is equally important for adults to consider and value how children view the world and take their views and opinions seriously; we know that childhood experiences inform adulthood, and it is crucial that we nurture, protect and listen to our youngest citizens.

To learn more about the Valuing Children Initiative visit http://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/

About the researchers

Dr. Madeleine Dobson
Curtin University School of Education
Dr. Madeleine Dobson is the Director of Student Experience & Community Engagement in the Curtin University School of Education. She is a Senior Lecturer of Early Childhood Education & Care with her teaching and research focusing on social justice and children's rights. Madeleine is an early career researcher with a successful thesis completion in 2016 and has lead several qualitative and mixed-methods research projects focusing on media, digital technologies, wellbeing and care in education, and student voice.

Dr. Vicky Absalom-Hornby
Child Australia
Vicky led the Valuing Children Initiative from 2018 – 2020. She has spent over 16 years in the UK and Australia working to enhance outcomes for children and young people including clinical roles and positions in various taskforces and steering committees focusing on research, policy, strategy and social impact. Vicky commenced her career as a psychologist in the national health service, followed by leadership roles in research across public, private and University systems, where she achieved her PhD in Clinical Psychology. A passionate advocate for the wellbeing of children, Vicky continues to work across research and advocacy opportunities, to ensure children have a voice in an adult led world.

The researchers wish to thank Elizabeth Baca (Curtin University) for her assistance with preparing this report.

About the study

Context

The voice of a child is significant. Children are citizens with rights who deserve to be recognised as significant community members who are key to a thriving population. For children to truly flourish we must provide opportunities for them to actively participate in different areas of society; to have a voice, to be heard and to take part in action for change in an ever changing environment. In valuing our children, we should ensure that children are at the forefront of our minds in decision-making.

In building a population that values children through our thinking and actions, it is imperative to invite children and young people to share their attitudes and perspectives on their value in the world. In keeping with this aim, the "A Child's Voice" research project was undertaken in partnership between The Valuing Children Initiative (VCI), the Curtin University School of Education, and a participating school.

VCI was developed as an advocacy project for children across Australia. Research indicates that the wellbeing of Australian children continues to worsen (e.g. AIHW, 2018; AIHW, 2019; Davidson et al., 2020). In addition, youth unemployment is poor (e.g. Youth Action, 2019), and the number of children experiencing abuse is significant (e.g. AIHW, 2019). In 2016, VCI surveyed Australian adults on their attitudes towards children. Part of the findings showed that adults described children as lazy, selfish, spoilt, fortunate and vulnerable (VCI, 2016). In considering these research findings, we question if children truly are valued members of society.

There is a need to engage in further research where the voices and values of children and young people are elicited and analysed. VCI was keen to create an opportunity for children to have a voice in an adult dominated world.

This opportunity was embraced in the "A Child's Voice" project in partnership between VCI and the Curtin University School of Education, where children and young people from Kindergarten to Year 12 at a participating school were invited to take part in a research survey asking for their voice and views about our world, their perception of being a child, how they are valued, and how they can add value within their community.

Ethics

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approved this study (HREC number HRE2020-0278). Informed consent was obtained

from the school leadership to grant access to the school site and its enrolled students. All parents/carers and students were provided with participant information forms, and dual informed consent (parent/carer and student) was required in order for students to participate. All survey data was fully de-identified, with the only demographic data indicated being the participant's year level.

Participants

Participants were students enrolled at a participating private school in Perth, Western Australia. All participants opted in to the research project with informed parent/carer consent and informed student assent. The distribution of participants across year levels was as follows:

Stage	Year level	Year level total	Stage total
Early childhood	Kindergarten	16	
	Pre-primary	19	
	Year 01	22	90
	Year 02	12	
	Year 03	21	
Middle and upper primary	Year 04	29	
	Year 05	28	90
	Year 06	33	
Lower secondary	Year 07	29	
	Year 08	31	91
	Year 09	31	
Upper secondary	Year 10	18	
	Year 11	21	66
	Year 12	27	
Total participation			337

While there were initially 337 student participants, the overall response rate was ultimately 326 – this is due to nine students declining to proceed when they accessed the online survey, and instead opting to exit.

Methodology

A survey methodology was utilised to gather student perspectives and experiences regarding the role of "value" in their lives. The instrument,

which was built in Qualtrics, comprised fourteen questions (see Appendix 1) with a blend of open-ended/close-ended items. The overall focus was gathering attitudinal and experiential insights from participants.

Participants accessed the survey online via Qualtrics and self-reported about what they valued in their lives and how valued they felt as an individual. The survey was fully anonymous, with no identifying information reported. The only demographic data collected was the participants' year levels.

Participants in the Early Childhood year levels (Kindergarten – Year 3) were guided through their survey experience by the researchers, who sat one-on-one with participants to explain the survey and to assist with responding. To facilitate this, iPads were provisioned by Curtin University. Where participants were willing and capable, they used an iPad to respond. Where participants preferred and/or needed greater assistance, the researchers used the iPad to lodge the participants' selected and reported responses. In instances where the latter option was utilised, the participants had full view of the iPad and were able to check that the researchers' submissions were accurate.

Participants from Years 4 – 12 were responsible for accessing and completing the survey on their own device during school hours. Teachers were available to support and assist where necessary.

Data analysis

The survey data was subject to two modes of analysis:

1. Quantitative analysis within Qualtrics for closed-ended questions where the data was examined in terms of frequency and trends

2. Qualitative analysis within NVivo 12 for open-ended questions where experiential data was subject to inductive thematic analysis

This report speaks predominantly to the qualitative data analysis and the resulting findings, with the intent of maintaining a strong focus on the voices and views of the participants.

Snapshot: Do children & young people feel valued?

This section provides a snapshot of findings pertaining to how valued the participants felt by various people in their lives. These findings are expanded in the section to follow, which explores the participants' voices and viewpoints through a thematic lens.

Feeling valued

The vast majority (n=259) of participants felt valued (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Feeling valued was universally apparent amongst participants in Kindergarten through Year 1, whereas uncertainty or negative responses started to feature from Year 3 onwards. Feeling valued was very important (n=203) or somewhat important (n=90) to most participants, with a minority identifying feeling valued as unimportant (n=14) or something they were uncertain about (n=19).

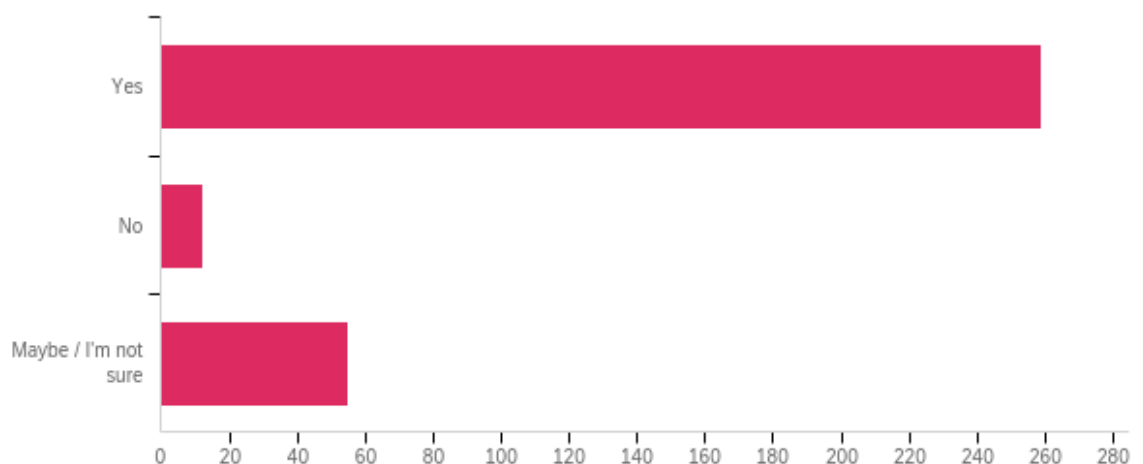### Figure 1: Do the participants feel valued?

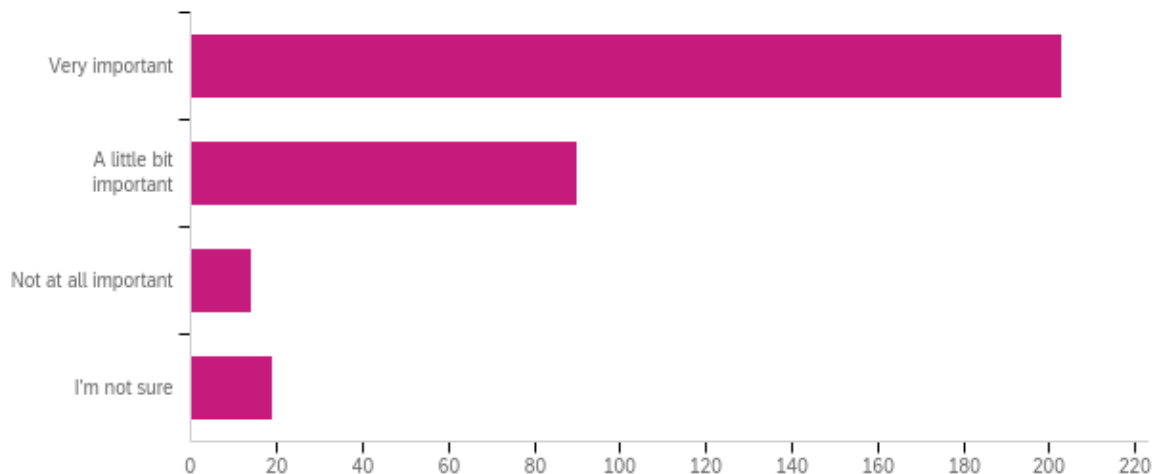

Figure 2: Is it important to the participants to feel valued?

Table 1: Year level breakdown of feeling valued

Response (total)	Year level breakdown	
Yes (259)	Kindergarten	16
	Pre-primary	18
	Year 01	22
	Year 02	11
	Year 03	13
	Year 04	23
	Year 05	23
	Year 06	24
	Year 07	22
	Year 08	18
	Year 09	20
	Year 10	13
	Year 11	18
	Year 12	18
No (12)	Year 03	2
	Year 04	1
	Year 05	1
	Year 07	2
	Year 08	2
	Year 09	1
	Year 10	1
	Year 11	1
	Year 12	1
Maybe/ I'm not sure (55)	Pre-primary	1
	Year 02	1
	Year 03	6
	Year 04	5
	Year 05	3
	Year 06	9
	Year 07	4
	Year 08	8
	Year 09	10
	Year 10	3
	Year 11	1
	Year 12	4

Value across relationships and contexts

The participants were asked to rate how valued they felt by different people in their lives. These findings are mapped visually (see Figure 3) with an accompanying summary (see Table 2).

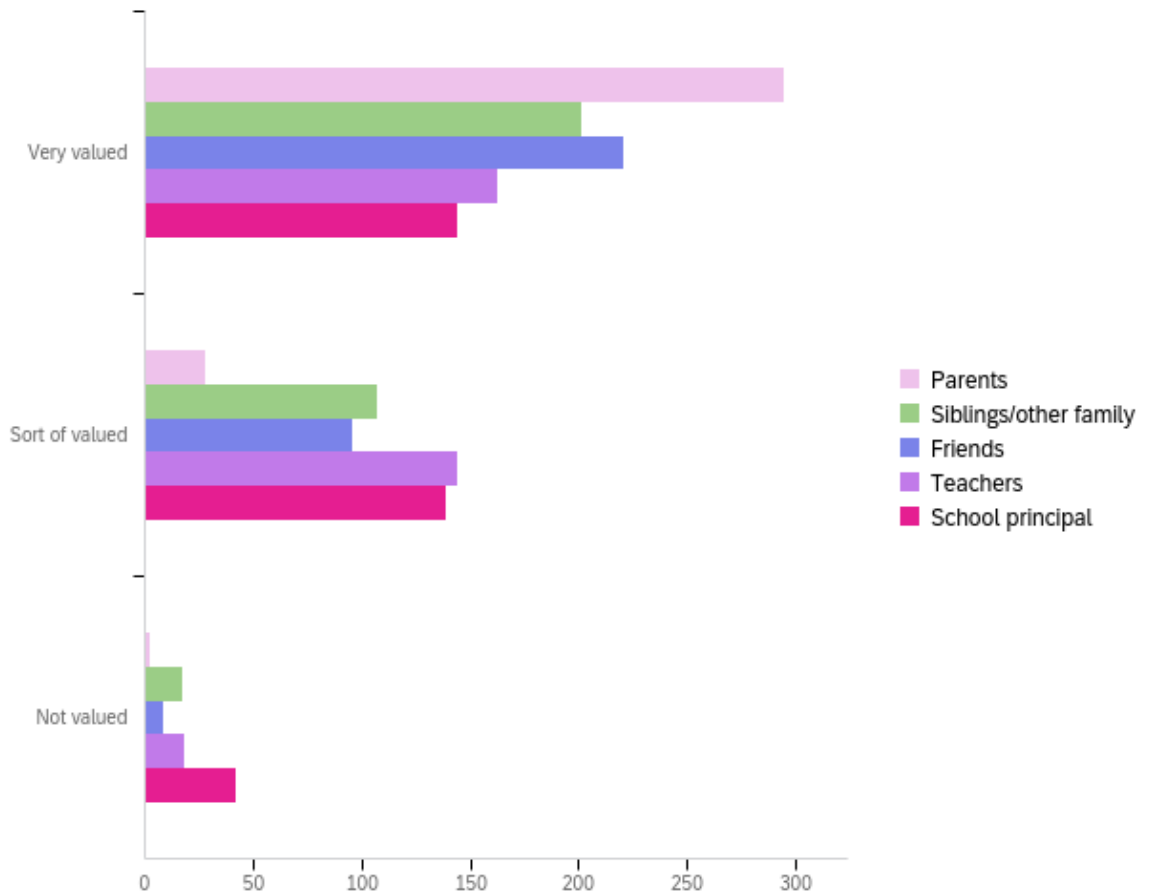Figure 3: Participants' sense of value across different relationships

Table 2: Percentage breakdown of sense of value across different relationships

Relationship	Very valued	Sort of valued	Not valued
Parents	90.77%	8.62%	0.62%
Siblings/other family	61.85%	32.92%	5.23%
Friends	68.00%	29.54%	2.46%
Teachers	50.15%	44.31%	5.54%
School principal	44.31%	42.77%	12.92%

Thematic findings

The thematic findings of this study are arranged into overarching themes which speak to prominent perspectives voiced by the participants through the survey instrument (see Appendix 1, pp. 29-34). The overarching themes are delineated below (see Figure 1) and explored in detail throughout this section.

Figure 1: Summary of overarching themes

"Be beside me":

The value of connectedness and belonging

"They care and they give us some playtime":

The value of play

"We can speak out together":

The value of respect, recognition, and being heard

"We could all unite together, and together we could all make a change":

The value of making a difference

"Be beside me": The value of connectedness and belonging

The participants attributed great value, meaning, and significance to the relationships they held with friends, family, and their educators. Extensive focus was given to the value of feeling a sense of connectedness and belonging in these relationships and in different contexts. This section explores this theme and features voice and views from participants in all year groups.

Throughout their responses, participants focused extensively on their need to be connected to their fellow children & young people, their families and their educators. They shared actions that made them feel valued, for example:

- ❖ "Be careful and kind to others is value." (Early Childhood student)

- ❖ "My friends like always say kind things about me, it makes me feel valued and respected. My sisters are always really funny and they make me laugh." (Early Childhood student)

- ❖ "My family trust me and love me and give me courage." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "My parents for always looking after me and taking care of me, keeping a roof over my head, always being there for and for always believing in me." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "I value my Dad because he supports me no matter what and I can always get a hug from him." (Lower Secondary student)

- ❖ "I value my family and friends most because they make me feel equally as valued in return." (Upper Secondary student)

Many of the Early Childhood students focused on concepts of affection, but across the cohort kindness and compassion were major themes. Some responses were reflective of an absence of connectedness, or barriers to connectedness. Many of these were from Upper Secondary students – this is a pattern that repeated in other sections of the study, and which is addressed further in later sections of the findings (p. 19, pp. 25-26). Some further examples of responses reflective of limitations around connectedness from the Middle/Upper Primary and Secondary students are as follows:

- ❖ "When I broke my leg I felt more valued because more people cared about how I felt. Now not so much as I am now just an ordinary [child]." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "I value my family above anything and this is hard because I am a boarder so I struggle to connect with them over the phone unless it is the weekend. I value being valued so I have to find other people to connect with." (Lower Secondary student)

❖ "Friendship is so important to me. But I can't help feeling my friendships are only one way." (Lower Secondary student)

❖ "There isn't enough kindness in high school culture, I think that is a huge problem that schools need to be aiming to fix for the better of people's wellbeing." (Upper Secondary student)

❖ "I feel as though my friends would be able to move on very quickly if I wasn't around. [This shows] the lack of value they have for me." (Upper Secondary student)

❖ "I just wish that everyone could get along and that people were valued based on their attributes…" (Upper Secondary student)

The participants also identified ways for other people to value and support them – particularly adults. For example:

❖ "Love me and take care of me." (Early Childhood student)

❖ "There's too many ways. Listen to us more." (Early Childhood student)

❖ "Help me let my creative side out!" (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "Talk to you peacefully, believe in you." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "By listening and supporting us in all things that we do." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "Help me and guide me." (Lower Secondary student)

❖ "Just ask how you are going from day to day life." (Upper Secondary student)

❖ "They can be open to listening to your ideas and being there to support you." (Upper Secondary student)

❖ "Value student mental health more." (Upper Secondary student)

One student from the Lower Secondary cohort provided a more extensive response which signalled issues of adult perceptions of children:

> "[Adults can value me] by including me in conversations and treating children more sensibly, because often I think adults can judge a teen or a child as being silly when some kids are really smart kind and funny and have amazing qualities. For parents, they need to be a good parent [by] listening to their child and actually try and help them.

The matter of adult perceptions of children and young people is explored more comprehensively in a later section of the findings (pp. 25-26).

At times the responses focused on the importance of connecting within certain contexts and with a shared purpose. One response which is particularly illustrative of this came from a participant in the Early Childhood cohort:

> "I love gardening. I always feel happy and my family pitches in. I always laugh and play with my big brother and sister. And they always make me feel happy when I'm sad. They always help me garden when there are lots of weeds in the garden. They always pitch in. It feels really nice because you can make the world special for others too."

This reflects a key theme that arose regarding the concept of connectedness to our world and our environment – this is explored further in a later section of the findings (pp. 21-22).

"They care and they give us some playtime": The value of play

A significant theme for the Early Childhood and Middle/Upper Primary cohorts was the value of play. While there were some rare mentions of play in the responses from the Secondary students (n=4), there were frequent mentions from the younger participants (n=85).

Focus was given to their enjoyment of play, its importance to their wellness, and the significance of spaces where play was possible. Often, participants attributed value to outdoor play (n=24). Apparent through many of the responses was how much the creation of play opportunities by adults, in terms of provision of time and space, was cherished by the participants and identified as an act of care.

The following are illustrative quotes which speak to this theme:

❖ "They care and they give us some playtime." (Early Childhood student)

❖ "I'm happy when I'm playing outside." (Early Childhood student)

❖ "[I value] having play time at school so it isn't just boring work, work, work." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "[I feel valued when] people [are] happy to play with me." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

"We can speak out together": The value of respect, recognition, and being heard

Participants often focused on their desire to be respected and recognised by the people in their lives. This was principal to the participants feeling valued. For example, one Upper Secondary student explained that "feeling heard, helped, and at the very least, [being] accepted" was critically important in feeling valued.

This was a significant point of focus for the Upper Secondary cohort, many of whom referenced the importance of being shown respect, being acknowledged and being engaged in meaningful dialogue. Many of these responses were aligned to the question "What makes you feel valued?", with some example responses as follows:

- ❖ "When people actually sit down and listen when I need them."

- ❖ "By giving me attention and involving me."

- ❖ "People acknowledging my points in a conversation."

- ❖ "Having someone to talk to at any time during the day, knowing there are people that enjoy talking to me and hanging out with me make me feel valued. People asking me for help and guidance also makes me feel valued."

While this was a prominent feature of the responses from Upper Secondary students, it was also apparent to an extent in the responses from the Middle/Upper Primary and Lower Secondary students. The Early Childhood students were much more focused on concepts of affection and protection, which was explored previously in the section of findings focused on connectedness (see p. 14). The following quotes further illustrate the significance that children and young people attribute to being heard and respected:

- ❖ "People talking to me and people noticing me [makes me feel valued]." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "[I feel valued when] people talk to me, include me, and help me." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "[I feel valued when] people listen to me and what I have to say and care about me." (Lower Secondary student)

❖ "People standing up for me [and] letting me express my opinion [makes me feel valued]." (Lower Secondary student)

There were also participants who noted the absence of respect and recognition, for instance:

❖ "I'm not sure how people value me but I certainly don't feel valued and I usually get ignored by lots of people." (Upper Secondary student)

❖ "Someone actually acknowledging some things that I've done [makes me feel valued]. I always put everyone before myself but I feel as though no one really appreciates it." (Upper Secondary student)

A key concern shared by participants was the lack of respect and recognition given to them by adults. This finding is explored further in the following section (pp. 25-26).

"We could all unite together, and together we could all make a change": The value of making a difference

The students were asked to report on their perspectives and experiences of making a difference in their communities, in terms of whether they felt this was important (see Table 3 and Figure 4, p. 21), what difference they wanted to make, and whether anything was holding them back from making a difference (see Table 4 and Figure 5, pp. 22-23).

Table 3: Participants' perspectives on making a difference

Do you feel it is important for children and young people to make a difference?		
Response	Number of respondents	Proportion
Yes	256	78.52%
No	10	3.07%
Maybe	45	13.80%
I'm not sure	15	4.61%

Figure 4: The importance of making a difference
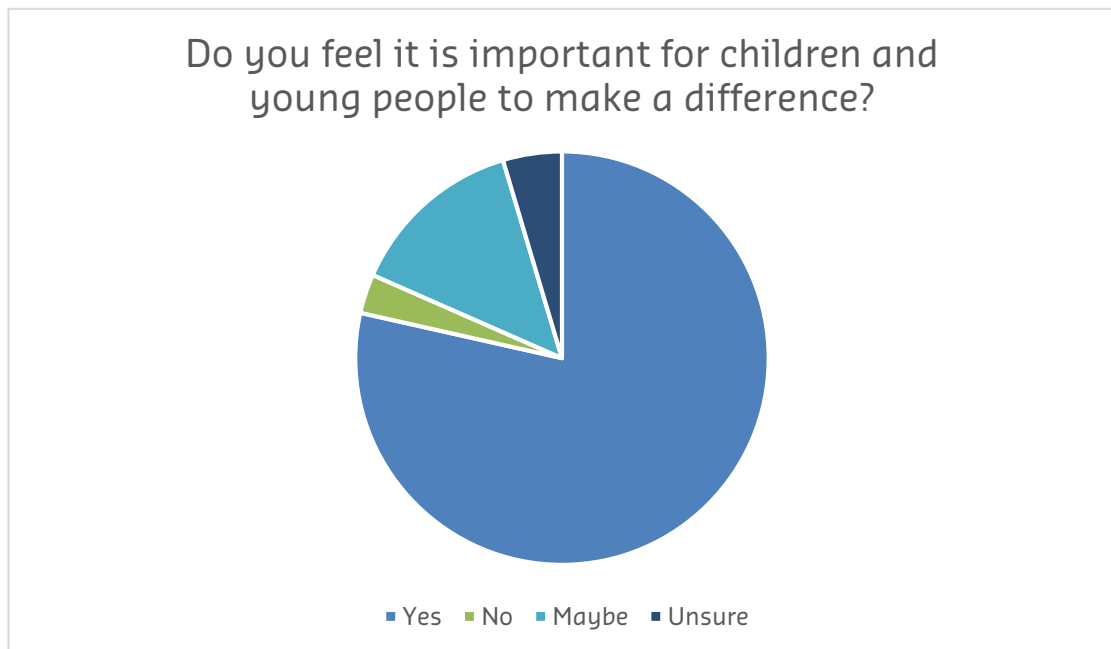
In terms of what difference the participants wanted to make, there was a significant focus on the environment (n=67). Regarding this environmental focus, a range of ideas were articulated by participants across the age span. These were predominantly focused on a general commitment to caring for and protecting our environment (n=55). For example:

- ❖ "We can help bring more sustainability to the world and inspire others to do that with us." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "[Children and young people can make a difference by] setting goals in the future for the good of humans and most importantly the environment." (Lower Secondary student)

Where participants named particular issues, the climate crisis and the

rights and welfare of animals were common talking points that generated more extensive commentary. For example:

- ❖ "I really don't want sea lions to get hurt with rubbish and suffocate and die. I would get the rubbish off of them and I would just get a grabber and get it off there." (Early Childhood student)

- ❖ "I feel that we can speak out together and include things in our schools where we collectively try and solve problems such as lowering emissions and waste production." (Upper Secondary student)

- ❖ "I feel that younger generations, as exemplified by Greta Thunberg have a huge role in pushing for change. Having the protests and voicing concerns is so important, as we, the younger generations are going to have to live our lives amongst aspects such as climate change." (Upper Secondary student)

As this was such a distinct point of emphasis for the participants, which clearly aligned to pedagogical emphases within the school, this report includes a gallery of student voice around environmental matters (see Appendix 2, p. 35).

While the participants were generally invested in the idea of making a difference, many felt they were being held back (see Figure 5 below and Table 4 on p. 23).

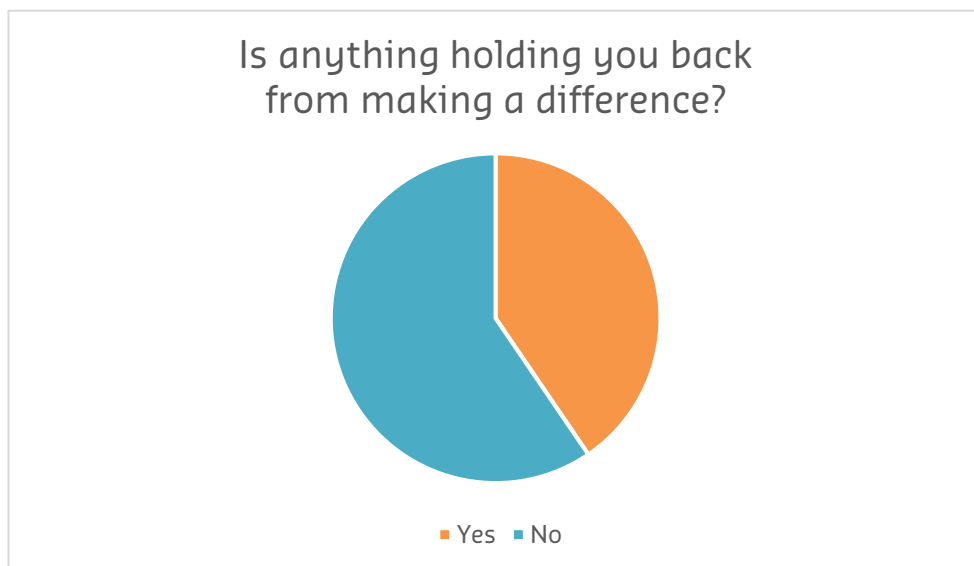Figure 5: Student perspectives on being held back from making a difference

Is anything holding you back
from making a difference?

■ Yes ■ No

Table 4: Student perspectives on being held back from making a difference

Is anything holding you back from making a difference?				
Response	Year level	Count	Total	Percentage
No	Kindergarten	10	194	59.51%
	Pre-primary	19		
	Year 01	15		
	Year 02	10		
	Year 03	14		
	Year 04	20		
	Year 05	15		
	Year 06	15		
	Year 07	18		
	Year 08	16		
	Year 09	14		
	Year 10	7		
	Year 11	6		
	Year 12	15		
Yes	Kindergarten	6	132	40.49%
	Year 01	7		
	Year 02	2		
	Year 03	7		
	Year 04	9		
	Year 05	12		
	Year 06	18		
	Year 07	10		
	Year 08	12		
	Year 09	17		
	Year 10	10		
	Year 11	14		
	Year 12	8		

In terms of what the participants (n=126) felt was holding them back, three key themes emerged. The age/grade distribution was concentrated in middle/upper primary (n=38), lower secondary (n=39), and upper secondary (n=31), with a smaller number of respondents from the early years (n=19).

"I think the thing holding me back is me": Children's perspectives of their own limitations

Many participants (n=26) expressed concerns that they were holding themselves back from making a difference, with much of their reasoning focused on personal issues. These issues included "anxieties" (Middle/Upper Primary), "lack of self-control" (Lower Secondary), "self-confidence", "my personal knowledge", and "mental health" (Upper Secondary). Participants also articulated a number of fears that were impacting on them:

❖ "Negativity and maybe people thinking I am a weirdo when I try or I am just trying to show off. And [if] I do achieve they might think that I am not good enough and should just give up." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "... feeling scared to talk at Assembly or talk to my friends about it in case they think it's a bad idea." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

❖ "Me being scared of being my true self." (Lower Secondary student)

❖ "Myself in general. I don't feel the need to make large changes beyond what affects me personally/what I see in my everyday life. When a wider issue is involved I feel as though my individual input into changing it would not be enough to make a change so I don't even attempt it." (Upper Secondary student)

The quotes presented here are illustrative of a broader pattern apparent in these responses, where it was clear that the participants were engaged in the survey in a deeply reflective and authentic manner. Their willingness to identify their own limitations and to share their fears and concerns in this realm was appreciated by the researchers, as it provided greater insight into the complex interior worlds the participants inhabit and navigate.

"The pressures of school": School and education as barriers

Where participants (n=17) reported that school and education were a barrier, a range of concerns arose. Not all participants offered an explanation about their concerns and simply reported that school, school life, and/or their education were holding them back from making a difference (n=10). The participants who did share further explanation mainly focused on issues around time and choice, or lack thereof:

- ❖ "[I] have to be at school too long." (Early Childhood student)

- ❖ "In prep school everything is chosen for you and you can't do what you want." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "Hours of homework." (Lower Secondary student)

- ❖ "I do not have an opinion as every time I try to express it, it gets shut down by the teachers." (Upper Secondary student)

- ❖ "It feels like I can't get involved in many peaceful protests or movements in fear of being penalised by the school. On top of this, it doesn't ever feel like there is time to get involved with anything, and [Upper Secondary] is already too stressful enough with trying to get a good ATAR and school commitments." (Upper Secondary student)

Notably, one Lower Secondary student provided an extended critique of the Australian education system:

"The Australian education system […] doesn't encourage improvement. Students are locked within standards based on nation-wide assessments, competing just to stay where they are, as opposed to achieving their personal best. Brighter students are rarely challenged within the public education system, stifling their potential. Australia's standards are too low. So many people are being allowed to leave school without the proper requirements to succeed in life, only being able to put their kids into the public education system, continuing the cycle of poor education."

This finding ties in with the next, which concerns the impact of adults on children and young people's capacity to make a difference.

"People won't listen to my voice": Limitations posed by age and the perspectives of adults as barriers

Adult perceptions of children and young people were flagged as problematic (n=22), with participants across the age range raising concerns about not being acknowledged, listened to or respected by adults. For example:

- ❖ "I'm not big enough yet." (Early Childhood student)

- ❖ "The old people think they do everything right." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "Kids aren't useless and adults don't rule EVERYTHING anymore." (Middle/Upper Primary student)

- ❖ "Adults and older people see me and other children as irresponsible and unable to make good decisions." (Lower Secondary student)

- ❖ "[Children and young people] need to [make a difference], but can't. There's no way that we can make a difference, thanks to the law and the dinosaurs in the governments of the world." (Lower Secondary student)

- ❖ "Children can make a difference by sharing their perspective and expressing the way the world feels to them." (Lower Secondary student)

- ❖ "I feel as though it is our opportunities that are holding us back because we don't get enough of them as kids. Another problem is that people don't listen to kids as much as they do to adults so we kind of get outspoken as well." (Upper Secondary student)

- ❖ "[Teachers could support me by] treating students as equal and losing the superiority complex." (Upper Secondary student)

These findings are concerning and indicate a need for greater centring of children and young people and their voices and views. This is addressed in the following section which focuses on recommendations.

Recommendations

This section provides recommendations that school communities and their educators and families may wish to consider. These recommendations stem from the researchers' analysis of the rich data generated throughout this study, and honour the voices of the children and young people who dedicated their time and efforts to participating in this study.

❖ **Make student voice and views visible and embedded at all levels and an integral part of the school's strategic direction.**
It is recommended that this be undertaken in a holistic and comprehensive way, and become a continual point of emphasis and reflection for the school community.

❖ **Ensure play has a strong emphasis within the whole-school culture, inclusive of all students and extended to the staff cohort.**
The focus on play at the school was very apparent and clearly supported and appreciated by children and educators alike. It is recommended that this continue to be supported, and be expanded, so that the entire school community benefit from engagement in play and play-based methods of learning.

❖ **Create, sustain, and communicate methods of support for all children of different ages, needs, and identities throughout the school.**
It is recommended that the school establish and give visibility to differentiated methods of support across all aspects of identity.

❖ **Design projects in partnership with students aimed at connecting with their community, and facilitate their safe participation in enacting change.**
It was clear throughout the study that the participating students believe in giving back, making a difference, and contributing to positive change in their communities. It is recommended that the school invest in this and facilitate meaningful opportunities for their entire school community to connect with community and enact change, with a distinct emphasis on enabling student participation and agency as change-makers.

The researchers, Vicky and Madeleine, are available to discuss these recommendations further and to support school communities with progressing these recommendations.

References

Davidson, P., Bradbury, B., and Wong, M. (2020). Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 2, Who is affected? ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 4, Sydney: ACOSS.UNICEF Australia. (2020). Retrieved from: http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Poverty-in-Australia-2020-Part-2-%E2%80%93-Who-is-affected_Final.pdf

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Overweight and obesity: an interactive insight. Retrieved from https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/overweight-obesity/overweight-and-obesity-an-interactive-insight/contents/whatis-overweight-and-obesity

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia2018/contents/summary

Youth Action. (2019). Change the story on youth unemployment. Retrieved from http://www.youthaction.org.au/change_the_story_on_youth_unemployment#:~:text=Currently%2C%20there%20are%20more%20than,has%20had%20a%20lasting%20impact.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story. Retrieved from https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true

The Valuing Children Initiative. (2016). Australian's attitudes to children- the valuing children initiative benchmark survey. Essential Research. Retrieved from http://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/the-valuing-children-initiative-benchmark-survey-2016/

Appendix 1: Survey instrument

A Child's Voice Survey

Welcome to the "A Child's Voice" survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas.

This survey asks questions about what and who you value in your life, and how valued you feel. Keep in mind that when someone or something is "valued", it is important and meaningful. For example, you may value your friends, because they are important and meaningful to you, and you care about them.

If you choose to take part in this survey, we won't ask you for any personal information such as your name or contact information, so your answers are anonymous. We will only ask for your year level.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask your parents, your teacher, or the researchers (Madeleine & Vicky) if they are visiting your classroom.

Thank you again!

I have received information regarding this survey and I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project and I voluntarily consent to take part.

◯ Yes (1)

◯ No (exit survey) (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If I have received information regarding this survey and I have had an opportunity to ask questions.... = No (exit survey)

Skip To: End of Block If I have received information regarding this survey and I have had an opportunity to ask questions.... = Yes

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our survey. Can you please tell us what year level you are in?

○ Kindergarten (1)

○ Pre-primary (2)

○ Year 1 (3)

○ Year 2 (4)

○ Year 3 (5)

○ Year 4 (6)

○ Year 5 (7)

○ Year 6 (8)

○ Year 7 (9)

○ Year 8 (10)

○ Year 9 (11)

○ Year 10 (12)

○ Year 11 (13)

○ Year 12 (14)

Remember: When someone or something is "valued", it is important and meaningful. For example, you may value your friends, because they are important and meaningful to you, and you care about them.

The following questions are about what you value in your life. As you read through the questions, think about the people and things that are important and meaningful to you.

List three (3) things that you value most in your day-to-day life.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

List three (3) things that you value most at school.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who is someone you value a lot and why do you value them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Order the following from most important to least important. You can click and drag the items into their order of importance.

_____ My family (1)
_____ My friendships (2)
_____ My school and my learning (3)
_____ Creativity, art, and design (4)
_____ Devices (e.g. your smart phone, gaming device, etc.) (5)
_____ Social media (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook) (6)
_____ Websites and apps (e.g. YouTube, Netflix) (7)
_____ Entertainment (e.g. movies, TV shows, concerts) (8)
_____ Sports, recreation, and fitness (9)
_____ Our environment and sustainability (10)
_____ Feeling happy, safe, and well (11)
_____ Helping others and making a difference (12)

The following questions are about how valued you feel. As you read through the questions, think about how important and meaningful you feel, or how important and meaningful others make you feel.

Do you feel valued?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Maybe / I'm not sure (3)

How important is it to you to feel valued?

○ Very important (1)

○ A little bit important (2)

○ Not at all important (3)

○ I'm not sure (4)

- -

What sort of things make you feel valued? Share some examples of ways that people can make you feel important and meaningful.

_____

_____

_____

- -

How valued do you feel by the following people?

	Very valued (1)	Sort of valued (2)	Not valued (3)
Parents (1)	○	○	○
Siblings/other family (2)	○	○	○
Friends (3)	○	○	○
Teachers (4)	○	○	○
School principal (5)	○	○	○

The following questions are about how children and young people can make a difference. As you read through the questions, think about how you can help or make positive changes at school, at home, or in your community.

Do you feel it is important for children and young people to make a difference?

○ Yes (1)

○ Maybe (2)

○ No (3)

○ I'm not sure (4)

How do you feel children and young people can make a difference?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you feel like anything is holding you back from making a difference?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

What do you feel is holding you back from making a difference?

_____

_____

_____

How can adults support you so that you can make a difference?

_____

_____

_____

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about how valued you feel, or what you value in your life?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 2: Gallery of student voice about environmental matters

"Stop global warming."

"Plant more trees."

"Look after nature."

"Protecting the environment.
Young people can be the front runners for this issue."

"Make the environment better."

"Take care of nature."

"Help animals that are sick."

"Help stop pollution in order to stop climate change."

"Stop using plastic."

"Keep animals safe."

"Stop killing animals."

"Protesting… because by the time we are 18, the world will already be screwed up with climate change."

"I want to plant other plants in the park and pull weeds out so plants can stay healthy."

"We can help bring more sustainability to the world and inspire others to do that with us."

"I feel that we can speak out together and include things in our schools where we collectively try and solve problems such as lowering emissions and waste production."

"Before coronavirus, young people were absent from school to protest the way climate change is affecting how we all live. But politicians just treated the whole situation like it was just a speck of dust."