

Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing

I would like to make a submission to the above named Inquiry, addressing all items of reference, but in particular the first two, namely:

(a) the conflicting claims made by the Government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing

(b) the implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data

I believe that I can contribute meaningfully to the Inquiry, as I taught in Victorian secondary schools for more than twenty-five years as a Maths, English and Special Education teacher. Over the past decade, my work has involved analyses of educational data for two large-scale, key research projects [Victoria¹, Australia and Hong Kong²]. In both these projects, I conducted the statistical analyses under the supervision of Dr. Peter Hill, current CEO of ACARA, the body responsible for NAPLAN. I am able to interpret his technical reports and multi-level research papers, and discuss their merits and weaknesses.

As part of my doctoral research, I analysed senior secondary results in twenty subjects, across all Victorian government, Catholic and Independent schools, for the seven years 1994 to 2000, in terms of student achievement relative to ability. Since 2001, I have analysed VCE (Victorian Year 11/12) data, displaying 'within-school' patterns for large numbers of Victorian secondary schools, in a program effectively funded by schools. In response to the positive support and ongoing requests from Principals, this data-informed approach has been extended so that teachers, students and parents can better monitor the ability-adjusted learning progress for Year 7-10 students, and the program could easily be adapted for Year 3-6 students.

My research consists of ability-adjusted analyses of test results, that is, I examine individual and group (class/subject/school/region) achievement, in light of student academic ability, because this single factor - individual student ability - has the greatest influence on student academic performance. All other variables, including student motivation and aspirations, teacher and school resources, socio-economic status, etc. claimed to impact student and school performance, can only be fairly and meaningfully considered when student ability is taken into account.

From these data analyses, I developed a series of graphical displays that allows any stakeholder - teacher, student, parent, principal or system level staff - to quickly and easily see the ability/achievement patterns in academic results. Importantly, these patterns can be seen in the same user-friendly format, using real scores, at multiple levels - student, class, subject within school, and across schools for regions, sectors or states.

This way of incorporating research-based analyses with school-verified scores and contextual information about students is essential if valid comparisons and ethical interpretation of educational data are to be conducted.

Because of my life's work in teaching and research, I know the methodology involved in the NAPLAN and *My School* work conducted by ACARA, from the top-down,

departmental perspective, as well as from the teacher/parent level. Being able to understand student results appreciating the 'teaching and student learning' perspective alongside the statistical interpretation is a claim few people can legitimately make.

I am familiar with both the statistical and the educational interpretation of school data as conducted by Dr. Peter Hill and Professor Barry McGaw (current ACARA staff), from my time as a doctoral research student at the University of Melbourne, and as a Senior Research Fellow at ACER.

In common with many school and university staff, I have a number of serious concerns with the present NAPLAN system, both in methodology and management, which need to be acknowledged and remedied, if this expensive and extensive initiative is to achieve genuine educational benefits for all Australians.

Yours Sincerely,

Carmel Richardson

References

1. Richardson, Carmel. (2002) .VCE Data Project 1994-2000: Report to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Centre for Applied Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Vic. REF: 100625_EMAIL SENATE SUBMISSION.DOCX
2. Hill, P. W., Mok, M. M., Au, W. K., Jane, G. & Richardson, C. A. (2001). Final Report on the Quality Education Fund Project on Development of Performance Indicators for Measuring Value-added Improvement of primary and Secondary Students' Academic Performance. The University of Melbourne, Australia and The Hong Kong Institute of Education.
3. Richardson, C. A. (2005). Using Data to support learning: Researchers and Practitioners working together to ensure data-informed practice in secondary schools: Evidence from Vic, SA and NSW schools. ACER Research Conference 2005
This paper is posted at ACEReSearch. [http://research.acer.edu.au/research conference 2005/4](http://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2005/4)
4. For further discussion, search all references to "Richardson" in the following article:
Gabrielle Matters. "Using Data to Support Learning in Schools: Students, Teachers, Systems" *Australian Education Review*.49 (2006). Available at:
http://works.bepress.com/gabrielle_matters/1 or
<http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=aer>