

From:
Mr. Kevin Phyland

To Whom It May Concern,

I wish to address at least two concerns in this submission.

- (a) The ways in which NAPLAN data may be used correctly and incorrectly; and
- (b) The shortcomings of the NAPLAN tests themselves.

USES OF NAPLAN DATA

In its purest and rawest form, a NAPLAN test comprises a useful datum for teachers to integrate into their holistic and comprehensive year-long analysis of student achievement.

It must however be used judiciously. The test represents a snapshot of a student on a certain day at a certain stage in their development and under the influence of varying degrees of motivation and interest.

This translates to a single point on a continuum which is pared down to a single number.

What does this number tell us about a student?

Does it tell us whether this student has improved remarkably?

Does it tell us whether this student is stagnating?

Does it tell us anything at all about the environment in the school or the ability of the teacher?

The answer to every one of these quite legitimate questions is NO!

The purpose of education is (and always has been) to improve a student's understanding of curriculum areas and self-confidence in their own learning abilities. In the current jargon, it is about VALUE-ADDING. The current data does not give any information about whether value-adding may be taking place or, more pertinently, what conditions may be preventing it from taking place in some schools and enhancing it in others.

Data from successive year is being used to compare different student cohorts, which makes absolutely zero sense in small schools and very little in larger schools.

The creation of league tables was inevitable (if not by the DEECD but by the media) due to the perception that the only influence on a student's learning is the teacher. Socio-economic and environmental factors have a sad history of being ignored or glossed over as recognition of the importance of these factors would require urgent (and expensive) remedial action. It is far easier (and cheaper) to blame teachers for perceived shortcomings in the system.

Using the data without reference to value adding or factors external to the school is tantamount to fraud and should be roundly condemned as tacit support for yet another round of teacher bashing by both the DEECD and the media.

THE CONTENT OF NAPLAN TESTS

As a currently-serving Year 9 Mathematics teacher the content of the NAPLAN tests also concerns me. Not all areas are tested and the CALCULATOR section

relies more on a student's familiarity with a new calculator than any mathematical understanding of the theory.

A directive from the LCM region to spend 10 WEEKS preparing for two 40 minute tests in Mathematics I find an unconscionable waste of teacher and student time in that it results in piecemeal understanding of topics not yet covered and which could have been used to cover some of the areas in detail. The pressure on teachers from both regional GMs and by extension principals to show improved NAPLAN results in EVERY school is resulting in teaching to the test and will ultimately result in a REDUCED understanding of how topics and theories in Mathematics fit together into a skein of common knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear by the exclusive use of external testing to somehow determine where a student lies on an arbitrary continuum as opposed to the 10 months of intimate evaluation, testing and assistance that a teacher provides, that the role of the teacher is being seriously undervalued.

- (1) I recommend that NAPLAN tests be only one datum used to evaluate a student.
- (2) I recommend that raw NAPLAN data not be used without referencing other external issues if the data implies that a student is underachieving.
- (3) I recommend that the data be used to address the problems that may exist in some schools due to socio-economic or environmental variables in a POSITIVE way - more aides, smaller class sizes etc.

Reputations of schools (and in particular SMALL schools) have usually been made at the local level and have ALWAYS been subject to parents and students being able to walk away if they are dissatisfied.

Using NAPLAN results on a single instance over a 2 year period to tell anybody ANYTHING about a student is akin to taking a photo of somebody in Bourke Street and then attempting to tell me where they were a year ago and where they will be a year hence.

Thank You For Your Time,

Kevin Phyland
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