

## Your say: Why NAPLAN must go

March 29, 2018

It's time for Australia to carve its own path in education and stop channeling the US. With the digital era upon us and exponential rates of change, critical and creative thinking are the very skills that will successfully take us into the future.

As a qualified primary school teacher, an education consultant who lives and breathes it every day, a private tutor with students from Year 1 to Year 9, a casual teacher with experience in both systems as well as having four of my own at different schools from Year 2 to Year 12, I believe I am in a great position to provide feedback and an informed opinion on why NAPLAN is a waste of our resources and the costs far outweigh the benefits.



First, it beggars belief that we would blindly keep taking on the mainstream practise of the US education system. Theirs is basically big business, based on standardised testing and lots of it, to compete in the global education race that is closely tied to the OECD's PISA results (Program for Independent Student Assessment). Ironically, the Western approach, led by the US is failing and Australia's rankings continue to drop.

I am of the opinion that you just have to look at who the American people voted in as the person to lead their country to know their critical thinking skills are shot to pieces and their education system is failing. As one very humorous English stand-up comedian said just before Trump gained power: "Surely there is a finite number of morons who live in the States". Apparently not!

Australia needs a new mentor combined with our own unique personality. Our nation is grown up, it's time we stop living in the shadow of the US. Finland and Singapore are the obvious choices as mentors. Finland has always ranked highly since PISA began and is the enigma of the Western world.

Educators travel there, observe and listen and the go back, add a few more tests to their curriculum to close the gap, make no real changes and wonder why nothing is improving. This approach demonstrates a lack of respect and understanding of what they have just witnessed in Finland.

Instead of pouring millions into rolling out excessive standardised testing — which is creating anxiety and sucking the life out of diverse, creative and spontaneous teaching as well as the autonomy of teachers to run their classroom and create lessons for the whole child and not just the right side of the brain (academia) – we could pour millions into more teachers and quality training.

This would lead to more quality teaching time as well as teachers being better equipped to respond to the individual needs of each child, instead of ticking boxes and preparing for NAPLAN so their school presents well. It is counterproductive and flies in the face of what teaching is all about. Teaching is a true talent and must be seen as such.

In Finland and Singapore, the top 5 per cent of graduates are targeted to teach the next generations. This way you have the dedication of disciplined professionals to embrace the privilege of teaching. The ratio of teacher to students is half of what it is in Australia and a teacher's status is right up there with doctors and lawyers.

In fact, in Finland, they have a saying when they leave school. "Don't worry, if you don't get into teaching you can always do law!" Brilliant!

Sadly, the main way to raise the status of the teaching profession is to pay teachers more money. The funds are there, we just need to direct the money to the right place. More quality teachers will reduce the student/teacher ratio so the teacher has a chance to recognise the talent of each child and cater for it. Every child has something to offer.

Information on the basic skills of numeracy and literacy are important. However, we can get that information at a lower cost with smaller sample sizes and through triangulation of schools and demographic statistics.

The other main contention is the imbalance of the curriculum. If you were to compare the timetables of most schools, I believe you would find nearly all of them dedicate 75 per cent of class time to numeracy and literacy. We all know we can teach literacy and numeracy through the arts, or any discipline for that matter. For example, the K-6 creative arts syllabus is great in theory but the respect it gets at shop level is not there. One could almost call it lip service.

The other cost of NAPLAN is the power it hands to parents as a tool to demand more focus on literacy and numeracy. Parents want the best education for their children but most parents are not privy to the latest research and practise in education and carry an attitude of, "If it was good enough for me and I was able to learn this way, then that is what I want for my kids." This is a real block.

If the Education Minister wants a quick fix to improving the quality of teaching in classrooms in a short time, I have a suggestion. When the literacy and numeracy papers are being handed out, introduce a third assessment. Provide a bag of weird objects that children have to write about and design a use for. Watch the private schools jump to attention. Suddenly the creativity and critical thinking of teaching will increase tenfold and the impetus for Australia to lead the world in education will have begun.

*Prue Reid is a casual teacher*