

From:  
Ms Leanne Costello

NAPLAN 2010 was a stressful time for teachers at our school. For the first time most teachers felt they had to "train" students for the test and spent many hours doing so. Good teaching? I don't think so! Why did we feel obliged to do this? My School website! I have worked in education for 30years and this has been the most damaging and demoralising thing I have encountered. Teachers are generally a caring group of people, who do many "extras" to support students' academic, social and emotional development. So to have your worth, and the worth of your school, described through a test on one day is pretty demoralising.

I work with a year 2/3 class so had year 3 students take part in the test. One 8 year old boy in my class, for whom literacy acquisition has been challenging, came in to class on the morning of one test crying and hanging onto his mother. This had never happened before. We have many discussions in our class about learning, the importance of making mistakes and that it is a journey that takes different time for different people. Yet on these NAPLAN days we are telling students that they all have to be the same and will be judged if they don't meet the standard! I settled this young boy, but early in the reading test noticed his head was on the desk and he was crying. I could have chosen to leave him for the next 30minutes, but made a professional decision that this action would show a lack of care. His issue was that he was unsure as to what he had to read to answer the questions. The dilemma - do I show him or leave him telling him I can't help him? I chose the former, saying something like "Read this bit and then answer these questions." I also said "Read this first bit to me," knowing that he would be able to read this particular text. Is that called "cheating" or "coaching"? I don't know. What I do know is that there is a thing called TRUST, that takes time to build with students. I'm unable to watch, and not take action, when a student with whom I've built a relationship is distressed. So if that is what I'm expected to do, the Government should hire people to administer these tests. In fact I will try to do a swap in future so I'm not part of administering the test. It's my belief too that the spelling component of the year 3 literacy test was markedly harder than in the past. I wonder how these tests are moderated. Then the media hype that followed! Cheating, coaching, weren't some teachers victimised! One can murder and have their name withheld, until guilt is proven. Not so if you are a teacher administering NAPLAN. I don't condone cheating, as I understand it, but who knows what happened. I wonder about the long term damage to these teachers. Who cares??? I am very supportive of parents having information about their children. However, the comparisons between schools are unfair and counter productive. In reality the results are received several months after the test, so by the time students and parents see their scores they are not necessarily an accurate representation of their development.

I wonder where Ms Gillard gets her information suggesting this is what parents want. NAPLAN tests/ my School website have undermined and undervalued our work and worth. The league tables, as published in "The Australian", were another source of "Let's kick the Public Schools in the Guts". I have NEVER seen teachers feel so undervalued, despondent and judged, by these narrow views of what is worthwhile in a school. There are many things to celebrate in Public Education. Why don't Governments sell the "Good News" stories?