

As a practising State Primary teacher of some 30 years experience, I offer the following observations regarding the Naplan testing regime. I sincerely hope these provide some insight into the detrimental effects of NAPLAN upon me and my colleagues sincere efforts to provide a meaningful, engaging and effective education for my year 4 and 5 students.

The first 3 months of the school year were largely devoted to preparation for NAPLAN testing. Much of this time was spent exposing and familiarising my 9 and 10 year olds with Naplan style test structure and to some extent content. NAPLAN is a format and rigour of testing previously unfamiliar to most 9 and 10 year olds. Thus 1/4 of my year was spent in NAPLAN preparation, when well planned, engaging and worthwhile teaching plans were to a great extent put on hold.

To ensure that my students had at least been exposed to likely NAPLAN test content prior to test dates in May, I hurriedly tried to 'teach' a year's content in just 3 months. This was particularly necessary in the Maths area. If NAPLAN is attempting to develop more effective teaching and learning this is NOT the way to achieve this goal. What I presented to my students during this time was a superficial coverage of curriculum unlikely to develop long lasting deep understanding of concepts and skills.

It is my sincere belief that demanding 9 and 10 year olds to be subjected to such a regime of testing to enable compilation of data on the My School website is simply not justified. This is particularly so with younger students (some as young as 7!) or those students with learning or emotional/social disabilities. To what end?

To prove that we are somehow achieving an Education Revolution?

My colleague and wife relayed her experiences with NAPLAN last year when she discovered one of her 7 year olds (in Year 3) sobbing quietly at her desk during class... because this poor little mite was worried about not doing well 'at NAPLAN'. Is this the sort of education we are trying to achieve these days? What idiot dreamed this up?

There appears to be much talk from both Federal and State politicians lately about the need to increase teacher skill and ability. We appear to be looking back at the 'good old days' of education some 30, 40 or 50 years in the past. I can attest to the fact that I am working harder these days than I ever worked 30 years ago, trying to provide a meaningful and accessible education to my diverse class of students. When I contemplate my teachers from the 60's and early 70's I can honestly say that many of these good intentioned souls would not 'survive' the classrooms and curriculum demands of modern classrooms... without the benefit of a large and frequently wielded 'stick'.

Today's teachers need and desire a common National Curriculum which is easily understood, educationally engaging, educationally worthwhile and achievable for the great majority of students. Lets get this part right first before we embark on draconian and inappropriate testing, data collection, display and comparison of results such as those presented on the My School website.

If we're seriously talking about 'value for education dollars spent'...how is displaying what we already know about an elite group of Private (and some State Schools a la Brisbane State High...) outperforming some under-funded and under-resourced state schools, getting value for money? Many of these wonderful colleagues from 'elite' classrooms wouldn't last a week in some of the extraordinary circumstances faced by State School teachers each and every day of their working lives. And guess what? We keep on prevailing.

Give teachers clear curriculum direction and a testing program (external if required) at APPROPRIATE junctures in the education lives of our students. Year 3 and 5 are not appropriate times for this regime of national testing. Let me suggest mid to end Year 6 which is likely to be a common 'end of Primary phase' for most states in the very near future. Further testing might also occur at certain junctures in the Secondary area of schooling.

Let's get this right before we destroy the good work, wonderful intentions and damned hard work of the teachers of Australia while providing misguided and ill conceived information for our school parents.

Let's put an educationalist in charge of education, one with a strong belief in childrens' needs, national, international and community expectations not an 'educationalist' with one hand firmly grasping a calculator while peering at a spreadsheet.