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A Case for Addressing the Literacy Demands of Student Assessment

Abstract

The development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum together with national testing of students and the publication of school results place new demands on teachers. In this article we address the importance of teachers becoming attuned to the silent assessors in assessment generally and in the National Literacy and Numeracy Program (NAPLAN) more specifically. Using the concept of literacies, we develop a method to conduct a literacy audit of assessment tasks that teachers can use to help both themselves and their students. Providing assistance to students as a consequence of such an audit is imperative to improve the outcomes for students and to address issues of equity.

Introduction

In Australia, a system of national student assessment and national reporting of school outcomes is being implemented (NAPLAN, 2010). A national curriculum, referred to as the Australian Curriculum as of 2010, is being devised (ACARA, 2010). Constitutionally, however, the power to decide on school curriculum resides with state governments rather than with the federal government. In the past, this division of powers has impeded development of a national curriculum and the publication of student results from national tests (Reid, 2009; Kennedy, 2009). Recent endeavours are no exception to this past trend.

With Labor governments at both national and state levels following the 2007 Federal Election, movement towards a national curriculum intensified (Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid & Keating, 2010). In 2009, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (ACARA, 2010) took over the work of the National Curriculum Board (NCB, 2008), which was established following the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007. ACARA now has responsibility for the management of the creation and implementation of the Australian Curriculum, and national student assessment and reporting of school education outcomes. We wish to emphasise, however, that while there has been a considerable silence regarding assessment in and of the curriculum, national testing programs have been introduced. Such changes, in curriculum, assessment and testing, make considerable demands on teachers, who need to be aware, prepared, and resourced for this level of reform.

In this article we argue that, in this context of educational change, it is imperative that teachers are aware of the literacy demands of national curriculum *and*

assessment, and that it is imperative that they are adequately prepared. To begin, we situate our argument by analysing the context of assessment and testing, at national and international levels. We then build our view that curriculum *and* assessment implementation requires the development of teachers' capacity to use the learning power of assessment to improve the outcomes for all students. This enhancement, we argue, requires teachers to address the literacy demands embedded in curriculum and in students' assessments.

National and International Testing

In Australia, national benchmark testing began in 1999, when the first annual literacy tests in reading and writing for Years 3 and 5 students were conducted (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000; Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998). In 2001 it became Years 3, 5 and 7 (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood, Development and Youth Affairs, 2009; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2002). The nationally agreed literacy and numeracy benchmarks for Years 3, 5, and 7 represent minimum standards of performance. In 2008, the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced. Students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 now sit national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar, and punctuation), and numeracy. In addition, NAPLAN testing has been taking place involving triennial sample assessments in Science at Year 6, in Civics and Citizenship at Years 6 and 10, and in Information and Communication and Technologies literacy at Years 6 and 10 (Harrington, 2008). Despite these developments in national testing there has been no direct link of these tests to a national curriculum.

Australia also participates in other international testing programs such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that tests reading, mathematics, and science for fifteen-year-olds on a three-yearly cycle. Another test in which Australia participates is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) at Years 4 and 8. The 2003 PISA data indicated in general that Australia was 'over-represented in the lowest categories of maths proficiency and under-represented in the highest' (Thomson, Cresswell, & De Bortoli, 2004, p. xiii). While the achievement of students overall in that analysis was high, there were wide differences between high and low achieving students. This trend persisted in PISA 2006, which assessed science as the main domain, with reading literacy and mathematics as minor domains (De Bortoli & Thomson, 2008).

Headlines such as 'PISA shows Indigenous students continue to struggle' (ACER, 2007) reflect areas of real inequity in Australia's education system. Reports (Thomson, Cresswell, & De Bortoli, 2004; Thomson, 2008; De Bortoli & Thomson, 2009) indicate that Australia's lowest-performing students are most likely to come from Indigenous communities, geographically remote areas, and poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Recent PISA results indicate that, in Australia, issues of inequity need to be addressed to ensure access to quality education for all students (Thomson, 2008). Consideration of these trends in assessment and testing at international and national levels indicates that literacy and numeracy are at the heart of assessment in Australia, and are a major part of what schools do.

Given the prominence of large scale testing for accountability purposes in Australia our argument is that teachers in their classroom assessment practices need to be

aware and skilled to understand and teach the literacy demands for both tests and assessment tasks. Ensuring that all students can understand and access the test question or assessment task is fundamental in addressing equity concerns.

Educational Reform Issues

Teachers need to be aware of the accountability context within which they work. They need to appreciate how the practices that they engage are mediated by structures beyond their control such as national policy about what they are to assess, and how that is to be recorded and reported. An important emergent issue in this context is for teachers to maintain a strong sense of responsibility by developing their professionalism through building their teacher assessment practices (Klenowski, 2009).

Another issue for teachers is the changing view of literacy framed as a visible social practice, with language, text, and discourse (Gee, 2003). We argue that from this view literacy is not the sole domain or responsibility of the English teacher, rather there are implications for all teachers to be responsible for supporting the literacy needs of their students. It is important to note here that these issues imply that teachers' assessment literacy is a further requirement. Capable teachers understand and practice the fundamental principles of assessment design such as ensuring that the assessments they design are fit for purpose and that the mode of assessment impacts positively on teaching and learning (Gipps, 1994).

Drawing together the points considered in this paper so far, as much as literacy is an issue for the students in terms of the demands of assessment and the curriculum, it is an issue for teachers in their efforts to align their teaching practices with the reform

agenda. It would seem that a common problem for both students and teachers is assessment literacy. Therefore, it is necessary to define what we mean by literacies and to consider the implications of this understanding for improved assessment practice.

Definitions of Literacies

To attempt to define literacy as a single entity is no longer possible, with the emergence of a plethora of literate practices associated with the texts of the new technologies. There is a tension between common sense definitions of literacy, official definitions of literacy (as enacted through key government policy documents in Australia since the early 1990s), and definitions held by teachers. What is known, though, is that with major and rapid changes in the world, it has been necessary to redefine what it means to be literate (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004).

Language based literate practices and pedagogies are no longer sufficient for the texts and practices that characterise the burgeoning information age (Unsworth, 2002). Cultural and linguistic diversity, coupled with a multiplicity of communication channels, challenge the traditional view of literacy associated with language-based approaches (The New London Group, 1996). The latter view of literacy is too narrow because it does not allow for the many sorts of literacies that exist, such as functional, financial, emotional, musical, and cultural (Lindmark & Erixon, 2008). The term, literacies, rather than literacy, is more helpful in creating a working definition of what it means to be literate in a global community. Despite the inadequacy of a definition of literacy that foregrounds language, reading, and writing, this term still holds a privileged position in academic and everyday understandings of the term (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). Use of the term,

multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996), enables a reconceptualisation of literacy to encompass modes of representation that are much broader than those represented by language alone. Different literacies are needed for different texts (Gee, 2003; Wyatt-Smith & Gunn, 2007).

The word literacy and debates about its use in schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon. Neither the term literacy, nor the term illiteracy, was used in the Australian press until the early 1970s (Green, Hodgens, & Luke, 1997). In Australia today, the term, literacy, is the subject of media debate and yet is used with confidence and frequency (Kress, 2001). Yet it is a controversial term, with cries of falling standards never far from the public consciousness. Such consciousness has been a significant factor in literacy becoming an object of policy at national and state levels. *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (Australia. Department of Employment, Education, and Training, 1991) marked the entry of literacy into national policy. An examination of key government documents over a 30 year period reveals official constructs of literacy within competing and wider notions of literacy in Australian academic debates, and the tensions that exist in defining the term (Edwards & Potts, 2008). This lack of shared understanding is problematic, especially when literacy and numeracy are at the heart of national testing in Australia, and are a major part of what schools do.

During International Literacy Year (1990) the report, *No Single Measure* (Wikert, 1990), was released. The writers of this report examined the levels of literacy among 1500 adults in Australia. The definition of literacy adopted in the report referred to the use of printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986). The

findings of the report were groundbreaking in that literacy could no longer be viewed as something one has or does not have. It is not a unitary set of practices, and those studied drew on different literate practices as the context determined.

The term, literacy, appeared for the first time in a government policy document in *Australia's Language*: *The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (Australia. Department of Employment, Education, and Training, 1991). In this document literacy was defined as, 'a level of spoken and written English which is appropriate for a range of contexts' (pp. 4-5) and effective literacy is 'intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing' (pp. 4-5).

These definitions are noteworthy because they recognise that spoken English is part of literate behaviour and that practices change according to context and purpose. However, by 1998, the emphasis changed to focus on reading and writing (presumably of print) and the goal, as stated in *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (Department of Employment, Education, Training, and Youth Affairs, 1998), was 'that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and be able to read and write and spell at an appropriate level'. The *Teaching Reading Report and Recommendations National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (Australian Government. Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005) drew attention to the close relationship between reading and literacy, as evident in the title and throughout the document.

Arriving at a common understanding of literacy or literacies is problematic. There have been paradigm shifts in definitions relating to literacy in postmodern times

(Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). Despite the printed word being a significant consideration when defining literacies, increasing amounts of information are encoded in visual forms (Unsworth & Chan, 2009; Wray, 2001). Semiotics, which is the study of signs and signifiers that operate within in a society, could be more potent as the disciplinary base for literacies than linguistics (Kress, 2001). From this perspective, alphabetic letters and words are just one system of signs produced by a society and they interact with other signs (Lindmark & Erixon, 2008), as for example, visual images (Kress, 2001). Such an understanding of semiotics reinforces the multi-modal nature of literacies (Kress, 2001).

A definition of literacy that suggests it is a singular entity that is spread almost ointment-like across the curriculum is not helpful (Kress, 2001). While it lures teachers to unite behind a common goal of the improvement of literacy standards, Kress (2001) argues that such a description of literacy masks the very deep differences that exist between how knowledge is represented in different areas of the curriculum. Literacy-across-the curriculum initiatives have failed in the past, possibly because they do not acknowledge the different appearances and meanings of literacy in areas of the curriculum (Kress, 2001; Unsworth, 2002). Thus literacies are not the same in each curriculum area (Unsworth, 2002; Kress, 2001) and the use of the word 'across' suggests they are. The transfer of literate practices across areas of the curriculum cannot be assumed and is, therefore, unlikely to be appropriate (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003). In subjects such as Manual Arts, Home Economics, The Arts, and Health and Physical Education the literate practices of speaking and listening are much more prominent than those of reading and writing, especially in the junior years of high school.

Literacy is not a static concept (Wyatt-Smith & Gunn, 2007). New literacies are generated regularly. The literate practices involved in using a mobile phone did not exist a generation ago. Some people are comfortable using the language of text messaging, while others are unwilling to do so, believing they are betraying the conventions of formal Standard Australian English. In our professional experience teachers have often asked if a list of literacies exists or if there is a website that would help. Literacy is a fuzzy concept; its edges are blurred and indistinct. Arriving at the destination of being literate is something of an anachronism (Unsworth, 2002); it is the journey of 'becoming literate' that is a better description (Unsworth, 2002, p. 63).

Curriculum Literacies

The term, curriculum literacies, has appeared in the literature in more recent times (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2001). It was first referred to in the study of the literacy demands of senior schooling although, as a concept, it has relevance to all years of schooling (Cumming & Wyatt-Smith, 2001). Whilst it is not the intention of this article to examine the epistemological implications of the term; an explanation of the term curriculum literacies is worth including here. Learning occurs in different contexts and students endeavour to manage their learning within these contexts (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003). The literacy demands placed on students in different areas of the curriculum are not the same. These literacies are both generic and subject specific and articulate how knowledge is presented within these areas (Cumming, Wyatt-Smith, Ryan, & Doig, 1998). Knowledge and literacies combine at an interface of teaching and learning. Curriculum literacies refer to the specific ways of deconstructing, constructing, reconstructing, and challenging knowledge in the curriculum areas and what is required to be literate in a discipline or related community of practice.

While the authors of *Literate Futures: Report of the Literacy Review of Queensland State Schools* (Queensland Government, Education Queensland, 2000) stated that all teachers are teachers of literacy; the authors of *Literacy the Key to Learning: Framework for Action 2006 – 2008,* (Queensland Government. Department of Education and the Arts, 2005) more clearly articulated the relationship between content and literacy by recognising that there is an inextricable link between effective learning and explicit teaching of curriculum literacies that are specific to constructing knowledge in curriculum areas.

> If all students are to learn effectively, they must become literate to learn in different areas of the curriculum across the phases of learning. Literacy demands in the curriculum interface with a body of knowledge such as a Key Learning Area or a subject. For example, in Science, students may need to write Science reports after undertaking investigations or experiments. This requires using language systems including specialised text and language structures, vocabulary and graphics that are specific to constructing knowledge in Science and that may not be learnt in other areas of learning. If these literacy demands are left implicit and not taught explicitly they provide barriers to learning. (Queensland Government, Department of Education and the Arts, 2005, p. 4)

Literacy Demands or the Silent Assessors

Literate practices differ according to the areas of the curriculum. They do not look the same nor do they function in the same way. This difference is because many definitions of literacy recognise the social situatedness of literate practices rather than *in the head* skills. There are as many literate practices as the social and cultural events that both spawn them and are shaped by them. There has been a shift from a traditional view of literacy as skills, knowledges, and cognitions that reside within the individual to a conceptualisation of literacy as visible social practices with language, text and discourse (Gee, 2003). Literacy and illiteracy are manifest when situations allow or disallow literate practices to be used. If students are placed in a

situation where their literacy skills do not match the demands of that situation then they can be positioned as failures (McDermott, 1999; Stobart, 2008).

National tests assess an individual's performance not their collaborative performance. This context of most testing denies students the resources that are normally available within a social context for solving problems, finding information, making a decision, answering a question and the like. For example, these resources include books, the Internet, teachers, parents and peers. The nature of national tests is at odds with modern perceptions of education that are less about what students know and more about knowing how to do, and how to find out (Londsale & McCurry, 2004). While literacy is constructed as something that is located within the individual then deficiencies in skills and practices will exist.

ACARA has developed a website called My School (http://www.myschool.edu.au/) that profiles 10 000 Australian schools to enable schools to search the site to find schools that compare statistically, to view school-level NAPLAN results and to identify schools that are doing well to share successful practices and outcomes (http://www.myschool.edu.au/). The Federal Education Minister at the time, Minister Gillard of the Labour government, stated that parents can now access the results for their child's school and in so doing greater transparency is available. Australia does not appear to have learnt from the mistakes that have been made in the United States or in the United Kingdom, where the use of such tables of results were quickly formed into crude league tables by the media. This type of assessment is high stakes because of the impact that it can have on the individual teacher, the student and on the school. Smeed, Spiller and Kimber (2009) and Rowe (2000), for instance, draw attention to the possibility that a focus on test scores might lead

schools to ‘control the type of student’ that they enrol through ‘offering only “academic” courses’ (Smeed, et al., 2009, p.33). Further, there is a concern that, if the curriculum were narrowed in focus to meet external targets, it is possible that ‘creativity, diversity and individuality’ will be eroded (Smeed, et al., 2009, p.33; Meadmore, 2004). In addition, ‘teachers report anxiety, shame, loss of self esteem and alienation associated with the increased instructional pressures of testing’ (Smeed, et al., 2009, p. 33).

‘Assessment shapes how we see ourselves’ (Stobart, 2008, p. 1) through the way we are positioned as a Level 3 or a B grade student. Stobart (2008) goes on to argue that the assessment can impact on our identity because it is a ‘value-laden social activity’ (p. 1). For this reason, all assessment counts. All assessment makes demands on students’ literacy, and this demand is what is called the literacies of assessment or the *silent assessors*. Literate practices are often invisible because they are context-specific and constructed through social interactions. Assessment tasks are dense with literacy demands; educators can be forgiven for either not seeing them or assuming that these skills have been developed at another time in another place. The demands vary from student to student and it is difficult to say what these demands are, until teachers have what Reid (2001) calls, insights into students’ extra-textual knowledge. Failure to explicitly teach the literacies of assessment will seriously inhibit students’ reported learning because, ‘The literacy demands of assessment can provide a filter or enabler of student success in all areas.’ (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003, p. 48).

What constitutes literacy and literate practices is fluid and changing. There are many contexts in which people may be highly literate and other contexts where they find

themselves lacking the necessary literacy practices. As texts change and evolve, so too does the concept of literacy and what it means to be literate.

> It is a normal and absolutely fundamental characteristic of language and literacy to be constantly remade in relation to the needs of the moment; it is neither autonomous nor stable, and nor is it a single integrated phenomena; it is messy and diverse. (Kress, 2001, p. 23)

Teachers need to develop their understandings of the literacy demands of assessment because all assessment tests knowledge(s) and literacies. All assessment tasks make demands on students' literacies and there is often a mismatch between the literacy demands of the task and the literacy capabilities of the students that may result in failure or non-submission in the case of school-based assessment. An analysis of assessment tasks finds them dense with literacy practices that can remain hidden from both students and teachers. We have named these practices the silent assessors.

Literacy Audit Resources

Literacy audits can be performed on any assessment task to discover these silent assessors. Thus the purpose of such an audit is to explicate the literacy demands of the task. We have drawn on the following research (Freebody & Luke, 1990), our combined experience, and a number of resources to analyse assessment documents to illustrate how audits can be performed on current Australian assessment practice.

The Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke, 1990) underpins the *Literacy: Position Paper* (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001), which provides examples of different literate practices in each of the learning areas of the curriculum. This model was developed almost 20 years ago in response to changing understandings of what it meant, and continues to mean, to be literate in the modern world and to participate effectively in society. The model arose from Freebody and Luke's (1990)

dissatisfaction with prevailing wisdom that one way of teaching reading was deemed superior to others. There existed at the time vociferous and divisive debate around the best way to develop literacy. Approaches were broadly categorised as follows; skills, authentic experience, literature, genre, critical, and cultural (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997).

The four roles (Luke, 2000) or resources of the Four Resources Model are first, the Code Breaker which refers to the ability to crack the codes and semiotic systems of the multiplicity of texts that are spoken, written, composed, viewed, shaped and read. Second is the role of the Text Participant that comprehends and composes text, and draws on prior experiences to do so. Familiarity with the meaning patterns of text enhances the effectiveness of the Text Participant. As texts are the product of social and cultural practices, the third role is that of Text User. The reader knows about the relationship between the form and function of a text. Texts are the way that they are because of the job that they do within a given socio-cultural context. Finally, the role of the Text Analyst ensures that all texts will be viewed from the point of view that what is not said is every bit as important as what is stated. The cultural and ideological values that underpin texts deny them neutrality which it is tempting to believe exists. All interests and values are not equally represented and it is the role of the Text Analyst to identify this imbalance. Luke and Freebody (1990) stressed that each of these roles is necessary but not in itself sufficient and participation in these roles is not hierarchical or sequential. Being literate means drawing on these resources or roles to make sense of our world and to be an effective participant in that world.

Another tool that can be used to identify the literacy demands of an assessment task is the list of the 49 Common Curriculum Elements (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007). These are the skills and practices that are embedded in the Queensland Senior Curriculum (Appendix A) and so are familiar to Queensland high school teachers but less so to teachers in the other states of Australia or countries in the rest of the world. Queensland's long history of school-based assessment has meant that mechanisms have been put in place to ensure comparability of results across and between schools. One of these mechanisms is the Queensland Core Skills Test that is undertaken by Year 12 students towards the end of their final year of schooling. It is in this examination that the Common Curriculum Elements are tested. These elements include both lower order thinking skills such as recalling and remembering, compiling lists, using vocabulary appropriate to a context and higher order thinking skills such as comparing, evaluating, analysing or justifying.

The types of questions that are asked of students also make demands on their literacy. These questions include a full range of styles from multiple-choice, *fill in the blanks* responses, to extended written responses. Even within one type of question there is considerable variation in format. An audit of the 2008 NAPLAN Papers (NAPLAN, 2010) revealed over 30 different formats for the multiple-choice questions. With short response answers, writing to a word or space limit, poses significant demands on students' literacy because it requires them to understand the amount of detail and/or the degree of precision that is required.

There are many different types of texts students are required to use and produce. The organisation of these and the language used varies because the socio-cultural contexts from which texts emerge are extremely diverse. The NAPLAN Writing

Papers (2008 and 2009) for all year levels tested students' ability to produce a narrative. There are a number of structural or organisational elements that students need to control such as orientation, complication and resolution when writing a narrative. In addition, the control of language features such as vocabulary and grammar, the mechanics of language use (punctuation and spelling) are highly valued in the NAPLAN. An analysis of the breakdown of marks for the 2008 NAPLAN Writing Paper (again for all year levels) reveals that NAPLAN rewards linguistic competence over structure and organisation which could disadvantage some students. (See Table 1 below).

Insert Table 1 here

Assessment demands that students produce a wide variety of different text types. Even the same named text type may not serve the same purpose nor adopt the same format in different curriculum domains. To illustrate, a scientific report is not the same in structure or language features as a report produced in either the subject Study of Society and the Environment or the subject of English. Even if such skills as report writing were readily transferable in middle and high school phases of education, the subtle differences between ostensibly similar text types must be made explicit. It is neither appropriate nor fair to assess these components of curriculum literacies for which explicit instruction (Wyatt-Smith & Cumming, 2003) has not occurred. Assumption of transfer of literacies is as flawed as it is dangerous, therefore the literacies of text types must be taught within the context in which they are located.

For many teachers, particularly high school teachers, assuming responsibility for teaching the literacies of their learning areas, or the curriculum literacies, has been and continues to be a challenging prospect. Teachers of content area subjects see themselves first and foremost as *deliverers of content*. Often teachers bemoan that there is insufficient time to cover the content. While teachers acknowledge that there is a direct link between students' literacy skills and how well they learn subject content, they have been reluctant to see themselves as playing a significant role in the development of students' literacy (Santoro, 2004). This reluctance is partly due to continuing to operate with a traditional view of literacy, i.e. that it is a single set of skills with reading and writing at the core; skills which have been mastered during the early years of school (Santoro, 2004). This conclusion is surprising, especially in Queensland, where the authors of *Literate Futures* (Queensland Government, Education Queensland, 2000) found that while print based literacy is still necessary, what now counts as literacy has to involve a much greater range of texts and textual practices (Wyatt-Smith & Gunn, 2007).

Implications for Teachers' Practices

Teachers need resources and support to assist them in conducting literacy audits of assessment tasks and tests so that they can explicitly teach and incorporate the literate practices into day-to-day classroom teaching. We include now some examples of literacy audits of the test papers of the 2008 Year 9 NAPLAN Tests (NAPLAN, 2010) to demonstrate the level of complexity and the importance of teacher awareness in addressing the literacy demands of student assessment tasks and tests. We provide these lists, derived from our own experience of carrying out such audits, to raise teachers' awareness of their importance and to provide some

insights into how these might be used to assist all students, access the demands of the school-based or national assessments.

A Literacy Audit of the 2008 NAPLAN Year 9 Tests

To illustrate to readers the complexity and the importance of literacy demands for successful completion of assessment tests by all students we present this audit in full. The following table represents a literacy audit of the papers of the national tests (Year 9) which highlights the literate practices that teachers can incorporate into day-to-day classroom teaching as appropriate. This table is intended to be a representative list of literacies rather than a definitive list.

Insert Table 2 here

Strategies for Addressing Literacy Demands

The following strategies have been used by teachers to prepare students for the NAPLAN tests. However, these strategies need to be embedded in everyday teaching practice as any one of them is insufficient in itself. 'Teaching to the test' has the potential to corrupt the integrity of curriculum areas and is not an approach that is being recommended. Preparation to ensure that students are given the opportunities to develop the literacies and numeracies that NAPLAN testing demands, is a strategy that is being suggested.

Expose students to the style of questions

Even though the predominant style of questions on all, except the Writing Paper, is multiple choice, there are several unusual ways in which questions have been

constructed. Students can be exposed to the style of questions in many areas of the curriculum if teachers write tests where the questions mirror the style of the NAPLAN questions. The example shown below is potentially very confusing to any student unfamiliar with the style of this question that tests apostrophe use. Students might shade more than one bubble and they may also place an apostrophe in the bubble rather than shade it.

Insert Figure 1 here

Bolt on preparation

This strategy involves giving students the opportunity to practice past papers or questions under test like conditions. Such a strategy allows them to develop *test-wiseness*, particularly with regard to allocation of time. Queensland's long history of school-based assessment has meant that its students are largely unfamiliar with the routines associated with completing standardised, external testing. Three years of testing means there are not a large number of past tests in circulation so teachers might need to devise tests that are similar to the NAPLAN tests so that they can adequately prepare their students.

Literacy audit

The literacy audit as explained can provide the basis for a more whole of school approach to NAPLAN preparation, rather than assuming preparation is the responsibility of the English teachers (Literacy) and the Mathematics teachers (Numeracy). The literacy skills and practices that NAPLAN is testing can be taught in many areas of the curriculum. We argue that all teachers have a responsibility to know what these literacy demands are to explicitly teach them within their curriculum areas.

Design assessments and attend to literacies

Planning teaching and learning episodes around the literacies that NAPLAN is testing requires developing assessment tasks that embed these literacies. For example, one of the literacies associated with the NAPLAN Writing Paper is responding to stimulus material. There are many areas of the curriculum where assessment could be designed that embedded this particular literate practice. Although, as was stated earlier, assuming transference of skills across contexts is problematic multiple opportunities to develop particular literacies is able to be achieved through assessment.

Access and Equity Issues

In this article we have offered some strategies and approaches to attend to the *silent assessors*, or the literacy demands of assessment tasks that are embedded in national or teacher-based assessments. We argue that it is important in times of major curriculum and assessment reform that teachers become aware of these demands for students and more importantly are provided with strategies to attend to them. In an educational context where teachers and schools are being called to account by the cry for increased transparency from the government, it is imperative that governments and schools do not neglect support for teachers.

For equity reasons, it is also important to address the literacy demands of assessments and to provide students with strategies and understanding to better access what is being asked not just in national testing programs but also in school-

based assessments for improved learning. Attending to the *silent assessors* is particularly significant in terms of equity and has major implications for policy and practice in relation to students' underperformance. As we have argued if teachers do not attend to the literacy demands of assessment, whether these are national tests or teacher designed tasks, then students will not have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement and/or improvement. For if students cannot access the literacy demands of what the task or question is asking then we contend that it could well be the silent assessors impacting on their performance.

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Queensland Government

Queensland Studies Authority
Partnership and innovation

n Curriculum Elements (CCEs)

The 49 common curriculum elements of the Queensland senior curriculum:

Recognising letters, words and other symbols
Finding material in an indexed collection
Recalling/remembering
Interpreting the meaning of words or other symbols
Interpreting the meaning of pictures/illustrations
Interpreting the meaning of tables or diagrams or maps or graphs
Translating from one form to another
Using correct spelling, punctuation, grammar
Using vocabulary appropriate to a context
Summarising/condensing written text
Compiling lists/statistics
Recording/noting data
Compiling results in a tabular form
Graphing
Calculating with or without calculator
Estimating numerical magnitude
Approximating a numerical value
Substituting in formulae
Setting out/presenting/arranging/displaying
Structuring/organising extended written text
Structuring/organising a mathematical argument
Explaining to others
Expounding a viewpoint
Empathising
Comparing, contrasting
Classifying
Interrelating ideas/themes/issues
Reaching a conclusion which is necessarily true provided a given set of assumptions is true
Reaching a conclusion which is consistent with a given set of assumptions
Inserting an intermediate between members of a series
Extrapolating
Applying strategies to trial and test ideas and procedures
Applying a progression of steps to achieve the required answer
Generalising from information
Hypothesising
Criticising
Analysing
Synthesising
Judging/evaluating
Creating/composing/devising
Justifying
Perceiving patterns
Visualising
Identifying shapes in two and three dimensions
Searching and locating items/information
Observing systematically
Gesturing
Manipulating/operating/using equipment
Sketching/drawing

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Appendix 1

Common Curriculum Elements (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007)

The 49 common curriculum elements of the Queensland senior curriculum:

Recognising letters, words and other symbols
Finding material in an indexed collection
Recalling/remembering
Interpreting the meaning of words or other symbols
Interpreting the meaning of pictures/illustrations
Interpreting the meaning of tables or diagrams or maps or graphs
Translating from one form to another
Using correct spelling, punctuation, grammar
Using vocabulary appropriate to a context
Summarising/condensing written text
Compiling lists/statistics
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Visualising

Identifying shapes in two and three dimensions
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