

In Australia the NAPLAN testing has finally finished for another year and teachers can breathe a sigh of relief as they reclaim their curriculum. Perhaps they can now find the art supplies, plan an excursion to a farm, dig out the science resources or maybe even (heaven forbid) play more. The unintended toxic side-effects of national testing and the subsequent publishing of results on the My School website are damaging – I regularly hear from stressed students, even more worried parents and teachers with waning enthusiasm and passion. It worries me deeply that we are experiencing a dumbing down of our children, the devaluing of creativity and innovative thinking, and a pressure to focus so much on literacy and numeracy – without seeing the whole child or the full picture of quality, effective education. The schools that claim NAPLAN has improved their literacy and numeracy standards have forgotten that what really improves educational outcomes are quality, enthusiastic teachers who work within a strong sense of school community with positive parental involvement. It isn't teaching to the NAPLAN test that improves educational outcomes. Indeed there are many education experts who question the value of the 'testing frenzy' now sweeping Australia.

NAPLAN-style testing and reporting have failed in the United States by narrowing the curriculum and corrupting education standards, according to a chief education adviser to US President Barack Obama, Linda Darling-Hammond, professor of education at Stanford University,
Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/us-education-expert-blasts-narrow-national-testing-20110501-1e31u.html#ixzz1MkcC5Ig7>

Many in the US are calling for the abandonment of standardised testing and reporting. More than 10 years ago, the US National Association for the Education of Young Children issued a position statement[<http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSCAG98.PDF>] calling for guidelines for appropriate assessment.

This expert group point out that testing children younger than 8 (as some of our Year 3s sitting NAPLAN are) can produce misleading results. They also expressed concern about the effects of such testing on students, teachers and schools:

“In recent years, standardized test scores have become the primary vehicle for demonstrating that schools and teachers are accountable. Too often, this practice has led to blaming children who are ill-served by the program or punishing districts that do not measure up to expectations without examining all components of the program. Overreliance on standardized achievement test scores as the only indicator of program effectiveness has had a detrimental effect on curriculum.” — NAEYC

This brings me to my concerns that teaching involves so much more than teaching students how to pass tests, especially ones that are statistically invalid. I have been a mentor/ambassador to a community school in the south west of WA called Child Side for a number of years. What began as a community kindy and pre-school has grown into a small school that now goes up to high school. Recently they sent me their updated aspirations for their school and their precious students. Please read carefully and feel how your body responds to the goals of education that they value. The ones in italics are ones I have added simply because I believe we can aim even higher – without big visions and high positive expectations we, as the adults, limit our children on some level.

Our Aspirations...

With respect and acknowledgement of the following influences – BPE (Big Picture Education Australia) – ***The Real Goals of Education-*** Dennis Littky- 'The Big Picture' in alignment with the goals/vision of REIEA- Reggio Emilia Information Exchange Australia, with a few additions from Maggie Dent Emotional Resiliency specialist the following represents the Child Side School Philosophy.

Education is everyone's business.

What we most desire for our children (The Real Goals of education). To...

- Be able AND willing to care for themselves (regarding their own health and wellbeing, finances, conflict resolution processes, stress management.)
- Be lifelong learners
- Be passionate
- Be ready to take risks
- Be emotionally resilient
- *Have social competence to develop healthy friendships*
- Experience mastery in some aspects of their lives, developing a set of skills they have mastery over in order to feel and be competent, useful and capable
- Be able to problem solve and think critically
- Be able to look at things differently
- Be able to work independently **and** with others
- Be creative thinkers and be solution *focused*
- Care and want to give back to their community
- *Persevere and know the value of effort and endeavour*
- *Have integrity and have the moral courage to act from this place*
- Act with dignity
- Be able to use the world around them well
- Speak well, write well, read well and work well with numbers
- *Have the capacity and inclination to be kind*
- *Be respectful of self, others and our world*
- *Respect diversity and strive for understanding*
- *Know that they matter and can make a positive difference, no matter what*
- Truly enjoy their life including their work, *optimistically*

To achieve the vision above the sacred triangle of teachers, students and parents we need to work closely with a culture of true respect and care, for the greater good of all. Then, the school must be a vital part of the local community – valued and celebrated and deeply interwoven into the fabric of community life. This strong sense of belonging is vital in raising healthy, happy and resilient children.

If you want to see how schooling is putting pressure on our kids, please see or host a screening for the excellent documentary film, “Race to Nowhere”.<http://www.racetonowhere.com/>