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Exploring Children's Experiences of NAPLAN: Beyond the Cacophony of Adult Debate

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how Australia's National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is experienced by primary school-aged children, with a particular focus on the children's own reports of their experiences. Such research remains sparse, despite the commitment within the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians to achieve the highest level of collaboration with *all* stakeholders in the education of young Australians. This must necessarily include those who are required to undertake the tests. The research therefore seeks to answer the overarching question, *what are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?*

Children's experiences of NAPLAN occur within unique matrices of cultural, social and personal contexts, which are positioned at particular intersections of global-national-local policy frameworks. The thesis therefore begins by summarising the ways in which these policy frameworks have been recalibrated to align with neoliberal ideals of enhancing the labour force, which is purportedly achieved through strengthened teacher accountability based upon test scores. Within this closer alignment of social and economic policy objectives, children are situated as upcoming human capital, and thus in need of 'protection' and 'development' to strengthen and safeguard the future economy, rather than as active citizens, who contribute to society through sophisticated relationships.

The study was therefore situated within an emergent ontology, which simultaneously positions both children and adults as constitutionally unfinished, fellow human beings, and privileges open-ended processes over predefined techniques. The epistemology of enactivism was employed to allow possible tensions between different constructions of NAPLAN to surface, thereby validating the diverse experiences of all the children. This ontological and epistemological positioning required the flexibility of a thematic approach to data analysis, which is characterised by a lack of alignment with any pre-existing theoretical framework.

In order to explore in a comprehensive and tangible way how children experience NAPLAN, the methodology of case study was utilised to document the experiences of 105 children in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different socio-

economic status (SES) communities, during the 2012 school year. The study's positioning within Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) provided a concurrent opportunity to explore the extent to which systems are able to mediate any negative effects of NAPLAN.

The children's reports of their experiences were recorded through their drawings about NAPLAN, completed after the conclusion of the final test, with the children as the primary interpreters of their images, as well as through focus group discussions. Because these experiences do not occur within a vacuum, classroom observations were also conducted, and semi-structured interviews were held with parents, teachers, principals and systemic staff and executives. Other sources of data include teacher diaries, excerpts from school newsletters, and the researcher's personal field notes.

Analysis of the data revealed that the teachers and principals in these schools did not experience NAPLAN as high-stakes. However, the children experienced the tests within an emotionally charged and confusing context of contradictions and dissonances emanating from multiple sources; receiving little, if any, clear and consistent information regarding the purpose of the tests. Further, this confusing context was compounded by the need for test preparation as a result of NAPLAN's idiosyncratic format and test protocols.

This resulted in disjuncture between NAPLAN and the children's everyday experiences of school, including tasks and the thinking skills required to complete them, and the children's typical dialogic interactions with their teachers and peers. This in turn impacted upon the relationships inherent within and between the schools and their communities. This had the effect of engendering negative emotional responses in many children, with anxiety most commonly reported. For children with psychological disabilities, these negative emotions were at times manifest in outbursts and 'meltdowns', occasioning negative consequences that augmented their alienation from their teacher and peers. This anxiety culminated in an instance of self-injury in one case. By the time the children reached Year 7, they tended to report that NAPLAN was a waste of time that hindered their learning, resulting in their disengagement from the tests or any associated preparation.

The confusion and lack of coherence also led some children to construct NAPLAN as high-stakes. This was despite its design as a low-stakes test, BCE's attempts to mediate any negative impact, and a lack of adult suggestions that poor performance would have negative consequences for children. This effect was magnified for the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, as their parents thought good NAPLAN results were needed for enrolment in their secondary school of choice.

This research drew upon and honoured the voices of children in answering the framing research question and illustrates children's multiple and diverse constructions of NAPLAN. The research has also shown that children, parents, teachers and other significant adults involved in children's schooling construct their realities of NAPLAN within unique matrices of multiple contexts, and these different realities overlap and interfere with each other in unintended, often negative ways.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications during candidature

Book chapter:

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University of Queensland PGRC 2012: Exploring children's perceptions of NAPLAN in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different SES communities

AARE 2013: 'If I do well in NAPLAN ...': Year 3 children's perceptions of the tests as high-stakes

University of Queensland PGRC 2013: 'If I do well in NAPLAN ...': Year 3 children's perceptions of NAPLAN as high-stakes

AARE 2014: Exploring barriers to democratic dialogue when conducting research with children in Australia as part of the symposium, "Can children be rights holders in education in Australia & Aotearoa (New Zealand)?"

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NAPLAN, children, lived experiences, high-stakes testing, participatory methods

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List of Abbreviations used in the thesis

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
AfL	Assessment for Learning
AifL	Assessment is for Learning
AIMS	Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards
ART	Academic Risk Taking
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BCE	Brisbane Catholic Education
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CROC	Convention on the Rights Of the Child
DET	Department of Education and Training
ERA	Education Reform Act
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
LNIT	Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
MCEEDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAEP	National Assessment for Educational Progress
NAP	National Assessment Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NfP	Not for Publishing
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Problem-Based Learning
PIRLS	Progress in International Ready Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QCEC	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
QLD	Queensland
QSA	Queensland Studies Authority
QSRLS	Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study
RTTT	Race to the Top
SATs	Standard Assessment Tasks
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SFG	Systemic Functional Grammar
TAA	Testing Administration Authority

TAAS	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
TAKS	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
USA	United States of America
VDA	Visual Discourse Analysis

Chapter 1: Defining the research

Introduction

This introductory chapter commences by introducing the reader to the ways in which children are positioned within Australian ‘neoliberal’¹ society, and this is followed by an outline of the local-national-global policy contexts in which NAPLAN was established. The term ‘neoliberalism’ is often used as shorthand for a related set of political and economic rationalities and modes of governance, such as performative accountability in state policies. A detailed description of the NAPLAN tests, including the testing protocols and the ways in which individual and school results are reported is then followed by a deconstruction of the debate surrounding NAPLAN, including whether it is a high-stakes test or not. This discussion is followed by the rationale for and the significance of the study, as well as an outline of the research questions. A summary of the project is then incorporated into an outline of the thesis structure, before providing a summative conclusion to the chapter.

Positioning children within the NAPLAN debate

Within the wider debate surrounding NAPLAN, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, there is persistent discord regarding the extent to which children are affected by NAPLAN, despite teachers’ reports of this policy’s negative effects on the well-being of many children (Athanasou, 2010; Dulfer, Polesel, & Rice, 2012). This appears to be due to scepticism surrounding the credibility of these reports, which is evident in views expressed within the popular media that teachers’ perspectives on this issue are ‘not exactly objective evidence’ (Buckingham, 2014). In the midst of these heated and often contentious debates, it is evident that the children’s own accounts of their NAPLAN experiences remain largely absent.

¹ Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices which espouses that human well-being and social good are maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions. It therefore seeks to bring all human activity into the domain of the market (Harvey, 2005).

Attempting to include children's own accounts of their educational experiences within a neoliberal society which cultivates a vision of children as upcoming human capital (Apple, 2001), 'to be enlisted in the cause of economic recovery and growth' (Reid, 2009, p. 6), presents a formidable challenge. This vision, which is founded on dominant Western theories of developmental psychology (Corsaro, 1997), reinforces notions of children as not yet competent 'becomings', who have to progress through normative stages of development before they obtain the freedom to speak on their own behalf (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Lee, 2001; Qvortrup, 1997). Inherent within this imaginary, is 'adult suspicion of children's trustworthiness and doubt regarding children's ability to give and receive factual information' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 480), as adults remain 'intoxicated with the view of children as dependents and themselves as fair representatives of children' (Qvortrup, 1997, p. 91).

The consequent 'rhetoric to the effect that children are our most precious resource' (Qvortrup, 1997, p. 86), is reflected in future-oriented constructions of children's citizenship, in which they are viewed in terms of their adult futures as workers, rather than in terms of their present contribution to society as children (James, 2011). As a result, the importance of investing in and protecting children as a good for the country and its future economy (Peng, 2011) takes precedence over accounting for children's own experiences of their education.

This has been compensated for, to some degree, by participatory or 'student voice' approaches, which are founded on social justice principles of 'inclusion, or membership, of a community, in which pupils are valued and respected contributors' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 5). This principle has gained significantly in popularity since the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC or CROC) became the most widely ratified convention in the world. The UNCRC, which was ratified by Australia on 17 December 1990 and came into force on 16 January 1991, 'recognises that children have particular needs and vulnerabilities which require special protection beyond the rights to which adults are entitled' (Groundwater-Smith, 2011, p. 54) within the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948). In particular, article 12 stipulates that

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (UN, 1989, p. 4)

Article 12 is also one of four general principles of the Convention and, as such, should be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights protected in the Convention (UN, 2009). This necessarily includes children's right to education as outlined in article 28 of the UNCRC. However, while Australian children's right to education is fulfilled through the statutory entitlement to full-time primary and secondary education, the actualisation of children's right to be heard and taken seriously has not permeated into their schooling (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015).

This is largely because the UNCRC 'has an extremely limited impact both at law and at the level of social policy' (Jones, 1999, 'Primary myths about CROC', paragraph 3). As with any international treaty, the provisions of the UNCRC have to be 'understood and located in the context of the procedural rules of national law' (James & James, 2008, p. 94). In Australia, international treaties do not become part of Australian law unless specifically incorporated through legislation (Jones, 1999). Thus, until such time as the UNCRC is incorporated into Australian law, 'the right to participate, along with all of the other rights contained in the UNCRC, is not enforceable by law' (James & James, 2008, p. 94).

Education and neoliberalism

Since the rise of mass industrial education in the nineteenth century, education policies and politics have involved conflicts between groups with 'competing visions of 'legitimate' knowledge, what counts as 'good' teaching and learning and what is a 'just' nation state and world order' (Singh, Kenway, & Apple, 2005, p. 10). In contemporary times, these conflicts are closely connected to the forces of globalization, which have accelerated international collaboration and the borrowing of education policies between national education systems (Sahlberg, 2011a; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Despite the complexity and ambiguity which are inherent within the dynamic processes of the economic, political and cultural flows of globalization, the wide proselytization of neoliberal ideologies by politicians, right-wing think tanks and

the popular media has effectively reduced the dominant mode of globalization to a single economic conceptualisation which has become synonymous with neoliberalism. Within this imaginary, which consistently frames discourses surrounding education policy and practice, is the political and economic view that global economic competitiveness can best be defended by enhancing the productivity of the labour force, which is to be achieved through school improvement and better student learning outcomes.

This neoliberal perspective espouses that school improvement is achieved through the articulation of higher achievement standards, the transformation of those standards into rigorous assessments and expectations of accountability as reflected in test scores (Stiggins, 2002). The resulting emergence of 'policy as numbers' (Lingard, 2011), which '[translates] ... complex social processes and events into simple figures or categories of judgement' (Ball, 2003, p. 217), is reflected in demands for numbers-driven global, national and state evaluations of system and school performance. These numbers have consequently become surrogate measures of the global economic competitiveness of national economies (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sellar & Lingard, 2013b), as the 'global eye' and the 'national eye' facilitate governing as and through the comparison of numbers (Novoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003).

Sahlberg (2011) identifies test-based accountability and control as one of five common features of educational reform in predominantly Anglo-American nations, which he has named the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM. Drawing from the work of Fullan (2011), he defines GERM as an unofficial educational agenda propelled by the 'wrong drivers' of educational reform. These 'wrong drivers' of accountability, individual teacher quality, technology and fragmented strategies have engendered a culture of distrust of teacher professionalism, with its 'subjective' professional judgements, and education research, with its 'soft' qualitative measures (Hargreaves, 2007). This has resulted in disunity between research, policy and practice, and a significant contrast with the professionalism, collegiality, pedagogy and integrated strategies that drive education in high-performing and highly equitable nations such as Finland (Sahlberg, 2011a). The negative connotations of the acronym GERM reflect the significant consequences of these 'wrong drivers' of

educational reform for both teachers' work and students' learning in nations where GERM has been a viral driver of change (Sahlberg, 2011b). While these neoliberal ideologies and frameworks are utilised by educational policymakers across the globe, 'the historical specificity of this process does not necessarily guarantee a symmetrical or homogenous impact worldwide' (Burbules & Torres, 2010, p. 12).

In England, the direct political influence of neoliberal and neoconservative approaches upon education dates back to the Education Act of 1980. The ensuing Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 increased the powers of the Secretary of State significantly, with the introduction of a national curriculum, mandatory national testing and the publication of test results, providing a significant contrast to England's previous local approach to curriculum and assessment (Stobart, 2008). This shift resulted in the establishment of 'the most test-intensive education system in the world' (Sahlberg, 2011a, p. 98), with ambitious targets that produced an education culture where measurable outcomes, published as school performance and league tables, became the sole criteria for success in primary education. These tests were accordingly deemed to be high-stakes, with sanctions including school closure theoretically applicable in the event of consistently poor results (West, 2010). While Lingard (2010) notes that there has been some policy and political backtracking from this unequivocal emphasis on high-stakes testing, he argues that 'there remains an incapacity to move beyond the dominant policy paradigm of seeking to achieve better educational and equity outcomes through targeting linked to league tables of performance on high-stakes testing' (p. 138).

Other countries within the UK have abandoned such accountability regimes; for example, Wales removed national testing in 2004 in order to focus on the development of intelligent accountability policies which focus on authentic learning (Sahlberg, 2011a), and Northern Ireland similarly replacing such testing in 2010 (West, 2010). Drawing from Fullan's (1993, 2003) work on transformational change, and Black and William's (1998) notions of assessment for, as, and of, learning, Scotland developed an integrated system of assessment during the period from 1999-2005 that came to be known as the Assessment is for Learning (AifL) program (Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005). In a contrast to other countries such as England and the United States (US), where relationships between educational research

communities and governments are strained (Luke, 2005), AifL brought Scottish research, policy and practice into closer alignment to improve learning outcomes, rather than to increase test scores. This was achieved by aiming for a balance between teacher judgement and a degree of externality that aimed to ensure consistency of teacher judgment and improve public confidence, without the negative effects of high-stakes testing (Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005).

The US has a protracted history of high-stakes testing dating back a century; however North America's current faith in, and reliance on, such tests can be traced back to the immediate aftermath of the launch of Sputnik in 1957, confirming the Soviet Union's win of the so-called 'space race' (Kohn, 2001). The consequent 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was the government's answer to the call for greater attention to the quality of US schools. ESEA signalled the beginning of active state and federal involvement in public education, characterised by the increased use of tests to assess educational outcomes. These initial government interventions culminated in the 1983 release of the report *A Nation At Risk*, which, as intended, prompted a renewed interest and sense of urgency about American education (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This was the most influential educational report of the past few decades in the US, and "despite its lack of scholarly credibility, *A Nation At Risk* produced massive effects" (Kohn, 2001, p. 4), calling for the beginning of high-stakes testing regimes, more rigorous standards and accountability mechanisms (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed in order 'to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students ("Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)," 2001, NCLB and Accountability, para. 4). In essence, ESEA had been reauthorised as NCLB and became law in 2002, requiring schools to show regular progress towards all children achieving high standards, with the goal of 100 per cent proficiency by 2014 (Stobart, 2008). In January 2009, Barack Obama was elected President, with overwhelming support from educators and their unions, however heavy staffing of the Department of Education with corporate 'reformers' from the neoliberal and conservative wings of the Democratic Party saw the Race to the Top (RTTT) program authorised under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

(ARRA). Rather than severing from the policies of NCLB, RTTT has continued to facilitate strong government and testing influences in schools and classrooms, with aggressive intervention for schools with low test scores (Karp, 2010). This also strengthened moves towards test-based modes of teacher accountability.

In order to be eligible for RTTT funding, states must agree to teacher accountability measures as determined by test scores, which are utilised for 20 per cent of teacher performance evaluations (Hursh, 2013). In New York City, where the previous regime of professional accountability was replaced with one of neoliberal accountability (Lingard, 2010), as private sector solutions were applied to public school problems (Hancock, 2007), this agreement was contravened. In 2011, the Commissioner of Education and the Governor forced measures through the Board of Regents², to make state tests worth up to 40 per cent of teacher evaluations. In the following year, 'the New York City media, urged on by Mayor Bloomberg, won the right to publish names and ratings of principals and fourth through eighth grade teachers of maths and language arts' (Hursh, 2013, p. 584).

In Finland, where 'education policies since the 1980s have been almost orthogonal to those of the RTTT' (Sahlberg, 2011a, p. 102), the dismantling of the previous system of rigid tracking included the elimination of a mandated regime of national testing. This system was replaced with 'highly educated teachers with a high degree of professional autonomy practising intellectually demanding pedagogies for all students' (Lingard, 2010, p. 133), which focus on problem-solving, creativity, independent learning and student reflection. 'These changes have propelled achievement to the top of the international rankings and closed what was once a large, intractable achievement gap' (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 5).

Despite the success of nations such as Finland, much of the West nevertheless continues to depend on industrial models of education, with many nations ostensibly unable to undertake substantive reform (Luke, 2005). Luke observes that by

² From the 1960s, students in New York were able to choose between Regents courses, culminating in a statewide standardised test, or locally developed courses that concluded with tests developed by local school districts. In 1994, New York State began eliminating the local option (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Hursh, 2013).

contrast, Asia is looking to reconceptualise educational theory and practice, as multinational capitalism and globalisation augment the change already inherent within postcolonial approaches to curricular knowledge and cultural identity. Inherent within this process of change, a recurrent topic of discussion across education systems within the Asia Pacific region, including Singapore, Japan and China, is the recognition that centralised examination-oriented education cultures and traditional, didactic approaches to teaching need to change (Berry, 2011; Luke, 2005). China, specifically the larger cities of Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong, is making school-based curricula a national policy priority, while Japan and Singapore have adopted a 'less is more' approach in order to accommodate creativity within the curriculum (Sahlberg, 2011a). In recent decades, the Hong Kong and Taiwan governments in particular have responded positively to the Assessment for Learning (AfL) movement, despite resistance from a community deeply entrenched within a centralised examination culture, which had also resulted in teachers' lack of understanding of formative assessment (Berry, 2011).

In Australia, NAPLAN is the result of a neoliberal accountability agenda that has been largely borrowed from England and the USA, specifically New York City (Lingard, 2010). At the national level, Australia's national assessments occur through three-yearly sample testing in Science Literacy, which commenced in 2003, followed by Civics and Citizenship in 2004, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy in 2005, and finally the NAPLAN testing, which was implemented in 2008. NAPLAN, of course, is a census test, taken by all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. At the international level, comparisons are made through Australia's participation in the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), with Australia participating in all five cycles since its implementation in 2000; the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), in which has Australia participated in all five cycles since 1995; and the IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS), which commenced in 2001, with Australia participating for the first time in 2011.

The National Assessment Program (NAP) incorporates each of these assessments and is run at the direction of the Standing Council on School Education and Early

Childhood (SCSEEC), the intergovernmental council in education consisting of all education ministers in the nation, and managed by the independent statutory authority, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which oversees the national school reform agenda. The NAPLAN tests are purportedly designed 'to identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills that provide the critical foundation for their learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community' (ACARA, 2013a).

The first NAPLAN tests took place in 2008, preceding the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, which raises concerns within the literature that any national assessment program should be based on a curriculum and should 'not precede or determine it' (Job, 2008, p. 5). The Australian Curriculum was developed by ACARA and guided by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals*, which was adopted by the Ministerial Council in December 2008. Emphasising the importance of knowledge, understanding and skills to support learning in the 21st century, the Melbourne Declaration outlines the two primary goals of: (1) promoting equity and excellence in Australian schools; and (2) for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active, informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008). The first phase of the Australian Curriculum, which incorporates the learning areas of English, Mathematics, History and Science, began in 2011, with phase two commencing in 2014 with the implementation of Geography. Phase three learning areas awaiting final endorsement include The Arts, Health and Physical Education, Civics and Citizenship, Technology, Economic and Business, and Languages (ACARA, 2013a).

In the absence of a fully implemented national curriculum, ACARA maintains that the tests have been designed to reflect state and territory curricula via the Statements of Learning for English and Mathematics (ACARA, 2011d). These statements, which detail skills sets rather than minimum standards, were developed collaboratively with state and territory education authorities in 2005. The aim of these statements is to achieve greater consistency in curricula by outlining 'the knowledge, skills, understandings and capacities that students in Australia should have for the opportunity to learn and develop in English and Mathematics' (ACARA, 2011d, Statements of Learning, paragraph 2). ACARA argues that NAPLAN will be aligned

with the Australian Curriculum once it has been substantially implemented in schools (ACARA, 2011c); however, it must be pointed out that a national test which produces complex data sets to enable performance comparisons for accountability purposes assumes common knowledge and skills.

Introducing NAPLAN

The NAPLAN tests involve full-cohort, annual standardised testing of skills, rather than content, in the areas of Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and Numeracy. All Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 take the tests during three days in the second full week in May. Only students from a non-English-speaking background who have been in Australia for less than one year and students with severe intellectual or functional disabilities are exempt, unless they are formally withdrawn by their parents. With the exception of the writing task, which requires students to write continuous text in response to a stimulus, all questions are multiple choice or require a short written response. The answers to the multiple choice questions are scanned for electronic data capture, while the other answers are marked by trained, independent markers (ACARA, 2011c). During the 2010 Senate Inquiry into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing, ACARA advised that NAPLAN did not serve a diagnostic purpose because the tests are too broad in scope and do not provide immediate feedback (Back et al., 2010). ACARA is now anticipating that the move to computer adaptive testing, whereby the test is taken online, and which includes the potential for computer generated marking of the written tasks, will enable quick feedback and will thus make NAPLAN data more conducive to diagnostic usage by teachers.

NAPLAN's testing protocols

The protocols for the administration of the NAPLAN tests are highly prescriptive, aligning with ACARA's assertion that 'the test environment must be tightly controlled to maintain test integrity' (2012b, p. 4), and to ensure that the tests 'are administered in a way that is fair and equitable for all students' (p. 3). This control encompasses every aspect of the test administration process. The first of these is a code of conduct that incorporates a summary of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours for principals, teachers, support staff and students. Alleged breaches of this code, such as providing unauthorised assistance or manipulating answers or test results 'will

lead to an investigation and, if allegations are substantiated, to potentially serious consequences' (p. 3).

The NAPLAN tests, which 'must be delivered exactly as documented in the *Test Administration Handbook for Teachers*' (ACARA, 2012b, p. 27), range from 40-65 minutes in duration and must be completed in a single uninterrupted session in the mornings of the official test dates. During this time, students must be seated in isolation so that they cannot view other students' work, or communicate with any person other than a test administrator. In addition, they must not be able to view materials typically displayed in classrooms, such as multiplication tables or spelling lists, or have access to unauthorised equipment such as mobile phones, rulers, books or dictionaries, that may assist in answering test questions.

ACARA (2012b) emphasises that as NAPLAN is a national assessment, all students are expected to participate. Part of this approach is to grant disability adjustments where appropriate, in order 'to enable access to the tests on an equivalent basis to students without a disability' (ACARA, 2012b). In defining disability, ACARA draws from the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act of 1992, in which disability is defined as 'a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction ... [or] a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment' (*Disability Discrimination Act*, 1992, para. 4 (1)).

A variety of disability adjustments are in place for children who suffer from severe intellectual or physical disabilities. These include the use of a scribe, signed support, assistive technologies such as braille or electronic formats, and additional time; although this is generally limited to no more than an extra five minutes per half hour, or rest breaks, which are ordinarily limited to 10 minutes per half hour (ACARA, 2012b). However, the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy: National protocols for test administration (ACARA, 2012b) did not contain explicit references to children who suffer from psychological disabilities, such as autism or anxiety.

Thus, only students with severe intellectual or physical disabilities who are not able to access the tests with adjustments, or who are from a non-English-speaking

background and have been in Australia for less than one year, may be exempted from NAPLAN. While these students are considered as assessed, with results recorded in the 'below minimum standard' calculations for reporting purposes in national and jurisdictional summary data, they are not included in school-level calculations of mean scores (ACARA, 2012b). Students formally withdrawn from the tests by their parents or carers on the grounds of philosophical objections or religious beliefs are, however, not counted as part of the cohort of assessed students, with individual reports not issued.

Students who attempt one or more questions, but abandon the remainder of the test due to illness or injury, and are not therefore present for the entire test session are considered as having abandoned the test. This includes students who may choose to leave the testing session without a reason sanctioned by the Test Administration Authority (TAA). In these cases, students are counted as assessed with the score that they achieved for attempted questions. In order to avoid considering the student as assessed, the illness or injury must be reported to the TAA immediately for advice regarding the appropriate actions. Students who are in attendance for the test session but do not attempt any part of the test are considered as assessed, attaining a default score of zero. In cases where disruptive behaviour may impact upon other students' results, ACARA advises that 'the assessment environment should be appropriately managed' (2012b, p. 28).

Reporting of NAPLAN results

Individual results in each domain are reported on a common scale, with a mean score of 500. This scale is divided into ten bands, with six proficiency bands appropriate to each year level. For Year 3 the proportions of students within bands 1 to 6 are reported, while for Year 5, bands 3 to 8 are reported; for Year 7, bands 5 to 9; and for Year 9, bands 5 to 10, as shown in Figure 1.1.

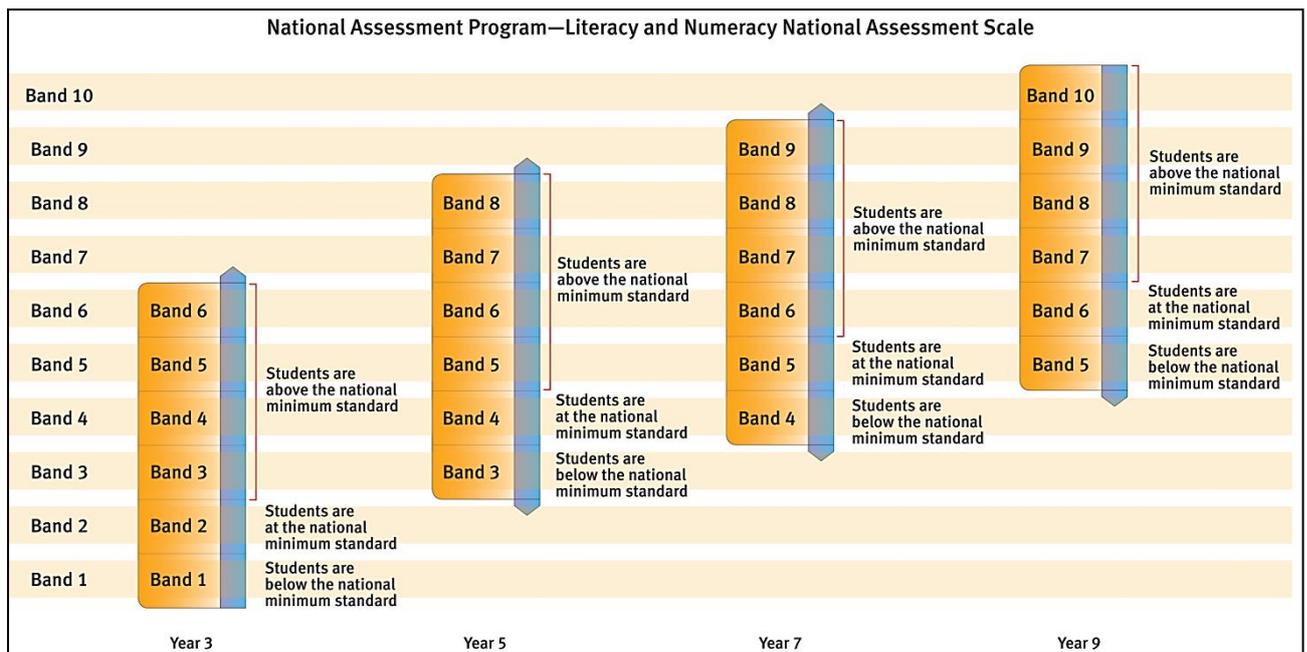


Figure 1.1 Minimum standards and common scales for NAPLAN results

Individual results, which are distributed to students and their parents or carers from mid-August through to mid-September, depending on individual state or territory Testing Administration Authorities (TAA's), are indicated by a dot positioned within the reported bands for their year level. This position can be readily compared with: the national average, as indicated by a shaded arrow; the school average, as indicated by an open arrow; and the range of achievement for 60% of students in that student's year level in Australia, as indicated by pale blue shading (see Figure 1.2). Preliminary national results are released in August, while the national report is normally scheduled for release in December (ACARA, 2011c).

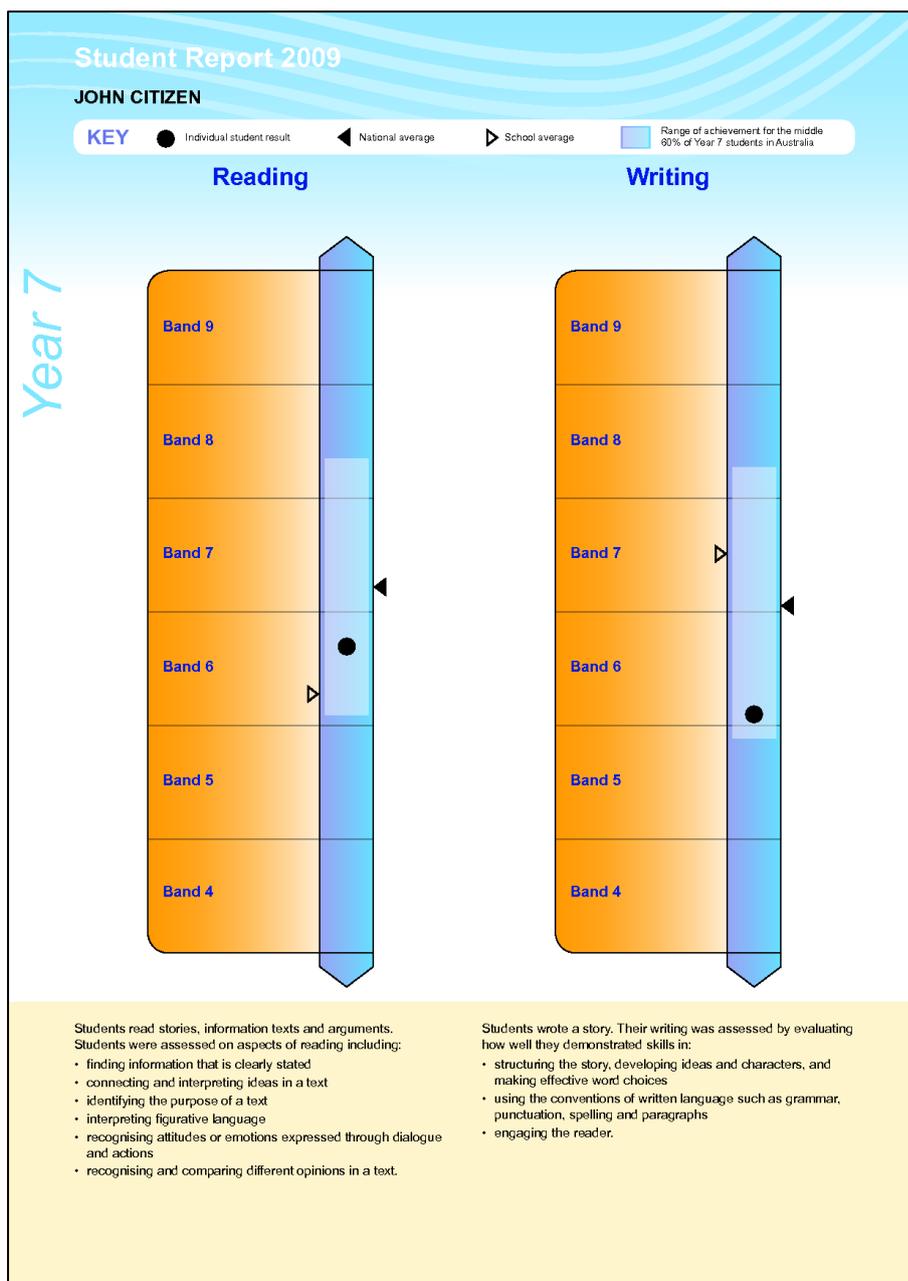


Figure 1.2 Example of individual student results.

In 2010, schools' average results were first published against national averages, benchmarks and the average of up to 60 'statistically similar schools' on the publicly accessible MySchool website. Statistical similarity is determined by an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA); a scale that represents levels of educational advantage and implicitly disadvantage. ACARA asserts that the purpose of ICSEA is to enable and encourage meaningful comparisons between schools,

which are similar in terms of a range of factors known to affect test performance, in order to facilitate student and school improvement (ACARA, 2012a, 2013b).

The average achievement for each school is presented on the website in three different forms: graphs, bands and numbers. The graphic display provides information regarding results within a single domain and year level, with clearly marked margins of error, as well as comparisons with statistically similar schools and the Australian average in that domain displayed in different colours. Dark green indicates performance which is substantially above the average for statistically similar schools or the Australian schools' average, while pale green indicates performance above these averages; white indicates performance close to these averages; pink indicates performance below these averages; and red indicates performance substantially below these averages. Results are also displayed across the bands of the NAPLAN scale, allowing comparison across year levels within the same school, in addition to comparisons with students in statistically similar schools and all Australian schools. Results are most commonly discussed in terms of numbers, in which student achievement is displayed numerically for each year of testing. This format simultaneously displays results for all test domains and year levels within the school using colours to compare the achievement of the school with statistically similar students, as well as students in all Australian schools, as shown in Figure 1.3.

2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		
Colour Scheme <input type="text" value="Red & Green"/> <input type="button" value="Submit"/>										
Alternate view: Results in graphs										
	Reading		Narrative Writing		Spelling		Grammar and Punctuation		Numeracy	
Year 3	352 337 - 367		385 372 - 398		374 360 - 388		360 344 - 376		364 351 - 377	
	SIM 371 362 - 380	ALL 400	SIM 391 383 - 399	ALL 414	SIM 374 365 - 383	ALL 400	SIM 370 360 - 380	ALL 403	SIM 372 364 - 380	ALL 397
Year 5	435 420 - 450		478 463 - 493		478 464 - 492		454 437 - 471		441 427 - 455	
	SIM 457 448 - 466	ALL 484	SIM 462 454 - 470	ALL 486	SIM 461 453 - 469	ALL 484	SIM 465 456 - 474	ALL 496	SIM 449 441 - 457	ALL 476
Year 7	524 509 - 539		548 531 - 565		566 550 - 582		507 490 - 524		554 539 - 569	
	SIM 511 504 - 518	ALL 536	SIM 506 497 - 515	ALL 534	SIM 515 507 - 523	ALL 539	SIM 500 491 - 509	ALL 529	SIM 517 509 - 525	ALL 545

Figure 1.3 Example of results displayed in numbers

Deconstructing the NAPLAN debate

Within the ‘widespread imaginary of education as a global ‘race’ for global economic competitiveness’ (Sellar & Lingard, 2013a, p. 717), there is sustained bipartisan support in Australia for economic rationalist policies incorporating the view of education as an arm of economic policy (Marginson, 1993; Sumsion, 2006).

Through the process of mediatisation, which refers to ‘the relationship between politics, government and mass media ... [meaning that] that many significant political events are now in fact media events’ (Fairclough, 2000, p. 3), government speeches and press releases on both sides of politics consistently assert a linear and commonsensical relationship between increases in standardised test scores, school improvement and future economic prosperity.

Well let’s just get to the facts here. What drives wealth in a nation? Participation and productivity. What gives you the edge in participation and productivity? It’s your investment in human capital ... I’m standing here with a plan today about investing in school education because it will make a dividend for productivity and participation in the future. It’s an economic

reform ... I'm here today with a transformative education plan which is a transformative economic plan (Gillard, 2010b).

This statement from the then federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, reflects the 'simultaneous 'economisation' of education policy and 'educationising' of economic policy' (Sellar & Lingard, 2013b, p. 15), arising from the recalibration of policy frameworks to more closely align social and economic policy objectives (Peng, 2011). Within this context, Australia's apparent performance decline in PISA (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013), coupled with the Council Of Australian Governments' (COAG) 2013 report, which indicated that 'Australia is ... performing behind top countries' (COAG, 2013, P. 1), has prompted claims that Australian schools are failing. This diagnosis of failure is accompanied by claims and counter claims within very public debates between various stakeholders, regarding the extent to which NAPLAN is purportedly able to achieve the government's stated aims of improved quality and equity in education (Back et al., 2010) in order to enhance Australia's global economic competitiveness.

The broad spectrum of views within these debates, which are often 'based on conjecture, anecdotal evidence, theory and 'spin'' (Thompson & Lašič, 2011, p. 2), was evident during the 2013 Senate Inquiry into NAPLAN:

Submitters to the inquiry varied in response to the objectives of NAPLAN. Some submitters supported the objectives in full, but argued that NAPLAN was unable to meet them, while others suggested that the objectives need to be revisited. Still further submitters suggested that NAPLAN was being used for a much broader range of purposes than originally anticipated ... Finally, some submitters variously questioned the utility of NAPLAN, as well as its expense and its potential to actually cause harm to students, the implication being that the NAPLAN regime should be discontinued. (Australian Senate, 2013, p. 6)

It would not be appropriate to reduce the complexity and diversity of this range of experiences and perspectives on NAPLAN to polarised opinions within a one-dimensional debate (Thompson & Lašič, 2011). However, in essence, the debates and discourses surrounding NAPLAN focus on the question of whether NAPLAN is a high-stakes test. Tests are defined as high- or low- stakes according to the significance of the consequences attached to the test results. Most commonly, these

consequences are for students themselves. While low-stakes achievement tests simply provide information for students and their families, high-stakes tests have significant, life-changing consequences attached to the scores. These consequences may include grade retention, access to university course of choice, exclusion from university, reward payments for teachers whose classes attain high scores and firing of teachers whose classes do not achieve set targets (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Research in other nations, particularly in England and the United States, has revealed unintended negative consequences of high-stakes accountability regimes. These include the distortion and corruption of data (Nichols & Berliner, 2007) and a negative impact on the teaching and learning process (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2010), with a disproportionately negative impact on students in schools serving low SES communities (Alexander, 2010; Kohn, 2000).

ACARA has consistently maintained that 'Australia has not made the mistake of the UK and USA of having those extreme high-stakes consequences' (Back et al., 2010, p. 65). This assertion is made on the basis of key differences between the Australian and English/US testing models (Polesel, Dulfer, & Turnbull, 2012). The first difference, relating to consequences for schools, is that under Australian policy, underperforming schools will be offered both support and financial assistance. This differs from the high-stakes US policy, which involves aggressive intervention for schools with low test scores and includes the closure of underperforming schools. The second key difference relates to consequences for students. Unlike the US, where students are 'held back' if they fail to attain minimum standards, NAPLAN scores are not used to govern grade promotion or retention. The third difference centres on avoiding 'the 'naming' and 'shaming' regime that has existed in the UK for the past two decades' (Polesel et al., 2012, p. 7) through the publication of 'league tables' of school performance on tests and exams. Finally, in accordance with the Principles and Protocols for Reporting on Schooling in Australia (MCEECDYA, 2009), a range of contextual data pertaining to SES, student enrolments and attendance, and staffing is included, along with a short statement of approximately 450 words provided by each school, which may include information about the school's teaching programs, student population, values and/or purpose (ACARA, 2011a).

These key differences illustrate the intention for NAPLAN to be a low-stakes test. However, while the website 'can be read as a 'narrative apparatus', arranging casts of characters in particular settings over time ... [thus] far it is the numbers that count on MySchool and those that count most are the NAPLAN results' (Gannon, 2013, p. 26). The publication of schools' comparative performance against national averages, as well as against up to 60 statistically similar schools on the MySchool website, ultimately representing green for 'good' schools and red for 'bad' schools (Lingard & Sellar, 2013), has resulted in an inexorable emphasis on NAPLAN performance and comparisons, particularly in the media and in school systems. Reflecting the 'tendency of readers, media and government rhetoric to emphasise the hard facts of numbers over the myriad of narratives that might be generated' (Gannon, 2013, p. 27), the initial release of MySchool provoked a frenzy across all domains of the Australian media, with most newspapers constructing and publishing league tables (Mockler, 2013), despite ACARA's assertion that this would be difficult to achieve.

Amidst increasingly vociferous media and political claims that Australia's public schools are failing, 'the notion that 'data' can provide the solution to all educational 'problems', either real or manufactured' (Mockler, 2013, p. 13) has become pivotal to the government's national education reform agenda. This agenda includes the use of NAPLAN data for accountability purposes and the negotiation of reward payments for the achievement of targeted and improved NAPLAN performance (Lingard, 2011; Lingard & Sellar, 2013), through National Partnerships between the Federal Government and States and Territories. These National Partnerships aimed to 'improve teaching quality, literacy and numeracy development of young people and provided specific support for students to improve their educational outcomes' (DEEWR, 2013).

However, there is evidence to suggest that the feelings of anxiousness experienced by policy-makers in response to political and media pressures to be 'seen' as improving and achieving at a high standard (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) are invariably transferred to specific regions, systems and schools (Cormack & Comber, 2013). The ramifications of poor performance were experienced in Queensland, following that state's relatively poor comparative NAPLAN performance in 2008. This resulted

in a review commissioned by the then Premier Anna Bligh, which focused on how to improve test performance and the introduction of Teaching and Learning Audits and State-wide targets for improving NAPLAN test performance (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). These political, policy and media pressures can be seen to have pushed NAPLAN towards being high stakes in Queensland. These pressures are deflected down the line to schools, principals, teachers and young people in classrooms.

The experiences of England and the US have shown that 'when the stakes rise, people seek help anywhere they can find it, and companies eager to profit from this desperation by selling test preparation materials and services ... appear on the market' (Kohn, 2000, p. 324). Accordingly, test preparation books such as 'Cracking the SAT: 2014 Edition', are accompanied with advice on 'proven techniques for raising your score'. In Australia, 'neither MCEECDYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs) nor ACARA endorses any organisation who may be offering answers to the NAPLAN sample questions, diagnostic tools or any other product or service to teachers or students in connection with NAPLAN (ACARA, 2011c). Nevertheless, demands for test preparation materials are evidenced in retail sales of NAPLAN-style preparation books, which were reported by the media as almost doubling during 2012, and Hinkler Books' *School Zone NAPLAN-Style Workbook: Year 3 Numeracy* positioned 9th of the top ten best-selling books in Australia in 2013.

In her work on representations of MySchool within the print media, Mockler (2013) found that the print media's coverage of the website presented an artificial resolution to this debate by providing an apparent lens of common sense. This lens is created by three major narratives which work together to reinforce and promote neoliberal education discourses by linking skills with the productivity agenda. The first of these narratives is distrust, which 'asserts that teachers and other educationalists act out of self-interest and ideology' (p. 14) and that 'without the publication of this information in the public arena, governments will (presumably, continue to) shirk their responsibilities with regard to education' (p. 7). Within this narrative of distrust, she suggests that the media position themselves as 'protectors and crusaders for the Public Good' (p. 7). The second narrative of choice alludes to an 'educational crisis' in which parents are empowered to make the 'right' decisions about which school to

choose through the provision of an 'objective, measurable alternative to the subjective opinions held by educators and educational researchers' (p. 9). Building on the notion of objectivity, the third narrative of performance positions competition as a key driver of school improvement, with 'a school's position within the rankings becoming the real measure of success' (p. 10). Mockler observes that the staunch support of published results by News Limited Corporation is unsurprising, given its conservative orientation and ownership of the twelve capital city and national newspapers in Australia, making it a prime beneficiary of the supposed public interest in published league tables.

The intense focus on performance comparisons on the MySchool website, the policies surrounding the NAPLAN data, the use of the data by the media and Australia's escalating testing industry has propelled NAPLAN away from its original design as a low-stakes test. There is evidence within the research literature to suggest that, as a result, Australia is now also experiencing the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing, including the distortion and corruption of data and negative impacts on the teaching and learning process, paralleling the English and US experiences (Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2016; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). As in other nations which have adopted the GERM orthodoxy, these debates are in turn commandeered by politicians who present themselves to voters as being firmly in the driver's seat (Alexander, 2010), through public speeches describing 'my vision, my plan for school reform in this country' (Gillard, 2010b). Through this transactional relationship between media narratives and the mediatisation of policy, it is evident that 'other criteria for school performance [are shrinking] into the background as the NAPLAN data takes centre stage' (Comber, 2012, p. 127). This is the context in which this study was undertaken.

Developing the research questions

The research questions for this study were developed over time, and from several sources. First, during my years as a teacher in several primary schools, I encountered a variety of approaches to school leadership. These ranged from a focus on teachers' professional autonomy, which encouraged the development of a variety of pedagogies, to a prescribed reliance on text books with a focus on end-of-term testing, which entailed up to three or four tests per day, even in the younger

grades. Through these experiences, I discovered first-hand the extent to which this focus on prescriptive teaching and test results hinders authentic learning, by impeding the transactional relationships between children's constructions of themselves as capable problem solvers and engagement with their learning.

During my Master's degree, I therefore focused on developing my knowledge and understanding of the contexts which facilitate authentic opportunities for children to engage in academic risk taking (ART), which is described within the literature as the willingness to risk mistakes in order to enhance personal growth and understandings (Burkhardt et al., 2003). During this time, I found confirmation within the literature that prescriptive approaches with a stringent focus on test results severely limit the extent to which children are able to engage in ART.

My concerns were intensified when NAPLAN was launched in 2008, amid political and media sensationalism, with headlines declaring NAPLAN results as 'a vital barometer' (Chambers, 2010) and a solution to increasingly vociferous claims that Australian schools were failing. My experiences of NAPLAN as a parent, whose children each responded differently to the tests, also led to me to question how other children responded to NAPLAN.

A combination of these experiences led to my review of the research literature relating to standardised high-stakes testing and its effects, which will be described in detail in Chapter Two. This literature is essentially clustered into four core themes:

- (1) technical issues in the construction and scoring of high-stakes standardised tests;
- (2) the impacts of high-stakes testing on school systems, their schools and communities, and the resulting distortion and corruption of the data;
- (3) the impacts of high-stakes testing on teachers and their professional practices, resulting in narrowed curricula and pedagogies and impoverished learning outcomes; and
- (4) the impacts of high-stakes testing on children and young people.

However, aligning with my observation that children are rarely consulted on matters that are important to them, research in this final area remains sparse and generally limited to adult perceptions and appraisals.

While it is outside the scope of this research to evaluate further the first theme of the technical issues surrounding the construction and scoring of NAPLAN, the remaining three themes of the effects of high-stakes testing on school systems and schools, teachers and their professional practices, and children, outlined above, provided the foundation for the research questions.

The research questions

This research seeks to address the overarching question, *What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?* In order to achieve this objective, the following research questions were designed to guide the development of a comprehensive account of the children's lived experiences of NAPLAN. A summary of these questions is provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Summary of research questions

Overarching question:	What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?
Research question #1:	To what extent can systems mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN?
Research question #2:	How do children experience NAPLAN within the classroom?
Research question #3:	How do children respond to their experiences of NAPLAN?

As research pertaining to the ways in which NAPLAN affects children is limited, this study endeavours to enhance understandings of how NAPLAN may be impacting upon children more generally by selecting schools within the median range of SES

communities. Catholic schools were selected for this purpose because they hold average ICSEA values (Bonnor, 2010). This provided an opportunity to explore the hypothesis that the greater negative impact of NAPLAN in government schools is 'due to different systemic approaches and emphasis placed on NAPLAN' (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013, p. 311). The first research question therefore asks: *To what extent can school systems mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN?*

This component of the research involves a consideration of the ways in which Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN identified in the Australian literature (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). Inherent within this exploration of policy mediation is the question of the extent to which these interventions are experienced by children.

The second component of this research focuses on the extent to which NAPLAN aligns with the children's everyday experiences of school by addressing the second research question: *How do children experience NAPLAN within the classroom?* Answering this question necessarily begins with considerations of children's everyday school lives, which encompass a wide range of factors, including: (1) the extent to which classrooms are teacher-centred or child-centred; (2) the tasks and assessments completed by the children, including the thinking skills required to complete them; (3) the typical classroom discourses to which the children are accustomed; and (4) the child-teacher-peer relationships which are an inherent part of everyday school life. The extent to which NAPLAN impacts upon these facets of school lives is explored, including an examination of the prominence of the tests within classrooms, changes in the teachers' customary curricula and pedagogies, and shifts in child-teacher-peer and parent-teacher relationships.

The third component of this research focuses on the children's responses to their experience of NAPLAN as explored in the second research question, by addressing the third question: *How do children respond to their experiences of NAPLAN?* This incorporates the children's emotional reactions to their experiences and their reports of the ways in which the tests affected their learning. This is done through drawings created by the children after the conclusion of the final NAPLAN test, with the

children as the primary interpreters of their images, and through focus group discussions with children in each class.

Rationale and significance of the study

With the introduction of neoliberal frameworks, which are founded on 'institutional self-interest, pragmatics and performative worth' (Ball, 2003, p. 218), it is evident that 'there has been a pervasive silence around ... the ways in which [children] have been positioned by testing and accountability priorities' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 76). This is reflected in the review of the literature, which demonstrates that few studies have explored the ways in which children are affected by NAPLAN. Further, these studies are largely limited to teachers' perceptions and experiences, and accounts of specific problems reported by children and their parents (Athanasou, 2010; Dulfer et al., 2012).

While the findings of these studies are unquestionably significant, given that 'teachers are uniquely placed to account for the impacts that NAPLAN is having at the school and classroom level' (Thompson, 2012, p. 1), they neglect to recognise that children's experiences may differ from adult perceptions, effectively defining children's realities for them. Substantive research regarding the effects of the tests on children through children's own accounts of their experiences (Wyn, Turnbull, & Grimshaw, 2014) remains minimal, with Year 3 children excluded entirely from such research. Thus, as adult debate surrounding NAPLAN continues, it is evident that there is a considerable deficiency in our understandings of how children experience the tests. Despite the obstacles to including children in research within a neoliberal society, it is argued here that the continued exclusion of children from research regarding the impacts of NAPLAN on various stakeholders in education compromises its findings, because without children's reports of their experiences, these accounts are incomplete (Masson, 2004).

It may be argued that the case for increased compliance with article 12 (1) of the UNCRC is a compelling rationale for including children in research (Lundy, 2007) on the impacts of NAPLAN. However, there is evidence to suggest the need for diligence in the employment of this approach, as using law as a tool of regulation frequently 'attempts only to set the minimum acceptable standard' (Masson, 2004, p.

43), resulting in superficial compliance rather than meaningful enactment. This study was therefore informed by the commitment within the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for young Australians to ‘achieve the highest possible level of collaboration with ... *all* stakeholders in the education of young Australians’ (own emphasis) (MCEETYA, 2008, P. 5). This necessarily includes the children, who are the consequential stakeholders of this policy, as they ‘bear the consequences ... of decisions that are made on their behalf’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2011, p. 52).

The significance of including children’s accounts of their experiences of NAPLAN is evident in several themes within the research literature. First, there is evidence to suggest that, reflecting the experiences of England and the US, NAPLAN is impacting negatively on teachers’ professional practices. However, the ways and extent to which children experience these shifts in curricula and pedagogies remain largely unknown. There is also evidence to suggest that inherent within these shifts in teachers’ professional practices, are equivalent shifts in child-teacher-peer and parent-teacher relationships, which are an integral part of everyday school life. However, the ways and extent to which children experience these shifts and are impacted by them also remains largely unknown.

Research also suggests the presence of strong symbiotic relationships between high-stakes testing regimes, negative emotional responses and poor test performance. Further, over time these relationships result in impoverished learning outcomes, particularly for students in schools serving low SES communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This issue is a somewhat contentious one, given the current debate surrounding NAPLAN and ACARA’s (2014) consistent argument that NAPLAN was designed to be a low-stakes test, which assumes that children experience the tests as low-stakes. However, the review of the literature found that the children’s own accounts of the extent to which they experience NAPLAN as high-stakes remain largely unheard. The research reported in this thesis seeks to fill this gap.

Thesis structure

This introductory chapter began by providing a description of children’s positioning with Australia as a neoliberal society and a summary of the global-national-local

policy contexts in which NAPLAN was engendered. This was followed by an introduction to the tests, their associated protocols, the way in which results are reported, and issues surrounding the NAPLAN debate. Within this debate, key differences between the English/US and Australian assessment models, including intentions to provide support and financial assistance for underperforming schools, the rejection of claims that NAPLAN results are used to govern grade promotion or retention, and the inclusion of contextual data on the MySchool website. These points are used to support claims that NAPLAN is designed as a low-stakes test. However, the intense focus on performance comparisons, the policies surrounding NAPLAN data, the use of the data by the media and Australia's escalating testing industry together have propelled NAPLAN away from this original design and intention. The research questions then preceded the rationale and significance of the study, which seeks to fill a gap in the literature by providing children's own reports of their NAPLAN experiences.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature in terms of the four core themes outlined previously. The chapter begins with a review of the technical issues inherent within high-stakes standardised tests, and this is followed by a discussion of the ways in which the high-stakes uses of these tests distort and corrupt the data. This is followed by a review of the ways in which such tests impact upon teachers and their professional practices and, finally, the effects of high-stakes tests on children and young people in England and the USA in particular are considered.

Chapter Three elucidates and justifies the research design for this study, which aimed to address the current deficiency within research by engaging children in authentic and equitable ways through methods that give children shared control of language and concepts. This process began by recognising that there is no ubiquitous children's experience of NAPLAN and children experience the tests within unique matrices of cultural, social, economic and personal contexts, at particular intersections of local-national-global policy frameworks. Drawing from the notion of ethical symmetry, in which relationships between the researcher and participants are the same whether the participants are adults or children (Christensen & Prout, 2002), I developed a case study involving 105 children and their parents, teachers and principals, in two Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) primary schools serving

different socioeconomic status (SES) communities, as well as senior systemic staff and executives.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the first research question: *To what extent can school systems mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN?* This question seeks to contextualise the children's responses, which did not occur in a vacuum, but were influenced by the particular intersection of global-national-local policy, social and cultural contexts in which they were situated. This is achieved by exploring parental views of NAPLAN, as well as those of the teachers, principals and senior BCE staff and executives through semi-structured interviews.

Chapter Five addresses the second research question: *How does NAPLAN impact upon children's everyday school lives?* Analysis of the children's bimodal responses and the focus group discussions, in combination with the teachers' diaries, classroom observations and artefacts, are used to generate themes relating to (1) differences between school-based assessments and NAPLAN; (2) shifts in curricula and pedagogies; and (3) child-teacher-peer relationships as a result of NAPLAN and preparation for the tests. Issues surrounding the ability of children who experience psychological difficulties and struggle to cope with NAPLAN, and some children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, are also addressed.

Chapter Six explores the children's responses to their experiences by addressing the third research question: *How do children respond to NAPLAN?* As in Chapter Five, analysis of the children's bimodal responses and focus group discussions was combined with other sources of data, specifically, classroom observations and the researcher's personal field notes, to generate common and distinct themes across the data from different schools and year levels. These themes focused primarily on emotion and the children's experience of the ways in which NAPLAN affected their learning.

The final chapter of the thesis provides a summary of the data analyses with the aim of addressing the overarching research question: *What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?* This chapter provides a summative conclusion to the thesis by succinctly outlining the key findings of the project, and the contribution of this

research to knowledge, before providing recommendations to better facilitate assessment and raising possibilities for further research.

Conclusion

NAPLAN was engendered within a context of political, economic, social and cultural change geared towards neoliberal ideals of enhancing the labour force, which is purportedly achieved through higher schooling standards, and the translation of these standards into rigorous assessments, with new modes of teacher accountability constructed around student test scores. Reflecting children's positioning within a neoliberal polity, research pertaining to the effects of NAPLAN on children remains sparse and largely limited to adult observations and accounts. The research reported in this thesis aims to address this deficiency by exploring the children's lived experiences of NAPLAN, largely through the lens of the children's own accounts of their experience, utilising research methods that give children shared control of language and concepts.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

The objective of this research is to enhance understanding of how NAPLAN is impacting upon primary school-aged children by exploring children's lived experiences of the tests. In order to achieve this objective, the following review of literature begins by making the distinction between assessments *of* and *for* learning. Research literature in England and the US, from where Australia's accountability agenda is drawn (Lingard, 2010), provides ample evidence to suggest that a disproportionate focus on assessments *of* learning can readily lead to such tests becoming high-stakes. As described in Chapter One, this has occurred in Australia, despite NAPLAN's espoused design as a low-stakes assessment of learning. This outcome is the result of the government's utilisation of the data for accountability purposes and the negotiation of reward payments through the National Partnerships program, in addition to the construction of league tables by the media and the influence of a flourishing education industry associated with testing in Australia.

The review focuses on literature pertaining to the effects of high-stakes testing in England and US, which have a longer history of high-stakes testing than Australia, in addition to the developing literature relating to the effects of NAPLAN. This review encompasses firstly the technical issues within high-stakes testing regimes, such as the validity and reliability of such tests, and potential errors in their construction and scoring. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which the data produced by high-stakes testing regimes may be distorted and/ or corrupted through cheating, the exclusion of poor performing students, differential test preparation, educational triaging of students and the 'gaming' of assessments by schools and school systems.

The review then addresses the impact of high-stakes testing on teachers and their professional practices, which encompasses two core themes. The first of these is the narrowing of curricula and pedagogies to focus on test scores, which includes a discussion of the differential impact of these reductions on schools serving high and low SES communities. Secondly, the effects of high-stakes tests on teachers'

relationships with students and their parents, which are an inherent part of everyday school life, are examined.

The final sections of the review focus on the available literature regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on children and young people. This begins with a description of several substantive studies which were conducted with children in regard to their experiences of high-stakes testing in England, the US and Australia. In combination, these studies generated common themes. The first of these themes focuses on the ways in which children and young people experience the changes in their teachers' curricula and pedagogies, as well as their relationships with their teachers and peers in the lead-up to the tests, and includes some students' critique of the differential test preparation between high and low SES schools. The next theme focuses on students' reports of the ways in which they experienced taking high-stakes tests, which includes students' descriptions of the format of such tests, and their level of difficulty, as well as the formal protocols of standardised testing, particularly the requirement to sit in isolation and the time constraints imposed on these tests.

Assessments *of* and *for* learning

A fundamental difficulty within political and media discourses is that testing is simplistically equated with assessment, which 'is a serious error – linguistically, technically and educationally' (Alexander, 2010, p. 324). Historically, assessment has been defined as either summative or formative, which are not labels for different forms of assessment, but describe the different ways assessments are used (Mansell, James, & Assessment Reform Group, 2009).

NAPLAN, like other standardised tests such as the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) in England or the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in the US, is a form of summative assessment, or assessment *of* learning. These assessments of learning can be used for a range of purposes such as reporting to parents or external authorities by assessing students' knowledge and understanding at a given point in time (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Mansell et al., 2009).

Formative assessment, or assessment *for* learning, is conversely seen as 'a process rather than an end product, specifically, *the* central process in instruction' (Wiliam,

2011, p. 48) within the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment cycle. In his work on developing research-based formative assessment practices, William argues that the primary aim of assessment for learning is the provision of feedback that moves learning forward. Further, such feedback can only function formatively if the information is used by the learner to improve their performance. From this perspective, he asserts that the secret to effective feedback is recognising that saying what is wrong is insufficient. Rather, to be effective, feedback must provide a recipe for future action. Within this argument, William highlights research evidence which suggests that while fine-scale evidence can be aggregated for summative reporting, it is not possible to utilise aggregate reports of achievement to address learning needs.

Failure to balance the use of summative and formative assessments, coupled with a disproportionate focus on the results of summative assessments (Alexander, 2010; Stiggins, 2002), results in such tests becoming high-stakes. Further, such tests can generate unintended negative consequences, which have negative effects on the validity and reliability of results and teachers' professional practices, ultimately resulting in impoverished learning outcomes. The following section outlines these unintended consequences of high-stakes testing regimes and their subsequent negative effects.

Technical issues in high-stakes testing

The considerable political and public faith in test scores as 'scientifically developed instruments, capable of yielding objective measures of a student's real achievement' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 68), is challenged by several technical issues pertaining to the validity and reliability of results, which are generated by large-scale high-stakes testing regimes. In order to explore these issues, it is necessary to begin by defining the terms 'validity' and 'reliability'.

Validity is 'the single most important criterion for evaluating achievement testing' (Koretz, 2008, p. 215). Rather than being a characteristic of the test, validity 'refers to the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure and consequently, permits appropriate interpretation of scores' (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 154). The importance of this distinction lies in recognising that a given test

score can be used to support multiple conclusions, 'some of which may be justified and others not' (Koretz, 2008, p. 217). Koretz (2008) argues further that validity is dependent on the particular use to which a test is put. Thus the first step in ascertaining the validity of a test is to determine its purpose, as a 'given test may provide accurate information for one purpose but not another' (Le & Klein, 2002, p 60).

ACARA maintains that the primary purpose of NAPLAN is to 'identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge to provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community' (ACARA, 2013b). However it has been argued that the introduction of the MySchool website in 2010 shifted this purpose

... from being one piece of information which informed schools and education systems about one aspect of the outcomes of schooling, to being a high-stakes test purporting to measure the quality of a whole school and to compare it with other schools. (Reid, 2010, p. 16)

This initial purpose was further supplanted by use of the published data for accountability purposes and the negotiation of rewards payments through National Partnerships between the Federal Government and States and Territories (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). This both raises the stakes and the issue of 'the relationship between the political appeal of particular education policy directions and the more fundamental matter of fitness for purpose' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 68). The most common forms of validity are known within the literature as the '4 C's' of content, construct, criterion and consequential validity, which are viewed as interrelated, rather than independent aspects of validity (Gay et al., 2009).

Content validity refers to the degree to which a test measures an intended content area. This encompasses item validity, which refers to whether the test items are relevant to measuring the intended content area (Gay et al., 2009). Regardless of the type of test being administered, 'the concern is that if teachers teach to the standards, but the tests aren't aligned with those standards, then the test will underestimate the amount of content actually learned by the students' (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 111-112). As discussed in Chapter One, the implementation of NAPLAN in 2008 preceded the full implementation of the Australia National

Curriculum, and is therefore informed by the Statements of Learning for English and Mathematics, rather than by the curriculum. This raises the question of NAPLAN's content validity on two levels. First, Wu and Hornsby (2012) observe that the Statements of Learning documents are unfamiliar to staff in most schools, and are therefore unlikely to be utilised by teachers to inform their teaching. Second, in the event that that NAPLAN will be aligned with the Australian Curriculum once it has been substantially implemented in schools, it will still be a long time before NAPLAN truly matches what is taught because student learning is cumulative (Wu & Hornsby, 2012).

Consideration of the content validity of a test incorporates sampling validity, which is concerned with how well the test samples the total content area being tested (Gay et al., 2009). Alexander (2010) argues that national achievement testing under-samples the curriculum while over-sampling the population. He notes this stark contrast to population sampling, where a small proportion of pupils are selected to take a small sample of test items, which covers the curriculum more adequately than a single test taken by all pupils. When considering that the information used in the interpretation of scores is 'only as broad as the range of items included on the national tests' (Alexander, 2010, p. 317), it may be argued that NAPLAN, which in its current form is comprised of one annual test of 40 questions per subject area, 'does not indicate students' learning in an entire domain' (Wu, 2010; Wu & Hornsby, 2012).

The term 'face validity' is sometimes used to describe the content validity of tests and basically refers to the degree to which a test *appears* to measure what it claims to measure (Gay et al., 2009). However, face validity is not considered as substantial evidence of validity, as it is the result of a casual examination of a test's content, rather than a more systematic evaluation of that content (Koretz, 2008). Therefore, 'content validity should not be confused with face validity. The latter is not validity in the technical sense: it refers not to what the test actually measures, but to what it appears superficially to measure' (Anastasi, 1988, p. 144).

There is evidence within the literature to suggest that content validity 'depends not on what adult experts or critics *think* it measures nor on what item statistics suggest about the item, but rather on how individual test-takers perceive and react to the test or test item' (Haney & Scott, 1987, p. 301). Further, adult perceptions of the validity

of test items do not necessarily correlate with how these items are experienced by those for whom the tests are intended – the children. This is because ‘when test items are viewed from the perspective of children ... [they] do not always seem to represent what is commonly assumed’ (p. 354).

Criterion validity, which is also sometimes referred to as predictive validity within the literature, is ‘the degree to which a test can predict how well an individual will do in a future situation’ (Gay et al., 2009, p. 156). Thus, it refers to ‘a test’s ability to predict certain kinds of achievement now, or in the future’ (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 115). This type of validity is crucial for tests that are used to classify or select individuals, where a minimum score for admission is founded on the belief that students who achieve that score have a higher probability of succeeding than those who achieve lower scores (Gay et al., 2009). While no test will provide perfect predictive validity, the predictions based on a combination of several scores will invariably be more accurate than those based on the scores of a single test (Gay et al., 2009).

Construct validity ‘deals with the question of whether a test measures that abstract attribute or characteristic it claims to measure’ (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 112). Nichols and Berliner describe testing as a way to make measurable hypothetical constructs that cannot be directly observed. In order to ‘measure the intended construct well ... we have to sample adequately from the domain implied by the construct’ (Koretz, 2008, p. 220). Koretz uses the construct of ‘proficiency in writing’ to illustrate this point by stressing that while some of the skills needed for writing can be assessed through multiple-choice items, ‘proficiency’ in this case can only be measured through students’ writing. As a consequence, many direct assessments of writing, which require students to write continuous text in response to a stimulus, are now common. While this approach affords the NAPLAN writing test with greater validity, caution still needs to be employed as there are three basic ways in which markers can differ from each other. These differences relate to the degree of leniency shown by each marker, the use of the full range of scores and the extent to which the markers agree on which answers are better than others (Le & Klein, 2002).

Consequential validity is sometimes referred to as the extent to which a test creates harmful effects for individuals. While some tests serve their intended purposes in benign ways, others may have negative consequences for both the test takers and

users (Gay et al., 2009). However, consideration of the consequences of a test often goes beyond the concept of 'consequential validity', as the effects of a testing program can be detrimental even if the inferences based on the score are valid (Koretz, 2008). Consequential validity therefore refers to the negative consequences arising from these harmful effects on individuals, which affect the validity of the test, rather than all negative effects *per se*.

Reliability refers to the 'degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring' (Gay et al., 2009, p. 158). This differs from validity, which refers to consistency across alternative measures of the same construct (Koretz, 2008). The more reliable a test is, 'the more confidence we can have that the scores obtained from the test are essentially the same scores that would be obtained if the test were readministered to the same test takers at another time or by another person' (Gay et al., 2009).

Large-scale testing regimes have difficulty in recognising that the same pupil can take the same test on different days while producing very different results (Alexander, 2010). This possible variation in test scores, known as Measurement Error, can occur for two reasons. First, each test samples a small set of a student's capabilities in the subject domain being tested (Wu, 2010). Second, there are various types of chance effects that are independent of the test itself. These include health, level of anxiety, fatigue, environmental conditions, adherence to instructions and time limits, quality of the booklets and other materials, encouragement and the nature of disturbances that may have occurred during the test session (Le & Klein, 2002).

The assumption that numeric test scores generated by computers have a high degree of precision also fails to recognise that in any large-scale testing system, several kinds of errors are possible. The first cause of error may lie in test construction, which relates specifically to test items which have the potential to cause confusion as the result of multiple interpretations (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). In one example from the US, 45 per cent of the AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards) test core items were found to have a problem that could have caused a consistent measurement error. While some of these items have been removed from the test, one out of six items remains mathematically flawed, meaning

that up to 17 per cent of a student's responses may be marked incorrect when they should not be (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

A second possible cause of error within large-scale testing regimes arises from demands for quick results. While this is intended to provide rapid feedback in order to inform quality teaching and learning, these demands may result in a rushed scoring process, which increases the probability of score error, potentially resulting in the publication of incorrect scores (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). For example, in the US, the Ohio State Department of Education failed to correctly translate raw scores into scores on a publicly reportable scale, resulting in the need for new scores for 5,000 of the 5,400 students who had taken the test (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This trend towards demands for quick results is also evidenced in Australia. Following criticism of 'the five-month delay in providing results [which makes the tests] useless for informing teaching' (Wu & Hornsby, 2012, p. 2), Federal, State and Territory education ministers have agreed to move NAPLAN online from 2017, over a two-to-three year period (ACARA, 2015a). This move is designed to facilitate faster feedback to teachers, among other objectives.

As well as the errors which are inherent within large-scale testing systems, it must be acknowledged that children may be prone to making errors, which are unrelated to their knowledge, understanding or skills within the domain being tested. For example, children may miss a line when marking their test booklet, throwing the remainder of their test answers out by one line (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

These issues pertaining to the reliability and validity of large-scale, high-stakes testing regimes suggest that 'to make a fetish of specific, measurable goals is not only simplistic insofar as it fails to capture what is going on, it is destructive insofar as it changes what is going on for the worse' (Kohn, 2000, p. 315). ACARA maintains that 'NAPLAN tests are one aspect of the ... assessment and reporting process, and do not replace the extensive, ongoing assessments made by teachers about each student's performance' (ACARA, 2011b). However the fact that 'the dominant information that appears on ... My School about each school is its annual NAPLAN results' (Reid, 2010, p. 16), suggests both the government's prioritisation of statistical information and that numeric measures of student/school outcomes are the

government's preferred mode of communication and way of measuring school and system performance (Hardy & Boyle, 2011).

Distortion and corruption of data

A primary issue surrounding the validity and reliability of scores produced within high-stakes testing regimes is the distortion and corruption of data, which occurs through a phenomena described by Campbell's Law. This law warns that 'the more any quantitative indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor' (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 27). Drawing from a business analogy, Nichols and Berliner describe the potential for corruption when high-stakes incentives such as big bonuses are attached to sales.

[W]hen stakes are attached to the sales ... the business of selling could become corrupt. Cars may be sold that are lemons, houses may be sold with concealed defects, [and] guarantees may be made that are not genuine. It is the sale that is important. (p. 28)

In a similar way, 'attaching serious ... consequences to performance on tests for schools, administrators, teachers and students, may have distorting and corrupting effects' (Kohn, 2001, p. 5), as 'schools and individual teachers ... throw up smokescreens in order to hide rather than reveal issues and problems that confront them in their teaching' (Reid, 2010, p. 17). Illustrations of these corrupting processes include cheating, the exclusion of low performing students, differential test preparation, educational triage, 'gaming' the system, and narrowed curricula and pedagogies, which will be discussed in depth in the subsequent section of this chapter.

Cheating

The most obvious cause of data distortion and corruption is the potential for cheating, as 'high-stakes tests always bring with them the risk that those for whom the consequences are greatest will try to improve their results by fair means or foul' (Stobart, 2008, p. 20). Cheating may take place before, during or after tests and may range from subtle suggestion to manipulation of answers or scores (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Teachers and/or administrators may engage in cheating for self-

preservation or the altruistic purpose of avoiding the psychological cost of anxious children failing the test. Within this more complex scenario, teachers argue that 'helping' a struggling student is a small infraction 'compared to the potential motivational and psychological costs of that student failing another test' (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 34). In either case, cheating is 'more likely to elicit condemnation of the individuals involved' (Kohn, 2000, p. 322), disciplinary action against teaching staff (West, 2010) or questions of increased security, rather than scrutiny of the system in which the cheating occurred (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

While the Australian media has announced incidents of cheating with sensational headlines such as 'Queensland tops NAPLAN cheating list' (Chilcott, 2012), ACARA has reported low numbers of cheating incidents within the approximately five million tests taken by approximately one million students. In 2012, six of 79 substantiated test incidents were found to be substantiated cheating breaches (ACARA, 2012c), while in 2015 the number of substantiated test incidents had reduced to 42, with six cheating breaches also substantiated in that year (ACARA, 2015b).

Exclusion of low-performing students

Another form of cheating involves 'playing' or 'gaming' the system through the exclusion of students who are judged unlikely to perform well in the tests, in order to maximise results (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Stobart, 2008). Research suggests that the removal of low-achieving students from the test-taking pool can result in large gains in test scores without providing educational opportunities for those students (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This implies that exclusionary practices may result in a new form of discrimination 'against the score suppressors, those children who keep the school from looking good' (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 11).

There is evidence to suggest that within England's marketised school environment of competition, high-stakes testing is a major factor in schools' decisions to 'reduce their intake of children from low-income backgrounds, given the strong negative association between poverty and achievement' (West, 2010, p. 30). In Australia, the Whitlam Institute report, *The experience of education: The impacts of high-stakes testing on school students and their families* shows that three per cent of participants

reported the removal of students to avoid those students pulling down the school average (Dulfer et al., 2012).

Dulfer et al. (2012) also found that while an overwhelming majority of students undertake NAPLAN, primary teachers are more likely than secondary teachers to recommend that a student be removed from the tests. These recommendations were largely founded on students' eligibility for exemption, such as having less than one year English language background or a significant intellectual or functional disability. However 50 per cent of the participants who exempted students from NAPLAN cited concerns regarding potential damage to self-confidence, while others recommended the removal of students on the grounds that 'they simply would not be able to concentrate for the length of the test' (p. 22).

Differential test preparation

Intensive test preparation may involve the use of commercially available practice materials, previous tests and narrowing what is taught in a domain in order to improve test scores. This approach invalidates test scores because they 'no longer represent the broader domain of knowledge for which the test score was supposed to be an indicator' (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 16). The extent to which teachers, particularly in nations which have adopted the GERM orthodoxy, employ intensive test preparation as part of their professional practice is well documented (Alexander, 2010; Stobart, 2008). Since testing became a mandatory part of primary education in England, many teachers have been 'impelled, because they considered they were being judged on the Standard Assessment Tasks (SAT) results, to spend a good deal of time in Year 6 and sometimes earlier in revision ... in order to maximise the test levels' (Alexander, 2010, p. 321). In the US, high-stakes testing has 'radically altered the kind of instruction that is offered to the point that teaching to the test has become a prominent part of America's educational landscape ... the test essentially becomes the curriculum' (Kohn, 2000, p. 320).

Drawing from the English and US experiences, ACARA stresses that 'excessive preparation [for NAPLAN] is not useful' (ACARA, 2011b). However teachers report that they are either choosing or being instructed to 'teach to the test' (Thompson, 2012). There is evidence to suggest that this practice is widespread, with 93 per

cent of respondents in one study reporting 'at least one practice session in the two weeks prior to NAPLAN, and approximately one quarter of the respondents reporting practising more than seven times in those two weeks' (Dulfer et al., 2012, p. 25). The literature provides evidence to suggest that this may be occurring for two reasons. First, teachers 'are told repeatedly that student performance is contingent on the quality of their teaching, and ... no excuses will be brooked for low standards' (Comber & Nixon, 2009, p. 334). The second reason pertains to the lack of information about expected qualities of performance or how these tests relate to learning in the curriculum, or to specific curriculum domain standards (Klenowski, 2010). Research also suggests that while many teachers invest time in test practice for NAPLAN (Athanasou, 2010; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013; Wyn, Turnbull, & Grimshaw, 2014), such preparation appears to be motivated by concerns for student welfare rather than outperforming competing schools (Wyn et al., 2014).

The distortion of data which is caused by intensive test preparation is exacerbated if students have had differential test preparation, as is often the case with students in low SES schools; where many teachers 'feel obliged (or are explicitly directed) to set aside other subjects for days, weeks, or even months at a time to devote themselves to boosting students' test scores' (Kohn, 2000, p. 320). In the US, the range of differences in test preparation range from 20 per cent of teaching time in North Carolina, up to 100 hours per course in Arizona (Stobart, 2008). In Australia, Athanasou (2010) similarly found that while teachers in Australian Catholic and Independent schools reported a median of 15 hours preparation, a few schools did not prepare students at all, while other schools spent as much as 100 or 150 hours preparing students for the tests.

There is evidence within the Australian literature to suggest that significant numbers of parents also prepare their children for NAPLAN (Athanasou, 2010; Dulfer et al., 2012). These parents draw from past tests which are freely available on the MySchool website, or the 'plethora of commercial products [which] have been produced and are now available from retail outlets' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 71). ACARA specifically states that it does not recommend the use of commercial products such as booklets and practice tests, and that none of the commercial products currently on the market are endorsed by ACARA (2011b). However, the

extent of parental coaching is evidenced in retail sales of NAPLAN-style preparation books. In 2012, the media reported that such sales have 'almost doubled in the past 12 months (Morris, 2013)'. In 2013, Hinkler Books' *School Zone NAPLAN-Style Workbook: Year 3 Numeracy* was positioned 9th in the top ten best-selling books in Australia. There is evidence to suggest that parental coaching for NAPLAN may be due to concerns that their child had not practised sufficiently in the lead up to the tests, or that this practice was necessary in order to secure their child's enrolment into a 'good' private school (Athanasou, 2010; Dulfer et al., 2012, p. 25).

Educational Triage

The notion of educational triage is drawn from the practice of medical triage, which describes attempts in a medical emergency to 'direct attention to those people who might survive (with help), leaving other (less hopeful) cases to die' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 134). Educational triage thus describes intensive instruction for students who 'are on the margins of passing and so might be pushed over with additional help' (Stobart, 2008, p. 127). This focus on 'triage kids', also known within the US literature as 'bubble kids' (Lipman, 2004), targets resources at a limited number of students in order to benefit schools as institutions and their position on league tables (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Evidence within the literature suggests that educational triage 'exacerbates educational inequality as the students who either pass or are close to passing the test become valued commodities and those who need the most help are left to fend for themselves' (Hursh, 2007, p. 507). Emergent literature on the effects of NAPLAN provides evidence to suggest that this trend is reflected in Australia, as students with greater needs do not 'receive as much attention for the first five months of the year until the completion of the NAPLAN tests' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 71).

'Gaming' the system

Cheating is typically associated with teachers, students or administrators at the school level. However gaming may also occur at the systemic or state levels, as they 'seek to protect their 'reputational capital' and as such, 'game' the system' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 1). For example, in the US state of North Carolina, large gains in mathematics in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were initially heralded as proof that high-stakes testing improves student achievement.

Research later revealed that one reason behind these gains was North Carolina's eighth grade mathematics exclusion rates, which had increased by 467 per cent from 1992-2000, while the nation's exclusion rate remained unchanged (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

In Australia, the 'wide scope for perverse incentives and effects which arise when funding and reputation capitals are tied to performance measures and comparisons' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 654) was clearly demonstrated in the distinct approaches of three states to the negotiation of reward payments for meeting targets on NAPLAN performance.

Victoria used 2009 data as baseline, set ambitious targets and failed to meet them, while Queensland set much less ambitious targets, met them and was rewarded. New South Wales created targets that combined literacy and numeracy scores, obfuscating the evidence and met their targets. (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 634)

Effects of high-stakes testing on teachers' professional practices

Research suggests that teachers' professional practices are situated on a continuum, ranging from didactic to constructivist approaches, with many teachers employing a mixture of both (Nie & Lau, 2010). Nie and Lau observe that while there is no universally accepted definition of didactic teaching, 'educational researchers generally share the view that it is characterised by a teacher-centred and knowledge-transmission approach' (p. 412). This approach, which is typically manifest as whole class instruction of knowledge as fact, followed by students' completion of worksheets (Smerdon, Burkham, & Lee, 1999), is founded on the industrial, or 'factory' model of learning, reflecting the establishment of factory life at the turn of the 20th century (Bush, 2006). Bush observes that assumptions underpinning this approach include the belief that 'all learners gain the same understanding and that all students can learn given appropriate environmental influences' (p. 14). Inherent within these assumptions are expectations that teachers are solely responsible for making decisions regarding curriculum design and implementation, that errors should be minimised (Clifford, 1991), and that children are seen as fragile learners rather than robust thinkers who are capable problem solvers (Giglio-Andrews & Trafton, 2002).

At the other end of the continuum, constructivist, student-centred teaching espouses that the didactic approach is no longer sufficient in a world where 'students will be expected to think for themselves, pose and solve complex problems and generally produce knowledge rather than reproduce it' (King, 1993, p. 1). Nie and Lau (2010) observe that the constructivist view of learning, which emphasises deep cognitive processing rather than regurgitation of facts, has been generally accepted. However they emphasise that diversity in conceptualisations of constructivism has resulted in the lack of an appropriate translation from the constructivist theory of learning into actual teaching practice, which has generated some controversy. Conceptual misunderstandings at the heart of this debate include that there is no focus for learning, the curriculum is not thoughtfully planned, there is an absence of structure for learning and that the role of the teacher is less important (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000). As a result, espoused constructivist approaches to teaching tend to be somewhat ambiguous (Smerdon et al., 1999).

Nie and Lau (2010) have however identified three features of teaching practice which are consistent with the central notion of constructivism, which advocates that meanings are constructed rather than discovered, as students make connections through which they make sense of their experiences. These features incorporate an 'emphasis on deep understanding of knowledge, substantive and elaborated communication, and making connections with real-world situations' (p. 412).

Approaches within the constructivist paradigm include inquiry-based learning and problem-based learning (PBL), which are described within the literature as having roots in constructivist philosophy (Dole, Bloom, & Kowalske, 2016). While these student-centred approaches similarly focus on questioning, critical thinking and problem solving, the primary difference between these approaches relates to the role of the teacher (Savery, 2015). Within an inquiry-based approach, the teacher acts simultaneously as a facilitator of learning and provider of information. Within a PBL approach, however, the teacher supports the process of learning, but does not provide information relating to the problem to the students, as finding such information is the responsibility of the learner (2015).

Ball (2003) argues that a distinctive feature of neoliberal reform is that it does not simply change what teachers do, but who they are, as they are required to 'live an

existence of calculation' (p. 217). Over time, expectations of accountability, as reflected in test scores, leave little space for resistance (Lipman, 2004), as teachers experience a loss of professional autonomy, becoming script readers and testing technicians rather than professionals in the sense in which the term is normally used (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Within this climate, teacher morale can be low while anxiety levels can be high, because they have little or no input into the systems by which they are judged (Nichols & Berliner, 2007), they are publicly portrayed as 'so incompetent that they must ... be compelled to improve' (Kohn, 2000, p. 323), and face the serious ethical dilemma of whether to 'teach to the test' to maximise student scores (Kohn, 2001).

The literature reveals that teachers' responses to this negative climate vary. In addition to the loss of experienced teachers, 'promising teacher candidates may understandably be reluctant to begin a career that is increasingly centred on test results rather than learning – a career manipulated with rewards and punishments' (Kohn, 2000, p. 322). Of those teachers who remain or enter into the profession, some try to avoid being assigned to grade levels in which tests are administered (Kohn, 2000), while others 'absorb aspects of the accountability discourse, shaping their practice and language to the dominant framework' (Lipman, 2004, p. 130).

Current research indicates that the propulsion of NAPLAN away from its original design as a low-stakes test has resulted in the emergence of parallel trends in Australia. These trends include the typical reporting of average self-efficacy by teachers (Thompson, 2012) some teachers leaving 'a profession that is intent on locking them into goals and practices to enhance short-term results' (Comber, 2012, p. 132) and the perception of many teachers that 'NAPLAN is having a profound impact on the curriculum and pedagogies in their class and school (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013, p. 312). The MySchool website in particular reduces educational practices to numbers (Hardy & Boyle, 2011).

The subsequent section discusses the impacts of high-stakes testing regimes on teachers' professional practices through a discussion of the ways in which curricula and pedagogies are narrowed to accommodate the intense focus on standardised test results. This is followed by a description of the disproportionate narrowing of

curricula and pedagogies in low SES schools and schools serving culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Narrowed curricula and pedagogies

Proponents of high-stakes testing make no attempt to deny that through testing regimes, teachers will be forced to narrow curricula and pedagogies; 'indeed, they cheerfully acknowledge that this happens' (Kohn, 2000, p. 323). In Australia, this is evidenced in political statements such as,

Does it measure everything, effort, character, sports ability, artistic flair, action to help community members who need assistance? No it doesn't. It measures reading and writing and mathematics but my point here is a very simple one; whatever kids are learning and doing at school, they need to come out of school able to read, write and do mathematics. So the things we test aren't an optional extra, the things we test are the necessary foundation stones. (Gillard, 2010a)

This simplistic dichotomy between 'the basics' and 'optional extras' fails to recognise that a focus on improving test scores in 'the basics', 'can lead simply to an enhanced capacity to take tests, rather than enhanced and authentic learning across a broad and defensible range of schooling purposes' (Lingard, 2010, p. 135). For example, in the US, dramatic improvements in the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores during the 1990s, which came to be known as the 'Texas miracle', 'led to the incorporation of many features of Texas's policy into the Bush administration's major education initiative, No Child Left Behind, in 2001' (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 81).

However, a number of studies found that while students were passing the TAAS reading test by being able to select the correct answers, teachers reported that they were not able to read assignments, make meaning of the literature, complete reading assignments out of class or connect reading assignments to other parts of the course such as discussion and writing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Further, after several years in classes where reading assignments were increasingly centred on TAAS materials, many students were unable to read a novel even two years below their grade level (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). These impoverished learning outcomes were reflected in the writing test, with teachers reporting that writing, as it relates to thinking, language development and fluency, understanding audience, vocabulary

enrichment and developing ideas, had been replaced by writing to the prescribed TAAS format, which predictably resulted in rote writing (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). Similarly, research in England found that 'teaching to the test' in science 'resulted in a reduction in hands-on practical tasks, which in turn led to students' conceptual skills actually decreasing ... so while the test results improved year on year, the learning and understanding decreased' (Klenowski, 2010, p. 12).

These research findings suggest that 'student learning is indeterminate, remains at the same level it was before the policy was implemented or actually goes down when high-stakes policies are instituted' (Kohn, 2001, p. 3). This has significant implications for Australian education, as many teachers 'are either choosing or being instructed to teach to the test' (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013, p. 299). In this climate of an 'over-emphasis on basic skills and a concurrent neglect of higher order and critical thinking' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 74), teachers report that 'designing responsive, inclusive and engaging curriculum and pedagogies [is] very difficult to maintain' (Comber & Nixon, 2009, p. 343). This is particularly significant in schools serving low SES communities (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013).

High-stakes testing in different SES schools

Research suggests that constructivist approaches, such as inquiry-based learning, have the potential to reduce achievement gaps between high and low SES schools, as they 'might have powerful effects where students have the cognitive capacity to think critically but have not previously been encouraged to think in this way' (Hattie, 2009, p. 209). The belief that didactic teaching, with its focus on memorization, drills and practice, may be more effective for students in lower SES schools or those in lower-track classes (Smerdon et al., 1999), was evident in the classic US study *Social Class and School Knowledge* (Anyon, 1981), which provided a detailed description of the differential social class-based construction of knowledge.

Contemporary research suggests that 'a basic education for students who have historically been denied an enriched and intellectually rigorous education is hardly a solution to ... inequities' (Lipman, 2004, p. 45). However, in the current neoliberal climate, with its intense focus on standardised test results, more progressive constructivist approaches are unwelcome (Smerdon et al., 1999). Luke (2010)

argues that as a result, what Anyon critiqued as a reductive schooling for the working class has in many cases now become the norm, particularly in low SES schools.

The inequitable outcomes of high-stakes testing are particularly evident in the US, where advances in integration and academic achievement between students in high and low SES communities 'which were closing the gap from the late 1950s through 1980s, began to unravel in the 1990s' (Hursh, 2008, p. 60). Research suggests that this occurred because the education of students in low SES schools came to 'increasingly resemble multiple-choice test prep instead of the skills students desperately need' (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 67). Similarly, the 2006 PISA survey indicated that the spread of 15-year-olds' scores for England were the largest among 29 OECD countries (Alexander, 2010). 'The persistence of this wide range in attainment since the introduction of the national curriculum and SATs-based targets suggests that these have done little to raise the relative performance of our lowest attaining children' (Alexander, 2010, p. 334).

This differential impact of high-stakes testing is a considerable issue in Australia, with 80% of students who would be classified as disadvantaged attending government schools (Gonski et al., 2011). There is evidence to suggest that, particularly in culturally diverse communities, teachers take 'the underlying patterns of NAPLAN testing and use it in redesigning their approaches to ordinary classroom curriculum' (Comber, 2012, p. 128). This 'over-emphasis on basic skills and ... concurrent neglect of higher order and critical thinking' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 74) creates a less inclusive classroom environment for low-achieving or disengaged students who most need teachers' expertise, a broad curriculum and a range of learning experiences to re-connect with the educative process (Comber, 2012; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). Within the current climate of the pressures and processes associated with improving NAPLAN scores, many of these students are likely to achieve the lowest results, positioning and labelling them as 'underperforming' which in turn engenders a learner identity of failure (Klenowski, 2010).

The inequity of high-stakes testing is intensified by the nature of the tests themselves. 'Many standardised tests are biased because their questions require a set of skills more likely to be possessed by children from a privileged background

(Kohn, 2000, p. 234). Hursh (2008) argues that upper and middle class students are more likely to succeed on these tests, not as a result of greater academic ability or effort, but because their cultural experiences, or capital, match those demanded by education institutions.

While in this respect, students in higher SES schools are implicitly advantaged within high-stakes testing regimes, research in England and Australia found that higher SES schools were also negatively impacted by such tests. This negative impact is associated primarily with the tendency of middle class parents to rely heavily on school-of-choice enrolments to maintain social status and strategic positioning (Rowe & Windle, 2012). Rowe and Windle (2012) argue that embedded within this process of positioning, is the notion of networking, described by Bourdieu (1986) as 'social capital' or a network of relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term. There is evidence to suggest that this tendency is not limited to private schools, as middle-class public schools have also started to engage with neoliberal market logic 'to compete actively for 'quality' students by flaunting the examination results which flow from their already rich social mix and the opportunities for selectivity provided by high demand for places' (Windle, 2009, p. 234).

Effects of high-stakes testing on relationships

Foster's (2006) study found that high-stakes testing colours the myriad of social relationships that define children's school lives, which in this case increasingly functioned for the purpose of making the school look better. First, Foster found that the replacement of constructivist pedagogies with didactic approaches and test drills harmed the relationships between teachers and students, as classroom dialogue was replaced with solitary test practice, which resulted in the 'students' [belief] that their only value to the school is the test score they attain' (p. 222).

Negative shifts in teacher-student relationships were also represented or described in several responses from children in Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study. While some of these children represented or described their teachers in the roles of 'coach' or 'comforter', others represented their teachers as 'monitors' or 'uninterested observers'. The depiction of a teacher as an uninterested observer is particularly evident in Figure 2.1, taken from Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study, in which the

teacher is drawn facing away from the child and signaling him/ her to stay away, while the child has drawn him or herself as distressed.

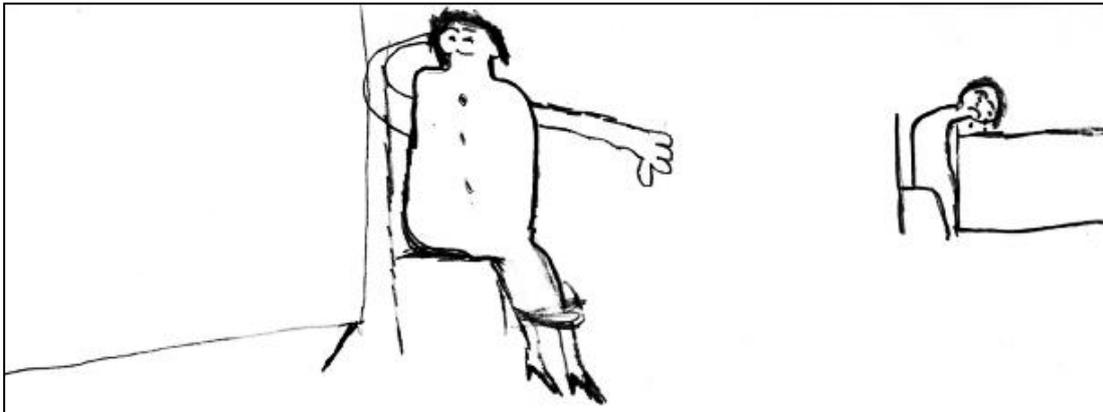


Figure 2.1 Response representing the teacher as an uninterested observer

Foster (2006) also found that some teachers stereotyped those students who were predicted to achieve low scores, which engendered friction between the students and alienation of those who performed poorly in the tests. These students reported that 'we are frustrated with those students who are not trying. We are working our butts off when they are not because they don't care'; 'if those students want to fail, let them stay behind. Just don't punish the rest of us for their failure', and that 'the school should just get rid of those thugs and gangsters' (p. 150). Finally, she observed the way in which the school drew from the unfortunate stereotype of parents in low SES communities failing to involve themselves in their children's education. This resulted in entirely unidirectional messages from the school to the parents, who were treated as though they were compliant children.

In Australia, Wyn et al. (2014) also observe that 'NAPLAN has an especially strong imprint on the quality of relationships in schools and on the relationship between schools and their communities' (p. 31). This shift in the quality of relationships is particularly evident in some students' experience of a sense of exclusion and failure, and in some cases, the creation of an 'us and them' relationship between schools and parents.

The effects of high-stakes testing on children

This section of the literature review describes several studies which were conducted in relation children's and/or young people's experiences of high-stakes testing in England, the US and Australia. Data analysis within these studies produced several common themes, which will be outlined in the subsequent section.

The first study is the independent *Cambridge Primary Review* conducted in England in 2009. Published as *Children, Their World, Their Education*, this research explored children's opinions of their schools and their learning, including assessment, through submissions and community soundings which involved 19 sessions with 197 children (Alexander, 2010).

In the US, Wheelock, Haney and Bell (2002) explored middle and secondary school students' experiences of high-stakes testing regimes in the US through drawings produced by the students in grades 4, 8 and 10. The responses produced a range of categories, including anxiety, anger, and boredom (Wheelock, Bebell, & Haney, 2000). However, the findings of this study must be treated with caution, as the meanings of the children's drawings were inferred by the researchers, rather than explicitly stated by students.

Triplett and Barksdale (2005) consequently refined this approach in their study, *Third through sixth graders' perceptions of high-stakes testing*, which encapsulated the responses of 225 children through a drawing of their testing experience and writing about their drawing on the day immediately after the test. This approach allowed for students' descriptions of their own drawings, reducing the need to rely on researcher interpretation (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). Foster's (2006) study explored how junior Latino students negotiated the demands of high-stakes testing, specifically the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, predominantly from their own perspectives. This was achieved through the researcher's role as a participant observer within a case study situated in a low SES school.

Much of the Australian research pertaining to the effects of NAPLAN on children has, to date, relied on teachers' observations and accounts of parent and student reports of specific problems associated with the tests. The first of these was Athanasou's (2010) study, which explored the impact of NAPLAN and MySchool through two

nationwide surveys, which were prepared separately for teachers and principals in independent and Catholic schools. Within these systems, some elite schools begin their intake in Year 5 and therefore request the children's Year 3 NAPLAN results as part of the enrolment process. This study provided insights into systemic differences in the effects of NAPLAN on children.

The first phase of another study, the *Effects of NAPLAN* project (Thompson, 2012), examined the impact of NAPLAN on schools and classrooms through the perceptions of 961 teachers within Government, Catholic and Independent schools in Western Australia and South Australia who participated in a voluntary online survey. This study found that 51% of teachers reported increased student stress, indicating that NAPLAN is having a significant impact upon many children.

Thompson emphasises that as the survey was voluntary in nature, care must be taken with the generalisability of the data. However, he draws attention to the significance of the concerns which emerged from the survey 'not just because teachers perceive these effects, but because the findings are consistent with international research about the negative effects of high-stakes testing' (p. 7).

The Whitlam Institute Report, *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high-stakes testing on school students and their families* (Dulfer et al., 2012), explored educators' views about NAPLAN through an online survey, which was sent to all members of the Australian Education Union and Independent Education Unions in each state. Data pertaining to the impact of the tests on children's health and well-being were drawn from the numbers of students and parents who had directly reported particular problems associated with the NAPLAN tests. This phase of the study was followed by an exploration of the effects of NAPLAN on children and young people through semi-structured interviews with the children and young people themselves (Wyn et al., 2014). These interviews were conducted with 22 and 25 children in Years 5 and 7 respectively, and 23 young people in Year 9 at a range of State, Catholic and Independent schools in Victoria and New South Wales.

Common themes

Together, these studies produced common themes which can be placed into two distinct categories. The first of these is children's and young people's experience of

taking the tests, which encompasses sub-themes relating to children's and young people's experiences of tests as high-stakes, test preparation, test formats, level of difficulty, protocols of standardised testing – particularly isolation and time, and finally, test results. The second of these themes relates to children's and young people's responses to these experiences, which incorporates the sub-themes of emotion and learning outcomes. While research of this kind remains quite sparse, there is evidence to suggest that children's and young people's experiences of, and responses to, high-stakes tests are varied (Alexander, 2010; Wheelock et al., 2000; Wyn et al., 2014), with some students reporting that they 'were confident and thought of tests as interesting challenges, [while] others worried that they might do badly' (Alexander, 2010, p. 149).

Children's and young people's experiences of tests as high-stakes

Students in high SES schools are implicitly advantaged by high-stakes testing, as their cultural capital matches that of assumptions regarding prior knowledge and experiences which underpin the test design. Research in England and Australia nevertheless suggests that students in high SES schools may experience tests as high-stakes even when results are strong. This can occur when parental aspirations to enrol their children in their school-of-choice are compounded by the neoliberal market logic of competition (Rowe & Windle, 2012; Windle, 2009).

Wyn et al. (2014) found that NAPLAN was high-stakes for high achieving or aspirational children, particularly those in Year 5 in New South Wales. In New South Wales there are a number of highly desirable selective government secondary schools, which top all of the league tables of academic performance. Some children 'referenced the role of NAPLAN scores and individual performance as a significant consideration in gaining access or a 'selective' or 'partial selective' secondary school in their area' (p. 23). A small number of students in Wyn et al.'s study who self-reported as high achievers also expressed concerns regarding 'how you compare with others in Australia' and more specifically '... if I'm in the top group. I would worry and be upset if I wasn't' (p. 23). However overall, primary school-aged children were 'generally unsure about the purpose of NAPLAN ... citing confusion about ... why it only happened in certain years and uncertainty about what it meant if they performed poorly' (p. 23).

As a result of the mis-match between the cultural capital inherent within the tests and that of low SES communities, students in these communities are more likely to face consequences of poor test performance, such as grade retention or the requirement to attend summer school (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

Further, they are also more likely to experience the pressures associated with the extent to which teachers and schools experience standardised tests as high-stakes. Nichols and Berliner (2007) observe that these pressures on students to perform well on a single test raise their stress levels beyond what is considered reasonable, resulting in teachers' and administrators' engagement 'in all sorts of creative efforts aimed at reducing their students' level of stress' (p. 161).

Through her carefully detailed descriptions of Parker High School's approach to the TAKS, Foster (2006) provided insights into the ways in which students in low SES communities experience high-stakes tests. This included a prep rally that took place in the school cafeteria, which had been decorated with ribbons, where adults were handing out raffle tickets and the school band were waiting to perform, as the following scenario unfolded.

... With the help of a student, the science teacher sets fire to tissue paper with a lighter ... 'Don't let your dreams go up in smoke, pass the TAKS. You can do it' ... Seven cheerleaders ... smile, wave, and begin their cheer routine. 'Let's pass the TAKS', 'Push your skills', 'We are the almighty Panthers and we will prevail!'. 'BEAT the TAKS!' 'Attack the TAKS!' 'Hooray!' They do flips, jumps ... summersaults and then walk off the stage. The audience goes wild with excitement. (Foster, 2006, p. 136)

Despite this attempt to reduce student stress, the school nevertheless appeared to draw simultaneously from the stereotypical view that parents in low SES schools fail to involve themselves in their children's education, and the claim that fear of punishment automatically leads to motivation to succeed. Foster described the consequent message, which was unambiguously intended to 'instil in the minds of the students and parents the importance of performing well on the tests' (p. 131).

Students, this is the test of your lives ... The school will look terribly bad if we do not score well ... the first time we make an error ... people will come out of the woodwork and say, you see, you see, what did I tell you, what did I tell

you about those kids at Parker? ... Parents I need your support. Insist that your kids be serious about this test. (Foster, 2006, p. 138)

The findings of Foster's (2006) study indicate that this rally was not an isolated instance of reminding students of the importance of TAKS results. Rather, her observations suggested that students appeared to be 'mentally exhausted from the bombardment of TAKS messages they receive on a daily basis' (p. 197). The students' reports supported Foster's observations, with many asking, 'Why do teachers bug us about getting a diploma? They drill it into us about this test. We are so tired of it' (p. 197).

Foster (2006) also found that many students feel that they are being held responsible for their teachers' job security, with students conveying that '[teachers] tell us that if we don't pass TAKS, they will lose their job. How is that supposed to make us feel? That means we will be blamed if they are not teaching here next year' (p. 197).

Children's experiences of test preparation

The available literature pertaining to students' experiences of high-stakes testing in the US appears to focus predominantly on their experiences of taking such tests, rather than the preparation which was involved in the lead-up to testing periods. However, more generalised research regarding the effects of high-stakes testing suggests that students in low SES schools experience higher levels of test preparation than their high SES counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This finding is supported by students in Foster's (2006) study, who were acutely aware that their experiences of teaching and learning were very different to those of students in other schools across the city. These students conveyed that, 'you know, in other schools, their students are learning and teachers are teaching' and 'we should be learning like them' (p. 143). Further, these students believed it was unjust that they were restricted to test preparation, arguing that, 'It's not fair that we have to do nothing but TAKS', with one student adding, 'yeah, we're smart too and we can learn other things you know!' (p. 143)

In Australia, students who participated in Wyn et al.'s (2014) study reported varying patterns of test practice in the period leading up to NAPLAN. At one end of the

continuum, some students reported limited use of practice tests and revision. At the other end of this continuum, some students, particularly aspirational or high-achieving students seeking to gain entry to selective or partial selective secondary schools, described a more intensive and thorough preparation program, which commenced in the third or fourth week of the first term of the school year.

These students reported being appreciative of their teachers' efforts, as they 'talked with confidence about being drilled and being taught to memorise processes, for example ... selecting the most likely answer from a multiple choice list' (Wyn et al., 2014, p. 24). In some cases, the thoroughness of this preparation included extending the children's vocabulary to accommodate idiosyncratic language used in NAPLAN. One Year 5 student explained that these words were incorporated into weekly spelling tests, conveying that 'in our spelling tests [our teacher] gave us the words of NAPLAN. And also like hard, really tricky words like 'exposition', 'narratives', 'high modality' words like 'crucial', 'critical', 'vital' [and] 'necessary' (p. 25). The importance of this preparation to the children was evident in the responses of a number of Victorian children in Year 5. These children expressed concerns regarding the reduced preparation they had experienced in that year, as 'they had done a lot more preparation in Year 3 and that that had made it much better and less stressful ... while NAPLAN was still a bit scary, they were less anxious than their friends in the other class' (p. 24).

These children's experiences of NAPLAN preparation contrasted significantly with those of refugee students, who had suffered trauma prior to their arrival in Australia, had low levels of functional English, and in many cases, little recent experience of schooling (Wyn et al., 2014). While these students' own accounts of their experiences of NAPLAN preparation were not included in the final report, one teacher described that their approach was one of focussing on 'explaining basic instructions such as what 'colour in the circle' means' (p. 25).

A combination of the literature regarding students' experiences of tests as high-stakes, and the extent to which they experience test preparation, suggests that variation in test preparation may be due to the extent to which students experience standardised tests as high-stakes.

Children's experiences of taking high-stakes tests

This section outlines the core themes within children's and young people's reports of their experiences of taking high-stakes tests. These themes encompass, firstly, the physical tests, including the format, or presentation of such tests, and their levels of difficulty. The second core theme relates to children's and young people's experiences of the protocols of standardised testing, particularly isolation and time. Some of the children's responses take the form of drawings, which at times incorporate written text. In cases where the quality of the image is poor, making this text difficult to read, it has been copied verbatim style below the image.

Many children who participated in US research on the impact of tests on children included visual representations of tests and their associated accoutrements within their drawings. For example, over half of the students who participated in Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study included such representations. In some cases, these representations were quite detailed, including identifying the particular content area being tested. Three-quarters of the children and young people in Wheelock et al.'s (2000) study similarly included representations of the test booklet, with 41 per cent depicting writing in the booklet, while 12.7 per cent included representations of bubbles to be filled in.

The literature suggests that not all children experience standardised tests as difficult. For example, Triplett and Barksdale (2005) found that 'The words 'easy', 'eazy' or 'EZ' occurred with reasonable regularity, with a small number of children reporting that they genuinely found the tests simple to complete. However, the most common uses of the word 'easy' had ambiguous implications, with some children equating 'easy' with 'boring', a theme which was also evident in Wheelock et al.'s (2000) study (see Figure 2.2).



This is soooo easy! And boring!

Figure 2.2 Response describing a test as 'easy'

As literacy educators, Triplett and Barksdale (2005) argued that some children's descriptions of standardised tests as 'easy' were at odds with the quality of their writing and developmental spellings, which indicated that they were achieving below grade level. For example, one child in Year 3 reported that 'The HST's were welly easy. The since was the eazyest. The math was the hardest. I was afad I was going to fel. We chud gum and we tuck of our shos' [The HST's were really easy. The science was the easiest. The math was the hardest. I was afraid I was going to fail. We chewed gum and took off our shoes] (p. 248).

However, there is evidence to suggest that students are more likely to describe tests as 'hard' than 'easy'. For example, Wheelock et al. (2000) found that students were four times more likely to explicitly describe tests as 'hard', and, reflecting Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study, the words 'tricky' or 'confusing' were often used by students to describe the difficulty of the tests. In some cases, the resulting confusion was represented through the use of question marks, often in thought bubbles (see Figure 2.3); while others drew representations of themselves asking the teacher for help (see Figure 2.4).



Figure 2.3 Response representing a test as difficult



Figure 2.4 Response asking for help

The reasons for these difficulties appear to relate to several central themes within the literature. For example, Triplett and Barksdale (2005) found that some descriptions of high-stakes tests as difficult related to specific content areas, with 'the most common comments [relating to] difficulty in mathematics' (p. 248). Wyn et al. (2014) conversely found that descriptions of difficulties related to two themes within the children's and young people's responses. The first of these was the idiosyncratic language used in NAPLAN, with students consistently reporting that the tests were 'really hard to understand because they use strange language' (p. 24). The second theme related to several students' reports that 'the tests also included work that they have never been taught' (p. 27). These students' reports were supported by a principal in Athanasou's (2010) study who argued the following:

It is unreasonable to test students on work that has not been covered in the syllabus in the NAPLAN. eg: Year 7 algebra is not covered until August (correct sequencing of topics determines this) yet a considerable number of the questions in the NAPLAN cover this. (p. 7)

These responses are not only suggestive of disconnect between curriculum content and standardised tests, but raise the issue of tests which are either implemented prior to, or determine the curriculum. The literature provides credible evidence to suggest that in order to be valid and reliable, tests must be diagnostic and 'built around what is actually taught to students' (Job, 2008, p. 5).

Children's and young people's experiences are not limited to taking the physical test, but also encompass the context in which this testing occurs, which includes the formal testing protocols inherent within high-stakes testing regimes. Two core themes of isolation and time were present in the responses of many children and young people in this regard.

'Isolation' is defined within the literature in terms of physical, rather than emotional isolation, which was not described by the students *per se*, but was represented in children's drawings. Drawings were classified in this manner if they 'included an individual sitting at a desk, with no one else included in the drawing (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 254), thereby depicting test-taking as a solitary experience (see Figure 2.5) (Wheelock et al., 2000).

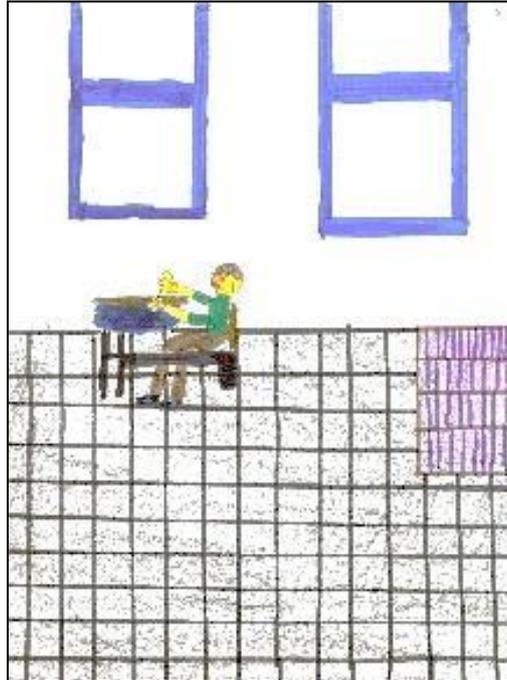


Figure 2.5 Representation of high-stakes testing as a solitary experience

Isolation was a prevalent theme within these children's and young people's responses, with 55 per cent of student drawings in Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study, and 70.7 per cent of those in Wheelock et al.'s (2000) study including this type of representation in their responses. Triplett and Barksdale (2005) note that while such representations were likely, given the nature of high-stakes testing, the majority of these contributions included children's representations of themselves as very small (see Figure 2.6).



This is a tough one

Figure 2.6 Representation of self as disproportionately small

Citing specialists in the interpretation of projective drawings, who agree that 'tiny drawings, much smaller than average for the relevant age group, may indicate inadequacy, inferiority, low self-esteem, anxiety or depression' (Thomas & Silk, 1990, p. 112), the researchers inferred that these drawings represented feelings of personal inadequacy (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005).

The second dominant theme within the literature pertaining to the protocols of high-stake testing is time, which encompassed two further themes. The first of these related to students' fear of running out of time to complete the tests. For example, one student described that

I felt as if time was slipping through my fingers. I tried to stay calm. To pass THE HST you had to read carefully. But because there was only 55 minutes to complete it, I thought I was a goner. (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 253)

Other students represented their fear of running out of time by drawing clocks or the remaining minutes displayed on the board, with the caption, 'time's up!' (See Figure 2.7) (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005).

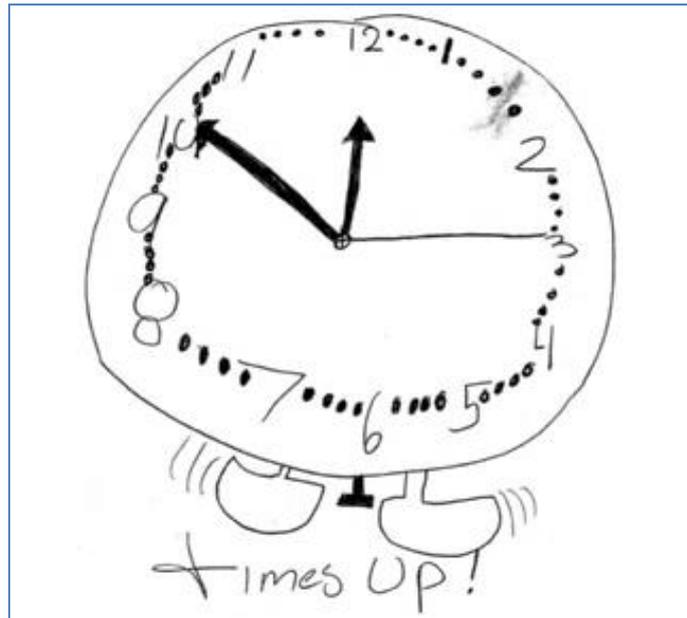


Figure 2.7 Representation of time

Wheelock et al. (2002) also found that many students described the tests as 'too long'. For example, the child who contributed the response in Figure 2.8 drew herself with a representation of a MCAS test booklet comprised of 6,021,000 pages.



Figure 2.8 Representation of a test that took too long

While some students included representations of themselves asking, 'Is it over yet?' others alluded to the repetitious nature of the MCAS testing period, exclaiming 'not the MCAS again' or 'No not again!' (Wheelock et al., 2000)

Children's responses to high-stakes tests

The children's and young people's responses to their experiences of high-stakes testing can be essentially categorized into two core themes. The first of these is emotion, commonly reported as the 'most prevalent category that emerged through the data analysis procedures' (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 244). The second is learning outcomes, defined here not in terms of standardised test scores or improved results on school-based assessments, but the ways in which high-stakes tests affected authentic learning experiences. This related predominantly to students' self-reported levels of engagement with the tests. Both of these themes incorporate positive and negative elements.

Emotion

Historically, theoretical and empirical studies have tended to study cognitive and affective systems in isolation, rather than exploring their powerful symbiotic relationships. Through their work in psychology, Blanchette and Richards (2010) assert that 'this partition may have stemmed from the early conceptual distinctions between reason and passion, with its implicit hierarchical distinction' (p. 276). They argue that current research confirms the relationship between cognition and emotion, and as such, the transactional interplay of these variables 'impacts upon the four key processes of interpretation, judgment, decision making and reasoning' (p. 308). The children and young people who participated in the studies described earlier expressed a variety of positive and negative emotions within their responses. In order to fully understand these responses, brief discussions of these commonly-reported emotions are included here.

Children's and young people's reports of positive experiences of standardised testing are mixed within the research literature. On the one hand, Triplett and Barksdale (2005) found that expressions of happiness, described within the literature as 'a cognitive construction which the individual puts together from his [or her] various experiences' (Veenhoven, 1984, p. 7), were rarely described and typically expressed

conditionally. For example, some children reported that 'I was happy we got to chew gum' and 'I liked the ice cream party after the test' (p. 247). Wheelock et al. (2000) (see Figure 2.9) and Foster (2006) reported similar findings, with some students portraying themselves as happy and/ or relieved only when the tests were over.



Figure 2.9 Response representing happiness that tests were over

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that some students genuinely look forward to such tests, with younger children showing a greater tendency to be positive about them (Alexander, 2010). The most prevalent positive emotion reported by the children and young people in these studies is confidence, which is generally accepted as 'having a feeling or belief that you can do something well or succeed at something' (2015).

Aligning with Alexander's (2010) finding that younger children tend to be more positive about testing, Wheelock et al. (2000) found that younger children were also slightly more likely to depict themselves as confident test takers. However, the authors emphasise that given their small sample size, this difference was not statistically significant. The authors also found that while few children and young

people expressed confidence in themselves as test-takers overall, some students represented themselves as confident and motivated within their drawings. For example, in Figure 2.10, a child in Wheelock et al.'s (2000) study has drawn herself 'working hard to get a good grade'.



It's not too hard, just right! MCAS rules! Wow! I'm working hard to get a good grade.

Figure 2.10 Response incorporating confidence and motivation

Alexander (2010) also found that some children thought of tests as interesting challenges. Moreover, the findings of the Whitlam Institute Report similarly suggest that some children and young people were 'interested in their progress and how they compared to other students' (Wyn et al., 2014, p. 28).

Students' accounts of their experiences of high-stakes testing in the research literature are dominated by negative emotions, with anxiety the most frequent expression of emotion. Anxiety is defined as an adaptive response to stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which causes 'information processing [to be] geared towards identifying potential threats and minimising potential negative outcomes' (Blanchette & Richards, 2010, p. 309). Nervousness was the most prevalent

expression of anxiety within these studies, which was commonly represented through drawings of wavy-line mouths and sweating (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005) (see Figure 2.11), and descriptions of the tests as 'nerve-wracking'.

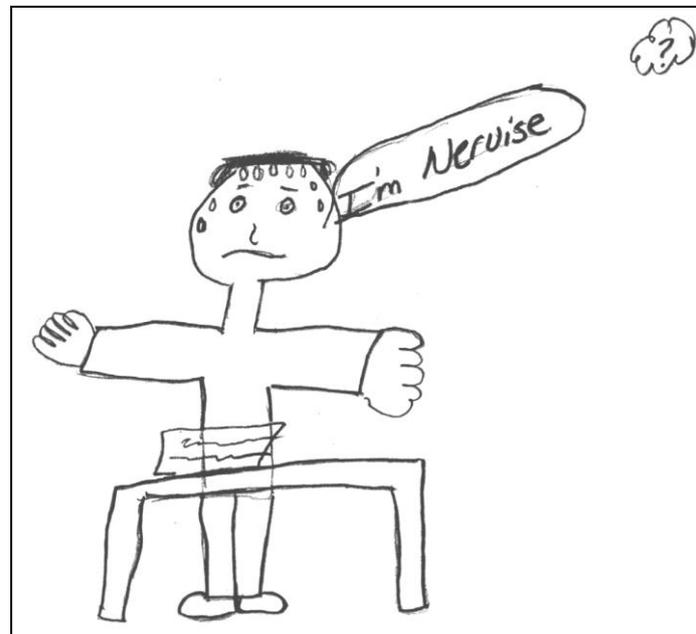


Figure 2.11 Representation of nervousness

Students reported feeling nervous in relation to a range of issues, including 'not having enough time to finish, not being able to figure out the answers, and not passing the test' (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 244), in addition to the fear of having to attend summer school (Wheelock et al., 2000). Alexander (2010) found that children were also 'acutely aware that SAT results were important for their schools and teachers' (p. 149). While this reflected England's focus on results as a judgment on schools, the children often saw these results as a judgment on themselves, with some children asking to stay home from school.

Athanasou's (2010) study included reports of 'one Year 3 student [who] was under so much pressure from his parents that he sat and cried during the first test' (p. 12), and the need for teachers to

... counsel several students who believed that their personal NAPLAN results would be displayed on MySchool. They were very stressed and anxious, even after I assured them that it was school averages, not personal results that were displayed. The students felt that even this placed pressure on them to do well – that they would be seen as achieving the results on MySchool, and potentially labelled according to them. (p. 12)

Wyn et al. (2014) found that while the majority of students 'generally got through it without too many issues' (p. 27), some reported significant stress which they directly associated with NAPLAN. Reflecting the findings of research in England and the US, students reported several underlying causes of this stress, including the significance placed on test performance, concerns regarding weaknesses in a particular area of the curriculum and/ or fears relating to not being able to complete the test in time.

In some instances, this anxiety was manifest in physical responses, which occur when threat is perceived and 'the limbic system provides an automatic, uncontrolled reaction ... acting as a circuit breaker between the prefrontal cortex (centre for purposeful thought in the brain) and the limbic (emotional centre of the brain) systems' (Burge & Heath, 2008, p. 969). As a result, fear causes an increase in both heart rate and blood pressure (McKay, Rogers, & McKay, 1989). Physical responses reported by students included an inability to sleep the night before the test, hyperventilation, feeling faint or dizzy, nausea, headaches and some reports of students feeling that they felt like crying.

Reports from Australian students are supported by those from their counterparts in Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) and Wheelock et al.'s (2000) US studies, who reported instances of shaking, which was represented through arcs drawn around children's representations of themselves (see Figure 2.12), or sweating, which in some instances appeared to be quite profuse (see Figure 2.13).



Figure 2.12 Students' representation of shaking



Figure 2.13 Representation of sweating

Anger was the second dominant emotion to emerge from the literature, with older students more likely to convey anger in their responses (Wheelock et al., 2000). Defined as 'a temporary combination of both arousal ... *and* the perceptions and awareness of feeling angry' (author emphasis) (Tavris, 1982, p. 89-90), anger is

elicited by the violation of an expectation for how things should be (Laurent & Menzies, 2013) and therefore shares the same root as anxiety (Bowlby, 1973). The reasons for this anger, which was conveyed through representations of the mouth incorporating teeth, and inwardly turned eyes, as well as the use of jagged lines (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005) (see Figure 2.14), were consistent across the studies described here. Students reported anger in relation to the length and level of difficulty of the tests, not being able to communicate with their friends, and the potential consequences of failure.



Figure 2.14 Depiction of anger

Some students in US research expressed both their anger and their desire to gain power over their situation through representations of themselves burning the tests (see Figure 2.15) (Wheelock et al., 2000). Triplett and Barksdale (2005) found that these types of representations were more prevalent in contexts where the stakes were higher for the students, indicating that these students ‘were experiencing feelings of greater powerlessness’ (p. 256).

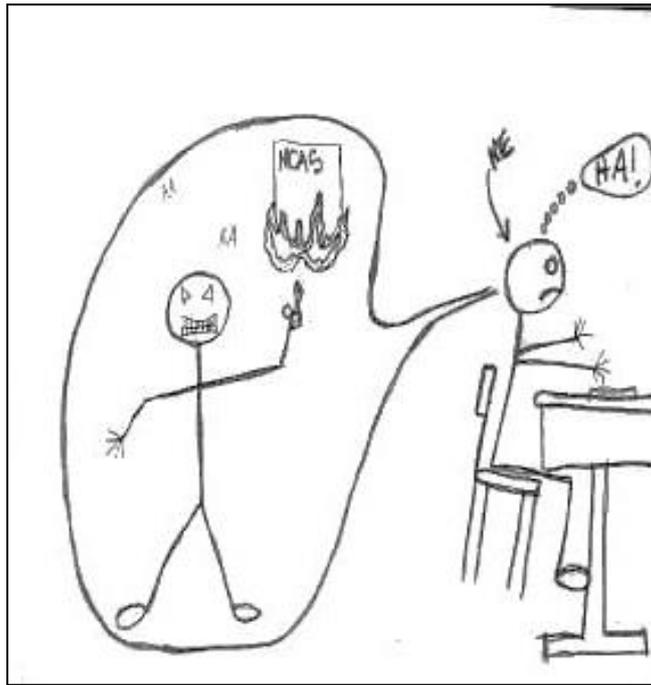


Figure 2.15 Representation of burning a test

Finally, some children expressed sadness, which ‘focuses on the appraisal of loss of one or more goals’ (Power & Dalgleish, 1997, p. 236), and is the most likely emotion to be experienced in combination with other basic emotions such as anger, which as described previously, is directly linked to anxiety (Power & Dalgleish, 1997). These responses contained explicit references to the length and difficulty of the tests and students’ pessimistic anticipation of failure, grade retention or a poor score (see Figure 2.16) (Wheelock et al., 2000).



Figure 2.16 Response depicting sadness and disappointment

These students' negative emotional responses to their experiences of high-stakes testing raise concerns relating to two central issues within high-stakes testing regimes. The first concern is the health and well-being of children who are required to undertake high-stakes testing regimes. Second, the effects of intensely negative emotion on children's ability to engage in the processes of interpretation, judgment, decision making and reasoning, as described by Blanchette and Richards (2010). Finally, children's hindered ability to effectively engage in these processes raises questions relating to the validity of these children's test results in addition to the quality of these students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are referred to here in terms of the ways in which high-stakes tests affected authentic learning experiences, rather than improved scores in standardised tests or school-based assessments. These effects related primarily to the students' level of engagement with the tests.

There is evidence to suggest that younger children are more likely to report engagement with high-stakes tests. For example, Wheelock et al. (2000) found that 21.5 per cent of fourth graders portrayed themselves as diligent and persistent test

takers, compared with 8.3 per cent of eighth and tenth graders. Some of these students drew representations of themselves thinking and utilising problem solving skills, such as weighing up various answers to problems (see Figure 2.17) (Wheelock et al., 2000).



Figure 2.17 Representation of problem solving

Students' reports of negative learning outcomes were classified into two themes within these studies. The first of these, reported predominantly by older students, was that high-stakes testing was a waste of time. These students believed that time spent in testing as well as preparing for the tests was time which was stolen from their learning (Wheelock et al., 2000). Foster (2006) similarly found that 'students believe that real learning is being sacrificed for TAKS scores' (p. 143), with students reporting that, 'I am tired of doing TAKS, TAKS, TAKS. I am not learning anything' (p. 143) and 'we learned that this test is so important, important enough to stop learning' (p. 144). These students' descriptions were supported by those of the teachers, who also reported that test preparation took time away from 'real' teaching and learning, and that this test-focused environment was having a detrimental impact

on the students and their learning. In some cases, the teachers blamed themselves for this outcome, conveying that 'I've asked students what was the last thing they learned? I mean really learned. They can't answer that. We did this to them, the school and the teachers' (p. 145).

The second theme relating to negative learning outcomes in the research was a lack of motivation to successfully complete the tests, with older students in particular representing and/ or describing themselves as bored (Wheelock et al., 2000) (see Figure 2.18) or disengaged.



This is so boring.

Figure 2.18 Representation of boredom

Disengagement was often represented through drawings of students sleeping during the tests (see Figure 2.19) or daydreaming about things unrelated to the tests (Wheelock et al., 2000). Wheelock et al. also found that in some cases, students described feeling fresh and eager at the beginning of the testing period, but that this enthusiasm depleted and they became careless as the protracted testing continued.



This is so boring. I wish I didn't have to do this!

Figure 2.19 Representation of disengagement

Foster's (2006) study provides evidence to suggest that students in lower SES schools may be more likely to disengage from high-stakes tests, as public constructions of their abilities appear to weigh heavily on their minds. These students reported that, 'We keep hearing we aren't going to pass the test and everybody thinks we are going to fail this, so why bother?' (p. 151)

Conclusion

The negative effects of high-stakes testing regimes, which are not generated by the tests *per se*, but through how the results are used, are evident in two core themes within the literature. The first of these is the distortion and corruption of the data, which involves cheating and 'gaming' the system, in addition to the exclusion of low performing students, differential test preparation, and educational triage. These effects, combined with the errors inherent within test construction and scoring, raise

serious concerns regarding the validity and reliability of test scores generated by high-stakes testing.

The second core theme within the literature is the negative effects of the tests on teachers' professional practices. These effects encompass narrowed curricula and pedagogies, engendering impoverished learning outcomes, particularly for students in culturally diverse and low SES schools, as their schooling becomes characterised by intensive test preparation.

While research pertaining directly to children's experiences of taking high-stakes tests remains quite sparse, the findings of these studies combine to suggest that the negative impact of such regimes on many students is a strong pattern within the available data. Children's and young people's reports of their experiences of taking high-stakes tests suggest that the pressures to perform on such tests are greatest at both ends of the SES continuum. On one end of this continuum, students in high SES schools are pressured to ensure they meet academic requirements for enrolment into their parents' secondary school-of-choice, while students in low SES schools, particularly in the US, face grade retention or the requirement to attend summer school in the event of poor performance.

Some students' reports of shifts in their teachers' curricula and pedagogies in the lead-up to the tests suggest that these changes have a negative impact on the quality of learning outcomes, particularly in low SES schools, where students' school lives are most dominated by test preparation. Further, these negative shifts in their teachers' professional practices have an equivalent negative effect on the students' relationships with their teachers and in some cases, their peers.

Finally, this review of the literature demonstrates that children's and young people's responses to high-stakes testing regimes, which encompass the core themes of emotion and engagement, are overwhelmingly negative, with many students becoming disenfranchised with, and consequently disengaging from, high-stakes tests and their associated preparation; impacting further on learning outcomes. The literature provides evidence to suggest that, in combination, these negative effects of high-stakes testing regimes engender negative emotional responses which hinder students' ability to engage in the key processes required, not only for optimum test

performance, but to improve the quality of their learning experiences. Research additionally suggests that this combination of unintended negative consequences of high-stakes testing results in a negative shift in the range of relationships inherent within and between schools and their communities, which impact further on the overall quality of students' learning experiences.

With the benefit of hindsight gained through the experiences of England and the US, NAPLAN was designed as a low-stakes test to identify student levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, the use of the tests for accountability purposes, the negotiation of rewards payments and Australia's burgeoning testing industry have launched NAPLAN on a high-stakes trajectory. As a result, the developing research literature pertaining to the impact of NAPLAN has identified issues that largely parallel the English and US experiences of high-stakes testing. To date, this research has focussed predominantly on education systems, schools, school leaders and teachers. As a result, there is a gap in the Australian literature regarding children's lived experiences of NAPLAN, as the few studies which have explored the impact of the tests on children have relied largely on adult perspectives. This study aims to address this gap by exploring children's lived experiences of NAPLAN through the utilisation of research methods that prioritise children's voices.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the research design, which provided the foundations on which to develop a methodology that was open to flexibilities and ambiguities, yet robust in its ability to enhance our understandings of the ways in which children experience NAPLAN. The first section proceeds with a discussion of the theoretical, epistemological and ontological contexts and frameworks in which children and childhood are conceptualised by adults and used as a foundation on which to judge children's capacity to make autonomous decisions. I then focus on the conceptual and methodological frameworks of the study. The methodology includes considerations of Gallacher and Gallagher's (2008) proposal for a constitutionally unfinished ontology, Hacking's (1999) proposal for an enactivist epistemology, and the utilisation of a case study approach.

In the second section of the chapter methods are considered, including the justification for the site and participant selection. This research is founded on the rationale of valuing children's participation and positions children as competent and valid contributors to research regarding the impact of NAPLAN on the stakeholders in Australian education. Such an approach necessarily extends to considerations of equity in the selection of the child participants (Phillips, 2014). This means including 'not only the few [children] who already have the cultural, social and intellectual resources to be visible and audible' (Groundwater-Smith, 2011, p. 54), but also those who have special needs (Badham, 2004), are marginalised, seen as 'difficult', or reside in low SES communities (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, 2011).

In this study, different methods were utilised to elicit the children's responses and to contextualise them in relation to the perceptions, beliefs and actions of significant adults in the children's lives, as well as those associated more broadly with their education. This approach has been refined by an understanding that it is not the role of methods to 'lay [such methods] bare as if they were so many aspects of a single reality ... [rather,] they are different versions of the object ... multiple forms of reality' (Mol, 1999, p. 77).

Ethical considerations of the study are addressed in the third section, with a special focus on those which are specific to the inclusion of children in the study. These involve striking and maintaining a balance between safeguarding the children's positioning within this research, and issues surrounding child protection. Finally, the thematic approach to the analysis of the different types of data is discussed.

Critiquing the notion of 'student voice': Situating children within the study

In order to explore children's lived experiences of NAPLAN, I begin by considering the unique positioning of children within research. The primary focus of this study requires the inclusion of the 'student voice', also referred to as 'pupil voice' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Lipman, 2004), which is founded on the social justice principles of 'inclusion, or membership, of a community, in which pupils are valued and respected contributors' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 5).

There has been a substantial increase in the popularity and institutionalisation of children's participation in research over the last few decades in Northern Europe, Australia and particularly the UK (Raby, 2014), where 'the requirement to consult children and young people is increasingly being put into statute' (Tisdall & Davis, 2004, p. 131). While 'participation' is generally viewed as a positive attribute of research with children, it is argued that enthusiasm for this emergent practice has elicited limited methodological reflection on both the meaning of the term and oft-cited claims regarding the extent to which various forms of 'participation' 'empower' children (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). As the notion of children's participation becomes increasingly widespread, it is evident that: (1) the rhetoric surrounding participation is not always matched by practice (Lundy, 2007; Mannion, 2007); and (2) the uncritical adoption of this approach risks thwarting the ethical principles on which it is founded (Groundwater-Smith, 2011; Raby, 2014).

The most palpable issue is evidence which suggests that the notion of 'student voice' is becoming a 'bandwagon' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), with superficial and tokenistic enactments of children's participation comprising 'much of what purports to employ the voices of young people' (Groundwater-Smith, 2011, p. 55). Experiences of student voice to date suggest that without careful critique, the notion of 'student voice' may merely serve to reinforce conventional constructions of childhood

(Cruddas, 2007), which are based on the rationale of children's immaturity and ignorance, denying the legitimacy of their knowledge (Rogers & Rogers, 1992).

Fielding (2011) argues that 'if we reflect on the slide from public service to private profit, from engaged citizen to querulous consumer in the light of neoliberalism's global ambitions, another reading of the rise of student voice begins to emerge' (p. 63). This slide is evidenced in the frequent focus on and rewarding of middle-class based participatory skills, with the aim of managing childhood to produce consumers rather than citizens (Badham, 2004; Raby, 2014; Sinclair, 2004). This raises ethical questions of the potential exclusion of children from collectivist cultures (Raby, 2014); 'vulnerability and the extent to which young people may be manipulated or coerced' (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 113); and increased governance of children and young people as they partake in the processes used to regulate them (Bessant, 2003; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Raby, 2014). These issues highlight the need to proceed with caution in both the interpretation and enactment of this emergent practice, as well as diligence in monitoring progress. In order to achieve a more critical orientation to children's participation, I begin by deconstructing the term 'student voice'.

Within Anglophone nations, 'those to whom schools are meant to offer life chances and access to powerful knowledges are variously called children and young people, students, pupils and learners' (Thomson, Lingard, & Wrigley, 2012, p. 9). Through the review of the literature presented in Chapter Two, it is evident that these terms are used interchangeably and thus are generally treated as synonymous. However, Biesta's (2010) question, *what should we call those who are the subjects of education, and does it matter?* raises the issue of 'making language problematic in order to precipitate insight and debate' (Thomson et al., 2012, p. 9).

The rise of the word 'learner' is part of what Biesta (2010) has termed the 'new language of learning', which refers to children as learners, teachers as facilitators of learning and schools as places of learning. Biesta argues that what matters in calling someone who is the subject of education a 'learner' is not that something needs to be learned, but the construction of that person as lacking the very capacity to learn without the explications of an educator. Further, the word 'student' transforms this construction from 'someone whose intelligence is subordinated to

another ... [to someone who] is summoned to *study* and thus, in the most literal sense, has become the *student* (original emphasis) (p. 545), through what Ranciere (1991) describes as the act of revealing intelligence to itself. The term 'pupil' is often taken to be synonymous with 'student' within the literature, particularly in the UK. However, 'in the Australian context, the preferred term is 'students', that is intended to invest them with greater agency than the former designation would suggest' (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 115).

Biesta (2010) also highlights the need to distinguish between those who become students of the explications of others and those who 'follow their own paths in intellectual space' (Ranciere, 1991, p. 59). He argues that this distinction is made in proceeding from the assumption that students are 'speakers', capable of producing their own speech, or 'voice'. While participatory research typically refers to the term 'student voice', I employ the plural form 'voices', which recognises that children's understandings and speech emanate from multiple intersecting positions and experiences based on gender, ethnicity, SES and academic ability (Prout, 2001), and as such, cannot constitute one homogenous 'voice'.

Children are situated in this research according to the notion of students as speakers. However, this construction lacks the holistic approach essential to exploring children's lived experiences of NAPLAN, which are not confined to their classrooms or indeed their schools. I therefore utilise the word 'children' in a manner which recognises students as speakers, while allowing for life beyond the school gates.

The use of the word 'children' also requires some critique, through 'unpacking the cultural discourses through which children's everyday lives, as *children* are constructed' (original emphasis) (James & James, 2012, p. 168). There has been considerable theorising within the literature regarding pre-sociological and sociological constructions of children and childhood, which emanate from the binary constructions of children as 'beings' or 'becomings'. Within social investment societies such as Australia, children are predominantly constructed in traditional, future-oriented terms as 'becomings' who have to progress through normative stages of development before they obtain freedom to speak on their own behalf (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Lee, 2001; Qvortrup, 1997). This construction is founded on

dominant Western theories of developmental psychology (Piaget, 1955), in which 'development is basically unilateral' (Corsaro, 1997, p. 11). Inherent within this imaginary is 'adult suspicion of children's trustworthiness and doubt regarding children's ability to give and receive factual information' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 480).

Within the context of research, this paradigm views children as objects of study, '[reflecting] a genuine, if often paternalistic, desire to protect children as essentially incompetent' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 480). This is particularly evident in Australia, where research with children has come to be

commonly understood as cautious territory ... as children and young people are classified as a special group with specific ethical considerations in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2007), demanding careful attention to their protection rather than their participation in research. (Phillips, 2014, p. 165)

This paradigm is often criticised within participatory research, because while children's many gatekeepers, such as parents and teachers can protect children, they can also silence and exclude them (Alderson, 2004). As a result, children may not be heard for themselves, but in terms of their resemblance to the character of 'the universal child' in Piaget's writings (Lee, 2001).

The construction of children as 'beings' surfaced in the early 1990s within a paradigm shift in the sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1999), which questioned the pervasiveness of a particularised construction childhood (James, 2011) and argued that the popularity of traditional Western views of child development have long outlasted their credibility (Alderson, 1999). This shift has prompted considerable change in theoretical understandings of childhood by recognising that 'children's perspectives are particular to the childhood they experience' (Masson, 2004, p 45). Research conducted within this paradigm, which is underpinned by the rationale of a rights-based approach, views children as competent social actors in their own right, who are actively constructing their own 'childhoods'. While this child-centred perspective is generally favoured within the literature (Mannion, 2007), it remains inadequate, because although children are acknowledged as subjects rather than objects of research, their involvement is still

'conditioned by judgements about their cognitive abilities and social competencies' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481).

Lee (2001) observes that economic, political and social changes brought about by globalisation have generated a climate of uncertainty, in which the 'standard' figures of the 'mature' adult and the 'developing' child are being eroded as childhood becomes more complex and ambiguous, while adulthood becomes increasingly unpredictable and unstable. This climate has engendered a further theoretical shift in which the constructions of children as 'beings' or 'becomings' are increasingly recognised as products of relationships between theories and the times in which they were written, and as such, have become out-dated (Corsaro, 1997; Lee, 2001). The view of 'beings' and 'becomings' as discrete and conflicting discourses is progressively giving way to a complementary theoretical construction of all people, regardless of age, as 'beings' with 'the inherent dignity and worth of the human person' (UN, 1989), who are emergent 'becomings', 'always-unfinished subjects-in-the-making' (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 511). Within this new paradigm, the conceptualisation of children as subjects has been extended to constitute children 'as fellow human beings' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481) and 'active citizens who contribute to society and interact through sophisticated relationships' (Alderson, 1999, p. 198).

This theoretical shift cannot, in and of itself, reverse the unequal power balance between adults and children, within a 'Western society and its institutions in which unequal child-adult relations are inherent and assumed' (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 302). Rather, by conceptualising children 'in the real situation of being present and future agents of their present and future lives' (Uprichard, 2008, p. 312), existing hierarchies of control and competence are mediated (Raby, 2014), thus positioning children as young people who are not only competent, but also valid research participants as co-producers of knowledge. This positioning founded my rationale for this study, which advocates that 'another chair be pulled up, alongside those already present' (Lancaster, 2003, p. 5) in current research regarding the effects of NAPLAN on the stakeholders in Australian education.

Ontological and epistemological positioning of the study

The reconceptualisation of adults and children as constitutionally unfinished, fellow human beings in an increasingly unpredictable and unstable world, requires an ontological shift (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008) away from the dominant common sense view that reality is 'relatively stable, determinate and therefore knowable and predictable' (Law, 2004, p. 144). This explicitly objective understanding of reality, which favours standard research designs that are quantitative and 'scientific' in nature (Lichtman, 2013), predominates within the current climate of an intense focus on numbers, which is fuelled by the political fervour of neoliberal ideologies. The significance of quantitative research is not disputed, as it has revealed clear and definite social inequities (Law, 2004), such as the correlations between low educational standards and poverty (OECD, 2013). However, because this perspective has been 'elevated from being necessary to being sufficient, even exclusive' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 24), it is presumed that the same criteria used to evaluate quantitative research methods should also be applied to qualitative research (Lichtman, 2013). Within this climate, 'talk of 'method' ... tends to summon up a relatively limited repertoire of responses' (Law, 2004), as social science researchers are 'compelled to strive for and legitimate themselves in terms of this ['scientific'] ideal' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 56) through standard research methods.

Of course, standard research methods are not inherently flawed. Rather, the danger of method is its potential to capitulate to the dominant framework of socially recognised standards, which aspire to 'provide a ready answer to controversies' (Lee, 2001, p. 122). When this occurs, 'opportunities for other voices to be heard, for other means of sharing what we learn, and for creativity and new ideas to emerge may be stifled in the interests of wide acceptance' (Lichtman, 2013, p. xx). In order to account for the voices of children, 'researchers must make a firm decision not to apply the dominant framework' (Lee, 2001, p. 47), and focus instead on a broader, more generous sense of method (Law, 2004), which recognises that 'the logic of justification does not dictate what specific data collection and analytical methods researchers must use' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15). Rather, the methodology 'must suit the persons involved in the study, the kind of questions that one wishes to investigate and the specific social and cultural context of the research' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481).

This study rests on Gallacher and Gallagher's (2008) proposal for a constitutionally unfinished ontology of 'emergence', 'becoming' and 'inexpertise', which encompasses an attitude of what might be viewed as 'methodological immaturity'. Within this framework, the concept of 'immaturity' has been critically re-examined to be understood as privileging open-ended processes over predefined techniques. It is argued that the incorporation of such an attitude enhances the potential to challenge the dichotomy of competent adults and incompetent children, because the 'distinction between maturity and immaturity becomes as irrelevant as that between being and becoming' (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 511).

This ontological positioning requires epistemological considerations of the ways in which children attempt to make sense of NAPLAN within unique matrices of cultural, social and personal contexts, which are interwoven with numerous paradoxes and paradigm shifts emanating from enormous sociocultural and geopolitical change. This complexity suggests that a constructivist epistemology, which focuses 'exclusively on the meaning-making of the individual mind' (Crotty, 1998, p. 58), is appropriate. Constructivism espouses that meanings are not discovered, but constructed by people as they make connections and frameworks through which their experiences are filtered and made intelligible (Crotty, 1998; Pring, 2000). This is distinct from constructionism, which focuses on 'the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes' (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127).

Just as the study of 'children's voice' is in danger of becoming a bandwagon, it is argued that the notion of 'construction' has been used excessively and become a fad within research (Hacking, 1999). Hacking argues that this leaves constructivist research open to critique that relativism permits any 'construction', thus minimising opportunities for the interrogation of oppressive ideas. This highlights the need to progress from talk of 'construction', which 'usually implies that objects start without fixed identities but that these converge and so gradually become stabilised as singular in the course of practice, negotiation and/or controversy' (Law, 2004, p. 158), to more complex understandings. Within the wider epistemology of constructivism, I adopted Hacking's (1999) notion of 'enactment', which requires the inclusion of multiplicity by examining the contexts in which different ideas are

constructed. This allows for possible tensions between different enactments and knowledges of reality to be made manifest (Law, 2004), thereby validating the diverse experiences, voices and silences of children (Lancaster, 2003).

Methodology: Case Study

As discussed in previous chapters, research regarding the impact of NAPLAN on children has thus far relied largely on adult perceptions and observations (Athanasou, 2010; Dulfer et al., 2012; Thompson, 2012). While these studies have offered valuable insights into the 'big picture' of the impacts of NAPLAN on children, they cannot answer the question: *What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?* In order to achieve this, I argue that we need to drill deeper, with the thick descriptions and narrative accounts that are generated by case studies (Gannon, 2013).

Case study is defined as the in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection over time, where research is conducted in its natural context (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). It is commonly used when 'a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control' (Yin, 1994, p. 9). Case studies are often critiqued as being an unsuitable basis for generalisation, as while their advantage is depth; their problem is one of breadth (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 1978). Such censure is unsurprising, given the current focus on 'scientific' research designs which hold that generalisation, 'free of the specific constraints of any particular context and therefore applicable to all' (Mishler, 1979, p. 2), is one of the most basic goals of such research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

There is evidence to suggest that a strategic choice of case may, however, add significantly to the generalisability of a study (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, while the primary objective of this study was to understand and 'appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case' (Stake, 1995, p. 16), a secondary focus sought to enhance understandings of how NAPLAN may be impacting on children more generally. This reasoning informed the rationale of developing an instrumental case study, which is defined as representative or typical, in order to encapsulate the circumstances and conditions of a commonplace situation (Yin, 2009).

Queensland was chosen as the context of the study; data collection for which took place during the 2012 school year, since a combination of the implementation of NAPLAN as an accountability agenda and the State government's response to the Masters Review of 2009 have challenged the progressive reforms of the last four decades (see Chapter One). Catholic Education was considered the most appropriate case, as data indicate that Catholic schools hold both average ICSEA values and NAPLAN scores (Bonnor, 2010). This also provided an opportunity to explore the ways in which BCE attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN as identified in the Australian literature (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012).

Drawing on Yin's (2009) model of a single-case study, the research design incorporates multiple embedded units of analysis, which 'can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing insights into the single case' (p. 52). This model was modified to comprise several holistic and self-defining units known as sites, a methodological construct commonly applied in qualitative research designs to describe a unique or special focus (Patton, 1990). These sites consisted of two primary schools serving different SES communities, with the embedded units of analysis comprised of two classes within each school. While the case study aimed to explore children's lived experiences of NAPLAN in Queensland Catholic primary schools, the special focus was on the extent to which the children's experiences contrasted across different SES communities.

Site and participant selection

Selecting participants within the median range of schools was intended to enhance our understandings of how children experience NAPLAN more broadly. However in 2011, the average ICSEA value of Catholic primary and P-12 schools within the Brisbane archdiocese was 1074, which was above the national mean of 1000. This increased the likelihood of an unbalanced focus on the voices of children residing in middle-class communities. In order to ensure that 'participation [was] not just afforded to the articulate and literate' (Lundy, 2007, p. 934), schools were purposefully selected within higher and lower SES communities within this median range, as identified by the schools' ICSEA values.

To achieve this aim, the ICSEA values for all Catholic primary and P-12 schools within the Brisbane Archdiocese during 2011 were recorded in order from lowest to highest and divided into quartiles. Beginning with sites located at the extremes of the highest and lowest quartiles, schools were progressively invited to participate in the study. However, it quickly became apparent that gaining access to schools was going to be more difficult than anticipated. While the principals' responses indicated that the most likely reason was the high workload associated with the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, perceptions of NAPLAN as high-stakes also arose as a potential concern. This was particularly evident in one high SES school where the principal described considerable pressure from parents to maintain the school's high positioning within league tables published by the Brisbane newspaper, the *Courier-Mail*.

Two schools ultimately participated in the study. While not as diverse in SES as initially desired, these schools were nevertheless representative of different SES communities, with one located in the lower-middle quartile and the other in the upper quartile of Catholic primary and P-12 schools within the Brisbane archdiocese, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1.

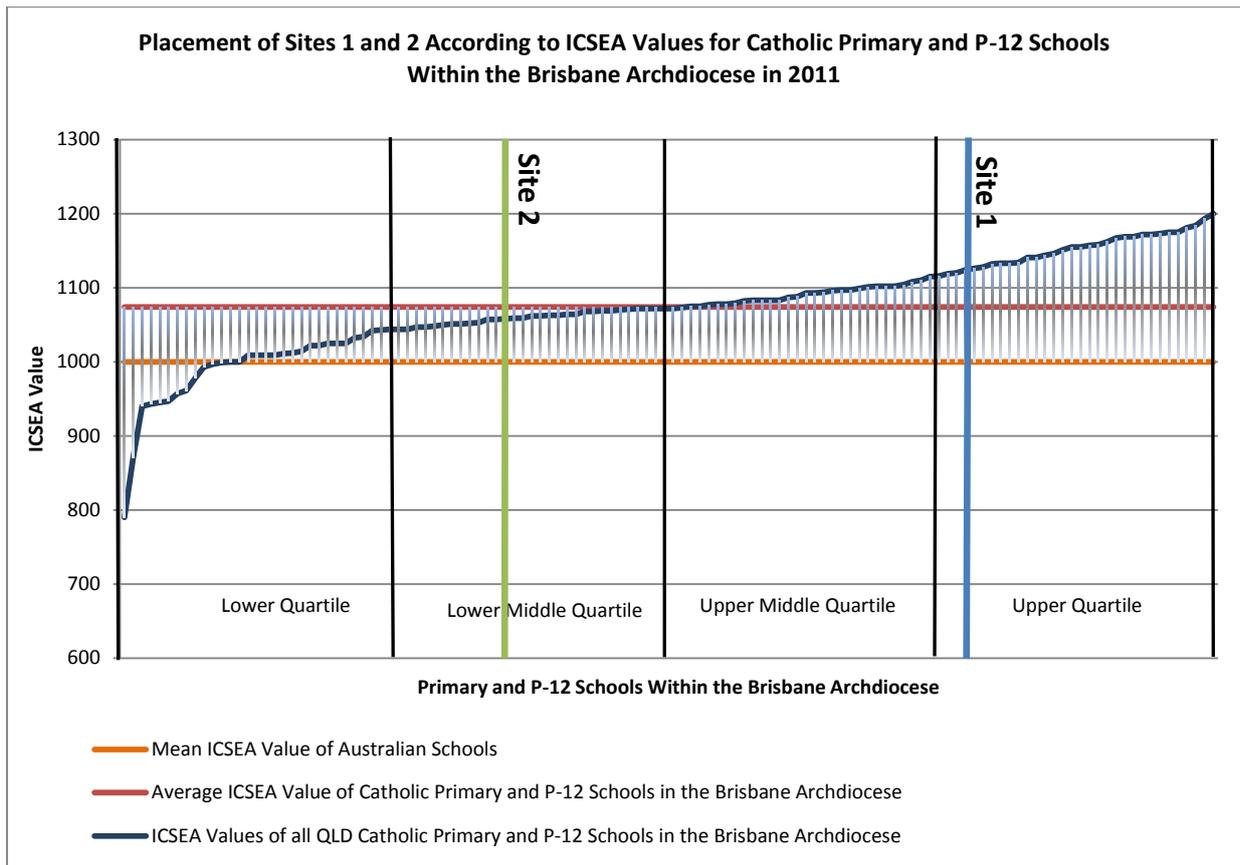


Figure 3.1 Positioning of research sites according to ICSEA values

With only two schools participating, the study was expanded to include two classes, or embedded units of analysis, within each site (Figure 3.2). This not only afforded an opportunity for more children of different ages within the same school to be involved, but provided the benefit of enhancing the likelihood that multiple realities and perspectives within the same school context, as well as potential tensions between them, would surface.

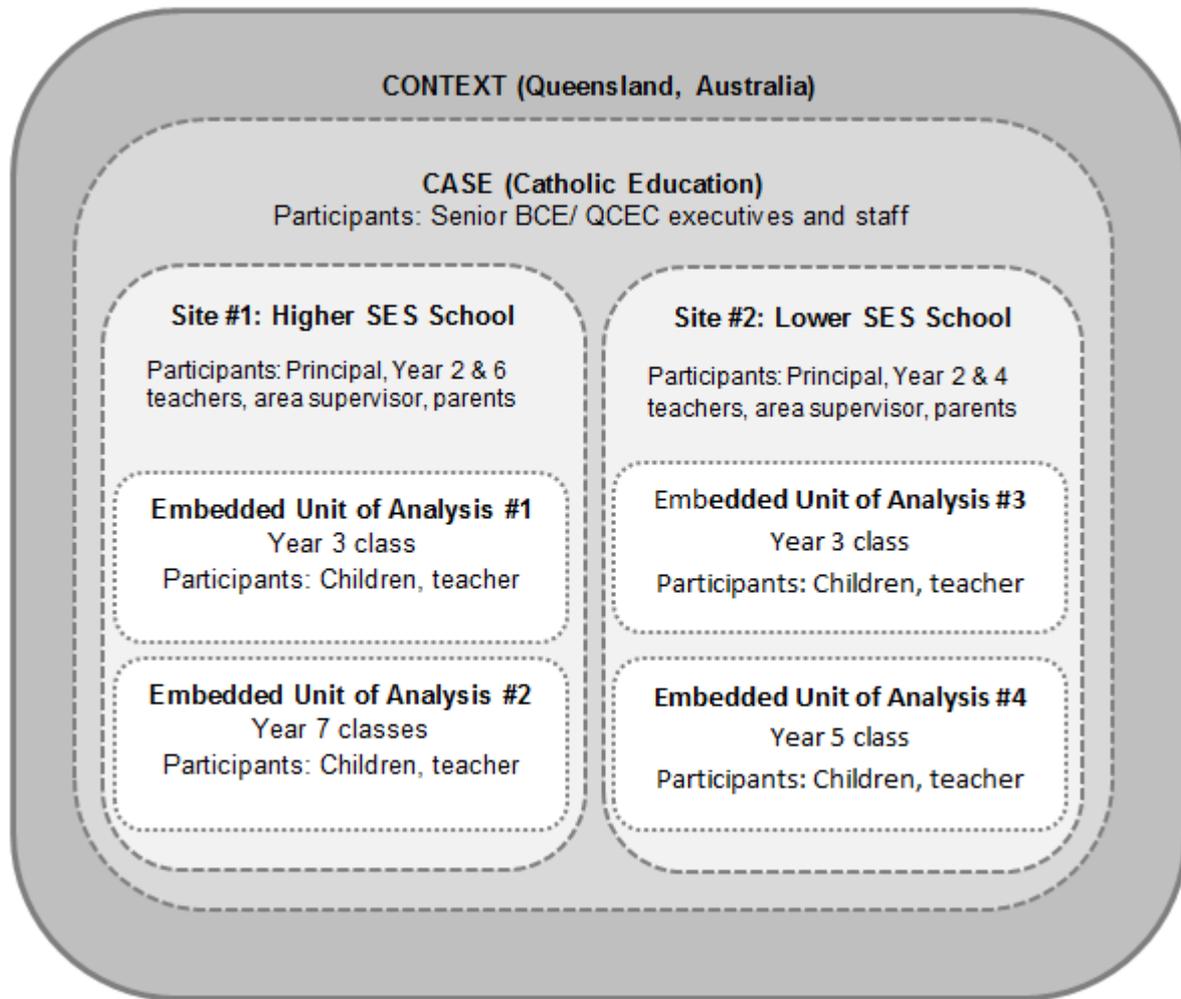


Figure 3.2 Case study design

The case: participants and methods

As described previously, the two schools were representative of different SES communities. The first was located within the upper quartile of Catholic primary and P-12 schools within the Brisbane archdiocese, with over 500 hundred enrolments. This school’s NAPLAN performance in the year prior to this study (see Table 3.1) was comparatively good, with the Year 3 children achieving average or above average results in all domains with the exception of spelling, which was below average in comparison to 56 statistically similar schools. The Year 5 and 7 children scored average or above average results compared to all schools in all domains, however scored below the average of their statistically similar schools in all areas

except persuasive writing. Of the 56 statistically similar schools, only seven were located in Queensland, and only one of these was a Catholic school.

Table 3.1 2011 NAPLAN results for higher SES school

School & class	Reading	Persuasive Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
Higher SES school					
Year 3	465	443	425	466	454
Similar Schools	458	428	440	466	435
Australian Average	418	402	412	426	402
Year 5					
Year 5	524	505	498	539	506
Similar Schools	537	493	520	538	518
Australian Average	501	468	498	504	488
Year 7					
Year 7	582	558	572	575	583
Similar Schools	579	543	570	580	582
Australian Average	546	512	545	543	546

The second school was located in the lower-middle quartile, with just over 400 enrolments. While a substantial portion of these children required significant social, emotional and cognitive support, this was not included on the school's profile on the My School website. This school's NAPLAN performance in the year prior to this study was comparatively poor (see Table 3.2), with the Year 3 children achieving average results only in grammar and punctuation, and below average results in all other areas. In numeracy, the children's average score was well below the average of their 57 statistically similar schools. The Year 5 children achieved below average results in all domains. However their average score for reading, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy were well below that of their statistically similar schools; with their results in numeracy also well below the average for all schools. The Year 7 children achieved above average results as compared to all schools in persuasive writing, and average results compared to their statistically similar schools. In reading, and grammar and punctuation, these children achieved average results as compared to all schools, but below the average of their statistically similar schools.

However in spelling and numeracy, the children’s average was below that of both all schools and their statistically similar schools. Of the 57 statistically similar schools, eight were located in Queensland, and as was the case for the higher SES school, only one of these was a Catholic school.

Table 3.2 2011 NAPLAN results for lower SES school

School & class	Reading	Persuasive Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
Lower SES school					
Year 3	408	359	381	390	378
Similar Schools	428	407	415	433	409
Australian Average	418	402	412	426	488
Year 5					
Year 5	476	439	466	466	468
Similar Schools	509	473	500	509	493
Australian Average	501	468	498	504	488
Year 7					
Year 7	539	496	519	533	524
Similar Schools	550	517	546	548	549
Australian Average	546	512	545	543	546

While the research focuses on the children’s responses, it can be difficult to understand the significance of how a child experiences NAPLAN, or to interpret confidently what a child says about NAPLAN, without some sense of the child’s whole experience of school (Ellis, 2006). The enactivist approach employed in my study addresses this issue by contextualising the children’s responses in relation to parental perceptions and beliefs regarding NAPLAN, as well as those of their teachers and the impact of NAPLAN on their teachers’ professional practices. Since the experiences and beliefs of teachers and parents are in turn largely situated within the social, cultural and material conditions of the schools and the system in which they operate, the principals and senior systemic staff, comprising area supervisors, Directors and CEOs were therefore also included in the study. Interviews with the Year 2, 4 and 6 teachers additionally provided insights into the extent of any backwash effect of NAPLAN into the children’s previous year of schooling.

Child participants

The study had a high rate of participation, with 105 of the 118 children across the two sites who were invited to participate in the study choosing to contribute (see Appendix 6). Of these children, 42 were in Year 3, with 18 and 24 in the lower and higher SES schools respectively. The Year 5 children represented the smallest group, comprising 17 children in the lower SES school. By comparison, 46 Year 7 children in the higher SES school constituted the largest group. This was the result of merging the two Year 7 classes, which occurred because the two teachers worked very closely together in an informal team teaching arrangement, which effectively created a single class. While this had the added benefit of affording more children the opportunity to participate, it resulted in a disproportionate number of children representing the higher SES school, with 70 children in this group as compared to 35 in the lower SES school.

The children could elect to contribute to the study in several ways. First, the children could create a drawing of their NAPLAN experience, and provide a written description of their drawing, although a few children chose to contribute a written response only. The children could also choose to participate in a focus group discussion. The significance of using a range of methods was not to achieve triangulation of data; rather to facilitate the meaningful engagement of children from potentially diverse backgrounds with a wide range of competencies and experiences, and to give the children a choice about how, and to what extent, they wished to participate (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009).

Children's drawings as a Participatory Visual Research Methodology

This part of the data collection involved utilising Participatory Visual Research Methodologies (PVRMs) as a mode of inquiry. PVRMs are informed by the study of a range of visual data including, but not limited to, photography, video, digital storytelling and drawings (Bland, 2012; Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011). While children's drawings have been collected as data and used extensively in clinical and diagnostic research in psychology and psychotherapy for many years (Leitch, 2008), relatively few studies have used drawing as an innovative way to understand children's experiences. As a result, drawing is a minimally explored method, 'with few models of good practice' (Bland, 2012, p. 236).

Following Triplett and Barksdale (2005), the children in my study were invited to create a drawing about their NAPLAN experience after the tests had been completed. This approach is founded on the premise that the simultaneous simplicity and complexity of children's drawings not only provides a rich entry point for engaging children in issues that are important to them (Mitchell et al., 2011), but recognises that the limits of children's cognition are not defined by the limits of their language development (Eisner, 2002).

The term 'artwork' is typically used to describe texts which are created through the use of art materials (Albers, 2009). However, following Albers (2009), I refer to the children's drawings as 'visual texts', which are defined here as still images created by visual media (Albers, 2009; Anstey & Bull, 2004). The importance of the distinction between 'artworks' and 'visual texts' is recognising that 'artwork' implies knowledge and experience of the disciplinary processes and techniques associated with fine art (Efland, 1990). While the children in the higher SES school received a minimal one hour per week of instruction from a specialist art teacher, the children the lower SES school received no specialist instruction in art. It thus seemed more appropriate to consider the children's drawings as visual texts.

The focus of the children's visual texts is centred on the significance of features which represent the children's lived experiences of NAPLAN. However, 'the context surrounding the drawing may also influence the outcome, and as observers of a child's processes, [the researcher becomes] part of this context' (Wright, 2010, p. 27-28). Several procedures were therefore employed to uphold ethical and participatory ideals (Mitchell et al., 2011) and to maximise the likelihood of creating optimal conditions in which the children could 'purposefully bring shape and order to their experience' (Cox, 2005, p. 125). This process began with recognising that children 'who agree to participate in drawing activities preferably need the time to engage with the researcher prior to drawing' (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 24), as '[g]ood relationships need to be built in order for trust to be established' (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 124). Through classroom observations (discussed below), which I conducted once per week for approximately six to eight weeks in the lead-up to NAPLAN, the children came to know me as a regular visitor to their classrooms. During this time, I aimed to become a familiar figure 'for whom the children did not

behave in special ways ... and with whom the children might confidently talk' (Mayall, 2000, p. 123).

In order to eliminate as far as possible any researcher or teacher bias, the instructions provided to children were quite open-ended 'to avoid limiting them or directing them on what to include or exclude' (Hayik, 2012, p. 298). The children were simply asked, 'could you tell me what it was like to do NAPLAN?' It is noted that while this would have encouraged some children to pursue personal agendas and interests, others may have felt insecure and drew what they felt their teacher would expect and approve of (Hopperstad, 2010). To avoid this, the children were reassured verbally and in writing, by way of a specifically written children's Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 3), that the focus of their contribution was the content of their drawing rather than its quality, that their contribution would be de-identified, and that there could be no 'right' or 'wrong' response.

There is evidence within the literature to suggest that 'colour facilitates richer expression and often affords participants a greater sense of satisfaction, both with regard to the process of creating the drawing and the completed product' (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 23). I therefore gave the children the option to choose from a variety of media, including crayons, lead and/ or coloured pencils and felt-tipped markers. In using this approach, it was imperative to ensure that the children had access to quality materials, as 'markers that are dried out, crayons that are old and broken, paper that tears easily, or lack of a full range of colours can be not only discouraging but also frustrating to children' (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 57). The children in both schools already had access to good quality drawing materials, with some choosing to share different media between them. As some children 'may be intimidated by poster-size pieces of paper' (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 23), I provided the children with new A4 copy paper, with a lined section for the written response, so that there was no possibility of the drawn and written components becoming lost or mismatched. I also informed the children that I had ample to spare in the event that they wished to start over.

Finally, Malchiodi (1998) highlights the importance of allowing children to become deeply involved in the process of drawing by giving them sufficient time. 'Participants need enough time to visualise and draw – making the drawing is contingent on a

process of reflection and of finding a way to express this pictorially' (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 25). The children were therefore permitted by their teachers to continue until such time as they felt they were satisfied with their response.

Writing: Children as interpreters of their own images

The literature recognises that if we are to honour the voices of the children, then we need to '[find] ways to remain true not only to what children say but to what they mean' (Sinclair, 2004, p. 113). While drawing is a useful method when researching with children, multiple readings of drawings are always possible (Reissman, 2008), because 'like written texts, visual texts ... have a range of organised patterns of information' (Albers, 2009, p. 240). In order to recognise that 'each medium has its own possibilities and limitations of meaning' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 19), I adopted an approach which recognises that 'drawing as a research method is more than just engaging participants in making drawings, followed by researcher based analysis of the artefacts' (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 25).

Collaborating with children as part of the process of creating and analysing visual texts, which is known as the 'draw and talk' approach, is particularly useful in eliciting children's ideas (Bland, 2012; Wright, 2010). However, due to the time constraints associated with research involving so many children in a short space of time, the children were asked to write about the meaning embedded in their drawing, in a process known as the 'write and draw' technique (Mitchell et al., 2011). In order to minimise any potential insecurity associated with the written component of their contribution, the children were assured verbally and in writing that the focus was on the content rather than the quality of their writing and that this part of their contribution would also be de-identified. Several children with significant learning difficulties found the written part of the contribution particularly challenging, however they still wished to participate fully. These children were offered the option of talking through their drawings with their teacher, teacher aide, or with me. Their explanations and descriptions were transcribed verbatim-style.

Focus group discussions

Aligning with the ontological positioning of adults and children as fellow human beings, I intended to move away from the adult question-child reply mode; so that we could engage in conversation in the same way that I would with adults. However,

research suggests that 'children believe that a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children' (Mayall, 2000, p. 121). Mayall (2000) suggests that the solution to this problem is recognising and working with these generational issues rather than either attempting to diminish them or assuming a position of adult superiority. Following Mayall (2000), I explained to the children that I needed to acquire their own unique knowledge and assessment of their lived experiences of being a child sitting for the NAPLAN tests, by '[presenting] myself as a person who, since she is an adult, does not have this knowledge' (p. 122). This approach recognises that by understanding the subjective nature of our constructions, 'we can, through the social event of social interaction, struggle towards shared meanings' (Cruddas, 2007, p. 485) of complex phenomena such as NAPLAN.

These discussions explored the children's everyday experience of school, including the types of lessons in which they learned best, the extent to which they felt lessons and their teachers changed in the lead-up to NAPLAN and their experiences of the tests. During these discussions, I acted as a moderator, inducing the children to 'express their opinions but with minimum, if any direction' (Yin, 2011, p. 141), in order to 'refrain from assuming that there is shared meaning for words or concepts' (Ellis, 2006, p. 117).

Child and adult participants: Classroom observations

In order to ascertain the extent to which the children experience changes in their teachers' customary curricula and pedagogies as a result of NAPLAN preparation, an observation schedule was used to record a teaching session of 90 minutes to two hours once per week. These observations occurred during the six to eight weeks leading up to the tests, during one of the NAPLAN tests, in the two weeks following the tests and for two weeks after the release of the results.

The observation schedule (see Appendix 10) tallied the number of class activities pertaining specifically to NAPLAN preparation and the frequency of the use of the word 'NAPLAN' by the teacher. Stake (2006) urges caution in the use of observation schedules, as while they may be 'an excellent example of the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative research methods' (Yin, 2011, p. 144), there is an implicit danger of reducing complex phenomena to simple categories.

This was avoided through unobtrusively recording detailed accounts of the children's daily classroom lives; including the teachers' pedagogical styles, activities and child-teacher, child-peer interactions, as well as the children's lived experience of one of the NAPLAN tests. These were recorded verbatim-style as lessons unfolded, with the aim of recording a 'vivid image' and minimising stereotyping (Yin, 2011). While it must be acknowledged that the presence of the researcher unavoidably had at least some influence on those being observed, the purpose of this approach was to maximise the chance of creating 'nonreactive' situations, where the researcher 'cannot have influenced the participants' behaviour that produced the physical traces' (Yin, 2011, p. 146).

Adult participants

While the focus of this research is exploring the impact of NAPLAN on children from their own perspectives, ignoring or erasing the adult dimension of children's contexts results in limited narratives (Mannion, 2007) and questionable assumptions about the children's ability to represent their own interests (Cruddas, 2007). I therefore adopted an approach of situated agency (Mannion, 2007), which recognises that children's lived experiences of NAPLAN are inextricably interwoven with those of their teachers and parents, as well as other adults involved in the wider school and system levels of their education.

Teachers

Six teachers were directly involved in the project. While the study was conducted in four classrooms, a temporary teacher changeover and team-teaching arrangements resulted in a larger number of teacher participants. There were three teacher participants in the higher SES school, comprising a Year 3 teacher and two Year 7 teachers who worked so closely together that the Year 7 classes were treated as a single unit. A Year 3 teacher and two Year 5 teachers from the lower SES school also participated. The Year 5 teacher in the lower SES school was unexpectedly asked to take on the position of Assistant Principal, Religious Education (APRE) in another school two weeks before the NAPLAN tests. The relief teacher accepted an invitation to participate in the study, which provided a second teacher's perspective for this class group.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews should always be considered as verbal reports only and as such, subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall and poor or inaccurate articulation (Yin, 1994). Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that it is the best technique to utilise when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals, as it allows the researcher to gain insights into the emotions, experiences and interpretations of the respondents (Merriam, 1998). This approach is therefore ideally suited to studies where multiple realities are an inherent feature of the phenomena being explored.

Interview styles may be conceptualised as being positioned on a continuum, ranging from highly structured/ standardised to unstructured/ informal, as demonstrated in Figure 3.3 (Merriam, 1998).

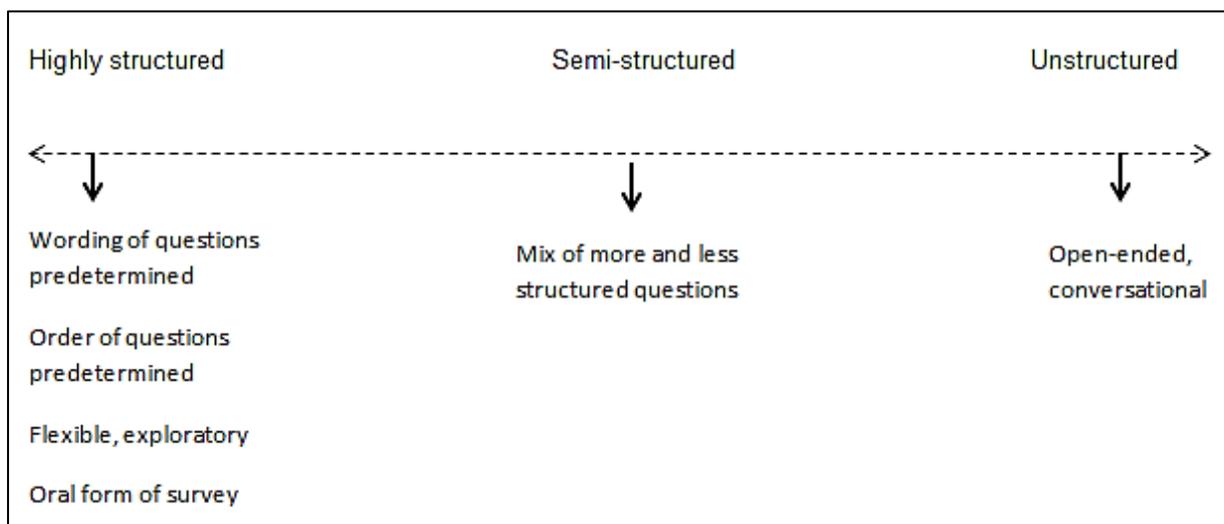


Figure 3.3 Interview styles positioned on a continuum

The literature recognises semi-structured interviews as ‘the most important form of interviewing in case study research’ (Gillham, 2000, p. 65). Within this semi-structured format, either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is ‘a mix of more and less structured questions [which] allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic’ (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). According to Yin (2011), these interviews fulfil ‘one of the fundamental objectives of qualitative

research, which is to depict a complex social world from a participant's perspective' (p. 135).

The teachers participated in a semi-structured interview at the commencement of the study (see Appendix 8). The purpose of this interview was to explore each teacher's beliefs about education, the teaching and learning process and the approaches they believed maximised children's learning outcomes. The interview also explored the extent to which NAPLAN aligned with teachers' beliefs and approaches and was used to gain insights into the teachers' experiences of the ways in which NAPLAN impacted upon their professional practices.

Teacher Diaries

The teachers were asked to keep a diary for the duration of the 2012 school year (see Appendix 9). These diaries were used to record the amount of teaching time spent preparing the children for the tests, as well as the extent to which NAPLAN was discussed at staff meetings and the extent to which they felt pressured by the tests, which was intended to ascertain the prominence of NAPLAN within the schools. The diaries also provided teachers with the opportunity to supplement these entries by including any other relevant observations and reflections.

Contextual Participants

While teachers 'have a unique and significant perspective on NAPLAN ... their voice needs to be contextualised by other members of school communities also experiencing the effects of NAPLAN' (Thompson, 2012, p. 7). The contextual participants in the study therefore also participated in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 8). At the school level, semi-structured interviews were held with the principals to explore their beliefs, understandings and approaches to NAPLAN, and the extent to which they believed NAPLAN impacted upon their schools. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Year 2, 4 and 6 teachers, in order to investigate any possible 'wash-back effect' of NAPLAN and therefore any test preparation the children may have experienced in the previous year.

The parents of the children in each class were invited to participate in a focus group discussion, in order to explore parental beliefs and understandings regarding NAPLAN, in addition to their experiences and observations of how NAPLAN had

affected their children. In the lower SES school however, only one response was received from the grandparents of a child in Year 3 who had formal custody of both of their grandsons. One possible reason for the lack of responses from parents in this school is reflected in the Year 3 teacher's discussion of children within the school who are 'born into a family that has two working parents on shift work' (Year 3 teacher, lower SES school). The lack of data in this respect was compensated to some degree by the teachers' experiences and observations of the parents' responses to NAPLAN. In the higher SES school, it was not possible for the parents to meet due to conflicting work commitments. They were alternatively invited to respond to the discussion questions via email. Responses were received from four parents of children in Year 3 and three parents of children in Year 7.

At the broader contextual level, two area supervisors and senior BCE staff and executives, and a senior Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) executive also participated in semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to explore BCE's approach to NAPLAN and the extent to which BCE attempts to mediate the potentially negative effects of NAPLAN, as identified within the literature review.

In keeping with the view that 'a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence' (Yin, 2009, pp. 114-115), this study utilised a wide range of data sources. Throughout the duration of the research, various artefacts were collected, including copies of classroom tasks and worksheets, which provide evidence of the types of tasks completed by the children as part of their everyday schooling. Other artefacts, such as excerpts from school newsletters, provided a further source of data to explore the ways in which NAPLAN impacts upon children and their everyday school lives. This approach was framed by the understanding that these artefacts 'were constructed by socially situated individuals from a perspective and for an audience ... [such artefacts] do not speak for themselves' (Reissman, 2008, p. 22-23).

Finally, the researcher maintained personal field notes throughout the course of the study, providing a source of personal reflection of the study's progress, as well as insights and observations from interactions with the participants in the study. A

summary of all the research participants and their contribution to the study is outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Summary of research participants and data collection

Participants	Number of participants	Drawing	Writing	Focus groups	Observations	Diary	Interviews	Field Notes	Artefacts
Higher SES School:									
Yr 3 children	24	X	X	X	X			X	X
Yr 3 teacher	1				X	X	X	X	X
Yr 7 children	46	X	X	X	X			X	X
Yr 7 teachers	2				X	X	X	X	X
Principal	1						X	X	X
Parents	7						X	X	
Yr 2 and 4 teachers	2						X	X	
Lower SES school:									
Yr 3 children	18	X	X	X	X			X	X
Yr 3 teacher	1				X	X	X	X	X
Yr 5 children	17	X	X	X	X			X	X
Yr 5 teachers	2				X	X	X	X	X
Principal	1						X	X	X
Parents	1						X	X	
Yr 2 and 4 teachers	2						X	X	
Systemic staff:									
Area supervisors	2						X	X	
Senior Directorate staff	1						X	X	
Senior executives	2						X	X	
Total children	105								
Total adults	25								
Total participants	130								

Ethical Issues

This research is founded on the rationale of children's participation, which positions children as competent and valid contributors to current research regarding the impact of NAPLAN in Australian schools. This equitable approach recognises that 'equity as a concept does not stand alone – equity has a sibling relationship to ethics. If the goal is one directed to social justice then the means to reach that goal have to be undertaken in an ethical manner' (Groundwater-Smith, 2011, p. 61).

Protocols involving gatekeeper clearance, the recruiting of informants (see Appendix 2), data storage, anonymity and confidentiality, and informed consent (see Appendix 4) therefore complied with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2007), and the University of Queensland Human Ethics Review Committee. However, there is evidence within the literature to suggest that while 'formal ethical guidelines can provide useful checklists ... [and] help raise awareness and standards' (Alderson, 2004, p. 12), a disproportionate focus on specific ethical moments of research, such as formal ethical clearance (see Appendix 1) may result in rules becoming 'a substitute for the active engagement of individual researchers and the social science community as a whole on ethical issues' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 491).

The fundamental place of researcher reflexivity is undeniable, as not all issues which arise during the course of children's participatory research are predictable, and as such, the researcher cannot be solely guided by predetermined rules and guidelines (Horton, 2010). Exclusive dependence on individual researchers is however, equally problematic, as it 'may lead to an overreliance on developing ethical practices that are personal and idiosyncratic' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 492). This is particularly evident in research that suggests the current enthusiasm for children's participation 'evokes a troubling caricature of researchers leaping before looking, bungling headfirst on to ethical *terra incognitae* in their gung-ho enthusiasm to follow the latest disciplinary turn' (Horton, 2010, p. 164). I therefore endeavoured to achieve and maintain a balance between the relatively pragmatic steering of ethical research and an anchoring of particular tactics within a broader set of aims, which sought to include the voices of the children in an equitable and ethical manner.

Christensen and Prout (2002) suggest that the emergent construction of children as competent and valid participants in research is founded on what they term 'ethical symmetry' between adults and children. This means that the researcher 'takes as his or her *starting* point the view that the ethical relationship between researcher and informant is the same whether he or she conducts research with adults or children' (p. 482). This process began with recognising that while there is a legal requirement in Australia when researching children to have the informed, written consent of a parent or guardian, this requirement does not contravene the importance of obtaining the children's informed agreement to participate (Groundwater-Smith, 2007). In the event that children choose to participate, an ethical process of civic dissemination necessitates that the children need to be sure that they want their contribution made public (Mitchell et al., 2011).

The notion of assent, which is interpreted as 'an agreement obtained from those who are not able to enter into a legal contract' (Ford, Sankey, & Crisp, 2007, p. 20), is used as a substitute for formal child consent within current ethical guidelines. However, while 'assent' covers the legal requirements of children's participation in research, and is a substantial improvement on not seeking children's consent at all, it remains inadequate because it is manifestly subordinate to parental consent. The children's completion of their assent form (see Appendix 5) was therefore equated with formal consent in a manner that was consistent with the notion of adult consent.

Article 12 of the UNCRC has established that it 'is a right (not a duty) to express a view and there will be occasions when children and young people will not want to be involved' (Lundy, 2007, p. 934). In this study, 12 children declined to participate from the outset, choosing not to create a drawing and write a written description, or to fill in the child consent forms, or approach their parents. The remaining children were assured verbally and in writing that they could choose the extent to which they wished to participate, and that if they chose to contribute, their responses would not be published without their express consent, even if their parents had consented to such publication.

Of the 105 children who agreed to contribute to the study, 54 had parental consent and gave their own consent, while 49 had varying degrees of consent to participate (see Appendix 7). While most children created a drawing and a written description of

their drawing, with some children also choosing to participate in a focus group discussion within their class, several children in Year 7 opted to contribute a written response only and/or to contribute to a discussion. The children who chose to create a drawing and/or written description could also choose whether to have their response published. Two children who received parental consent to have their contribution published and to participate in a focus group discussion expressed their wish not to do so on their own consent forms. 16 children explicitly requested that their contribution not be published, and one child requested that her written response only be published. In these cases, the children's contributions, or part thereof, were marked 'NfP' – Not for Publishing, a code developed by the researcher and the children, in the children's presence, to assure them that their wishes would be respected and that their responses would not be made public.

Conversely, and of concern, some children indicated on their consent forms that they wished to contribute and have their contributions published; however, parental consent forms were not forthcoming and, as such, they were unable to have their responses published. This raises the question of whether 'we always have to obtain parents' as well as children's consent ... should we be barred by parents' refusal [or simply overlooking the return of relevant forms] when the children or young people want to join the research?' (Alderson, 2004, p. 106-107)

The children's drawings and written descriptions as well as the focus group discussions were approached from the perspective of ethical symmetry, in which the children's contributions were credited as 'knowledge' of their lived experiences, rather than the relatively flimsy notions of 'perspective', 'view' or 'opinion' (Mayall, 2000). Aligning with the need for a balanced approach, several issues relating to child protection concerning researcher interactions with children needed to be addressed. While transparency of research is one reason for seeking easily accessible spaces where children can engage and where the researcher was not alone with an individual child, the major rationale reflected awareness of child protection issues and positioning of the researcher as ethically responsible (Dockett et al., 2009). In order to maintain this balance, I chose the meeting place in conjunction with the children and the teacher, so that we could come to an agreement on the use of a quiet place nearby, where the children could talk freely.

Before commencing the discussion, I reiterated to the children that, as explained on their Participant Information Sheet, the conversation would be recorded, showing them the digital recorder and the display which indicated that the device was in use.

Attempting to balance the demands of legal requirements, pragmatics and ethical symmetry with children and adults within a research context which is potentially unpredictable poses a considerable challenge. This was reflected in several unexpected issues which arose during the course of the study. It is here that I return to the positioning of this study within an ontological framework of 'emergence', 'becoming' and 'inexpertise' (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008), as these issues '[demand] a more modest 'immature' ethical sensibility, one that does not confidently claim to know it all – or be prepared for it all – before the event' (Horton, 2010, p. 164).

Of primary concern was that in all classes but one, the teachers permitted the children to complete their visual and written texts without interruption. However, as the Year 3 children in the higher SES school were completing their responses, the teacher moved around the classroom, critiquing several of the children's contributions with comments such as, 'Oh, what a lovely smiling face and clean uniform!', while another child was asked, 'Now why would you say that?' This was in direct conflict with the discussion I had with the children that there could be no 'right' or 'wrong' response. This vignette emphasises the need for a critical examination of how 'we as adults in positions of power ... may position [children] through our own expectations and directions' (Albers, Frederick, & Cowan, 2009, p. 251). It also requires a full comprehension that 'the implications of exploring children's experiences of school include a potentially negative effect on their relationships with teachers, parents, or other members of their school community' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 483).

The question of the extent to which this study contributes to the social justice ideal of participatory methodologies, which as described earlier, is aimed at significant social change, arose as a second issue. International literature suggests that while the increase in the popularity and institutionalisation of children's participation is a step in the right direction, it has become evident that when 'children and young people are asked for their views [they] never receive feedback and never know if their views

have produced any change in policy or practice' (Tisdall & Davis, 2004, p. 132). This issue was addressed in part through explaining to the children that the purpose of the project was to explore children's actual experiences of NAPLAN, rather than attempting to affect change. Thus while this study could not bring about transformations in policy or practice, it created a critical pathway to democratic dialogue (Freire, 1970).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was primarily thematic; a method for encoding qualitative data through identifying patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke describe this approach to analysis as a flexible tool that can be used across different methods, rather than a specific method in its own right, because it is not attached to any pre-existing theoretical framework. This makes thematic analysis ideally suited to both the study's ontological positioning, which privileges open-ended processes over predefined techniques, and its enactivist epistemology, in which unpacking multiple constructed realities of NAPLAN is required for a robust exploration of the children's lived experiences of NAPLAN.

Following Braun and Clarke (2006), themes were generated on the basis of capturing something important in relation to the research questions, rather than solely reliant on the frequency of particular occurrences across the data sets. These themes were generated in the first instance through a process of inductive data coding, which does not involve the utilisation of a pre-existing coding framework, but rather the generation of themes which are closely linked to the data (Patton, 1990). This was followed by a process of deductive, or 'top down' coding (Boyatzis, 1998), which was based on themes within the literature regarding critical sociological accounts of the impacts of high-stakes testing, with a particular focus on the ways in which, and to what extent, such tests affect children.

This approach was refined by the understanding that 'data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84), but situated within the enactivist positioning of the study, which allowed for the generation of themes within multiple constructions of the significance, experience and purpose of NAPLAN. Themes were consequently identified primarily at a latent, or interpretive level, rather than a semantic, or explicit level (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clark (2006) argue

that this level of analysis 'goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (original emphasis) (p. 84).

The six phases of thematic data analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a structural framework for analysing the data. This process began with becoming familiar with the data through repeated active reading, which involved searching for meanings and initial patterns, followed by the generation of preliminary codes relating to the basic elements of the raw data. These potential codes were then sorted into prospective themes, with a view to developing relationships between these codes, themes and sub-themes, as well as different levels of themes. The fourth phase involved the refinement of coherent and meaningful themes, through the removal of those with insufficient data to support them, the collapsing of some categories into a single theme, and the breaking down of complex themes into smaller categories. A thematic map of the data, which will be presented in the final chapter of the thesis, then provided the basis for a coherent and internally consistent summary on which to base the final analysis and write-up of the data. This process was not a linear one, but an ongoing, iterative, organic progression, characterised by continual movement within and between these phases through the dynamic process of constant comparative analysis (Merriam, 1998), which incorporated simultaneous comparison of the contextual factors which were involved (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981).

While this overall approach was adopted for the analysis of all data collected for the project, some nuancing of this process was needed for different types of data, particularly the children's drawings, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and teachers' diaries.

The children's drawings and written descriptions

The bimodal nature of the children's responses was a central factor in the process of analysis, as 'simply analysing the visual then the written text separately ignores the fact that it is the combination of image and text that creates meaning' (Callow & Primary English Teaching Association, 2013, p. 15). The children's responses were therefore understood as a single bimodal act, which incorporates considerations of

'the degree to which [the visual and written semiotics 'commit'] meaning ... and the extent to which that commitment converges with or diverges from that of the other modality' (Unsworth & Thomas, 2014, p. 18).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) observe that within communication through representations, 'questions of truth and reality remain insecure, subject to doubt and even more significantly to contestation' (p. 154). I return here to the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study, which emphasises the validity of the multiple constructed realities inherent within complex phenomena such as NAPLAN. Analysis of the children's drawings was therefore approached from the perspective of exploring those facets of their NAPLAN experience that the children chose to include in their responses, as 'sign-makers choose what they regard as apt, plausible means for expressing the meanings they wish to express' (p. 154).

The process of analysis began with the initial classification of each child's contribution as (1) positive, (2) counterpoised or neutral, or (3) negative, according to the overall first impression. This was followed by a systematic analysis of the data, based on visual discourse analysis (VDA) (Albers, 2009, 2012), which is situated in the field of semiotics; a theory of the study of signs within written or spoken language, as well as visual images, and of how these signs make meaning (Callow & Primary English Teaching Association, 2013). VDA is informed by Gee's (2005) discourse analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design, which posits that 'visual texts are amenable to analysis because they have identifiable structures and organisational patterns' (Albers, 2009, p. 9). It is therefore both a theory and methodological approach, which begins with the analysis of the graphic elements, or the marks made by the creator, such as colour, shape, line, pencil stroke and texture.

While these visual elements allow people of all ages to surface meaning and psychological moods in metaphorical ways (Wright, 2012), these elements must then be read in relationship to one another and integrated as a meaningful whole through the syntactic elements, or structures and conventions within visual texts (Albers, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Unsworth and Thomas (2014) explain that just as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) describes language as a means to

construct experiential, interpersonal and textual meaning, so too images simultaneously construct representational, interactive and compositional meaning.

This generation of meaning occurs through the placement of the elements within the image and their salience, as realised by factors such as relative size, distance between different elements, or contrasts in colour. The use of framing devices such as dividing lines, which connect or disconnect the elements in the image, facial expressions and body gestures also generate meaning within the overall relationship that is constructed with the viewer; through direct gaze and close-ups or distanced images which may suggest alienation or loneliness (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Unsworth & Thomas, 2014).

Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews

In order to depict the complex issue of NAPLAN from the participants' perspectives, the interviews and focus group discussions were flexibly framed around the research questions (Appendices 19-22). This encouraged the participants to express their views, and allowed not only for new ideas on the topic to surface, but for the researcher and participants alike to respond to the emerging discussion. These interviews and discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed, with a focus on generating rigorous, verbatim accounts, which were then cross-checked with participants for accuracy and informed consent to use in the study.

These transcriptions generated large amounts of data, which were inductively coded through the identification of key words and phrases to generate themes, and then compared with other interviews and discussions, as well as the other sources of data, through the process of constant comparative analysis.

Classroom observations

The purpose of the classroom observations was to record detailed accounts of the children's daily classroom lives, as well as their experience of one of the NAPLAN tests. This was achieved by adopting the stance of the non-participant observer, recording these events on a laptop computer as they unfolded, from a position which was as unobtrusive as possible. These descriptions were analysed thematically to identify similarities and differences between the children's everyday school lives and their experience of NAPLAN. Through the process of constant comparative analysis,

the children's experiences were compared within and between the different classes and schools.

Teacher diaries

The number of self-reported teaching hours spent on NAPLAN preparation recorded in the teacher diaries were graphically presented in order to compare the similarities and differences between the numbers of hours each teacher spent on such preparation, which could then be compared within and between the two schools. However, an unexpected difficulty arose with these data, as some teachers recorded only those hours given to explicit test practice, while others included integrated preparation in addition to explicit test practice. These data must therefore be utilised with caution. The supplementary diary entries were analysed for themes through the identification of common words and/or phrases throughout the texts, which were compared to identify any common or distinct issues within and between the classrooms and schools.

Additional sources of data

Other sources of data, including copies of classroom tasks and artefacts, such as excerpts from school newsletters, were not analysed in and of themselves. Rather, they are intended to enhance the overall thematic approach to data analysis by providing concrete examples of how the children experienced everyday school life, and the ways in which NAPLAN altered classroom life.

The researcher's personal field notes were utilised in a similar way, providing additional insights into the formal data collection and its thematic analysis, rather than being treated as a source of data for analysis in and of itself.

Conclusion

The fundamental aim of this research was to explore children's lived experiences of NAPLAN. In order to achieve this aim, the children were positioned ontologically, together with the adults, as competent and valid research participants within a case study of BCE schools across two sites, which were purposefully selected to represent higher and lower SES communities. The study was located within an enactivist epistemology, to allow diverse and potentially conflicting enactments and knowledges of NAPLAN to surface. The collection and thematic analysis of a wide

range of data sought to present a vivid account of the children's daily school lives, and the ways in which they changed as a direct result of NAPLAN and its associated preparation. The data collection and analysis approaches outlined throughout this chapter were well aligned so as to enable the provision of answers to the research questions that underpinned the study.

Chapter 4: NAPLAN and Brisbane Catholic Education

Introduction

Children's experiences of their schooling, including NAPLAN, do not occur within a vacuum; rather, these experiences are situated within unique matrices of cultural, social, material and personal contexts, which are positioned at particular intersections of global-national-local policy frameworks. In order to explore children's lived experiences of NAPLAN, it is therefore necessary to begin by considering the school system in which they are situated.

The chapter thus begins with a brief description of Catholic Education's positioning within Queensland's schooling context. This is followed by an exploration of the strategies implemented by Senior Executives within the QCEC and BCE to mediate any perceived negative effects of NAPLAN. I then consider the extent to which these strategies were able to successfully filter down through each level of the organisation, given the external influences of political and media discourses surrounding NAPLAN and the MySchool website. This was achieved by exploring the views and experiences of the principals, teachers and parents, which ultimately affected the children in the schools, whose experiences will be the focus of Chapter Five. Finally, the chapter explores negative shifts in parent-teacher and child-parent relationships as a direct consequence of NAPLAN.

Catholic education in Queensland

As a peak body organisation, QCEC exercises state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schools that are administered by five autonomous authorities within regions, known as dioceses. These are comprised of the Brisbane Archdiocese, in which this study is situated, and the Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba Dioceses. The role of the QCEC is a strategic one, with the primary goal of coordinating and advancing Catholic education in Queensland. This role extends to a number of Catholic schools known as Religious Institute schools, which are owned and administered by various institutes or religious orders. Inherent within this strategic

role of the QCEC is regard for the autonomy of the diocese and Religious Institute schools (“Queensland Catholic Education Commission,” 2010).

As described in Chapter One, the positioning of Catholic education within Queensland’s context is unique in Australia, as the progressive reforms which took place after the abolition of the Scholarship Exam in 1963 led to several significant changes. These included the development of productive pedagogies (Lingard, 2007), the abolition of all public examinations and school-based assessments at the secondary level, which comprise a central component of Queensland’s education culture. During the 2012 school year, when this study took place, the Australian Curriculum areas of English, Mathematics and Science were being implemented in Queensland (QCAA, 2015).

The relative autonomy of Queensland teachers in developing curricula and assessments to meet the learning needs of children within different cohorts was particularly evident in one teacher’s description that:

We’ve been really spoilt here in Queensland; having the choices that we have had ... I can see some of the abuses of it, but I also think that it is an amazing tool for being able to adapt your curriculum to your kids (Year 7 teacher B, higher SES school).

However, this teacher’s acknowledgement that ‘I can see some of the abuses of it’ mirrored senior executives’ concerns that ‘sometimes I think our teachers have gone too far [with] ... ‘Trust us, we are professionals’, [while] the other extreme is no-one can be trusted and you’ve got to have these rigid type models independently marked and so on’ (Senior executive, BCE). In order to achieve a balance between these two extremes, the same Senior Executive described BCE’s approach to assessment as based on the Scottish model of assessment, which attempts to bring research, policy and practice into closer alignment (Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005):

It’s much more school-based and it has a lot more research base to it. The guy who helped us ... his line was 90 per cent school-based, 10 per cent external ... he said you do need the 10; you do need some externality to it. So they’re not completely deluding themselves, sometimes. (Senior executive, BCE)

BCE's adoption of this approach reflects a relative level of independence that, as one Area Supervisor explained, 'some of my colleagues in state schools would give their eye teeth for' (Area supervisor, lower SES school), because it enabled the implementation of several strategies to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN. As described in Chapter Two, these perceptions of negative effects largely parallel those of the assessment regimes in England and the US (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013), from which Australia's accountability agenda has borrowed significantly. The following section describes these strategies and the ways and extent to which they filtered down through BCE, from the senior executives, down to the directors, area supervisors, principals, teachers and finally parents and children.

BCE and NAPLAN

BCE has developed a particular approach to NAPLAN, which appears to be based on: (1) the advice of a data analyst who was described as 'very cautious about putting too much weight on NAPLAN results' (Senior executive, BCE); and (2) BCE's approach to assessment, which sought to achieve a balance between school-based and external assessments. As a result, BCE's approach to NAPLAN was one of being data-informed as opposed to data-driven, with senior executives conveying that 'what we do in Catholic schools is everything that we can to mitigate against [NAPLAN becoming a high-stakes test]' (Senior executive, QCEC). In order to mediate any perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, BCE implemented several strategies to ensure that results are viewed as 'just a part of the story ... it goes with other types of assessment ... [including] professional judgement about how a child is going' (Senior executive, BCE).

The first of these strategies involves a focus on utilising the NAPLAN data 'properly and wisely' (Senior executive, QCEC), in conjunction with school-based assessments 'to get that triangulation of data to make better decisions ... to build a better picture of what's going on' (Area supervisor, higher SES school), rather than for comparative purposes. This approach provides a contrast to reports within the literature that in Australian government schools, other criteria for school performance are giving way to a disproportionate focus on comparative NAPLAN results, particularly in schools serving low SES communities (Comber, 2012).

The second strategy employed by BCE is to reject the use of NAPLAN data for the purpose of accountability and intervention in relation to principals and teachers whose classes achieve poor results. Rather, senior staff reported that 'NAPLAN is one of ... several flags in this story which may indicate that this school may need more support' (Senior staff member, BCE). One form of support, funded through the federal government's National Partnership program, was the employment of Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher (LNIT) teachers. There was evidence to suggest that the work of the LNITs was held in high regard by staff, with one senior executive articulating his belief that 'they did some really good work' and expressing concern that the funding for these teachers had now ceased.

And this is the whole problem with short termism. You know, here's money for three years. Then what? Do we now suddenly assume that everyone is at some wonderful normative benchmark where we can say well no one is below that anymore? That's just kidding yourself. (Senior executive, BCE)

This concern regarding 'short termism' resonates with the work of Lingard (2010), who argues that this narrow focus on the short-term goal of improving test scores 'can lead simply to an enhanced capacity to take tests' (p. 135). As described in Chapter Two, there is persuasive research evidence to suggest that while this approach results in improved test scores, as children learn how to select the response most likely to be correct from a selection of multiple choice answers, the ultimate result may be impoverished learning outcomes. These outcomes include, but are not limited to, rote writing and reductions in conceptual and higher order thinking skills and understandings (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

Finally, BCE also officially rejects the notion of utilising NAPLAN data for marketing purposes. However, as an executive director explained, while senior staff 'encourage Catholic schools not to use that sort of thing in their marketing or promotional material; there have been occasions when that has happened' (Executive director, QCEC). Nevertheless, senior staff emphasised the importance of '[keeping] an eye on [NAPLAN data] from a genuinely educational point of view, [as] we're certainly not to be looking at them from a marketing point of view' (Senior executive, BCE).

The implementation of these strategies contributed significantly to the principals' and teachers' experiences of NAPLAN as low-stakes in this system, which will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter. However, BCE's positioning within wider societal and policy contexts made it impossible for the adults, particularly parents, and children to experience NAPLAN in isolation from the 'trend towards 'audit societies' and 'managerial discourses' [which stretch] beyond educational institutions' (Comber & Cormack, 2010, p. 21). Thus, it is not possible for systems to operate in a vacuum from the influence of wider political and societal discourses and surrounding NAPLAN and the MySchool website. The influence of reform trends and discourses, such as individual teacher accountability and the negotiation of rewards payments that occurred alongside BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, were discussed by several senior staff members who conveyed that 'it's amazing what politicians and the media can do. And ... there's no contesting voice in the political world. Everybody is just assuming that this is what you do' (Senior staff member, BCE).

Attempts to design NAPLAN as a low-stakes test have been thwarted by the intense focus on performance comparisons, policies surrounding NAPLAN data (for example, teacher, principal and school accountability), and the use of these data by the media, and Australia's escalating testing industry. There was evidence to suggest that BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN have been similarly hindered by the wider neoliberal trends and discourses of market logic within politics, schooling policies and the media. This has resulted in several dissonances within BCE in regards to NAPLAN, which added to the confusion already inherent within the community as a result of 'the government's poor communication of the intended purpose of NAPLAN' (Back et al., 2010, p. 22). Through interviews with the adult participants in the study, it was evident that this poor communication of NAPLAN's purpose is manifest in the multiple and often contradictory adult constructions of the purpose, accuracy and significance of NAPLAN, making attempts to provide the children with clear and consistent information ineffectual.

The requirements to utilise NAPLAN data for 'federal government financial resources [which] are now explicitly tied to various forms of compliance and demonstrable

gains in measureable performance' (Comber, 2012, p. 123) have resulted in a disproportionate focus on NAPLAN data. While senior staff '[encouraged] schools ... to consider the story that goes with those results' (Senior staff member, BCE), they also observed that there was an unintended message communicated to schools about the importance that the system attached to NAPLAN results. This was particularly evident in the observation that 'NAPLAN data are the most analysed, dissected data that we have ... So whether there is an unintended message going out to schools ... there probably is' (Area supervisor, lower SES school). This disproportionate focus on NAPLAN data was at odds with BCE's espoused adoption of the Scottish assessment model, which was purportedly comprised of 90 per cent school-based assessments and 10 per cent external assessments such as NAPLAN.

Secondly, while on the one hand senior staff emphasised BCE's systemic rejection of the practice of utilising NAPLAN results for marketing purposes, some senior staff reported that 'I've said to principals ... you've got to be engaging with your results ... you'd be naive to think that there aren't parents looking at it' (Senior Executive, BCE). This inconsistency was reflected in one parent's comment: 'they say it isn't [important], but they seem to go out of their way to say how the school performs against state or national averages – which says to me that they kind of do think it's important but they don't want to say so explicitly' (Parent, higher SES school). This parent's observation suggests that families receive a confusing set of mixed messages in regards to NAPLAN and its importance.

Within this context of confusion within the wider community, as well as the dissonance within BCE in regards to NAPLAN, it is important to ascertain whether and to what extent the principals and teachers experienced NAPLAN as high-stakes. The following section therefore begins with principals' reflections on NAPLAN, and this is followed by explorations of the views and experiences of the teachers and parents.

Principals' reflections on NAPLAN

The apparent success of the strategies implemented by BCE to mediate any perceived negative effects of the tests and an overemphasis on their significance was evidenced in the belief of the principal at the higher SES school that 'NAPLAN is

important, it has its place ... but it's only part of our plan for a holistic education for the children' (Principal, higher SES school). As such, he reported that NAPLAN did not impact significantly on the school: 'NAPLAN fits in with our program. We don't fit in with NAPLAN's program'.

The principal of the lower SES school similarly reported that 'it's just another way of learning some information about some children at a particular point in their journey' (Principal, lower SES school); despite the school's comparatively poor NAPLAN performance. This principal's experience of NAPLAN as low-stakes was also clearly conveyed in her report that 'the system suggests we look at the NAPLAN results and we use that data ... [but] I don't feel pressured that if the results are not up by a certain percentage that something is going to happen'. Her experience provides a significant contrast to research that suggests NAPLAN results are often utilised to exert pressure on public schools 'to improve their results at all costs without taking into account what the school has been doing to improve the students' performance and particular factors that have made progress so challenging' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 71).

While it is clear that the principals in these schools experienced and thought of NAPLAN as low-stakes, research which suggests that 'NAPLAN has less impact in more affluent school communities' (Comber, 2012, p. 133) was supported by the principals' differing views regarding utilisation of data. When asked whether NAPLAN was making a positive contribution to informing quality teaching and learning, the principal at the higher SES school replied, 'it gives some indication. I wouldn't say it is a quality indication; there are too many variables'. The principal of the lower SES school conversely believed that 'what NAPLAN has done for us, is helped us to understand data. Read data and make data analysis important in understanding the learning journey of children'. She articulated further that this understanding was developed with the assistance of BCE's data analyst, who '[helped] us to understand richness of the data and how we can use it effectively for future planning'.

The principal's report was supported by those of the teachers, who conveyed that time was often spent in meetings reviewing the data and consequently implementing changes to curricula and pedagogies. This finding is supported by research that

suggests a substantial proportion of schools spend time '[looking at ways to implement reform based on the NAPLAN data]' (Dulfer et al., 2012, p. 9) For example,

We've used NAPLAN data to have a look at deficits; areas of weakness ... the kids weren't real flash with fractions and not real flash with space. And we know that came back to the way we taught it ... we had all this maths equipment, but it wasn't being borrowed and used in classes, so how are they teaching fractions? How are they teaching shape? So it certainly is what stimulated a review of how we teach maths. (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school)

While it may be argued that such use of the data may contribute to positive change and thus improved learning outcomes, there is evidence within the literature to urge caution in utilising NAPLAN data in this way. First, standardised tests such as NAPLAN under-sample the curriculum, while over-sampling the population (Alexander, 2010); as tests are typically comprised of fewer items than the number actually needed to accurately assess the domain being tested (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). This results in limited sampling validity and only a partial indication of children's learning in each domain (Wu, 2010; Wu & Hornsby, 2012), leading to 'doubts ... regarding what such tests are actually testing and how such tests help to support learning' (Klenowski, 2010, p. 11). Nonetheless, such usage encourages professional mediation of test results.

The principals also differed in their views of the publication of the results, with the principal at the higher SES school generally unconcerned by the MySchool website and publication of league tables in the print media:

Look, it doesn't really worry me. Its headlines for a day, and then the next day, it's under the cocky's cage to collect the poo. I suppose I'd be a bit more concerned if I wasn't in a good school and wasn't achieving well, and the results indicated that we weren't doing our job properly.

Despite not being under pressure to improve NAPLAN performance, the principal in the lower SES school expressed concerns regarding issues of equity associated with the publication of the results, articulating that 'I would prefer that it wasn't published, for everyone's sake'. She explained her view further:

Educationalists know how to read the data, but everyone else just looks at the statistics and figures, and presumes stories ... if we just took it as ... let's see what the data provides for us; that can be a rich and rewarding thing ... [but] the way that it's currently rolled out ... used beyond that point in time data ... is less helpful.

An inherent part of minimising the stakes by 'not putting too much weight on NAPLAN' included limiting discussions surrounding NAPLAN and the release of results. The principals accordingly reported spending little time communicating with teachers or parents in regards to NAPLAN, with the principal of the higher SES school conveying that 'I congratulate the teachers at the end of NAPLAN for putting up with it and any stress that it has caused and the good the results that we get. But it's not a focus'. The principal of the lower SES school similarly stated that 'I don't honour it with too much time. Just to note that it is coming, that it is just another way of gathering data'. She similarly described the way in which results 'just quietly go home; the teachers just look at them, that's all. And then we do some data analysis in the background, trying not to make it a big deal'.

Within this wider approach of minimising the focus on NAPLAN, neither principal reported communicating with the children about NAPLAN or its purposes; apart from '[wishing] them good luck, when NAPLAN is on, when they're leaving assembly ... we don't get into them. There is no hype from here' (Principal, higher SES school). However, these laudable attempts to diminish the children's anxiety may have inadvertently resulted in failing to provide the children with adequate clear and consistent information regarding NAPLAN. Within the context of confusion and dissonances surrounding NAPLAN, there was evidence to suggest that limiting conversations with children about NAPLAN paradoxically contributed to their constructions of the tests as high-stakes, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Teachers' reflections on NAPLAN

The principals' experiences of NAPLAN as low-stakes were largely echoed in those of the teachers, who also reported that they were not under pressure to improve or maintain their school's NAPLAN performance. The interviews and classroom observations revealed considerable variation in the teachers' professional practices,

ranging from didactic to inquiry-based approaches, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five. Despite this variance, most teachers articulated their belief that there 'is a place for NAPLAN or something like it ... a small place, not a big place' (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school) as, paralleling the reports of teachers in other research, they felt the data could be utilised to inform their teaching (Athanasou, 2010; Dulfer et al., 2012).

One teacher, whose didactic approach aligned more closely with NAPLAN than those of the other teachers, reported that for her, NAPLAN had been quite productive.

It made me think that children need to not just acquire skills and knowledge, they need to apply it ... do problem-solving ... and NAPLAN is a vehicle for me to make sure that I have done those sorts of things. (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school)

While the approaches of the other teachers did not align with the demands of NAPLAN, some did believe that the NAPLAN data could inform aspects their teaching practice. For example, one of the Year 7 teachers in the higher SES school conveyed that, 'while the necessary skills are taught in primary school, we don't tend to say that there is a next step, there is a next strategy. I think it's actually made me more aware of that in terms of teaching maths' (Year 7 Teacher B, higher SES school). She explained that NAPLAN provided a tool for collecting data, and as such, their school should be utilising this tool more effectively.

I think that because our school generally does well, we just go right, phew! We've got through it. But I think you can look at the data, and look at what are we teaching well, where are we missing out? ... Literacy and numeracy are not something that you can just raise in a few weeks. (Year 7 teacher B, higher SES school)

While the teachers were generally supportive of the potential usefulness of data generated by NAPLAN, most described the tests as disconnected from their customary professional practice; for example, one teacher explained in relation to NAPLAN that 'anything that I find quite restrictive, it doesn't suit my natural style. I get all tongue-tied and think I've got to go through this step, this step, this step' (Year 7 Teacher B, higher SES school).

In the lower SES school, where there was a greater focus on inquiry-based pedagogies 'to try and get to these kids' (Year 5 Teacher, lower SES school), the teachers discussed the disconnect between NAPLAN and Australia's new national curriculum. These teachers argued that 'it's the way your teaching, learning, assessment cycle goes, they're saying it's through inquiry. It's what we're mandated to do. Yet they've got this thing called NAPLAN which goes against all of that' (Year 5 Teacher, lower SES school). This cycle, which is known as the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment cycle within the literature, is defined as 'a process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there' (Alexander, 2010, p. 315). In his work on research-based formative assessment practices, Wiliam (2011) argues that formative assessment, which refers to the utilisation of assessments to improve instructional decisions made by teachers, children and their peers, is at the core of this cycle. Formative assessment therefore has the effect of adjusting the pace forward to ensure the active participation of all the learners (Alexander, 2010) by taking advantage of errors to use them as starting points for learning, rather than regarding them as terminal deficiencies (Blenkin & Kelly, 1992). NAPLAN is more summative than formative in character.

This disjuncture was also raised by the Year 3 teacher at the lower SES school, who asked, 'why don't the people who set the NAPLAN tests get together with the people who set the curriculum? Have a dialogue? It should actually be in harmony' (Year 3 teacher, lower SES school). The importance of a congruous relationship between assessment and the curriculum is recognised within the literature: 'the closer the alignment between standards and assessment, between standards and curriculum, between standards and teaching and between teaching and assessments, then the better students achieve' (Klenowski, 2010, p. 13). Research suggests that a crucial component of this consistency is that 'a test must be developed along with a curriculum or after it is decided upon. The test must never dictate what is to be taught and learned' (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 12). NAPLAN is at odds with these findings, as these tests were implemented in 2008, well before the full implementation of the national curriculum, which commenced in 2011 with the learning areas of English, Mathematics, History and Science. While phase two commenced in 2014 with the implementation of Geography, the phase three learning

areas of The Arts, Health and Physical Education, Civics and Citizenship, Technology, Economic and Business, and Languages are, at time of writing, awaiting endorsement (QCAA, 2015).

While most teachers described NAPLAN as lacking consistency with their professional practice and the approaches and content inherent in the national curriculum, they did not experience the tests as high-stakes. When discussing the extent to which they were pressured to improve or maintain their previous NAPLAN results, the teachers in the higher SES school reported that ‘there’s no stress, we’ve never had a staff meeting on NAPLAN’ (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school). The Year 7 teachers similarly reported that they not been pressured from a ‘from a school perspective’ (Year 7 Teacher B, higher SES school).

The Year 7 teachers believed that this was largely a consequence of teaching in a higher SES school, emphasising that ‘[the children are] going to do well because they’ve got good home lives, and they’ve got all of the things like books at home ... all that sort of stuff’ (Year 7 Teacher B, higher SES school). The other teacher added that ‘I’m sure that if our NAPLAN results bottomed out for two years, the pressure would arrive for sure’ (Year 7 teacher a, lower SES school). However, the teachers in the lower SES school, where results were poor, also reported that ‘We have none of that external pressure on us. I know that other schools do, where the principal says ‘You will teach this’, we have no pressure like that’ (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school).

These principals’ and teachers’ constructions of NAPLAN as low-stakes appear to be shaped by BCE’s focus on being ‘data informed’ rather than ‘data driven’. As described previously, one form of support for poorly performing schools, such as the lower SES school in this study, was the provision of an LNIT, who was brought in to assist staff ‘because [BCE] felt, looking back at previous years, that we needed a bit of assistance or guidance’ (Year 3 teacher, lower SES school). The Year 3 teacher described this assistance as valuable, conveying that ‘she would actually model lessons for us. I learned so much from her, and she is the one who uses the philosophy, you’ve got to put the child in the driver’s seat’ (Year 3 teacher, lower SES school). While this would suggest that the LNIT assisted some of the teachers to focus on inquiry-based pedagogies, the Year 5 teacher expressed reservations

regarding some of this assistance, which had at times directly focused on developing the children's skills in 'test-wiseness':

We've never really taught the kids 'test-wiseness', until last year when our LNIT joined our team and she said, you know you need to skill the kids up on a bit of test-wiseness. So if they've got 10 minutes left ... they should just go and colour anything because you're better off to have something ... things like not spending too much time on one question ... there are always two that are wrong, and two that could be half-right and just choose out of those two ... We had not done that ever, until last year. And, did it help? Don't know. (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school)

This advice regarding the development of test-wiseness raises two salient issues. First, evidence within the literature suggests imparting such advice about test taking is 'not only an egregious waste of time but also educationally harmful to the extent that students begin to generalise such strategies ... rather than thinking deeply ... and responding' (Kohn, 2000, p. 321). Thus, while the basic skills utilised in developing children's 'test-wiseness' may result in yearly improvements in test scores, this may simply reflect 'an enhanced capacity to take tests, rather than enhanced and authentic learning across a broad and defensible range of schooling purposes' (Lingard, 2010, p. 135). This occurs because improvements in test scores may parallel a corresponding decline in learning and understanding (Klenowski, 2010), as children are unable to make meaning of literature or connect their learning to other parts of the course (Amrein & Berliner, 2002), resulting in impoverished learning outcomes.

The second issue pertains to mixed messages regarding the extent to which NAPLAN is high-stakes, which emanated from both ACARA and BCE. As described in Chapter One, ACARA asserts that NAPLAN was designed to be a low-stakes test, yet these data are explicitly utilised for accountability purposes and the negotiation of rewards payments for the achievement of targeted and improved NAPLAN performance (Lingard, 2011; Lingard & Sellar, 2013). These usages have been put in place by state and territory systems and through the National Partnerships introduced by the federal government with implications for consequential validity. A direct consequence of these uses of the data is the development of a focus on NAPLAN results within BCE, which is generated by both funding requirements and

'because you do have to keep an eye on it in terms of how your school is perceived' (Senior Executive, BCE), despite attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of the tests.

This focus on results had greater implications for the lower SES school, where a substantial proportion of children experienced physical or psychological disabilities. The Year 5 teacher explained that in previous years, many of these children had been exempted from NAPLAN: 'One year I think five of my 20; I exempted because I knew it would be too stressful for them' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school). However, the data analyst had advised that, 'if [these children are] here and they're exempt, they're counted ... and there are some cohorts, say like mine, where I could have six kids exempt, that's a very unfair reflection of the school'. The concerns of the data analyst relate to section 5.2.4 of the National Protocols for Test Administration, which state that 'students who qualify for exemption and do not submit a test attempted under test conditions are considered as assessed students and are counted in the 'below minimum standard' calculations' (ACARA, 2012b, p. 10). It should be noted that this is distinct from withdrawal, in which case 'students are not counted as part of the cohort of assessed students' (ACARA, 2012b, p. 12).

This teacher reported that the school had accordingly been advised that 'with these kids, you're better off for them to have a go than to be exempt' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school), even though national protocols state that these calculations are utilised solely for reporting purposes in national and jurisdictional data and, as such, do not impact upon school-level calculations (ACARA, 2012b). This teacher described that she, together with the other teachers in the school initially expressed reservations regarding this advice, saying: 'Hang on. Can that be right? Surely that can't be right' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school). However, the teachers ultimately questioned their decision to exempt these children from NAPLAN, deciding that, '... last year we pretty much got everyone to do it who could do it' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school).

This vignette is suggestive of the institutional self-interest which is inherent within neoliberal frameworks (Ball, 2003), as the school's decision not to exempt these children, despite the Year 5 teacher's concerns that 'I'm dreading the three days, just dreading it. I don't think they'll cope at all', confirms that these children's positioning

within current testing and accountability priorities was ultimately unheeded. While the children's experiences of and responses to NAPLAN will be discussed in detail in Chapters Five and Six, this teacher's concerns were justified. The anxiety experienced by two children in particular resulted in emotional outbursts during NAPLAN, which simultaneously engendered negative shifts in child-teacher-peer relationships and augmented these children's negative emotions and alienation from their teacher and peers, as well as their schooling.

Parents' reflections on NAPLAN

Discussions to this point have focussed on the perspectives and experiences of the principals and teachers. However, children's lived experiences of NAPLAN are not confined to their classrooms or schools. I therefore sought to incorporate the views of parents. However, it was not possible to explore the views and understandings of the parents at the lower SES school in depth, as these parents were unable or unwilling to take part in such a discussion. This was compensated to some degree by the descriptions of parental responses to, and views of, NAPLAN which were provided by the principal and teachers.

The parents of children at the higher SES school generally agreed about what they regarded as a 'good' education. Most of these parents discussed the importance of 'promoting a love of learning' (Parent 2, higher SES school) through 'things that children find engaging ... within a nurturing, safe, inclusive environment' (Parent 5, higher SES school) to 'help them reach their full potential' (Parent 1, higher SES school). Only one parent expressed a different view:

A good education is where the child can learn the correct knowledge they need to build their own character. To learn the processes of instruction, study, direction, training and discipline. Thinking skills are important in order to problem solve, and learn the rights and wrongs of life. (Parent 6, higher SES school)

By contrast, parental views of the significance and purpose of NAPLAN were quite diverse and, at times, in conflict. At one end of the continuum, some parents did not consider NAPLAN to be of significance, with one mother conveying her belief that 'NAPLAN is given more 'hype' than it deserves' (Parent 5, higher SES school). Another parent questioned the credibility of results: 'after seeing the way my child's

scores varied in the practice tests, I realise it's just about that one day' (Parent 2, higher SES school). These parents' responses suggest that they utilised NAPLAN results in conjunction with school-based assessments, with some parents favouring the results of school-based assessments as an indicator of how their child was progressing.

At the other end of the continuum, one parent explained: 'That my children achieve well academically is important to me ... I feel this is more 'real world' than anything else we parents are given to go on' (Parent 1, higher SES school). This parent's view contrasted with those presented above, as she clearly believed that NAPLAN's externality took precedence over school-based assessments in her evaluation of her child's progress. This diversity in the parents' responses reflects the confusion within the community in regards to the purpose, significance and accuracy of tests, which, as outlined within the 2010 Senate Inquiry into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing, appears to be largely due to the government's poor communication of the purposes of NAPLAN (Back et al., 2010). There was evidence to suggest that for some parents, this confusion was apparently 'resolved' through the media narratives of distrust, performance and choice, as identified by Mockler (2013), which were evident in the responses of several parents.

The first media narrative of distrust, which effectively '[silences] the voices of those with specialist or professional knowledge about the field' (Mockler, 2013, p. 14), was evident in several parents' comments. For example: 'I would expect that [teachers] should have to discuss their results with supervisors' (Parent, higher SES school). A Year 3 child in the lower SES school recounted her mother's similar explanation that NAPLAN is 'not all about getting A's and F's, it's just to see if your teachers are teaching you correctly' (Year 3 child, lower SES school). In some cases, teachers' attempts to minimise anxiety and disruption by leaving explicit test practice 'until last', which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, resulted in parents' distrust that teachers would effectively prepare the children for NAPLAN. The ensuing tension was evident in one teacher's comment: 'you just hear the talk about how they'll get [the children] ready [for NAPLAN]; how THEY'LL get them ready' (Year 2 teacher, lower SES school).

The parents and children reported varying degrees and types of NAPLAN preparation at home. This ranged from all of the Year 3 children at the higher SES school reporting some form of NAPLAN preparation at home, to only two Year 5 children at the lower SES school reporting such preparation, while others conveyed that they and/or their parents 'really don't worry about it' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). Some children reported indirect preparation through playing games on websites, while other children described working through past NAPLAN tests downloaded by their parents, or commercial NAPLAN preparation books or apps, despite ACARA's espoused advice to parents that 'neither MCEECDYA nor ACARA endorses any ... diagnostic tools or any other product or service to teachers or students in connection with NAPLAN' (ACARA, 2011c, Section 7, Para. 1). Some children additionally reported revising multiplication tables, or completing home-made tests compiled by their parents. This parental supervision of test practice exacerbates differential test preparation, which simultaneously impacts upon the validity of the results, and the inequity of standardised testing, because 'naturally, affluent families ... are better able to afford these products' (Kohn, 2000, p. 324). It also raises concerns regarding 'parents [who] are making their children do extra NAPLAN practice without any ability to teach the concepts properly' (Athanasou, 2010, p. 12).

The narrative of performance, which 'equates high NAPLAN scores with educational success' (Mockler, 2013, p. 14), was evidenced in the response of one parent who indicated that 'I like to know how [my children] are positioned within the school, state and nation' (Parent 1, higher SES school), while another explained that NAPLAN 'helps you to understand where your child is at' (Parent 6, higher SES school). Several parents indicated that this notion of performance aligned well with their constructions of a 'good' education, reasoning that 'if a person wants to go on to further study at high school, university [or] college, they will need to achieve certain standards' (Parent, higher SES school). In other cases, these responses indicated a construction of NAPLAN as a measure of school and teacher performance for the purpose of accountability, with one parent adding that 'if [my children] were not meeting the required standard, I would take action' (Parent, higher SES school).

Mockler's (2013) identified media narrative of choice, was palpable in the higher SES school, where parents aspired to enrol their children in their secondary school-of-choice'. These parents conveyed that 'we hope to send [our son] to a Catholic all-boys' school and it is very competitive to secure a place' (Parent 1, higher SES school). The anxiety this caused for parents was described by one senior staff member who concluded that rational arguments regarding the validity of utilising NAPLAN performance as a criterion for enrolments 'counts for nothing':

In that environment of, my father went to this school, I went to this school, my son is going to go to this school; it's all about friends if you like, my clients, my work are all there. So there's this very, very strong tight network. If their child doesn't go, they feel ... disconnected from that network, which is fairly significant ... I've seen it ... in operation here, and it's very tight. (Area supervisor, lower SES school)

As described in Chapter Two, this notion of networking is referred to by Bourdieu (1986) as 'social capital', and is used to maintain social status and strategic positioning. Within the current climate of a competitive market logic 'to compete actively for 'quality' students by flaunting [NAPLAN] results' (Windle, 2009, p. 234), these parents believed that 'elite' Catholic schools, which begin their intake in Year 5, utilise Year 3 NAPLAN results as a basis for acceptance or exclusion. While not all parents agreed with the notion of using NAPLAN results in this fashion, they were nevertheless in agreement that NAPLAN results played an important role in being accepted into these schools. For example, one parent remarked that 'the results were of NO importance to us at all ... I wish high schools took the same opinion' (Parent, higher SES school).

The teachers at the higher SES school both recognised and shared the parents' belief that acceptance into their high school-of-choice was contingent on Year 3 NAPLAN performance. As a consequence, the Year 3 teacher was acutely aware of the perceived importance of the children's NAPLAN results, conveying that 'you know, you may not get into a school because of your NAPLAN results ... it has a big impact' (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school). The teachers did not, however, agree with this alleged use of the NAPLAN data, with one of the Year 7 teachers arguing that

It's ... absolutely ridiculous ... there are ... kids that I've taught, haven't got into these schools because of their NAPLAN results. Sorry, I shouldn't say I know - I assume that they haven't got into these schools because of their results. (Year 7 teacher A, higher SES school)

This assumption that elite Catholic secondary schools utilise the NAPLAN data for the purpose of excluding those children who potentially encumber these schools' positioning on published league tables led one senior executive to raise this issue with the relevant principals. These principals had assured him that NAPLAN results were utilised together with school-based assessment data to ensure 'a match between the programs and [the students'] own academic performance ... they do not use [NAPLAN results] as an admission tool' (Senior executive, QCEC). He added that the parents' perceptions of NAPLAN data being utilised in such an inappropriate manner was likely the result of media hype and the publication of league tables. Another senior executive within BCE also confirmed that 'the principals of those schools will tell you no, they're not [asking for NAPLAN results] for academic selection, it's about meeting the child's needs'. However, he was quick to add that 'parents ... don't buy that'.

Despite systemic rejection of the practice of utilising NAPLAN results to govern school enrolments, many parents nevertheless believed that elite schools make de facto use of these results as part of the requirements for enrolment, irrespective of how these schools actually use these data. This suggests that NAPLAN may be high-stakes for families within higher SES communities seeking enrolment into elite secondary schools, particularly those families with children in Year 3.

Shifts in relationships between the schools and their communities

Within a context of confusion and multiple dissonances regarding NAPLAN, and political and media discourses surrounding the tests and the publication of results on the MySchool website, it was evident that there were distinctly negative shifts in some parents' relationships with teachers and their children. This section begins by addressing the issue of a deterioration of some parent-teacher relationships, which is followed by a brief discussion of evidence that some children's relationships with their parents may also have been affected by NAPLAN and the discourses surrounding the tests.

There was evidence to suggest that some children were positioned within discordant parent-teacher relationships in regards to NAPLAN, which corresponds with Wyn et al's (2014) finding that NAPLAN is contributing towards the creation of an 'us and them situation' (p. 14). Some of this discordance arose from adult perceptions of the reason for many children's anxiety in regards to NAPLAN. On the one hand, staff blamed parents, as evidenced in one teacher's observation that '[the parents] see it as this huge thing and their kid has to do well; it's nearly like doing an OP in Years two and three!' (Year 2 teacher, lower SES school). The Year 4 teacher at the lower SES school similarly reported that 'parents put a lot of focus on the NAPLAN tests ... [they] don't look at the whole picture'. On the other hand, parents blamed teachers for this anxiety, asserting that 'a national test on a seven year old child is a pretty big deal to the child, regardless of how a parent tries to settle them when the entire year's focus to that point appeared to be NAPLAN preparation' (Parent 3, higher SES school).

One teacher described the lower SES school's need to seek advice from ACARA, in order to manage the overtly negative response of many parents who 'were mortified, horrified, that our Year 3s as a cohort ... did so poorly [in the first round of testing]' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school), which provided further evidence of a negative shift in parent-teacher relationships. Other research findings suggest that this school's experience may be generally reflective of poorly performing schools. For example, one principal in Athanasou's (2010) study conveyed that 'we had a lot of explaining to do to justify our poorer results' (p. 17).

This positioning of children within discordant parent-teacher relationships raises concerns in relation to research that suggests quality relationships between parents and teachers may have a substantially positive effect on children's learning outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001). If, as these findings suggest, poor performance generates a greater negative shift in parent-teacher relationships, then those children in poorly performing schools are likely to face greater disadvantage as a result of published test results.

Through descriptions provided by the teachers and principal in the lower SES school, it was evident that these parents viewed NAPLAN differently from those at the higher SES school. While the principal emphasised that 'I just get the negative

feedback ... so it's not every parent of every child in Year 3, 5 and 7', she relayed that parents of children with disabilities were not supportive of NAPLAN. In describing this negative feedback, she explained that 'they have to allay anxieties well in advance of those few days of testing and even subsequent to testing' (Principal, lower SES school). These parents therefore seek her advice on whether to withdraw their children from the NAPLAN tests 'because they don't believe that it is helpful in any way to their child'. She added that some parents whose children achieve poor NAPLAN results do not share these results with them, 'because they don't want their child to be anxious about what those results show ... sometimes they show a story that is not particularly accurate or particularly helpful for the child's self-esteem'.

Most children in both schools reported receiving support from their parents, explaining that 'they just say do your best', with some parents emphasising that 'it doesn't matter what mark you get as long as you try your hardest and do your best' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). Another child in this class explained:

My parents, they're very serious about it, but then again, they don't really mind how I do, as long as I do my best and try my best, even if I don't do very well. They don't mind, because they know I've done my best. And some bits might not be as good as other bits, and they understand that and they know that. (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

Some parents also reminded the children that 'it's just another test' and one child explained that her mother had told her 'to pretend it was normal school. Because in normal school I'm never pressured, I'm always just calm ... but for NAPLAN I was really nervous, so my mum just told me to pretend it was normal school' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). Several parents additionally offered advice on test-taking strategies, with the most commonly-reported pieces of advice reflected in the following statements: 'if I can't get all the questions then just go to the next one and come back to it at the end' (Year 7 child, higher SES school) and 'don't try to be the first to finish and take my time' (Year 5 child, lower SES school). These children's reports are supported by Wyn et al.'s (2014) finding that 'the majority of students reported support from their parents in the lead-up to NAPLAN' (p. 6).

However, there was some evidence to suggest that a few children experienced a negative shift in their relationships with their parents in respect to NAPLAN and its perceived importance. For example, one child in Year 7 asserted that ‘My parents speak rubbish’ when discussing the pressure they placed on him to perform well in the tests. He went on to note that while some pressure was good, too much was bad, and that when the pressure was really on, it made him feel like ‘I just don’t want to do it any more’. This child’s response resonates with evidence within the literature that unrealistically high parental expectations for children’s test performance engenders dynamics of anxiety, particularly when parents react negatively to their children’s failure to meet these expectations (Hill & Wigfield, 1984). Hill and Wigfield would therefore argue that these children may try to avoid these types of evaluative situations, by disengaging from tests, rather than risking failure.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data presented in this chapter generated several key findings which suggest that, overall, the teachers and principals in these schools essentially experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes. Further, that this was the result of several strategies implemented by BCE to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN. Within an overall approach of being data informed rather than data driven, these strategies included such low-stakes uses of the data as a means of triangulating school-based assessment data and the rejection of the use of NAPLAN data for accountability or marketing purposes.

This apparent success was palpable in the lower SES school, where the Year 5 teacher in particular continued to utilise inquiry-based pedagogies to engage children with learning difficulties, despite the school’s comparatively poor NAPLAN performance. This provides a significant contrast to the experiences of teachers in low SES government schools who reported elsewhere that ‘designing responsive, inclusive and engaging curriculum and pedagogies [is] very difficult to maintain’ (Comber & Nixon, 2009, p. 343) within the current climate of comparative performativity.

The success of these strategies was however limited by the transactional interplay between several intervening factors inherent within the current climate of neoliberal

trends and discourses, such as the articulation of higher achievement standards, and test-based accountability and control. These included (1) multiple and often contradictory adult constructions of NAPLAN's purpose, significance and accuracy; (2) requirements to use the data for federal funding; (3) BCE's subjection to wider discourses of market logic; and (4) strong political and media discourses surrounding the publication of results. In combination, these factors produced contradictions and dissonances which engendered a confusing context of mixed messages and debates, which made providing children with clear and consistent information regarding the purpose of NAPLAN difficult.

The limited success of BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN was evidenced in several ways. The first of these was particularly evident in the higher SES school, where parents sought to enrol their children in their secondary school-of-choice. These parents believed that elite schools utilise NAPLAN data as a de facto means of governing enrolments, despite systemic rejection of such practice and these principals' reports that NAPLAN data are not used in this manner.

While staff at the lower SES school did not experience NAPLAN as high-stakes, they made greater use of the data, and were therefore more likely to reconfigure their curricula on the basis of NAPLAN results. Research suggests such use of the data risks an over-emphasis on basic skills at the expense of the higher order and critical thinking skills and thus reductive schooling for children in low SES contexts.

Finally, the limits of BCE's mediation were evident in negative shifts in the relationships between the schools and their communities. In some instances, teachers and parents blamed each other for the perceived causes of children's anxiety in relation to NAPLAN. While some parents also distrusted teachers who attempted to minimise the focus on the tests to effectively prepare their children for NAPLAN, consequently conducting such preparation with their children at home, others criticised teachers for implementing what they believed was excessive test preparation. In some cases, children were consequently positioned within discordant parent-teacher relationships in regards to NAPLAN.

Overall, analysis of the data indicates that while several mixed messages were generated through the symbiotic relationships between multiple NAPLAN realities, the strategies implemented by BCE were relatively successful; with the principals and teachers essentially experiencing NAPLAN as low-stakes. From this perspective, it would be reasonable to surmise that the children in each school would also experience NAPLAN as low-stakes. The thesis therefore moves to follow the children's everyday experiences of school, followed by preparing for NAPLAN, through to taking the tests.

Chapter 5: NAPLAN and everyday school life

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore in a comprehensive and tangible way, how primary school-aged children in different SES schools experienced NAPLAN. As described in Chapter Four, these children were positioned at a particular intersection of local-national-global policy contexts, in which strategies were implemented to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN described in the review of the literature. However, BCE schools cannot experience NAPLAN in unmitigated isolation from the political and media discourses surrounding the tests and the publication of results. While the extent to which BCE can mediate these perceived negative effects of NAPLAN is therefore limited, the analysis of the data presented in Chapter Four suggests that the principals and teachers in both schools essentially experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes, despite the lower SES school's comparatively poor test performance.

To facilitate this exploration of the children's lived experiences of NAPLAN, I begin with a brief description of the children's prior experiences of schooling and the extent to which they were exposed to, or prepared for the tests in the previous year. This is followed by a consideration of the children's everyday experiences of school during the 2012 school year, which aims to present vivid images of the types of tasks typically completed by the children, as well as the child-teacher-peer interactions and relationships within each classroom. The discussion then endeavours to answer the research question, *what are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?* by exploring the extent to which the children experienced disjuncture between their everyday school lives and NAPLAN. Analyses of all relevant data are utilised in seeking an answer to this research question. The discussion begins by establishing the extent to which the children in each class were prepared for NAPLAN, before ascertaining the differences between school-based assessments and NAPLAN, changes in the teachers' professional practices precipitated by NAPLAN, and shifts in child-teacher-peer relationships as a consequence of NAPLAN and its associated preparation. A

discussion of some children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes then precedes a summative conclusion to the chapter.

During the course of this analysis, I do not endeavour to evaluate any child's experience or construction of NAPLAN. Rather, as described in the research design, I explore the children's lived experiences of the tests within the complex context of the multiple overlapping realities of NAPLAN and the ways in which these realities interacted and at times interfered with each other (Law, 2004).

Preparing for NAPLAN in the previous year

In order to explore the children's lived experiences of NAPLAN in depth, it is necessary to also explore their experiences of everyday school life. This process begins with considerations of the children's prior classroom experiences and the extent to which they may have experienced any 'back wash' or 'trickle down' effect' of NAPLAN. This was achieved vicariously through semi-structured interviews held with Year 2, 4 and 6 teachers in each school community.

The Year 2 teacher in the higher SES school reported adopting constructivist pedagogies, with a particular focus on 'embracing inquiry-based learning'. Inquiry-based pedagogies do 'not aim to achieve a single 'right' answer for a particular question being addressed, but rather involve students more in the process of observing, posing questions, engaging in experimentation or exploration, and learning to analyse and reason' (Hattie, 2009, p. 208-209). To illustrate her approach, she used the example of the science topic, 'mini-beasts' which the children were exploring at the time of the interview. She explained that through this approach, the children 'can find their own topic as they become researchers themselves ... to use the resources within the room as well as outside of the room ... to become independent learners'. Within this approach, she recognised that NAPLAN was experienced as high-stakes by the families of the Year 3 children in her school community, who aspired to enrol their children in their secondary school-of-choice. As a result, 'when [NAPLAN] came up in planning, I immediately went; they need to be ready for NAPLAN. And that was something I didn't consciously think of; it was just an immediate reaction' (Year 2 teacher, higher SES school). However, she reported that the only NAPLAN preparation she did with the children

was to change the writing genre from narrative to persuasive text, 'so that [the children] would have some understanding, some idea of what that was for Year 3'. Thus, apart from the adaptation of the written genre, NAPLAN had little effect on the curricula and pedagogies experienced by the children in Year 2.

The Year 6 teacher at the higher SES school also appeared to implement a largely constructivist approach, in which the children were scaffolded and supported within 'multiple and varied opportunities to achieve ... to the best of their ability'. These included cooperative and individual learning experiences, and some rote learning. Like the Year 2 teacher, she was aware of 'the pressure [that] is put on the child for high school selection', however she also reported that NAPLAN had not impacted on her customary pedagogies, emphasising that 'results do not affect the support I give each child in my class ... but the text type for the following year ... is definitely an area that I feel I need to teach'. Thus, apart from familiarising the children with the genre of persuasive text, NAPLAN had little effect on the children's learning experiences in Year 6.

The Year 2 teacher at the lower SES school described adopting a variety of approaches to cater for the children's broad range of abilities by 'making sure that they have got as many different opportunities to get there as they need'. Part of this approach involved 'a sensible approach' to using NAPLAN data to identify 'what's happened so far, what are our weaknesses? Our strengths? So what do I need to focus on to really set them up for success?' While she utilised these data to inform her curriculum choices, an issue which will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter, she did not report 'teaching to the test', conducting practice tests or altering her pedagogies as a result of NAPLAN. The impact of NAPLAN on the children's schooling in Year 2 was consequently limited.

The Year 4 teacher in the lower SES school reported that she focussed on inquiry-based pedagogies. Within this approach, she described utilising a combination of cooperative and individual learning experiences. This teacher conveyed that NAPLAN did not align well with her professional practice, and that apart from covering the genre of persuasive text, she had not altered her curricula or pedagogies as a result of NAPLAN. However, like the Year 2 teacher, she described utilising the NAPLAN data 'to be able to pick out what inquiries we need to look at ...

[by looking] at the questions that they fell short on in Grade 3 and work on that for Grade 5'. She clarified this by adding, 'a little bit, but not much'. Thus, while she utilised NAPLAN data to inform her practice to some degree, she did not alter her inquiry-based pedagogies.

While these teachers reported that they taught the written genre of persuasive text, they did not indicate that they otherwise altered their professional practices to accommodate NAPLAN and did not conduct any practice NAPLAN tests. This is suggestive of negligible 'back wash' or 'trickle-down' effect from NAPLAN prior to the children's entry into Years 3 and 7 respectively. However it must be emphasised that teachers' perspectives alone cannot account for the children's lived experiences. As such, these reports were intended to be indicative of the extent to which the children experienced NAPLAN preparation in Years 2, 4 and 6, rather than to provide a comprehensive account of such preparation.

Everyday experiences of school

In order to explore the complex transactional interplay which occurred between primary school children's realities of everyday school and NAPLAN in the year that they took the tests, I begin this section with a consideration of the children's everyday lives. This is achieved through a brief reiteration of the Year 3, 5 and 7 teachers' approaches to and beliefs about teaching as described in Chapter Four, in combination with extracts from teacher diaries and illustrative examples of daily classroom life taken from classroom observations. Photographs and diagrams of classroom layouts support the classroom observations, together with excerpts from school newsletters and examples of tasks completed by the children. The section concludes with the children's own reflections on these typical experiences of school.

The Year 3 classroom in the higher SES school

The Year 3 teacher in the higher SES school conveyed that she was a 'great believer in teacher-directed teaching', which contrasted with the constructivist approach of the Year 2 teacher. She explained that her approach was founded on her concern to ensure that all children 'get the same message', and expanded on this by saying, 'now I know that sounds a bit old-fashioned, but sometimes when I work it out; there have been gaps in learning. You know, we assume.' Her choice of

classroom layout (see Figure 5.1) signalled a didactic, or transmission pedagogy, within an individualist learning environment, which is described within the literature as a space in which children work independently of one another to achieve set criteria (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). A clear area in front of a fold-out whiteboard did however provide a collaborative space for discussions between the teacher and children.

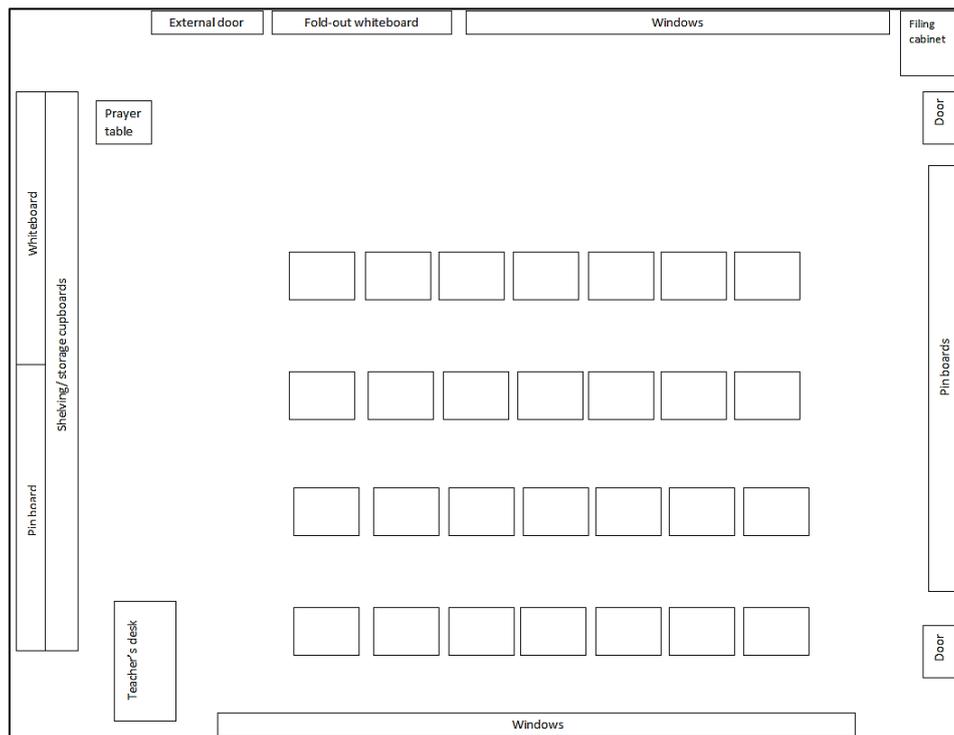


Figure 5.1 Year 3 higher SES school classroom layout

The classroom observations provided evidence to suggest that lessons typically began with the children sitting on the carpet in front of the fold-out whiteboard as the teacher elicited the children’s knowledge of the concept being taught or revised, which was followed by the teacher modelling the ‘right’ approach to solving set problems. The children then worked independently through teacher-directed tasks, which were corrected in red pen by the children as the answers were read aloud. For example, in the following excerpt from classroom observations, the children were reviewing the concept of division.

Discussion of division while sitting on the carpet:

Teacher: What is division?

Children: Sharing, opposite of times, you divide it, you can use groups of, it's kind of like subtraction.

Teacher: What sign do we use when we divide? Who can draw it on the board? Good boy. Who can give me a 2 multiplication?

Child: $2 \times 1 = 2$

Teacher: How do we make it into a divided by? We start with 2 and share it between 2. How many does each get?

Worked through several more examples.

Teacher: Take out your grid book. *Children move back to desks.*

Teacher: I'm going to put up some multiplications. You write the multiplication with the answer, and underneath, you write the division. I will do the first one with you.

Teacher writes five questions on the whiteboard. Children work quietly to complete the task while she walks around the room checking answers. (Excerpt from classroom observations 23/4/2012)

This excerpt provides evidence of this teacher's didactic approach that 'involves primarily teacher directed instruction of tasks to all the class, suggesting uniform ways of performing them' (Hattie, 2009, p. 245). Part of this approach included short weekly tests in number facts and spelling, which normally occurred on Fridays. On one occasion, these tests took place during classroom observations, providing insights into how the children experienced these tests. The children completed these tests at their desks, which remained in their typical position within the classroom as the teacher read out the words or number facts. Answers were written in the designated space on a tabled worksheet, which had been glued into the children's spelling books, and the children then self-corrected their work with red pen as the teacher wrote the answers on the fold-out whiteboard. After the tests, the teacher asked the children, one row at a time, to stand if all of their answers were correct, handing out stickers to those who performed well.

Such didactic pedagogies are strongly critiqued within the literature as '[failing] to make a difference in their lack of both intellectual demand and connectedness to the world' (Lingard, 2007, p. 246). However, research also suggests that a number of factors may play a part in the variety of approaches taken by teachers, including

certain subject areas, the particular cohort of children they are working with at the time, and the time of day or year (McPake, Harlen, Powney, & Davidson, 1999). In this study, classroom observations were typically conducted at the same time and on the same day each week, predominantly during the first half of the school year. With two exceptions due to a public holiday and a swimming carnival, this resulted in virtually exclusive observations of mathematics lessons in this classroom. However, in a lesson observed towards the end of the year, the children were applying what they had been learning about the history of their local area by creating a brochure utilising ICT's. This brochure was to provide information regarding the history, present or possible future of the local community, or its natural or built features. During this time, the children were seated in a group configuration, often discussing and comparing the content and format of their respective brochures, with some children assisting those who were experiencing difficulties with the technology. Thus, while observed pedagogies were predominantly didactic, there was evidence to suggest that the teacher utilised a variety of approaches, depending on the subject area and the learning task.

The Year 7 classroom in the higher SES school

As described in Chapter Three, the two Year 7 classes were merged, as a result of the teachers' informal team teaching arrangement. There was evidence of consistency between the children's experiences of school life in Years 6 and 7, with the Year 7 teachers also describing having high expectations of the children, and challenging them within a variety of individual and cooperative learning experiences.

It's got to be fun and exciting ... and not always just giggling or laughing, you know ... to make it ... joyous, interesting, [and] vital ... and there's got to be a bit of rote learning in there as well. It's a combination of working together and working individually. (Year 7 teacher B, higher SES school)

The Year 7 teachers emphasised the importance of giving the children opportunities to work cooperatively, as 'a lot of peer-tutoring goes on ... Sometimes I can stand back and see a twelve year old teach a concept better than I can teach it myself' (Year 7 teacher A). His description of the success of peer-tutoring aligns with William's (2011) assertion that 'the effect of peer-tutoring can be almost as strong as one-on-one instruction from a teacher' (p. 134). In order to accommodate this range

of learning experiences, a number of classroom layouts were utilised to facilitate collaborative, cooperative and individual tasks, whole class discussions, or space for the teachers to work with groups of children experiencing difficulties (See Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3).

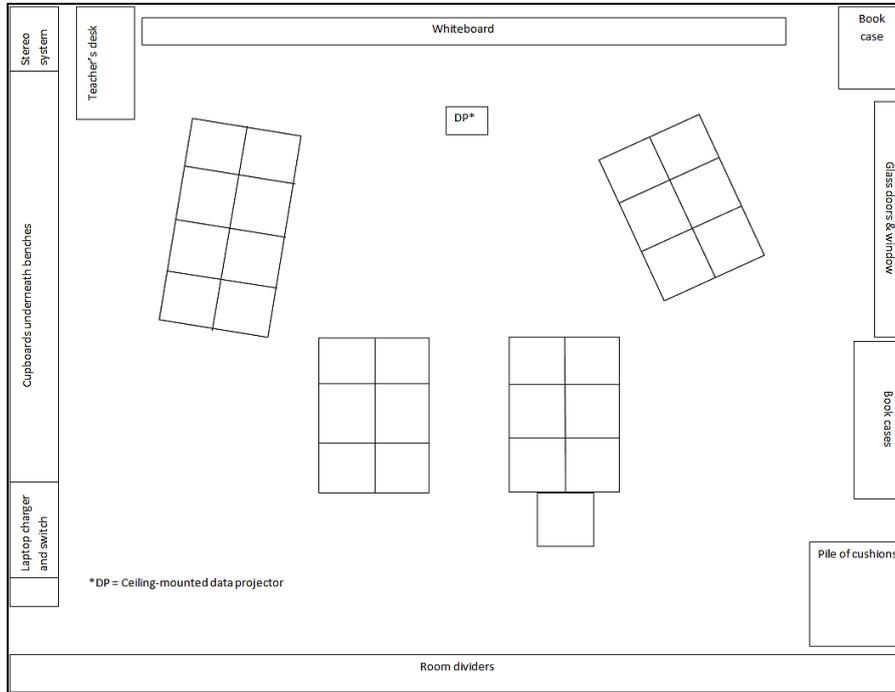


Figure 5.2 Year 7 higher SES school, classroom layout example 1

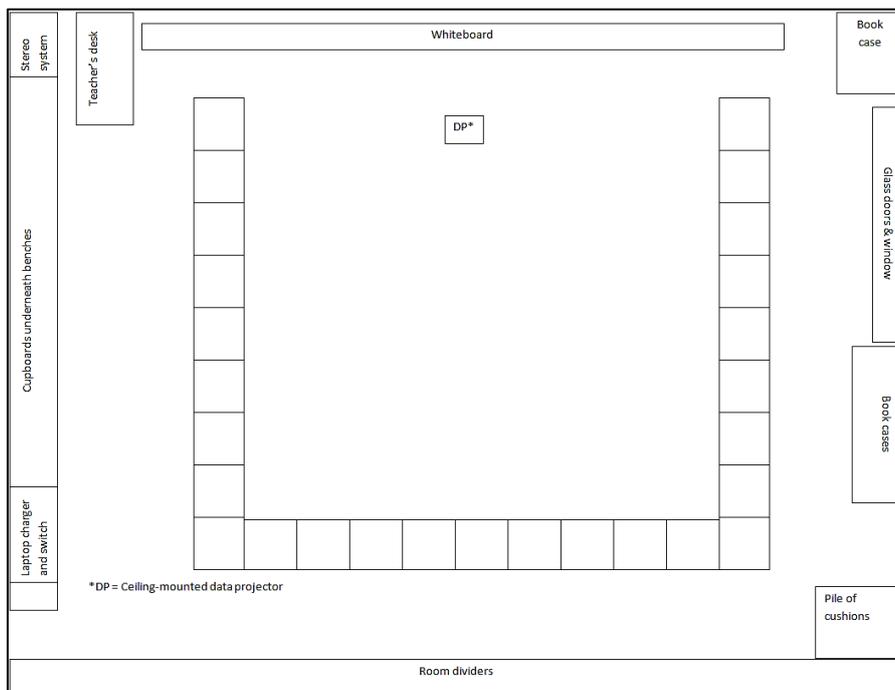


Figure 5.3 Year 7 higher SES school, classroom layout example 2

One of the most significant aspects of being in Year 7 was participating in the Year 7 Parliament. The Year 7 teachers had established the Parliament in conjunction with the school's senior administration staff to give the children the opportunity to learn about Australia's Parliamentary system, through active engagement in school leadership. During these Parliamentary sittings, which were held on several occasions throughout the school year, the children worked in committees to propose bills, which in this particular year were focused on the Ministries of Welfare, Sport, Social Events and The Environment. As bills were passed, they were announced in the school newsletter, for example:



Last week our Year 7 leaders convened their first session of parliament where an Earth Hour bill was submitted suggesting that we acknowledge a serious environmental issue of our time by 'turning off our lights' for the last hour of school this Thursday. The bill was unanimously passed and our Year 7's will be explaining the reasons for this action at an assembly this week. Congratulations to our student leaders who have demonstrated due thought, initiative and stewardship in proposing a bill that acknowledges the sustainability issues surrounding the use of fossil fuels in providing energy for the 21st century. (Excerpt from school newsletter 29/3/2012)

It may be argued that this notion of democratic participation does not give rise to 'the kinds of authentic student agency where students are extended an active voice ... [with] teachers and students [acting] as agent-partners in the construction and habitation of the school' (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015, p. 34). Nevertheless, this approach genuinely sought to enfranchise children in ways which attempted to embody concepts of active citizenship as described by Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, by providing the children with opportunities to enact change or raise awareness of issues that were important to them through engagement in their roles as the school leaders.

The high level of engagement fostered by this enfranchisement was evident during the second of these Parliamentary sittings, which took place during classroom observations three weeks before NAPLAN, with the principal acting as the Governor-General, while the children adopted the positions of the Speaker and various Ministers and members. The dividing doors between the Year 7 classrooms were opened and the room was rearranged to resemble the House of Representatives chamber (See Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4 Classroom arrangement for Year 7 Parliament

During this Parliamentary sitting, the Ministers for Sports and Welfare proposed several bills. The focus of this discussion is the Minister for welfare's proposal for an 'MJR superhero day', which was developed by the children in the committee to draw attention to the school's commitment to 'Making Jesus Real' (MJR) by assisting and supporting others. The Minister proposed to advertise the event in the school newsletter by placing posters around the school, and an announcement made by the Minister at a school assembly. The day itself was to involve the children coming to school dressed up as an 'MJR superhero'. The following excerpt from the classroom observations provides an account of the questions posed by the members and other Ministers subsequent to this proposal:

- Member #1:** Have you received permission from the Governor-General?
- Minister:** Yes.
- Member #2:** Why do you want to do this?
- Minister:** To promote MJR in our school.
- Member #3:** Will the Year 7s have to dress up as well?
- Minister:** Yes.
- Teacher B:** Could you give us an example of an MJR superhero?
- Minister:** 'Bridget build-a-bridge', which means that if something bad happens, like you have a fight with your friend, you build a bridge and get over it.
- Speaker:** The vote of the bill will now take place. Those who support the bill say 'aye'.
- All children:** 'Aye'
- Speaker:** The 'aye's' have it. (Excerpt from classroom observations, 23/04/2012)

The passing of this bill was subsequently announced in the school newsletter, and the school community responded enthusiastically to the event, with the Year 3 teacher organising a 'fashion parade' for the children in her class, and parents and teachers taking photographs of the children in their costumes at assembly that morning (see Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5 Example of an 'MJR' character, 'Mighty Matthew'

Part of the children's everyday learning experiences included a variety of assessments, which encompassed assignments, such as designing the layout of the upcoming school fair to scale, and taking tests. One mathematics test, which was taken by the children during classroom observations, provided insights into how these children experienced taking school-based tests. Paralleling the experience of the Year 3 children in the school, the seating arrangement in this class was not altered for this test. However, in a contrast to the experience of the Year 3 children, whose teacher read the words and number facts aloud, the Year 7 children completed the test without scripted direction from the teacher. While the test was expected to take thirty minutes to complete, the children were able to continue working on a history assignment once they had finished, thus providing sufficient time for all children to complete the test. These children's experiences of school-based tests suggest that they were an unobtrusive component of the teaching and learning cycle and as such, a normal part of the rhythms and patterns of everyday school life.

The Year 3 classroom in the lower SES school

The Year 3 teacher in the lower SES school also discussed the importance of engaging children in their learning, conveying that, '[the classroom] has to be a vibrant place, it has to be a busy place ... you have to engage them, you have to stimulate them, and it has to be interesting'. Within this wider perspective, she focussed on the importance of dialogic interactions, as 'you have to have a lot of experiences of talking ... There must be time for discussion; there must be time for sharing', which aligns with Ranciere's (1991) assertion that 'the child is first of all a speaking being' (p. 11), as discussed in the research design. The physical layout of the classroom was accordingly indicative of a constructivist approach, with the children's desks arranged in a group configuration of varying sizes to accommodate the needs of children with learning difficulties (See Figure 5.6).

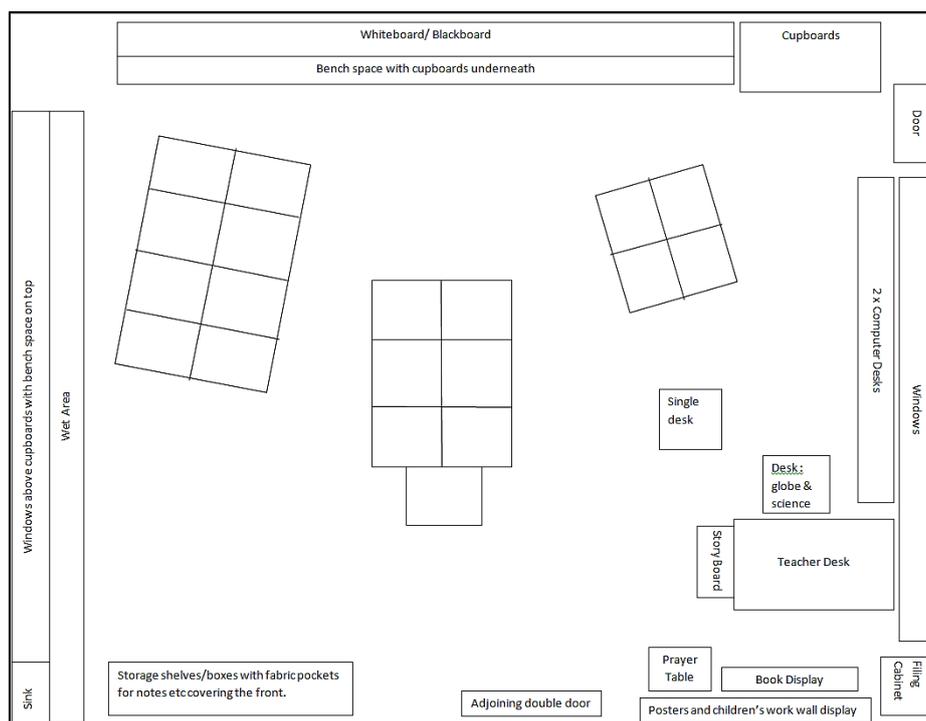


Figure 5.6 Year 3 lower SES school classroom layout

The classroom observations suggested that the interactions between the teacher and children during these discussions resulted in profoundly creative responses from

the children, whether they were pretending to be reporters researching the local area, or measuring the lengths and angles of shadows at several points in time during the day. For example, when preparing the children for a writing task, the teacher placed a large stimulus picture of people standing on a jetty on the whiteboard, and asked the children to 'brainstorm' ideas. The children were unsure of the meaning of this word; however during the class discussion, the children responded with various suggestions such as the metaphorical descriptions, 'well, it's got the word 'storm' in it, so I think it's like a twister in your brain, catching all the ideas', and 'It's like lightning, the ideas come really quickly'. Once the meaning of the word had been clarified in this way, the children were able to brainstorm their ideas, before sharing them with a partner and subsequently writing their response.

These children were not observed to complete formal assessments; however the teacher advised the children that the purpose of NAPLAN is that 'they want you to think', which was observed to be a common topic of conversation in the classroom. For example, in the following excerpt taken from a lesson involving preparation for the writing test, the teacher emphasised the importance of thinking:

The children are given examples of well-written persuasive texts.

Teacher: We will be working in small groups of three to discuss these – which arguments do you like best? Why?

Teacher: This is to get you to think, and to think about your thinking. Have you ever heard the word metacognition? ... Why is it good to think about your thinking? ... Have I ever told you that your brain is the greediest part of your body?

Brief discussion regarding energy, food and exercise.

Teacher: What kinds of things go on when you're thinking? ...

Children: We can make new things ... inventions ... think of new ideas.

(Excerpt from classroom observations 17/4/2012).

These types of discussions related to the teacher's belief that 'if you can get a child to think, they will be okay ... obviously you can go running it off parrot-fashion, but it's like a robot. Switch it on. Switch it off. But to have understanding, that's different'. This perspective is supported by Elkind (2001) who argues that rote

learning is very different from being able to perform mathematical equations and to read with understanding. Through the teacher's descriptions and classroom observations, it is clear that the central focus of these children's everyday school lives was the daily classroom discourses which enabled them to consolidate and refine their understandings through dialogic interactions with their teacher and peers.

The Year 5 classroom in the lower SES school

The Year 5 teacher at the lower SES school focussed on utilising inquiry-based pedagogies, which provided continuity from the children's experiences in Year 4. Her professional practices, which were founded on attempting 'to try and get to these kids', aligned most closely with research that suggests 'the broadest curriculum that encourages a range of learning experiences is crucial in lowering the equity gap' (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013, p. 312). Part of this approach of '[putting] the kids in the driver's seat of their learning ... [which involved] a lot of hands-on, [getting] them out and on the go doing practical things, real-life experiences where I can', included inquiry-based assessments. As a result, these children were unfamiliar with formal testing, as 'they've not done any sit tests. Occasionally I check on ... concepts, understandings, but most of it is done through inquiry' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school).

It is here that BCE's mediation of NAPLAN was most evident, as the Year 4 and 5 teachers in particular were able to continue utilising such pedagogies and assessments, despite the school's relatively poor NAPLAN performance. This provides a significant contrast to reports from teachers in government schools that 'designing responsive, inclusive and engaging curriculum and pedagogies are very difficult to maintain' (Comber & Nixon, 2009, p. 343) within the current climate of comparative performativity, particularly in poorly performing schools. In order to accommodate her inquiry-based approach, the teacher had developed a classroom layout to cater for individual activities, while providing sufficient floor space to allow for cooperative tasks or to work with those children who required additional assistance (see Figure 5.7).

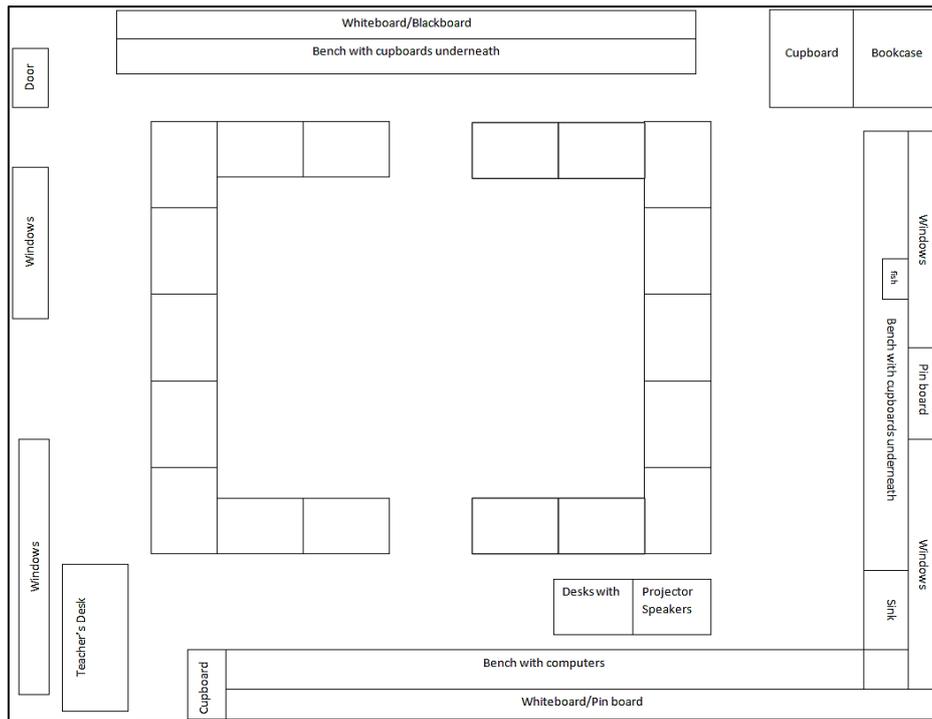


Figure 5.7. Year 5 lower SES school classroom layout

The teacher's belief in the importance of drawing from real life experiences was evident in many of the observed lessons. For example, a mathematics lesson was observed that focused on developing the children's understandings of time, including digital and 24 hour representations of time. Using an A3 sheet of paper with movie advertisements, photocopied from the Brisbane newspaper, *The Sunday Mail* (see Figure 5.8), and a blank copy of a timetable, the children were to plan a 'movie marathon'. This was to be recorded in digital and 24-hour time, with the aim of seeing as many movies as possible, allowing for lunch and toilet breaks. While this was an individual activity, many children shared and discussed their ideas throughout the completion of the task.



Figure 5.8. Movie advertisements from The Sunday Mail 15/4/2012

These children experienced a change of teacher a few weeks before NAPLAN, resulting in a distinct shift from their experiences of inquiry-based pedagogies and drawing from everyday life experiences, to a more didactic approach. Some children's inability to cope with this change was evidenced throughout the classroom observations such as the following excerpt, which was taken as the children were working in the multimedia room in science:

Child: (to school officer) I need help. If he does that ONE more time, I'm just going to lose it ...

One child has started arguing about seating; other children join in. Teacher asked one of the girls to move.

Child: I don't want to! *Bursts into tears and doesn't move.*

... The child who began the argument goes to the teacher with a question (inaudible). Doesn't like her answer, kicks furniture and throws a pencil. Girl still angry and upset, but at the teacher's suggestion, moves to the carpet in front of the screen. The children watch a YouTube clip on the beginning of the sun and solar system.

Child: That's not spectacular (re: 'spectacular supernova' in clip).

The children share their knowledge of space via discussion of the clip.

One child with speech difficulties attempted a lengthy explanation of what he knew about space.

Child: Can we move on now? (Excerpt from classroom observations, 3/5/2012)

This excerpt provides evidence of a significant negative shift in some children's behaviour, and consequently their relationships. This shift may be explained, as Alexander (2010) suggests, by children's feelings of vulnerability 'when they ... [encounter] new teachers ... which [means] having to adjust to new ways of working as well as new expectations and routines' (p. 148). These observations suggest that the arrival of a new teacher had significant implications. While some children were able to cope with the transition from inquiry-based pedagogies to a more didactic approach, others, particularly those with learning difficulties, experienced anxiety which manifested in a negative shift in their behaviour, affecting child-teacher-peer relationships and ultimately, the quality of all the children's everyday school experiences.

The children's reflections on their everyday experiences of school

During the focus group discussions with the children, it was evident that while the teachers focused on the importance of engaging the children in a variety of tasks, the children tended to concentrate on whether given tasks were cooperative or individual in nature, rather than emphasising the focus of the tasks per se. On the one hand, some children conveyed that they preferred collaborative or cooperative tasks because 'I'm not very confident sometimes' (Year 5 child, lower SES school), 'you get to talk to the other people and see what they think as well' (Year 3 child, lower SES school), or that 'it's good to ... bounce ideas between the classes and the teachers' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). Other children conversely preferred to work individually, with these children reporting that 'I get easily distracted with friends around' (Year 5 child, lower SES school) or that 'I actually like it when the teacher teaches you about it and then you go and do it in your textbook' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). These children's responses align with Hattie's (2009) claim that 'not all

students succeed or even prefer cooperative learning situations ... what is important is ... whether these situations produce greater outcomes, [and] deeper comprehension' (p. 212). Regardless of whether individual tasks were cooperative or individual in nature, the classroom observations outlined earlier provide evidence to suggest that the children's everyday experiences of school involved engaging in dialogue with their teachers and peers to consolidate, refine and expand their understandings.

The exception to this general trend of discussing preferences for cooperative or individual tasks was the Year 3 children at the higher SES school. When asked what types of lessons helped them learn best, one of the children responded 'When we're working in our books'. However the second child's response, 'I think it might be when you're actually doing the real NAPLANs from past years', immediately directed the conversation to NAPLAN, with one child agreeing, 'yeah, like practice tests'. A third child then added, 'I think that the practices really help you because you usually get the questions that are related in most of the NAPLANs, so I think doing the practice NAPLANs helps'. When I extended this discussion to ask the children how they learned best when they were not preparing for NAPLAN, one child responded, 'when you're spelling really well – so that in case it turns up on NAPLAN, you know how to spell the word', which suggests that at least one child had made a strong connection between NAPLAN and learning outcomes.

This connection appeared to be due to the relatively high level of explicit NAPLAN preparation this class had experienced in the lead-up to NAPLAN, indicating that this teacher's professional practices had been significantly affected by the tests. While the issue of preparation will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter, Comber's (2012) question of the 'extent to which students appropriate this approach to learning activity as normative or understand it as test-specific behaviour' (p. 129) may be exemplified in these children's responses. The teachers' diary entries indicated that any work relating to NAPLAN ceased immediately after the conclusion of the testing period. While this data will be addressed in further detail later in the chapter, it would be reasonable to hypothesise that if the children were to be asked the same questions later in the school year, their responses would contrast with those they gave immediately subsequent to NAPLAN.

The children's reflections on assessment

The children in the higher SES school reported that 'every year we already have heaps of tests' (Year 7 child), and that 'there [are] different tests and more important tests [than NAPLAN]' (Year 3 child), indicating that they were accustomed to taking tests. The focus group discussion with the Year 7 children provided evidence to suggest that this group was most likely to report that testing was their preferred method of assessment. For example, 'if I get something wrong I can see where I've gone wrong easier', or 'if I get a lot wrong ... it's easier to talk to the teacher about it'. This was somewhat unexpected, given the societal assumption regarding children's aversion to testing, which was evident in ACARA's assertion that '[n]ot many children like taking tests at any time' (ACARA, 2014). Only one of these children reported that

I learn more from assignments, because ... if you don't do very well, then the teacher talks to you about it and explains it, what you did wrong or what you did really well. So you learn from what you are doing. And with tests you just have to already learn it and then just do it. (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

These children's responses indicate that regardless of the assessment type, what mattered to them was receiving feedback which they could use to improve their learning outcomes. The rationale presented by these children is a critical one, as research suggests that not only is feedback a powerful influence in improving learning outcomes, but needs to be conceptualised as information that is received and acted upon, rather than merely given (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Gan, 2011). One child's response that, 'it's no use to get the answers, if the teacher doesn't talk you through the ones that you get wrong', emphasises the value these children placed on the feedback they received from their teachers.

The children in the lower SES school did not discuss formal assessment, which was likely due to their relative inexperience of such assessments, particularly taking tests. This was especially pronounced in the Year 5 classroom where, as described previously, the teacher's focus on inquiry-based learning incorporated inquiry-based assessments. This teacher's approach aligns with Barron and Darling-Hammond's (2008) suggestion that inquiry-based assessments provide seamless and unobtrusive transitions between the interdependent components of the teaching and

learning cycle to promote improved learning outcomes; ‘by enabling students to *transfer* their learning to new kinds of situations and problems’ (section 2, paragraph 9). While these types of assessments are central to inquiry-based pedagogies that have been shown to close the equity gap by engaging children in higher order thinking processes (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hattie, 2009), this may also indicate that NAPLAN, which aims to achieve a single correct answer, was disproportionately disjunctive for these children. This leads to the question of the extent to which the children experienced NAPLAN as disconnected from their everyday experiences of school.

Disjuncture between everyday school and NAPLAN

There was evidence to suggest that the children experienced considerable disjuncture between NAPLAN and their everyday school lives during the testing week as well as in the lead-up to the tests, albeit to varying degrees. The following discussion illustrates these differences through the children’s drawings and written descriptions, and focus group discussions, in combination with classroom observations and the teachers’ diaries and reports. This begins with an exploration of the differences between school-based assessments and NAPLAN, which incorporate format, level of difficulty and testing protocols. This is followed by a discussion of the children’s experiences of changes in their teachers’ curricula and pedagogies as a result of NAPLAN, which included the types of tasks, dialogic interactions and feedback to which the children were accustomed, as well as shifts in the children’s relationships with their teachers, peers and less commonly, their parents. An exploration of some children’s constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes then precedes the summative conclusion to the chapter.

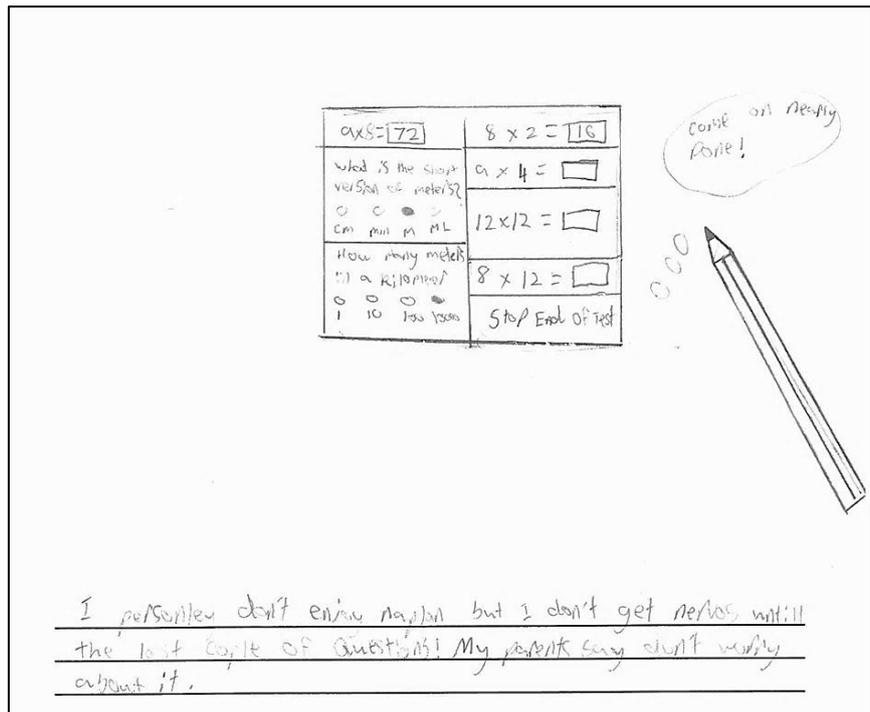
Disjuncture between school-based assessments and NAPLAN

In this section, I address the differences between the children’s experiences of their school-based assessments and NAPLAN. This begins with a discussion of NAPLAN’s idiosyncratic format and level of difficulty, which relates to the inclusion of unfamiliar content and vocabulary. Following on from this initial comparison, I ascertain the extent to which NAPLAN’s stringent testing protocols, specifically the

time limit and the requirement to sit in isolation for an extended period, were also outside the children's typical experiences of school.

Assessment format

Just over 50 per cent of these children included representations of the tests and associated accoutrements in their visual texts, which parallels the findings of research in the US, where 'over half of the students included the accoutrements of testing in their drawings' (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 253). Some children drew the test as a blank square with 'NAPLAN' written on it, lines to represent writing, and/or rows of bubbles, while others included carefully detailed depictions of test papers, including sample questions, clearly defined spaces for answers and instructions such as, 'Stop. End of test' (see Figure 5.9). As the children did not explicitly discuss the format of the tests in their written descriptions, I hypothesised that these representations indicated unfamiliarity with NAPLAN's distinctive format. This hypothesis was supported, firstly, by research that suggests standardised '[t]esting is frequently in formats that require explicit teaching and not regularly the experience of many children' (Athanasou, 2010, p. 8).



I [personally] don't enjoy NAPLAN but I don't get [nervous until] the last couple of [questions]! My parents say don't worry about it. Words in thought bubble: Come on nearly done! (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

Figure 5.9 Representation of the numeracy test

Second, the classroom observations taken during practice tests revealed that for some children, NAPLAN's idiosyncratic format engendered considerable confusion. This was particularly evident in classroom observations taken in the Year 5 classroom of the lower SES school, where the children were accustomed to inquiry-based assessment.

- Relief teacher:** Turn it over please; you're not supposed to pick it up ...
- Child 1:** Do we write in the book? ... Why can't we just write it in the book?
- Relief teacher:** Because this is just a practice. In the real NAPLAN test, you'll do it in the book.
- Child 1:** What does DDMMYYYY mean? ...
- Child 2:** In the real test will we be shading bubbles? ...

Relief teacher: Yes, that's why we're doing it now. Some questions you write in a box and some questions you shade in a bubble. (Excerpt from classroom observations, 10/5/2012)

The confusion arising from NAPLAN's distinctive format was also evident, albeit to a lesser extent, in the higher SES school, despite the children's reports that they were accustomed to taking tests. The following excerpt is taken from classroom observations during a practice test in the Year 3 classroom of the higher SES school, as the children were completing the demographic data required on the first page of the test, by colouring the appropriate bubbles.

Teacher: Fill in the one at the bottom, where it says to be completed by student. I am a boy or a girl. Only mark the one you need.

Girl: I accidentally coloured in boy.

Teacher: Rub it out. That's a worry. (Excerpt from classroom observations 9/5/2012)

These excerpts provide evidence of the confusion engendered by NAPLAN's idiosyncratic format, and the consequent potential for children to make mistakes. This parallels concerns noted by Nichols and Berliner (2007) that children are prone to making errors that are unrelated to their knowledge, understanding or skills within the domain being tested.

Level of difficulty

The children reported varying levels of difficulty in NAPLAN. First, there was evidence to suggest that some children had no difficulties in completing the NAPLAN tests. For example, the response in Figure 5.10 unambiguously conveys that 'it felt easy' and another child reported that he had 'probably done well since most of the questions were easily done' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). While this finding is supported by US studies that found some children genuinely do not experience standardised tests as difficult (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000), some children equated 'easy' with 'boring'. For example, one child conveyed that NAPLAN 'is kind of easy at the same time as boring' (Year 5 child, lower SES school).



(Year 3 child, lower SES school)

Figure 5.10 Example of a response describing NAPLAN as 'easy'

Several children, predominantly in Year 3, reported that NAPLAN was comprised of a combination of easy and hard questions. For example, during the focus group discussion with the Year 3 children in the lower SES school, one child reported that

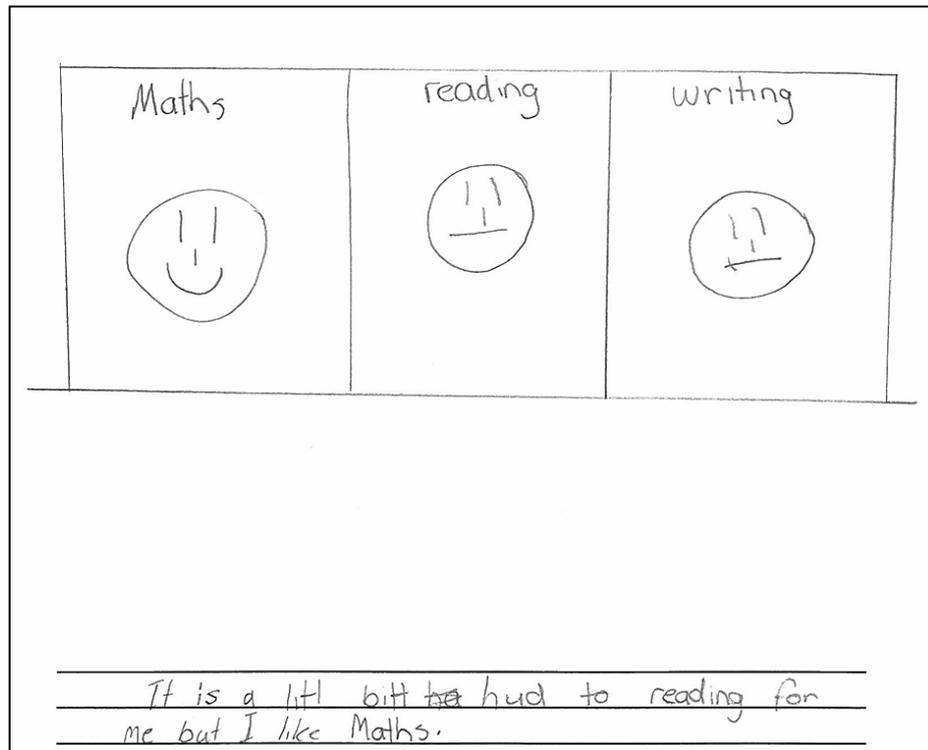
When I did NAPLAN, I had some questions that were easy and when I had the easy ones I felt like the whole NAPLAN was going to be easy, but when I got closer and closer to the end of the test, that's when the hard questions came. (Year 3 child, lower SES school)

Almost 20 per cent of children in this study, predominantly in Year 3, described the tests as hard, or 'tricky', with one child describing the tests as 'impossible' (Year 7 child, higher SES school) while another conveyed that 'it was the hardest thing I have ever done' (Year 3 child, lower SES school). These responses parallel US research that suggest children and young people are far more likely to explicitly describe standardised tests as hard than easy (Wheelock et al., 2000).

During the focus group discussion with the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, I asked whether they thought that this test should have been given to older children. One of the boys unreservedly responded, 'for Grade 12, like, seriously!' Another child expressed reservations regarding the adults who had designed the tests, contending that 'people should think if children can do it' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). This portion of her response was extended during the focus group discussion, when she described the difficulty of NAPLAN in the following way:

I thought the people who write out NAPLAN and think of the questions, should try and make it a bit easier for us, because there was [*sic*] some questions that were virtually impossible to answer. You really couldn't figure out the answer, and even with paper, like, we get little sheets of paper to work things out on, you really can't use paper for some questions; they're just so tricky. (Year 3 child, higher SES school)

Approximately ten per cent of the children described a particular domain as easy or difficult. While findings from Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study suggest that 'by far, the most common comments were about difficulty in mathematics' (p. 248), these children's responses indicated variation in which test or tests were experienced as particularly hard. For example, the drawing in Figure 5.11 indicates that this child found the numeracy test less difficult than the reading or writing tests. Other children conveyed that 'I found the reading and maths hard' (Year 7 child, higher SES school) or that '... numeracy, the last one ... was a little bit hard 'cause it was all like, times stuff and numbers stuff and I'm not really good with times and numbers' (Year 3 child, lower SES school).



(Year 5 child, lower SES school)

Figure 5.11 Response describing particular domains

The teachers' and children's reports suggest that at least some of the difficulties experienced by the children were due to the disjuncture between their daily school lives and NAPLAN. For example, the Year 5 teacher at the lower SES school conveyed that '[the children] have done this, and they know it, yet when they see it in NAPLAN they don't link that they know this'. This teacher's account was supported by children who also reported that the strategies they utilised successfully in their daily school lives were of little or no assistance in their attempts to answer the NAPLAN questions. For example, one Year 3 child in the higher SES school described the difficulty of the spelling test in the following way:

I found spelling at some points to be tricky because as someone earlier said, you try to think of the rhyming words and that's what [the teacher] says ... Some of the things, they have lots of different rhyming words and you just couldn't think of the right one, and some of them, they didn't have a rhyming word, so it was tricky. (Year 3 child, higher SES school)

The reports of these teachers and children are supported Wyn et al.'s (2014) finding that the difficulties experienced by children may be due to the 'lack of connection between the learning strategies used in schools and NAPLAN' (p. 30).

A few Year 7 children additionally reported that 'I got annoyed with some of the questions because I hadn't heard it before' and 'some parts of the maths we had not learned about'. This is consistent with the findings of Wheelock et al.'s (2000) US study as well as Wyn et al.'s (2014) Australian study that children and young people reported that they were not taught what was tested. This issue appears to relate to the timing of NAPLAN, takes place in the second full week in May and thus within the first half of the school year, leaving little time to adequately cover the year's curriculum. One of the Year 7 teachers at the higher SES school conveyed that this was particularly difficult to address in mathematics, as

You've got to punch through so many concepts so quickly, some kids, you may think they're never going to get these concepts [but] you really haven't got time to sit down and actually go through the nitty-gritty of that concept until after NAPLAN, and then you can take time to do it properly ... I really think that NAPLAN should be in fourth term. (Year 7 teacher A, higher SES school)

Several salient issues are raised in this teacher's report. The first of these is the impracticable attempt to adequately cover the entire years' curriculum within the first portion of the school year. This teacher's concern is echoed in the response of a principal in Athanasou's (2010) study who argued that

It is unreasonable to test students on work that has not been covered in the syllabus in NAPLAN e.g. Year 7 algebra is not covered until August (correct sequencing of topics determines this) yet a considerable number of the questions in NAPLAN cover this. (p. 7)

This raises the issue of NAPLAN's content validity, as Nichols and Berliner (2007) confirm that 'whether we are judging a short weekly test, a longer end-of-course test, or a high-stakes standardised test, questions on the tests should be about the content that students had an opportunity to learn' (p. 110).

The precipitous need to cover the curriculum in a short space of time also raises the issue of the quality of teaching during this first portion of the school year, which is

reflected in Year 7 teacher B's comment that after NAPLAN 'you can take time to do it properly'. Research suggests that 'the implications for the quality of teaching are not difficult to imagine, particularly if higher scores on high-stakes exams are likely to result from memorising math facts and algorithms, for example, than from understanding concepts' (Kohn, 2000, p. 320). While the Year 5 teacher in the lower SES school similarly reported that 'we don't cover everything by that time', she highlighted the issue of equity, 'because then we're behind the eight-ball in everything else'.

Close to 30 per cent of the Year 3 children in the lower SES school described the tests as 'hard', which is supported by US and Australian studies that found significant evidence to suggest children and young people in schools serving lower SES communities are more likely to experience standardised testing as difficult (Comber, 2012; Foster, 2006; Wyn et al., 2014). Much of this difficulty appeared to relate to vocabulary that was unfamiliar to these children; reflecting concerns within research regarding the 'inaccessible language in both the English and Maths tests' (Wyn et al., 2014, p. 26). For example, one child reported that 'the English was pretty hard because some of the words you couldn't actually understand' (Year 3 child, lower SES school). This issue is particularly evident in the following excerpt from observations taken in this classroom, as the children were reviewing and discussing their answers after completing a practice NAPLAN test.

Child: What is roasted?

Teacher: It means cooked.

The children were confused about the meaning of the word 'extract' in another question.

Teacher: If the dentist is going to extract your tooth, what is he going to do?

Children: Take it out! So, they've taken a bit out!

A child asked for the meaning of the word 'journal' within the same question.

Teacher: 'What is a journal?'

Child: A journal is a book with words in it; it's like a diary but for boys. (Excerpt from classroom observations, 17/4/2012)

While this excerpt provides evidence to suggest that some children experienced difficulties in relation to unfamiliar vocabulary, the Year 3 teacher in the lower SES school also questioned the adult assumptions regarding the children's prior knowledge and experiences which are inherent within NAPLAN.

And another one ... How many buckets of water to do this? And I said ... they might not have even seen a bucket ... There were three questions there that I thought to myself, as a child I would've baulked too, because unless you've had [that] experience, [how would] you know? (Year 3 teacher, lower SES school)

These issues of assumed vocabulary, and prior experience and knowledge are also noted by Hursh (2008), who argues that many standardised tests may be culturally biased. Further, that this ultimately results in the greater likelihood for children from middle and upper class families to succeed, as their cultural capital matches that assumed in the construction of the tests.

While very few children in the Year 5 class at the lower SES school explicitly described the tests as difficult, their results, which were well below average, indicated that they found NAPLAN problematic. One plausible reason for these children's poor performance may have been their inability to cope with the disjuncture between their everyday school experiences of inquiry-based learning and the inflexible format and protocols of NAPLAN. During her semi-structured interview, this teacher expressed concerns regarding her belief that those children who experienced psychological difficulties in particular would find it difficult to cope with NAPLAN, conveying that 'I'm just dreading the three days, dreading it. I just don't think they'll cope at all'. These children's responses will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

Test protocols

NAPLAN's idiosyncrasy is not limited to its distinctive format, but encompasses testing protocols which as discussed previously, were not part of the children's everyday experiences of school. The distinctive context generated by NAPLAN was most evident in the requirements to '[have] all our desks split up and our teacher reading from a script and giving us a strict time limit' (Year 7 child, higher SES

school). This child's description was supported by the Year 5 teacher at the lower SES school's report that,

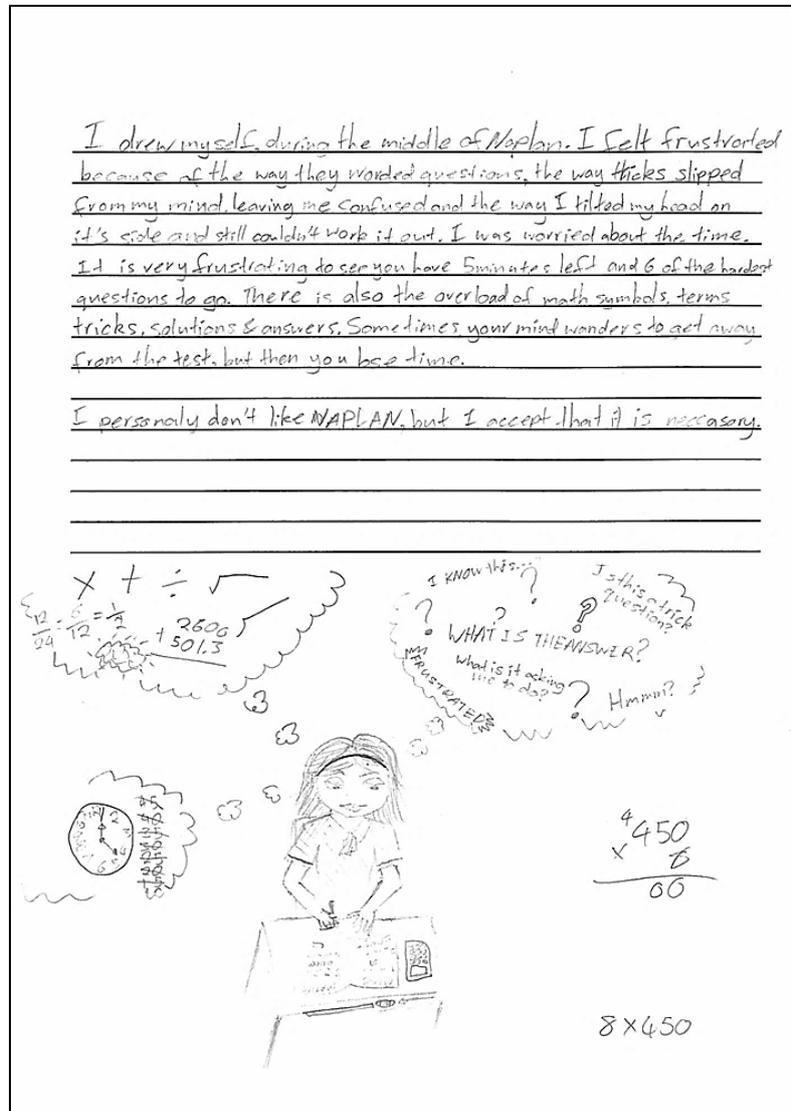
NAPLAN goes against everything we try to do in class. You're getting the kids to talk to each other and learn from each other, and learn from their peers and challenge their peers, and yet they've got to sit on their own, isolated for such a period of time. It's not even a real-life scenario. (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school)

The unfamiliar context generated by NAPLAN is supported by Comber's (2012) argument that while teachers' administration of school-based tests is a routine part of children's everyday lives, pedagogical relationships are temporarily altered as the classroom becomes a site of external testing. In discussing the unfamiliar context generated by NAPLAN, the children particularly included discussions and/or representations of time and isolation in their visual texts as well in focus group discussions. These children's reports were supported by those of their teachers and classroom observations.

During the classroom observations, it was evident that part of the teachers' belief in the importance of engaging the children in a diverse range of learning experiences, including taking tests, was allowing all children sufficient time to complete tasks. Test-taking was not observed in the lower SES school, however classroom observations taken in the higher SES school suggested that Year 7 children typically experienced tests which were about 30 minutes in duration, while in Year 3, weekly tests were limited to approximately 15 minutes. The provision of sufficient time was typically achieved by encouraging the children to continue with another task such as reading a novel, completing a word search, continuing with an assignment or completing an activity on a digital learning website when they had completed the task.

As described in Chapter One, NAPLAN's stringent test protocols stipulate that with the exception of cases of disability adjustment, 'all students must complete the test within the time allocated for each test' (ACARA, 2012b, p. 27). Further, the provision of extra time is considered cheating (ACARA, 2012b), as is bringing a novel to read or another task to continue with, in the event that a child completes the test before the allocated time. Time was consequently represented in many of the children's

visual texts, often represented through clocks and/or remaining minutes written on the whiteboard, as required in the formal testing protocols (see Figure 5.12). In some cases, the passing time was represented through the onomatopoeia 'tick tock' or 'tick tick' emanating from a representation of a clock.



I drew myself during the middle of NAPLAN. I felt frustrated because of the way they worded the questions, the ways things slipped from my mind, leaving me confused and the way I tilted my head on its side and still couldn't work it out. I was worried about the time. It is very frustrating to see you have 5 minutes left and 6 of the hardest questions to go. There is also the overload of math symbols, terms, tricks, solutions and answers. Sometimes your mind wanders to get away from the test, but then you lose time. (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

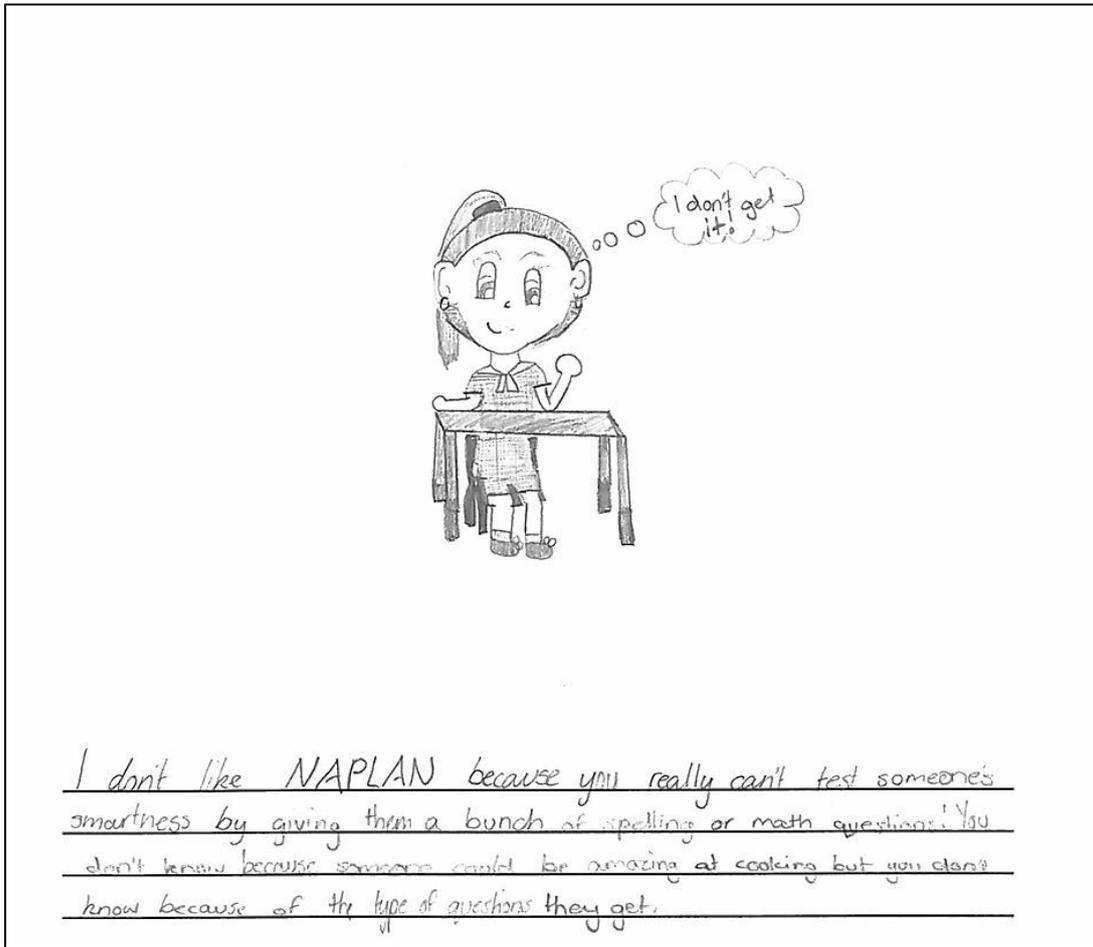
Figure 5.12 Response describing time limit

Many of the children who described the NAPLAN tests as difficult referred to the time constraints. This was evident in the children's written descriptions such as, 'I hate being rushed by the clock. When I am being rushed I feel like ... I will run out of time which makes it super hard to get it done' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). Similar sentiments were expressed during the focus group discussions, with one child conveying that

... when it said on the board ten minutes to go and you have, like, heaps of questions left, you'd be like really nervous and stuff because you wouldn't finish them or get them right because you wouldn't have enough time. (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

Several younger children, particularly in the lower SES school, also described fearing that they would run out of time to complete the tests. For example, one child reported that 'I felt a little worried because I didn't get a few questions and there wasn't much time left, so I didn't know if I was going to do them all' (Year 3 child, lower SES school), while another child conveyed that 'I might cry because I haven't checked it' (Year 3 child, lower SES school).

Almost 30 per cent of the visual texts incorporated representations of isolation. 'Isolation' in this instance refers to physical rather than emotional isolation, which was represented through drawings of the children sitting alone at a desk with no-one else present in the drawing. The children's drawings within the Triplett and Barksdale (2005) and Wheelock et al. (2000) studies paralleled these representations of isolation, suggesting that children and young people experience standardised testing as a solitary experience. For example, in Figure 5.13, this child has drawn herself in isolation as she questioned the validity of testing within the context of the 2012 writing test, in which she discussed the topic of persuasive text, 'Everyone should learn to cook'.



*I don't like NAPLAN because you really can't test someone's smartness by giving them a bunch of spelling or math questions! You don't know because someone could be amazing at cooking but you don't know because of the type of questions they get.
(Year 7 child, higher SES school)*

Figure 5.13 Representation of isolation

Representations of sitting in isolation at a desk were to be expected to some degree, given the nature of testing, as 'they have to be sitting, isolated; the room has to be stripped of all stimulus. So you can make them feel as comfortable as you want; but on the day, that's the way it has to be' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school).

Compliance with the protocol of isolation was evident during classroom observations which were taken during the tests, with the children's desks separated as far as possible (see Figure 5.14), providing a significant contrast to most classroom layouts presented earlier in the chapter.

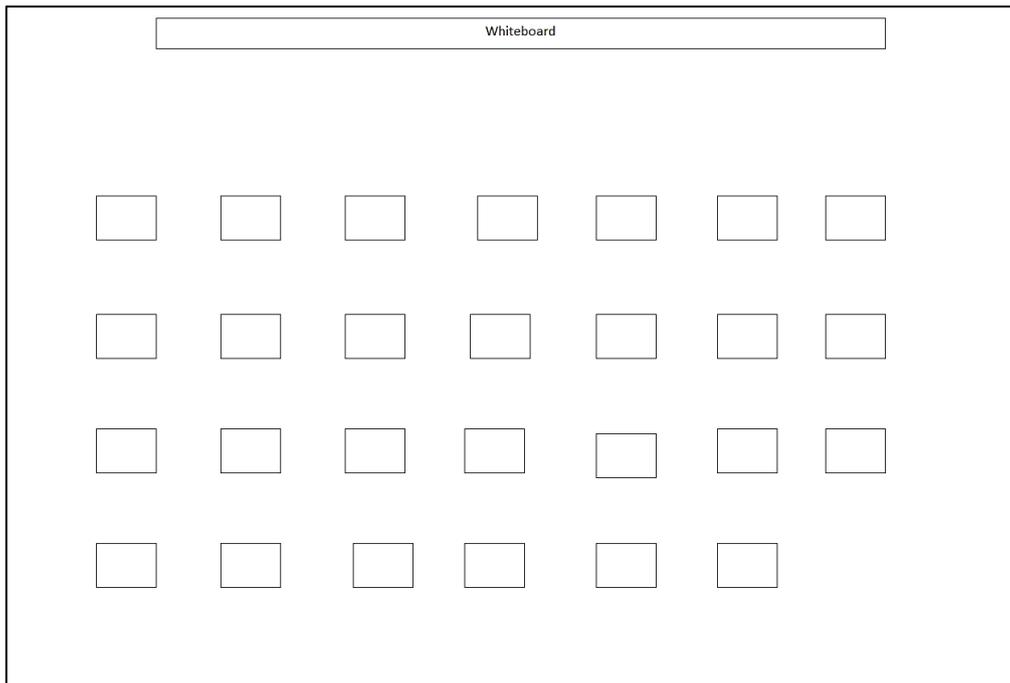


Figure 5.14 Classroom layout used for NAPLAN in all classes

In the Year 3 classroom in the lower SES school, the following excerpt from a conversation between the teacher and children just prior to a practice NAPLAN test, provides evidence to suggest that sitting in isolation for an extended period was an unfamiliar experience for these children.

Teacher: What's something we need to remember for the test?

Child: Don't look at anyone else's work.

Teacher: Well you won't be able to anyway because I will move the desks.

Child: What if someone sitting next to you ...

Teacher: You won't be sitting next to anyone, you will be by yourselves.

Child: So you can't cheat. (Excerpt from classroom observations, 8/5/2012)

Children in other classes also articulated the contrast between the dialogic interactions which were inherent within their everyday experiences of school and the length of time they spent sitting in isolation during NAPLAN. These children reported

that 'we weren't allowed to talk to anyone or communicate in any way' (Year 7 child, higher SES school), supporting evidence within research that NAPLAN does not promote 'classroom conversations that lead to sustained dialogue between students and between teachers and students' (Thompson, 2012, p. 4). Some children reported this as an unsettling experience, conveying that 'they take a long time and it's hard to sit still' (Year 5 child, lower SES school) and 'it's nerve-wracking because you've got to do the test, and sit silent for 40 minutes, or 65. I don't like sitting quiet like that for a long time' (Year 7 child, higher SES school).

There was evidence to suggest that this isolation extended beyond the classroom to the wider school, making the experience of taking the NAPLAN tests an especially insular one for the children. For example, as two children walked past one classroom talking to each other in relatively moderate tones, the teacher immediately opened the door and said, 'Hey guys, we're doing NAPLAN today. Ssshh' (Year 3 teacher, lower SES school). In a similar occurrence, as the Year 3 children in the higher SES school were completing their test, some mild noise could be heard from the large undercover area. The teacher immediately went to close the door to block the noise.

There was evidence to suggest that the protocols relating to disability adjustments were not clear to some of the parents, who unwittingly gave their children inaccurate information relating to adjustments which would be made for them. In the lower SES school, the Year 5 teacher described one child's 'meltdown' at the beginning of the writing test, because her mother had promised her that she would be allowed to use a computer, however this had not been approved through the disability adjustment process. The intensely negative emotional reaction caused by the poor communication between the school, parent and child in regards to the disability adjustment process, which may or may not have occurred as the result of the change of teacher, resulted in further confusion and, consequently, heightened anxiety for this child. Burge and Heath (2008) provide evidence to suggest that high levels of anxiety generate cognitive interference, which is defined as the redirection 'of logical and purposeful thought to distractions or sometimes reactions' (section 2, paragraph 1), which in this case was manifest in this child's 'meltdown'.

Disjuncture in curricula and pedagogies

I begin this section with a description of the teachers' rationale for investing classroom time in NAPLAN preparation. This was largely focussed on familiarising the children with NAPLAN's idiosyncratic format and testing protocols, which were described earlier in the chapter. I then explore the disjuncture which occurred in the children's everyday school lives as a result of this preparation. This includes substantial shifts in pedagogical approaches, the children's dialogic interactions with their teachers and peers, and the children's experiences of receiving results and feedback. This section concludes with an exploration of the negative shifts in child-teacher-peer relationships which were generated by the lack of connection between the children's everyday school lives and NAPLAN.

While the teachers did not experience NAPLAN as high-stakes, they felt compelled to prepare the children for the tests as a result of concerns for their well-being and 'to give them the best chance – to be fair to them' (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school). This aligns with research that suggests many teachers invest time in test practice (Athanasou, 2010; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013; Wyn et al., 2014). While the teachers acknowledged the need to allocate time to familiarise the children with 'how the questions are going to be presented and to fill in the bubbles and all the jargon that goes with that' (Year 7 teacher a, higher SES school), most did not agree with such training. The Year 3 teacher in the lower SES school in particular questioned this, conveying that 'we need to get children thinking ... why are so many teachers running around photocopying pieces of paper so [the children] can write on the lines and colour in bubbles?'

The teachers were varied in their approach to NAPLAN practice, with most explicitly reporting that they did not 'teach to the test'. For example, the Year 7 teachers reported that 'the NAPLAN we kind of put on the end and give them a few of those types of NAPLAN questions to prepare them in that way, so that they're not just going in cold' (Year 7 teacher b, the higher SES school). The teachers at the lower SES school also left explicit test practice as late as possible, with the Year 5 teacher encouraging the children to work cooperatively to devise strategies that could help them during the tests.

We only do it for a couple of weeks in the lead-up ... I'll put them into groups of three, so high, middle, low, and they'll work through some old NAPLAN tests in their groups of three, just discussing ideas and so they all hear problem solving, how everyone else approaches it. (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school)

The Year 3 teacher in the lower SES school's emphasis on 'leaving [explicit test practice] until last because if you do that stuff too early the children will get hung up on that' provided a significant contrast to the approach of the Year 3 teacher at the higher SES school, whose relatively intensive preparation began in the sixth week of the first term. However, like the other teachers, her rationale for NAPLAN preparation focused directly on the children's well-being. This correlates with Wyn et al's (2014) finding that preparation appears to be motivated 'less by the desire to outperform or match competing schools than by very strong concerns for student welfare' (p. 14). Rather than attempting to maximise the children's NAPLAN results, she intended to make the children familiar with the format and conditions of the test, thus minimising any anxiety during their first experience of NAPLAN.

There are some things I know I'm not going to push. I'd rather them learn it well and learn it later. All right, they might not do as well in NAPLAN, but I'd rather them be learners rather than people that, well, would they learn anything? (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school)

In explaining her approach, she compared the experience of a boy who had recently come to the school and had not previously experienced NAPLAN preparation, with those of the other children in the class who were accustomed to the format and conditions of taking the test.

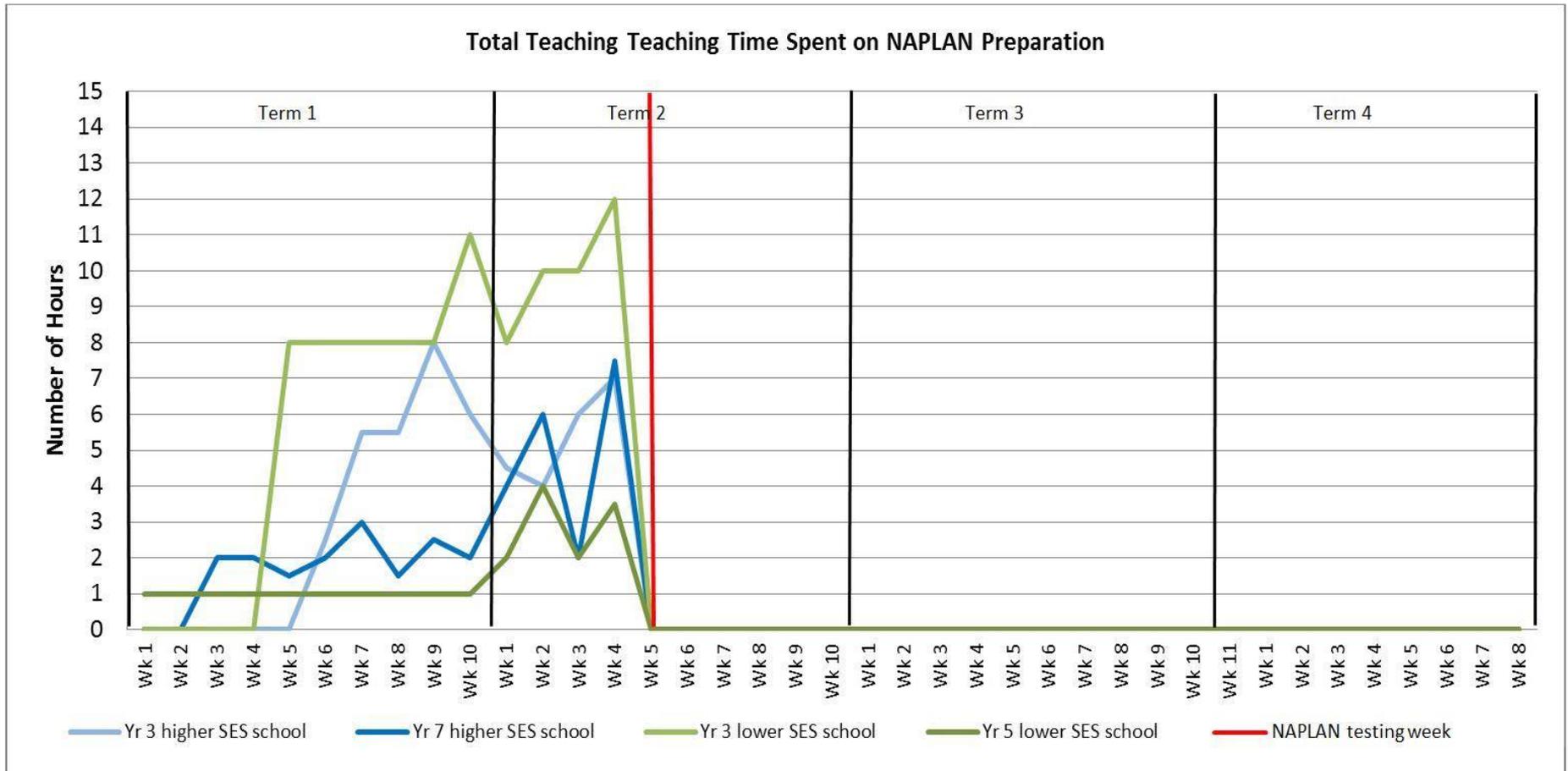
This new boy hasn't done any of this before, so when we did some the other day, he got quite upset. Because he hadn't been through it ... He's finding it highly stressful, but these kids, they don't care. It does not faze them. (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school)

The amount of preparation undertaken by the children in this class was evidenced in her diary entries, for example, 'this week we practiced the 2008 numeracy and reading. In reading we did two each day. The idea was to pace the children - time' (Excerpt from teacher diary, term 1, week 7). This comparatively high level of explicit test preparation was at odds with the principal's assertion that 'NAPLAN fits in with

our program. We don't fit in with NAPLAN's program', which aligns with research that suggests 'by and large teachers reported more hours of class preparation than principals' (Athanasou, 2010, p. 4). Wyn et al. (2014) similarly found that 'on occasion [teachers' reports] were in variance to a consultation with ... [the] principal ... who may have advised that the school spent little time on preparation for NAPLAN' (p. 24). Some of these practice tests were NAPLAN tests from previous years, while others were comprised of the Victorian Achievement Monitor (AIM) tests. She explained that she used the AIM tests because some of the parents were also using past NAPLAN tests to prepare their children at home and as a result, these children already knew the answers by rote. 'So that's why I like doing my own ... I don't think they know about the Victorian tests ... I just match it up with our curriculum and cut it out' (Year 3 teacher, higher SES school).

Despite this variance in the teachers' approaches to NAPLAN preparation, the children in all classes reported distinct changes in their everyday school lives in the lead-up to NAPLAN; with some children reporting that 'we start doing lots of tests every day' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). While laudably intentioned by the teachers to minimise the children's anxiety, this preparation generated significant disjuncture between everyday school life and NAPLAN, which emerged as a salient issue for the children. The teachers' diary entries confirmed that once the testing week had concluded, this disjuncture subsided as the rhythms and patterns of normal school life returned, as demonstrated in Table 5.1. The data in this table should be interpreted with caution, as the teachers reported varying interpretations of preparation, ranging from explicit practice only to the development of any skills likely to be tested, which were already inherent within everyday lessons. Nevertheless, the data clearly indicate that all activity pertaining to NAPLAN ceased after the conclusion of the testing period.

Table 5.1 Teachers' reports of time spent on NAPLAN preparation



Inherent within the shift from the types of tasks completed in everyday school to NAPLAN practice, was an equivalent shift from the higher order thinking skills required to develop and propose a new bill for the Year 7 Parliament, research the local area or plan a movie marathon, to the basic skills utilised in test drills. This aligns with research in which many teachers reported that ‘NAPLAN does not enable students to focus on identifying and solving intellectual and/or real-world problems’ (Thompson, 2012, p. 4). The focus on basic skills engendered by NAPLAN preparation is exemplified in the following excerpt from classroom observations taken in the Year 3 classroom of the higher SES school, as the children were about to complete a practice test.

Teacher: I am looking at your bubble colouring today because if you don’t do it properly, they won’t mark it ... [Name], I’m going to check yours, because sometimes you write too lightly and it’s hard to see ... Now where it says ‘to be completed by student’, write your name in there beautifully. Now [Name], you haven’t got the right pencil darling. *Gives her a pencil ...* I know it’s a 2B but it’s just a bit light. (Excerpt from classroom observations 9/5/2012)

Most of the teachers attempted to minimise this disruption to learning by maintaining their customary curricula and pedagogies ‘until last’, when they attempted to provide the children with sufficient NAPLAN practice to be at ease with the test format and protocols. However this had the unintended effect of generating often abrupt shifts in the dialogic interactions to which the children were accustomed, as they sought to clarify, refine and expand their conceptual understandings with their teacher and peers. For example, the following excerpt taken from classroom observations in the Year 3 classroom at the lower SES school one week before NAPLAN exemplifies the contrast between solitary NAPLAN practice and the dynamic class discussions, which as described earlier in the chapter, had generated profoundly creative responses from the children.

Teacher: I can’t help you.

Some children are frustrated, and one child is asking a question.

Teacher: I can't help you. Look for the clues, children. That's all I can say and I won't be able to say that next week.

Another child is trying to ask a question.

Teacher: Sorry, I can't tell you.

One of the children is very unsure of how to proceed.

Teacher: Just have a go darling, the best you can do.

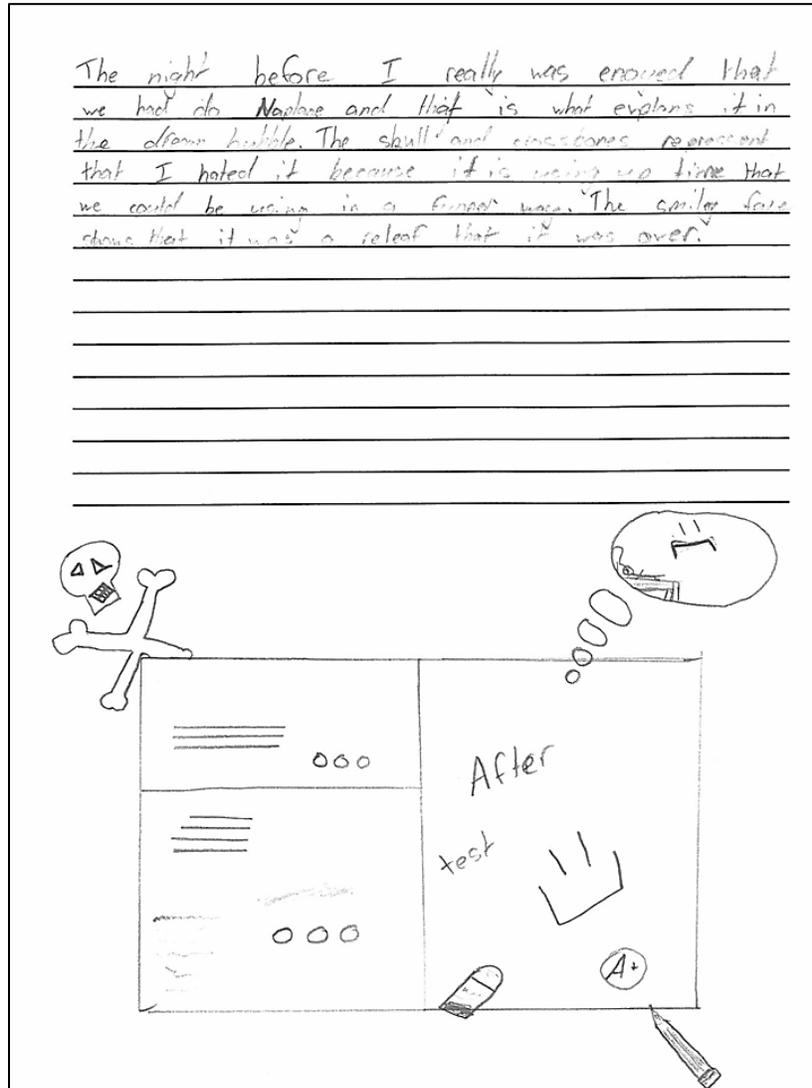
Child: But ...

Teacher: I can't tell you. (Excerpt from classroom observations 8/5/2012)

These children's responses suggest that the abrupt absence of dialogic interactions to which they were accustomed exacerbated the confusion and anxiety already inherent within the children's experience of NAPLAN. This is supported by research that suggests '[w]orking in silence without the normal exchanges of team work and discussions with [their] teacher [is] daunting and quite alien to many [children]' (Wyn et al., 2014, p. 26).

Results and feedback

As demonstrated in Figure 1.2 in Chapter One, NAPLAN results are indicated by a dot positioned within the reported bands for the children's year level, which can be compared with national and school averages, and the range of achievement for 60 per cent of children at the national level. There was evidence to suggest that receiving this type of result was an unfamiliar experience for the children, with just over 20 per cent including representations of scores or grades in their visual texts. For example, in Figure 5.12 this child included an 'A+' in his visual text; while other children included a defined score such as 50/50.



The night before I really was [annoyed] that we had to do NAPLAN and that is what explains it in the drawn bubble. The skull and crossbones represent that I hated it because it is using up time that we could be using in a funner [sic] way. The smiley face shows that it was a [relief] that it was over (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

Figure 5.15 Response showing score of 'A+'

Scores were most frequently discussed by the Year 3 children at the higher SES school, with one-third of these children including scores in their drawings and/or written descriptions. While a few children indicated that they were confident of achieving a good score, some conveyed mild anxiety regarding their hopes for a good score, and

others reported being fearful of achieving a low score. For example, one Year 3 child in the lower SES school drew three large red crosses, nine small red crosses and one green tick in a speech bubble emanating from the mouth of his representation of himself, indicating his belief that he would likely receive a low score. A few children in Year 7 also described apprehensions regarding the comparison of their scores with those of other children, for example, 'the only thing I don't like was being put under pressure to the fact that our results were going to be compared' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). There is evidence within the literature to suggest that score comparisons are incongruous with notions of improving learning outcomes, because 'as soon as students compare themselves with someone else, their mental energy becomes focused on protecting their own sense of well-being rather than anything new' (William, 2011, p. 128).

The children's experiences of receiving feedback on their everyday tasks and school-based assessments provided a significant contrast to their experience of the distinct lack of feedback provided by NAPLAN. As discussed earlier in the chapter, several children in Year 7 reported that they valued the feedback they received to improve their learning outcomes, regardless of the assessment type or activity they completed. However, the final classroom observations, taken after the release of the results, provided no evidence to suggest that any of the diagnostic data received by the adults was shared with the children to provide them with feedback. Rather, it appeared that the children simply received their result five months later, as indicated by a dot positioned within reported bands for their year level, with no indication of how they might be able to improve this result, or more importantly, how this result might inform their learning.

Negative shifts in child-teacher-peer relationships

These data suggest that the lack of connectedness between NAPLAN and every facet of the children's everyday school lives, which has been discussed throughout this chapter, led to negative shifts in child-teacher-peer relationships in both school communities. This finding is supported by research in which many teachers reported

that NAPLAN does not promote a 'socially supportive and positive classroom environment' (Thompson, 2012, p. 4).

In some cases, the change in the role of the teacher from a mentor, or helper, to a supervisor (Wyn et al., 2014), affected the children's relationships with their teachers. This shift occurred as the transactional interplay within typical classroom discourses gave way to insulated and isolating test practice, which often manifested as a punitive, disciplinary modality. This was reflected in the responses of some Year 7 children who reported about their teachers that '[she gets] more cranky' and '[he is] more intense' as NAPLAN approached.

These negative shifts in relationships were particularly evident in the Year 5 classroom of the lower SES school, where two children with psychological difficulties were unable to cope with the lack of cohesion between their everyday experiences of inquiry-based learning and NAPLAN. While the writing test was not observed in this classroom, the teacher described the way in which the first of these children, who was diagnosed with Autism, had 'really struggled with the writing test'. Her inability to cope, which was initially manifest in 'defiant and uncooperative' behaviour, culminated in her persuasive text being comprised of the words 'fuck you' written repeatedly over the test paper, which was not sent in for marking. The consequence of this response, evidenced in her description of the way 'I got in trouble with some of the tests because I was freaking out', involved spending the subsequent day in the principal's office. Here, she completed the numeracy test in further isolation from the other children.

The inability of another child, who experienced significant cognitive, social and emotional difficulties, to cope with NAPLAN not only impacted negatively on his relationship with his teacher, but also those with his peers. Before NAPLAN this child, referred to here as Child 1, was observed to consistently receive significant support from his peers. For example,

Child 1 had definitely lost the file [a draft of a persuasive text he had been working on] and he appeared to be very upset and stressed. A few children

came and rubbed his back, saying 'it's ok', and offering advice on where it might be. (Excerpt from classroom observations 3/5/2012)

However the following excerpt taken from observations conducted during the numeracy test highlights a negative shift in these children's relationships during the course of this final test, as increasing signs of his inability to cope progressively impacted upon the ability of the other children to complete the tests. Further, this shift affected the teacher's relationship with a second child who experienced the greatest difficulties and thus 'most [needed] her expertise' (Comber, 2012, p. 130), resulting in a deterioration in the atmosphere of the classroom.

Child 1: The others don't have to have extra time. *Rocks on his chair.*

Another child points out that four people have extra time ... Child 1 is making noises.

Child 1: Don't want to do it. Work sucks ...I don't want to do stupid work! ... This is boring.

Child 2: It's just like the maths we do every day ...

Child 1 continued to ... hum.

Child 3: [Child 1] be quiet!

Child 1: YOU be quiet! ... I HATE everyone in this classroom, and I hate [name] (the girl who has been asking him to be quiet) ...

Child whispered something (inaudible) to him.

Child 1: What am I doing to you?

Teacher speaks quietly about his behaviour and again asks him to start.

Child 1: Don't care ...

Teacher whispers that all he has to do is colour in a bubble, and that's it, and that he will miss out on computer time if the behaviour continues. (Excerpt from classroom observations 17/5/2012)

Research suggests that three key processes, finding out where learners are in their learning, where they are going, and how to get there; and three types of individuals, the teacher, the child and the peer, are at the core of all teaching (William, 2011). Given that the effective interaction between these processes and individuals is necessary to improve learning outcomes, it is reasonable to surmise that extended periods of explicit NAPLAN preparation would generate long-term negative effects on child-teacher-peer relationships and thus, children's learning outcomes.

The children who were most affected by NAPLAN and consequently experienced the greatest negative shifts in their relationships with their teacher and peers were those also experienced the greatest challenges in their learning. This raises critical questions regarding the ability of NAPLAN to achieve the government's espoused objective of improving equity in education, as outlined during the Senate Inquiry in the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing (Back et al., 2010).

Children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes

NAPLAN's design as a low-stakes test is reflected in ACARA's consistent assertion that 'it has no immediate consequences for children' (2014, section 1, paragraph 5). The data suggest that some children accordingly experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes. For example, when the Year 3 children the lower SES school were asked, 'What do you think will happen if you do well on NAPLAN?' they responded:

Um, I think we might, um, like, get a sticker or something?

Mum might bring in some lollies or something because we done such well and we sometimes get stickers.

Well, if I did really good [*sic*], mum and dad would take me out to my favourite place for dinner or mum would give me a lucky dip or a new toy.

Similarly, when asked what they thought would happen if they did not do well on NAPLAN, these children did not refer to their education or their futures.

Probably might um ... I don't know. Might not do NAPLAN anymore?

Um, I'm not sure about um, I'm not sure about these questions.

Well, pretty much my mum and dad would ground me and never take me to another place for dinner ever again.

It may be argued that a child would likely experience the threat of the latter as high-stakes at a personal level; however, these children did not construct NAPLAN as high-stakes in terms of their future success. Despite the lack of any evidence of direct adult suggestion that poor NAPLAN performance would result in failure, other children had however constructed a series of escalating consequences of failure which would ultimately impact upon their future employment prospects.

While ACARA has consistently conveyed that 'NAPLAN is not pass or fail' (2014, para. 5), some of the Year 7 children in particular conveyed concerns that 'I don't want to be below the average or fail a subject'. In this regard, some children had constructed NAPLAN as high-stakes at the personal level, fearing that they would be judged as foolish if they achieved poor results, despite the fact that individual NAPLAN results are not published on the My School website or in league tables. Similar concerns were described by teachers in two Australian studies who reported that some children believed that they would be 'viewed as 'dumb' by the community' (Dulfer et al., 2012, p. 19) or 'potentially labelled according to [results]' (Athanasou, 2010, p. 12). In England, where league tables of school performance on tests and exams are published, children similarly view their results 'as a judgement on themselves' (Alexander, 2010, p. 311).

Other children believed that they would let their families down if they achieved poor results. For example, one child with learning difficulties conveyed that 'when I thought I was going to fail I thought it may mean I'm failing my family' (Year 3 child, lower SES school).

A few children had constructed serious consequences of failing NAPLAN. For example, one child believed that 'I would have to repeat Year 3 until I got better scores' (Year 3 child, higher SES school), while another child who experienced social and emotional

difficulties described dreams he had in relation to being asked to leave his school during the focus group discussion.

Well, when the NAPLAN week was coming up, I kept having 'after NAPLAN' dreams, like what would happen if I did really bad ... in one of them, I was getting kicked out of the school, which made me feel quite anxious'. (Year 5 child, lower SES school)

The children's experiences of NAPLAN as high-stakes were magnified for the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, which aligns with research that suggests NAPLAN is high-stakes for aspirational children in younger grades (Athanasou, 2010; Wyn et al., 2014). Here, Mockler's (2013) narrative of choice, which alludes to an 'educational crisis' in which parents are empowered to make the 'right' decisions about which school to choose was palpable; as many parents described aspirations 'to send [our son] to a Catholic all-boys school', adding that 'it is very competitive to secure a place'. Similar reports were found in research in which parents reported that they 'have to use these results to get their child into a 'good' private school' (Dulfer et al., 2012, p. 25). The following excerpt from these children's focus group discussion reflects their parents' belief in the significance of Year 3 NAPLAN performance.

Well I think it is important to do NAPLAN because if you do well in NAPLAN you get to go to good high schools, and after good high schools you go to university and to better jobs.

If you do well in NAPLAN, like, you can get good jobs, like; you can get lots and lots and lots of money, like doctors.

There is [*sic*] different tests and more important tests, but still, you should try your best to do NAPLAN. Because then you could never ever get a job and get money and maybe couldn't even get a house!

The belief of these children that NAPLAN could impact upon their future careers and prosperity was also evident in research which found that 'children are talking about NAPLAN being vital to how successful they will be in the future' (Athanasou, 2010, p. 11). Children and young people who participated in Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) US

study similarly reported that ‘if you don’t pass you can’t go to a good [college]. So you could be the guy at the Burger King drive through’ (p. 252).

Only one child in this group did not believe that NAPLAN was high-stakes, commenting at the end of the discussion, ‘You don’t need to do well in NAPLAN. It doesn’t have an effect on your life. You won’t be like, *homeless* if you don’t do well in NAPLAN’ (Year 3 child, higher SES school). The assertion that Year 3 children in higher SES schools are most likely to experience NAPLAN as high-stakes is supported by the Year 7 children’s reports that ‘I already know that I’m in a good high school’ and ‘it’s not like if you do bad you’ll get pulled out of the high school’.

It is pertinent to note here that the Year 3 children in the higher SES school had also experienced the most intensive explicit NAPLAN preparation of all the classes in the study. As described previously, the teacher had intentionally implemented such preparation from the sixth week of the first term to minimise testing anxiety. This strategy appeared to be a successful one for some children, as evidenced in the high proportion of these children who contributed balanced responses, which represented and/or described equivalent numbers of positive and negative themes. During the focus group discussion, one child additionally described that they felt ‘a bit nervous, but it was all right, because you knew most of the questions. And when you got to the hard ones, you knew how to work them out because of the practice tests’ (Year 3 child, higher SES school). While this appeared to be a successful strategy for reducing anxiety in some children, it is indicative of a significant impact on this teacher’s professional practices, which raises the question of ‘what NAPLAN practice [had] replaced within the curriculum’ (Dulfer et al., 2012, p. 25).

Key findings

The findings within this analysis suggest that the need to familiarise the children with NAPLAN’s idiosyncratic format and test protocols, in combination with the confusing set of mixed messages and some children’s positioning within discordant parent-teacher relationships, as described in Chapter Four, have served to create an intense paradox. On the one hand, intensive test preparation may diminish the disjuncture between the

children's everyday school lives and NAPLAN, but may intensify children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes. On the other hand, minimal test preparation may diminish children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, but may intensify the disjuncture between the children's everyday school lives and NAPLAN. The issues arising from both intensive and minimal test preparation are discussed in the key findings, outlined below.

NAPLAN is disjunctive with everyday school life

The analysis of these data suggests that the children's experiences of NAPLAN and their everyday school lives lacked cohesion, resulting in discordance in every facet of their classroom experience. This disjuncture encompassed differences between the format, level of difficulty and protocols of school-based assessments, in addition to the feedback they received on such assessments. The children also experienced significant shifts in their teachers' curricula and pedagogies, which included shifts from higher order thinking skills to the basic skills utilised in test drills, and from the dialogic interactions inherent within daily classroom discourse to solitary test practice. A combination of these factors engendered an equivalent negative shift in some children's relationships with their teachers and peers as they struggled to cope with the disruption in their daily school lives.

NAPLAN has a disproportionate impact on children with psychological difficulties

The inquiry-based pedagogies employed by the Year 5 teacher at the lower SES school were disjunctive with the didactic pedagogies encouraged by NAPLAN. This disjuncture was palpable in the intensely negative responses of the children in this class who experienced the greatest learning and psychological difficulties. These children found it particularly difficult to cope with the transitions inherent within the shift from largely cooperative experimentation and exploration through hands-on, real life experiences, to sitting in isolation for an extended period, without the typical dialogic interactions which are inherent within inquiry-based pedagogies. Conversely, the largely didactic pedagogies of the Year 3 teacher at the higher SES school aligned more closely with NAPLAN. As a result, these children were most likely to report NAPLAN as helpful and

least likely to experience a negative shift in their relationships with their teacher and peers as a direct consequence of NAPLAN.

Year 3 children in higher SES schools experience NAPLAN as high-stakes

The children's experiences of NAPLAN as high-stakes were magnified for the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, where many parents aspired to enrol their children into their secondary school-of-choice. These parents' conviction that future success is contingent on acceptance into 'elite' secondary schools was reflected in these children's focus group discussion. On the one hand, these children believed that good NAPLAN results would mean that that 'you get to go to good high schools and after good high schools you go to university and to better jobs' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). On the other hand, they believed that poor NAPLAN results could mean that 'you could never ever get a job and get money and maybe couldn't even get a house!' (Year 3 child, higher SES school)

In a distinct contrast, the Year 3 children in the lower SES school discussed their belief that they might 'get some lollies or ... stickers' (Year 3 child, lower SES school) if they did well and that they 'might not do NAPLAN anymore' (Year 3 child, lower SES school) or be grounded by their parents if they did not. While it may be argued that a child would likely experience the threat of the latter as high-stakes at a personal level, these children did not discuss potential consequences of poor NAPLAN results on their education and future career pathways.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer the question: *How do children experience NAPLAN in the classroom?* Through the children's own accounts of their experiences and the classroom observations, it is clear that test preparation extends the disruption occasioned by NAPLAN during the testing week to permeate into the children's everyday experiences of school, during a substantial portion of the school year. However, the extent to which this occurs varies.

This disruption in the children's school lives has the effect of simultaneously creating a less inclusive environment for those children who most need their teachers' expertise and a broad range of learning experiences (Comber, 2012; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013), and causing confusion among the children regarding the purpose of NAPLAN, which led to some children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes. There was considerable evidence to suggest that by the time children reach Year 7, they were likely to feel disenfranchised from NAPLAN, and consequently disengage from learning associated with it.

Chapter 6: Children's responses to NAPLAN

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the children's responses to their lived experiences of NAPLAN, drawing on the relevant data and analyses of the data. As described in Chapter Five, the children experienced NAPLAN as disjunctive with their everyday school lives, within a confusing context of mixed messages regarding the purposes and significance of the tests. This was reflected in the analysis of the data, which revealed the two dominant modalities of disjuncture and some children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes.

In order to address the research question, *how do children respond to NAPLAN?* I primarily utilise analysis of the children's drawings and written descriptions, and focus group discussions. The children's reports are supported by those of their teachers and parents, as well as from excerpts from classroom observations and the researcher's personal field notes, which provide detailed accounts of some children's reactions to NAPLAN as they occurred. As a researcher, I observed the classes and also the children sitting the NAPLAN tests. The latter is uncommon in research on the effects of testing. The dominant modality within the children's drawings and written descriptions is emotion, with more than 90 per cent of the children expressing emotion in relation to their NAPLAN experience. The second dominant theme is learning outcomes, which pertained primarily to the extent of the children's engagement with NAPLAN.

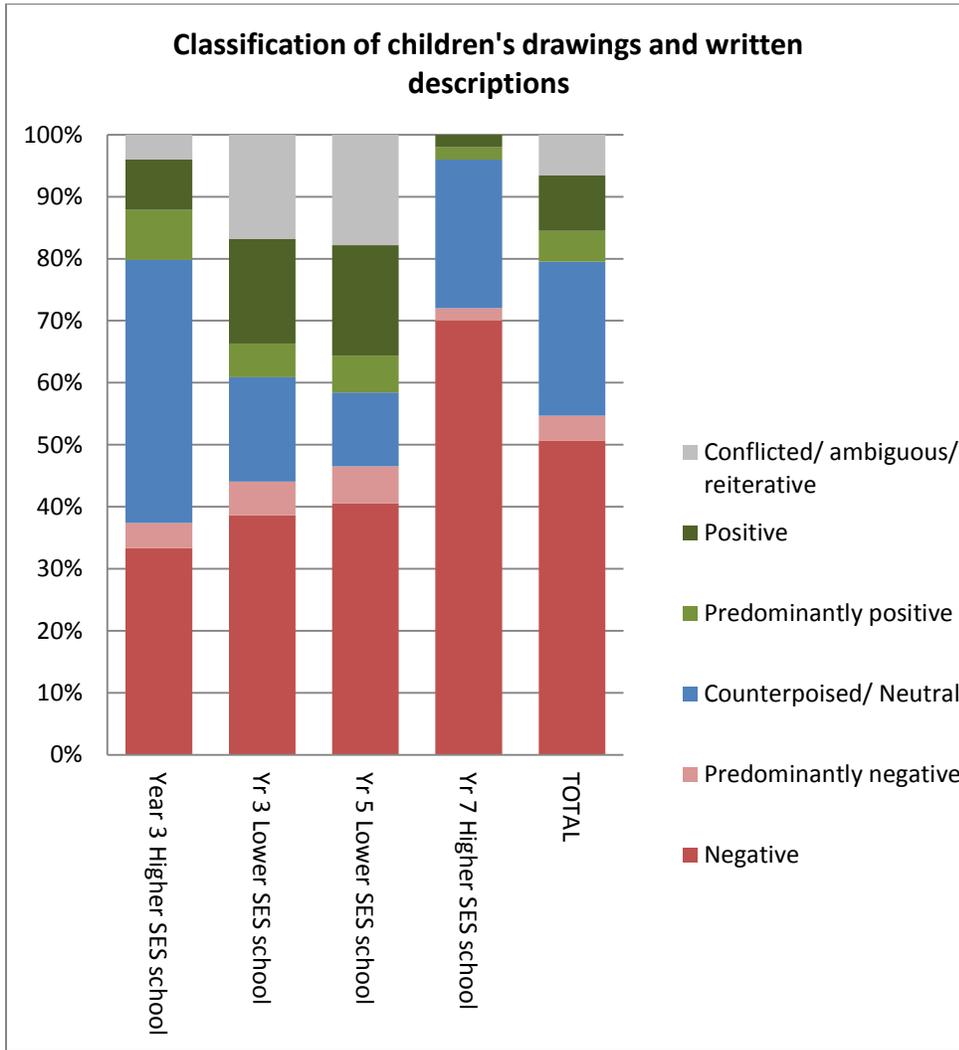
The following sections provide analyses of the relevant data. Initially, an account is provided of the positive emotions reported by the children, including happiness, confidence and pride, with some children reporting NAPLAN as a fun or enjoyable experience. This is followed by a description of the positive learning outcomes reported by some children in respect of NAPLAN, which encompasses engagement with the tests and reports of the tests as interesting challenges. Counterpoised and neutral responses are then considered before an exploration of the children's negative responses, which commences with a discussion of the negative emotions about

NAPLAN reported by many children. While anxiety was the most commonly reported negative emotion, anger, which incorporates frustration and annoyance, and sadness, which were also described by many children, share the same root as anxiety and are therefore closely linked. The children's reports of negative learning outcomes such as disengagement and that NAPLAN 'stops learning' then precedes a discussion of two responses from Year 5 children in the lower SES school, whose negative experiences of NAPLAN were discussed in Chapter Five. This is followed by an analysis of the categories which were developed from the children's various responses to NAPLAN in the various data sets. The chapter closes with a summative conclusion of the analysis and findings provided throughout the chapter.

Classifying the children's responses

As described in Chapter Three, the research design chapter, the process of analysis began with the initial classification of each child's drawing and written description as (1) positive, (2) counterpoised or neutral, or (3) negative, according to the overall first impression (see Appendix 11 Appendix). Based on the combination of themes, which will be described in detail further in the chapter, the children's responses were placed on a continuum, ranging from entirely positive to entirely negative (see Table 6.1). Some children's responses were classified as conflicted, ambiguous or reiterative, meaning that the children appeared to repeat the views of their teacher, and consequently their stance could not be positioned on this continuum.

Table 6.1. Classification of children's drawings and written descriptions



Positive Responses

Nine of the 105 drawings and written descriptions were considered to be entirely positive, as there were no negative themes within either the drawings or written descriptions. For example, the drawing in Figure 6.1, created by a Year 5 child in the lower SES school, explicitly conveys positive emotion. This is achieved through the 'happy' facial expression, which engages the viewer through her direct gaze, and 'thumbs up', which is drawn in close proximity to the representation of the test, indicating a direct relationship between her positive emotion and her experience of the

test. This positive theme is converges with her written description, which refers to NAPLAN as 'okay', as well as her positive references to each domain tested and her forthcoming test results.

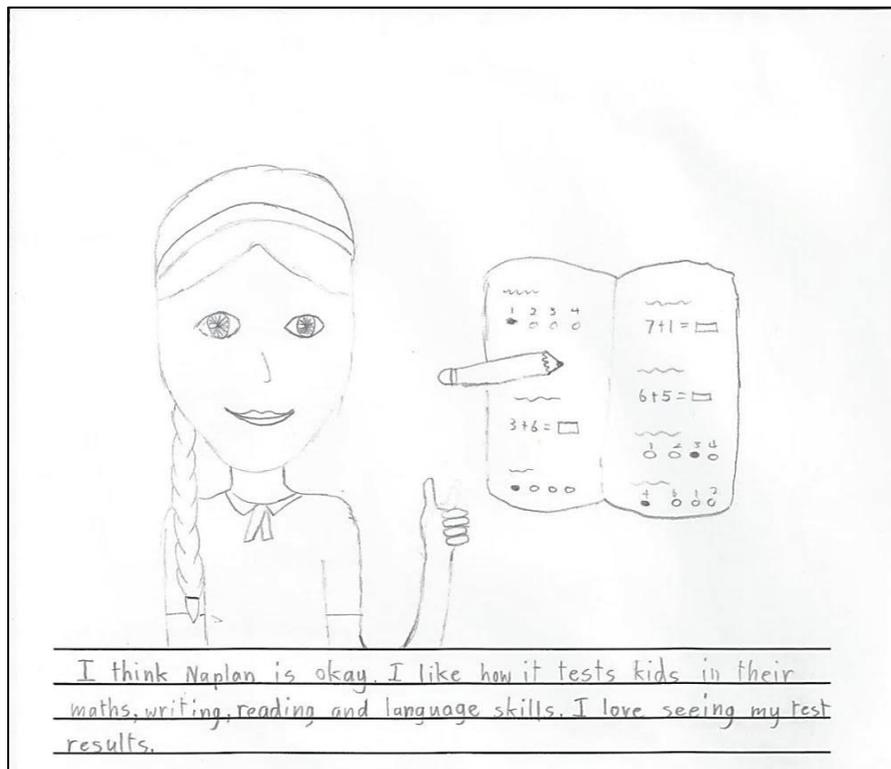


Figure 6.1 Positive response

While few drawings and written responses were entirely positive, 44 children included at least one positive theme, indicating that a substantial portion of the children did not experience NAPLAN as an entirely negative event. Five children's drawings and written descriptions were classified as predominantly positive, as they were comprised primarily of positive themes, with only one negative theme included. For example, one child described feeling both happy and excited about the tests, but added that 'I felt a little scared'.

The children in the lower SES school were more likely to contribute positive or predominantly positive drawings and written responses. While the frequency of this

type of response was low and as such, this finding should be treated with caution, it was nevertheless unexpected, given its inconsistency with the findings of research that suggests high-stakes testing has a disproportionately negative impact on children and young people in lower SES schools (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Cormack & Comber, 2013; Kohn, 2000). This finding also appears to be incongruous with these children's experience of more pronounced disjuncture between NAPLAN and their everyday experiences of school, in addition to the greater likelihood that they would experience NAPLAN as difficult.

A plausible answer to this apparent paradox may be found in the extent to which the children within each community had constructed NAPLAN as high-stakes. As described in Chapter Four, the teachers in the lower SES school experienced the tests as low-stakes, despite the school's relatively poor NAPLAN performance. This enabled them to focus on maintaining the development of engaging curricula and pedagogies, thus deferring explicit test practice 'until last' and minimising the focus on the tests, which in turn contributed to the children's constructions of the tests as low-stakes. This was reflected in the belief of the Year 3 children in particular that they 'might not do NAPLAN anymore' or be grounded by their parents if they did not do well. This provided a palpable contrast with the belief of some Year 3 children in the higher SES school that poor NAPLAN results could mean that 'you could never ever get a job and get money and maybe couldn't even get a house!' (Year 3 child, higher SES school)

Counterpoised and neutral responses

Approximately one-quarter of the children's drawings and written descriptions were considered to be counterpoised, because they represented and/or described equivalent numbers of positive and negative themes. For example, the response in Figure 6.2, contributed by a child in Year 3 in the higher SES school, initially appears to be predominantly negative, with two of the three facial expressions in the drawing representing negative emotion. The first of these emotions is nervousness, which is represented through the wavy-line shape of the mouth. Through close up representations, which are intended to engage the viewer, this child has emphasised

her representation of nervousness through the use of darker colour in the face, and by framing this portion of the drawing to disconnect it from her representations of excitement and worry. While the representations of these emotions converged with her written description, which incorporates the words 'nervous' and 'worried'; 'excited' and 'enjoyed' have been added to balance this negative quality. In addition, the negative theme of 'hard' was counteracted by the positive 'I knew I was doing ok'. Finally this child noted that she would like to do NAPLAN again, however this was immediately followed with, 'but only once every few years'.

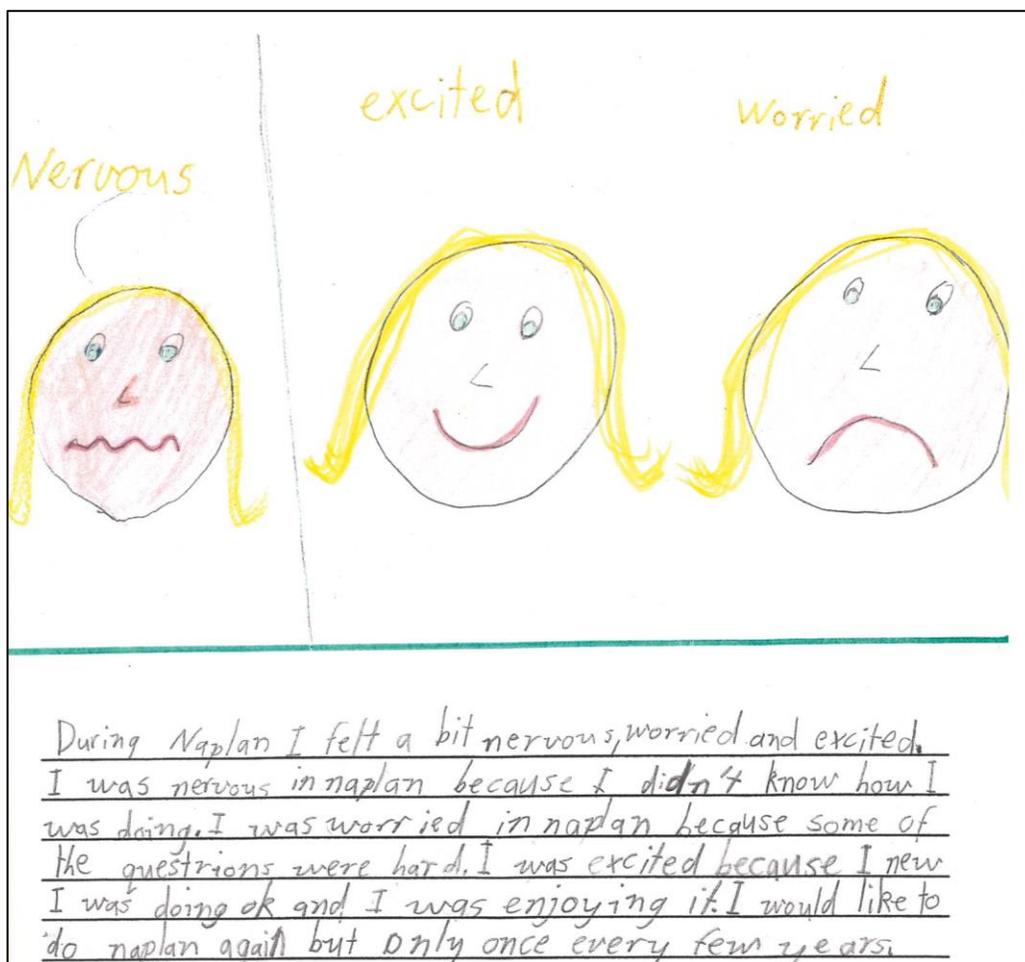


Figure 6.2 Counterpoised response

The Year 3 children in the higher SES school contributed a disproportionately high number of counterpoised drawings and written descriptions, with just over 40 per cent of these children contributing this type of response. The data suggest that this was likely the result of two themes discussed in Chapter Five which were unique to this class. On the one hand, the relatively high level of explicit test preparation appeared to cause some children to feel more at ease with NAPLAN's idiosyncrasy; as intended by the teacher. On the other hand, parental aspirations to enrol their children in their secondary school-of-choice intensified these children's experience of the tests as high-stakes.

Part of the category of counterpoised responses is neutral responses. For example, the drawing in Figure 6.3, created by a child in Year 7 in the higher SES school, features this child's relaxed facial expression and body gesture, with the test represented nearby to indicate a direct relationship between the neutrality of the drawing and written description, and the test. The commitment to this message within the drawing converges with that of the written response, as evidenced in her description that, 'On the day of NAPLAN, I walk in, do the test, and walk out. Just like it is a normal day'.

Even though I don't get the point of NAPLAN, I doesn't worry me because it is just another test that I only do once every two years. On the day of NAPLAN, I walk in, do the test, and walk out. Just like it is a normal day.



Figure 6.3 Neutral response

This child's drawing and written description is strongly suggestive of a low-stakes experience of NAPLAN. Reports from other Year 7 children during the focus group discussion that 'I already know that I'm in a good high school' and 'it's not like if you do bad you'll get pulled out of the high school' support this assertion. Thus unlike the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, they essentially experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes.

Negative responses

The children's drawings and written descriptions provided disproportionately negative representations of their experience of NAPLAN, with 89 of the 105 children including at least one negative theme within drawn or written elements of their response, and 54 contributing entirely negative responses. Negative responses were most prevalent among the Year 7 children in the higher SES school, despite their experience of NAPLAN as a low-stakes test, with 70 per cent of these children contributing entirely negative responses.

For example, the visual component of the bimodal response in Figure 6.4 was not drawn per se; however the dramatic use of size and colour foregrounds anger, which is represented through the expression 'Raaah!' This overarching theme was emphasised by the large scribble under the word 'Angry', immediately below the main focus of the response. The themes generating this anger, which have been positioned in the background through reduced size and the use of lead pencil rather than colour, include descriptions of the tests as 'confusing', and 'hard'. However the unambiguous statement within the written description that 'there is no point' in doing NAPLAN appears to be the main cause of this anger and consequent disengagement from the tests. This disengagement was evidenced in this child's references to the tests as 'ridiculous' and 'stupid', that she was bored and hungry, and that she was thinking about the popular band 'One Direction' and her pet guinea pigs rather than NAPLAN.

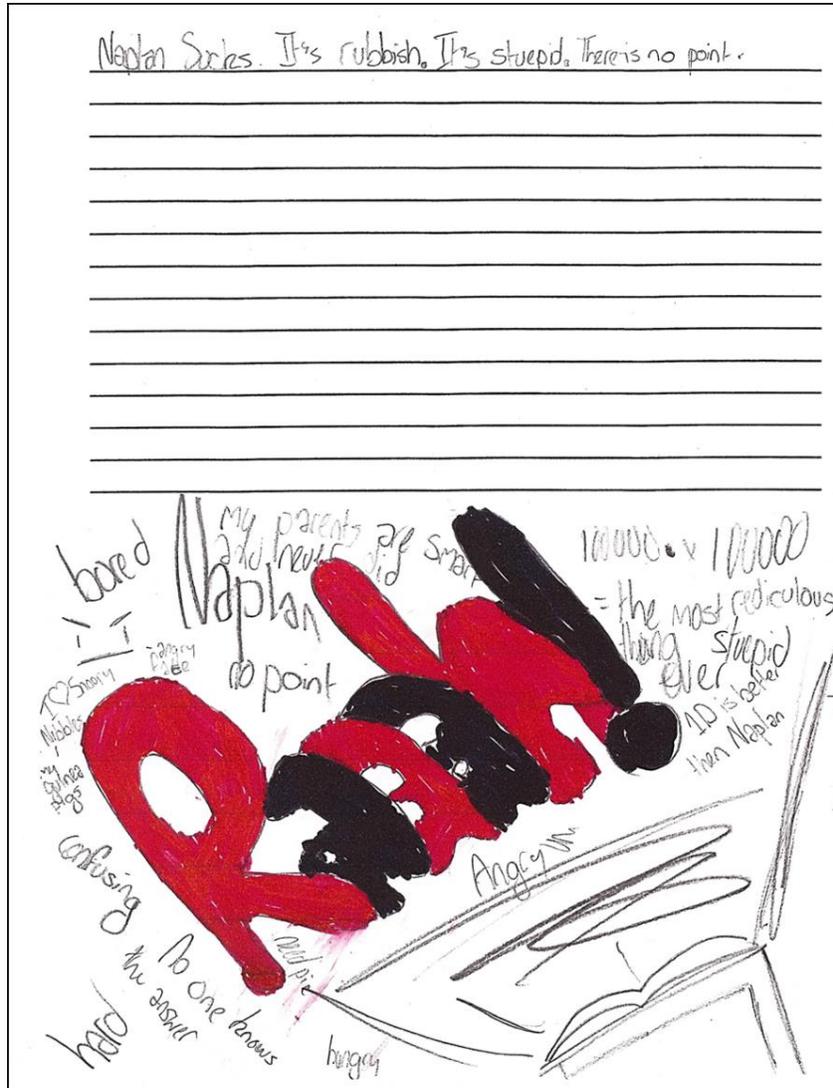


Figure 6.4 Response depicting anger

Some of the children's drawings and written responses were classified as predominantly negative, as they were comprised primarily of negative themes, with only one positive theme included. In many cases, this single positive theme was an expression of happiness or relief that the tests were over. For example, '... but when I finished I was really really happy!!!!!!' (Year 3 child, higher SES school) and 'I was happy afterwards because it was over and done for this year' (Year 7 child, higher SES school).

This was particularly evident in the responses of almost a quarter of the children, predominantly in the higher SES school, who represented and/or described their experience narratively, with clear demarcations of their emotions before and after the tests. For example, the drawing in Figure 6.5, contributed by a child in Year 3 in the higher SES school, presents unfolding actions and events (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) through the sequential positioning of the drawings from left to right. Through this narrative, this child represents the emotions he experienced before and after the tests, which are clearly demarcated by the framing of each image through the placement of the line in the middle of the drawing. The use of darker colours in his representation of himself in the first image is suggestive of nervousness, or worry, which is confirmed by the phrase 'I'm worried' within the speech bubble. The use of lighter colours in his representation of himself and inclusion of the expression 'woo!' in the latter half of the narrative emphasises his delight that NAPLAN was over.

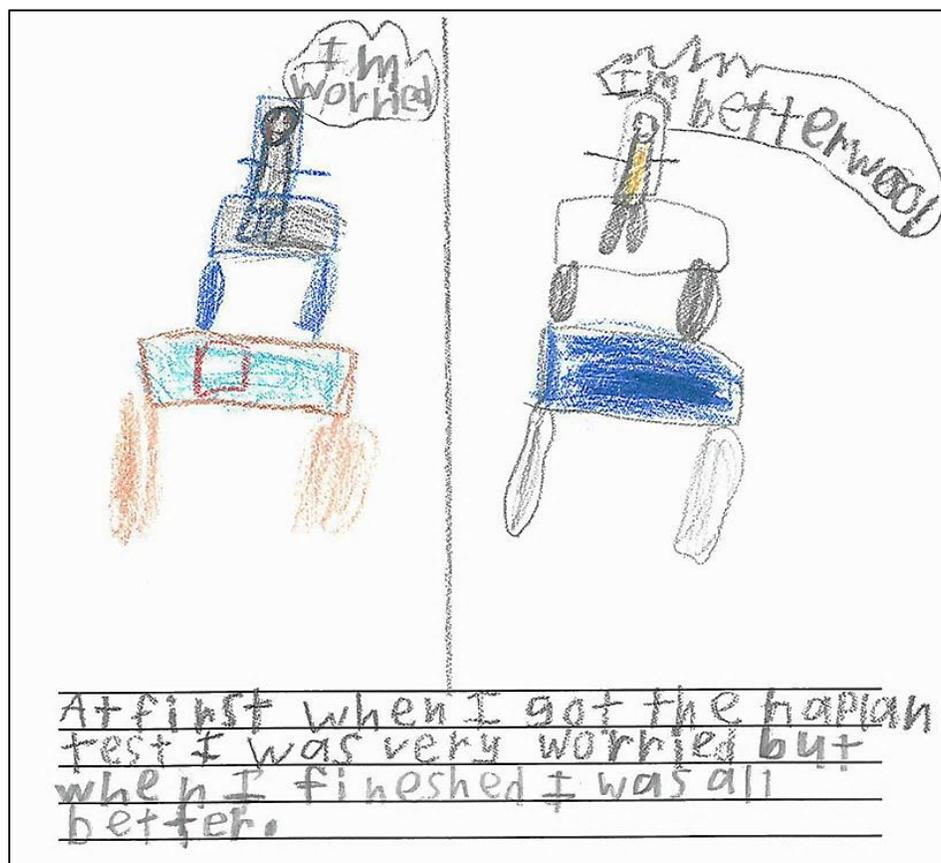


Figure 6.5 Response conveying happiness that NAPLAN was over

In a similar example, the layout of the child's drawing in Figure 6.6, contributed by a child in Year 3 in the higher SES school, also positions the viewer to read the narrative of her NAPLAN experience, from left to right. This narrative begins with a facial expression featuring a downturned mouth, which is framed by raindrops falling from a dark cloud to represent sadness before NAPLAN. The narrative then progresses to a facial expression featuring a wavy line mouth to represent nervousness, which is framed by question marks, indicating confusion while sitting the test. The narrative concludes with a facial expression featuring an upturned mouth, or 'smiley face', which is framed by hearts to represent happiness that NAPLAN was over.

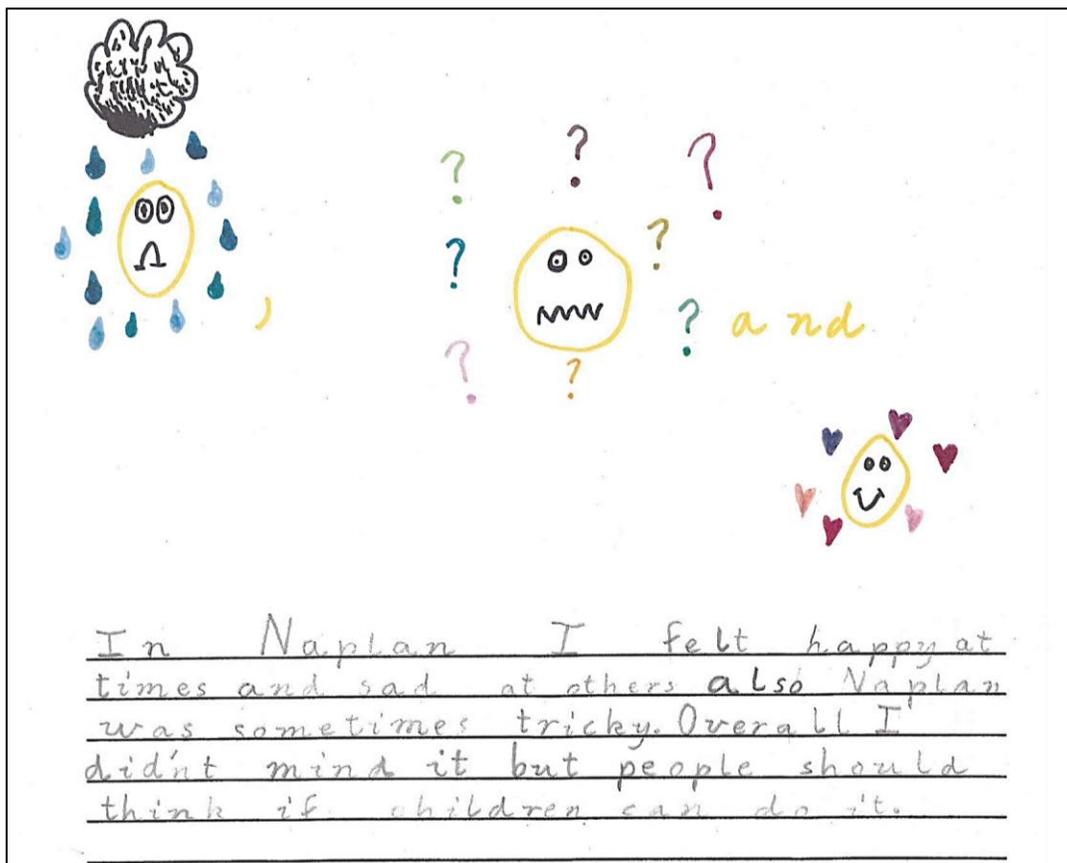


Figure 6.6 Narrative representation

These children's reports align with those from children in US research that positive themes within experiences of high-stakes testing related primarily to relief that such tests had ended (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). This theme was discounted from the positive category because it did not relate to a positive experience of taking the tests.

Four children's responses were subsequently classed as predominantly negative. For example, the drawing in Figure 6.7, contributed by a child in Year 7 in the higher SES school, represents this child sitting in isolation, with representations of other children's desks positioned in the margins of the drawing to indicate her isolation. Her direct gaze, inviting the viewer's involvement, draws attention to her facial expression which features a flat-line mouth. This negativity is highlighted by the word 'annoyed' within the speech bubble, which converges with her written description to describe her inability to understand NAPLAN's purpose as well as her experience of the tests as a waste of time which 'stops us from learning new things'. However, she added that she was glad the test writers had made NAPLAN easy.

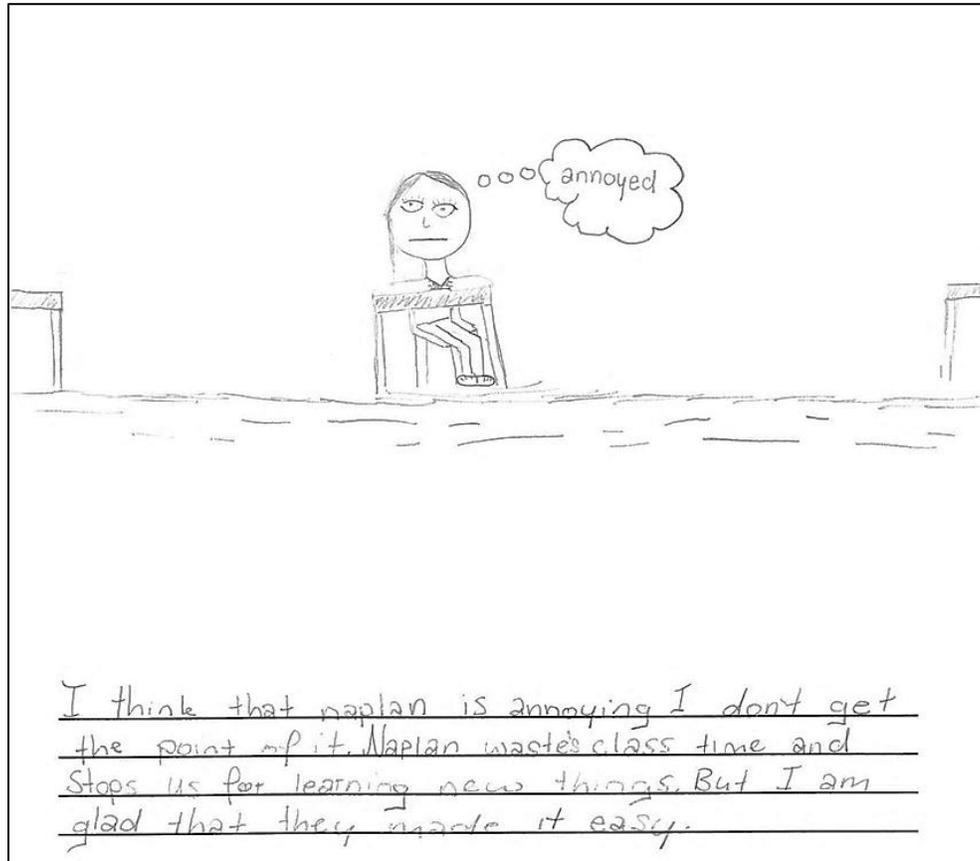


Figure 6.7 Predominantly negative response

Conflicted, ambiguous and reiterative responses

The drawings and written descriptions of seven children, almost exclusively in the lower SES school, could not be placed into any distinct category, as they afforded insufficient or conflicting information, thus preventing the creation of shared meanings (Cruddas, 2007) between the child and the researcher. In their US study on the impacts of high stakes testing on children, Triplett and Barksdale (2005) similarly reported that some children's responses were classified as providing 'not enough information' (p. 243) as a result of ambiguous content. In order to validate the voices and silences of all the children (Lancaster, 2003), these drawings and written descriptions were explored in the same manner as those of the other children, rather than discounted from the data.

Three responses from Year 5 children at the lower SES school were classed as ambiguous because there were no clear themes or meanings within the drawings or written descriptions. For example, while representations of sitting in isolation at a desk were to be expected to some degree, given the nature of testing, the response in Figure 6.8, created by a child in Year 5 in the lower SES school, provides no information to describe this child's experience other than the experience of isolation, although the lack of a distinct facial expression may signify hesitation to convey emotion.



Figure 6.8 Ambiguous response

Similarly, the drawing and written description in Figure 6.9, created by a Year 3 child in the lower SES school, appeared to solely reiterate the teacher's view that NAPLAN 'is all about thinking'. This was evident in the written description that 'I think it is good because it helps me [think better]'. This child's response was not the only one to incorporate this view of NAPLAN as 'good for thinking', and as such, it may be argued that like other children who contributed similar responses, he or she genuinely agreed

with their teacher regarding this point. However, several elements within the drawing may be indicative of a negative emotional response. First, this child drew him or herself in isolation, as evidenced in the large amount of white space on the page, and the absence of anyone else in the drawing. In addition, this child has drawn him or herself as disproportionately small, which as described previously, may indicate the intention to convey low self-confidence, personal inadequacy or powerlessness (Malchiodi, 1998).

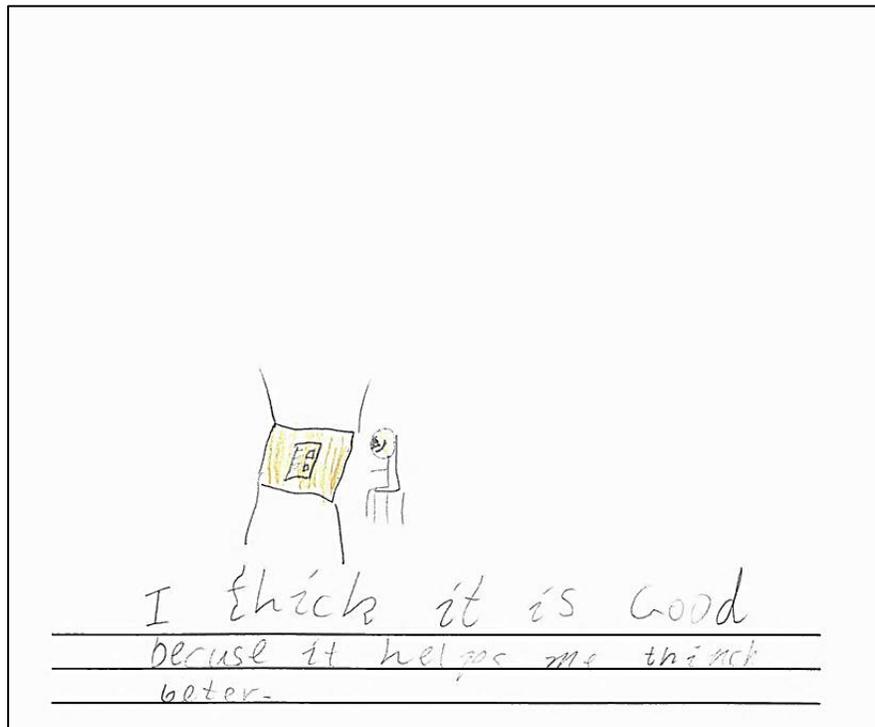


Figure 6.9 Reiterative response

Finally, two drawings and written descriptions created Year 3 children at both schools were classified as conflicted, due to divergence in the meaning of the two modalities. In each of these responses, the written description was distinctly positive, while the drawing conveyed an opposing negative message.

For example, in Figure 6.10, a Year 3 child at the lower SES school described NAPLAN as 'so fun because there was [sic] so [many] fun [questions]' within the written description. However in the visual text, this child has drawn him or herself without a

facial expression in an apparent attempt to avoid conveying emotion, and incorporated the phrases, 'I am not doing this', and 'I am [exhausted]'.

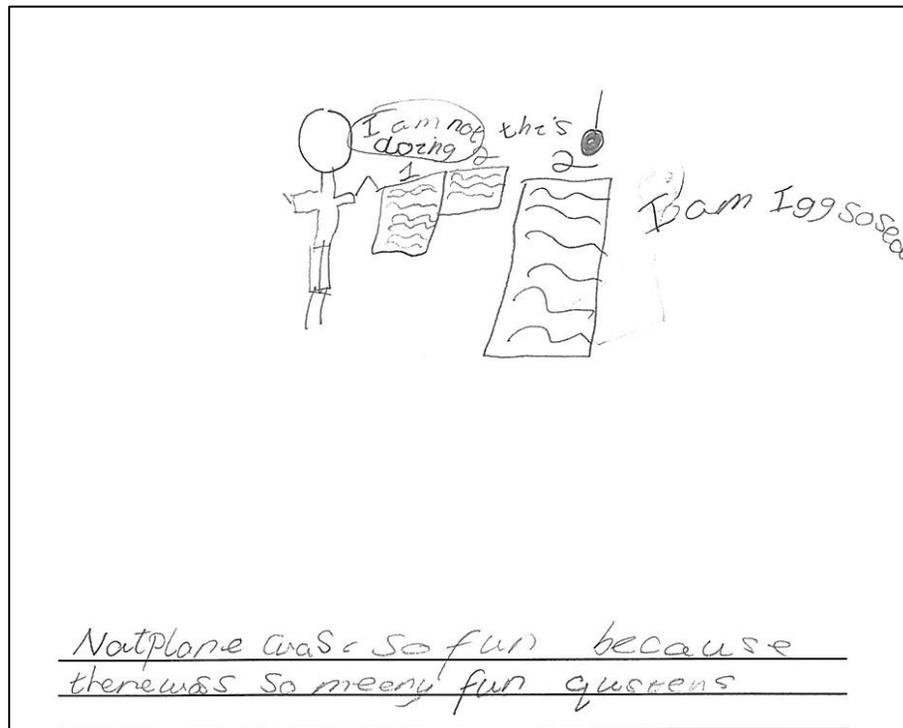


Figure 6.10 Conflicted response

I hypothesised that this divergence between the drawings and written descriptions may be the result of insecurity and/or confusion, arising from a combination of (1) these children's experience of NAPLAN as an incomprehensible event, involving often abrupt changes in their relationships with their teachers and peers; (2) some children's positioning within discordant parent-teacher relationships and/or (3) possible perceptions of conflicting teacher and researcher expectations, within the everyday classroom culture of expected compliance.

Further, this insecurity may be the reason that over 40 per cent of the Year 3 children in the lower SES school specifically requested that their drawings and written descriptions be designated 'NfP' – 'Not for Publishing', in addition to not providing consent for their contributions to be published. As described in Chapter Three, an ethical process of civic dissemination necessitates ensuring that children want their drawings to be made public

(Mitchell et al., 2011). While these children indicated that they wanted to contribute to the project, they did not want their responses shown to anyone. This compares to only eight per cent of the Year 3 children at the higher SES school.

The impact of NAPLAN's overriding authority is evident in teachers' reports within research that 'there's this authoritative voice coming through this piece of paper ... quite a powerful kind of voice' (Comber, 2012, p. 130), which Comber likens to the positioning of teachers as ventriloquists' dolls. The drawings and written descriptions of these children suggest that this invisible authority, which effectively silences their teachers also disempowers them further within an already confusing context of mixed messages and abrupt disjuncture between NAPLAN and everyday school life.

On this basis, it would appear that an invitation to participate may have been equated with a requirement to contribute. In the instances of the conflicted drawings and written descriptions, I would add the children's likely recognition that written texts take precedence over visual texts in everyday school life (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Wright, 2010). It therefore seems likely that these children felt compelled to respond in a manner which they felt would have been expected and approved of (Hopperstad, 2010). Further, they felt that this approval would be maximised by either maintaining ambiguity in the meaning of the response, or by responding positively in the lexical text, to provide an emotionally 'safer' option. Interestingly, there was no ambiguity or conflict in any of the Year 7 children's responses.

This initial process of classifying the children's drawings and written descriptions on this continuum was followed by a systematic analysis of the themes within the responses. The following section explores the positive themes within the children's bimodal responses, which pertain in the first instance to the positive emotions expressed by the children in relation to their NAPLAN experience. This is followed by discussion of the positive learning outcomes reported by the children as a direct consequence of NAPLAN.

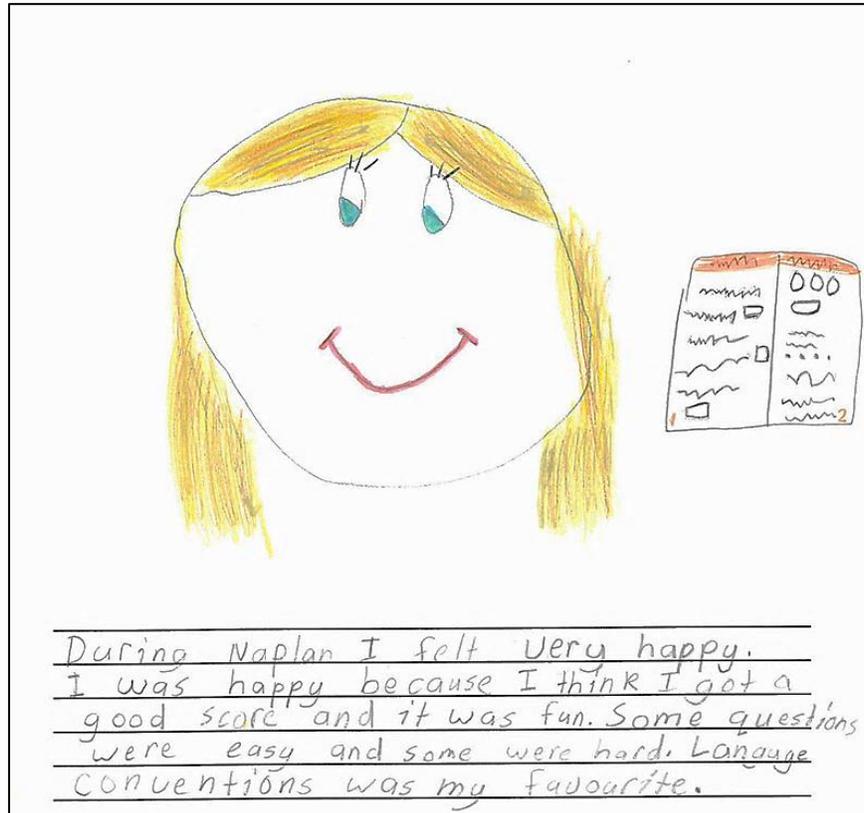
Positive themes

Emotions

Some of the positive drawings and written descriptions genuinely conveyed buoyant emotions, for example, 'during the test I felt absolutely great when I tried it' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). However several positive responses, particularly from Year 7 children, appeared to be noncommittal; implying a positive tone through the words 'ok', 'good', 'fine' or 'all right' in the written description, but offering little information. For example, 'In NAPLAN I felt reasonable and all right' and 'When I did the test I found it ok'.

Happiness was one of several positive emotions explicitly represented and/or described in the children's drawings and written responses. Some children described feeling happy more generally, for example, 'During NAPLAN I felt happy to be doing it' (Year 3 child, higher SES school); while others conveyed feeling happy because they believed they would achieve a good score. For example, 'I felt happy to do NAPLAN because I practice a lot so I'm probably going to get a lot right' (Year 5 child, lower SES school). This appears to indicate that children's emotional responses may have been associated, at least in part, with the extent to which they believed they would achieve a good score.

A few children, predominantly in Year 3, described feeling happy because they thought NAPLAN was fun. For example, in Figure 6.11, which was created by a child in Year 3 in the higher SES school, the close up image of this child, which is intended to engage the reader, features a happy facial expression, with a representation of the test close by, indicating a direct relationship between positive emotion and the test. This child also described feeling happy because she believed that she would achieve a good score, adding that Language Conventions was her favourite test.



During Naplan I felt very happy.
I was happy because I think I got a
good score and it was fun. Some questions
were easy and some were hard. Language
Conventions was my favourite.

Figure 6.11 Positive response describing NAPLAN as fun

Children's descriptions of NAPLAN as fun were met with teacher scepticism. This was evident in the following excerpt from classroom observations, which involves an exchange between the Year 3 children in the higher SES school and their teacher, immediately after the Language Conventions test had been handed in by the children.

Teacher: Thank you children. Ok, how do you feel?

Children: Good ... Nervous ... I was fine until I got to the one on the last page ... I was bit nervous but it was good because even though I think I got some wrong, I think I did really well ... When I started I was excited, but some were hard and I got nervous.

Child: I had a lot of fun.

Teacher: Well you're the only one. (Excerpt from classroom observations, 15/05/2012)

The teacher's dismissal of this child's description of her NAPLAN experience raises two issues. The first of these is the tendency of adults to define children's realities for them by overwriting their own speech; in this case, effectively silencing and excluding children whose constructions of their NAPLAN realities differed from those of their teachers or peers. Secondly, if, as research suggests, 'the school culture and its approach ... set the tone for the [child's] ... response to NAPLAN' (Wyn et al., 2014, p. 26), then overtly negative adult expectations may foster children's negative constructions of NAPLAN.

A few children, almost exclusively in Year 3, described NAPLAN as 'exciting', which in some cases, was described in conjunction with fear. For example, 'Before NAPLAN I felt scared and excited. After NAPLAN I wasn't so scared. During it I was very scared and very excited' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). The adults appeared to be more accepting of children's descriptions of NAPLAN as 'exciting' than those of NAPLAN as 'fun'. On the day of the Language Conventions test, the Year 3 teacher at the higher SES school spoke to me about her belief that the children were 'really excited'.

Similarly, one mother's response to the parents' focus group discussion questions conveyed that she believed her daughter 'was excited about doing [NAPLAN] – it was like she saw it as a rite of passage ... as an exciting challenge' (Year 3 parent, higher SES school). As Alexander (2010) noted in his study on children's opinions of their schools and their learning, some children experience formal tests as exciting challenges.

Two children, both in Year 3 at the higher SES school, described feeling confident while they were taking the NAPLAN tests, aligning with Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) finding that 'very few children [express] confidence in themselves as test takers overall' (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 247). For example, the narrative drawing in Figure 6.12 depicts this child standing confidently, with his hands on his hips in the final frame. The data suggest that these expressions of confidence were likely due to the children's positioning within a school where testing was a part of everyday school life, and the explicit test preparation they experienced in the lead-up to NAPLAN. A combination of these factors likely resulted in greater familiarity with testing formats and protocols.

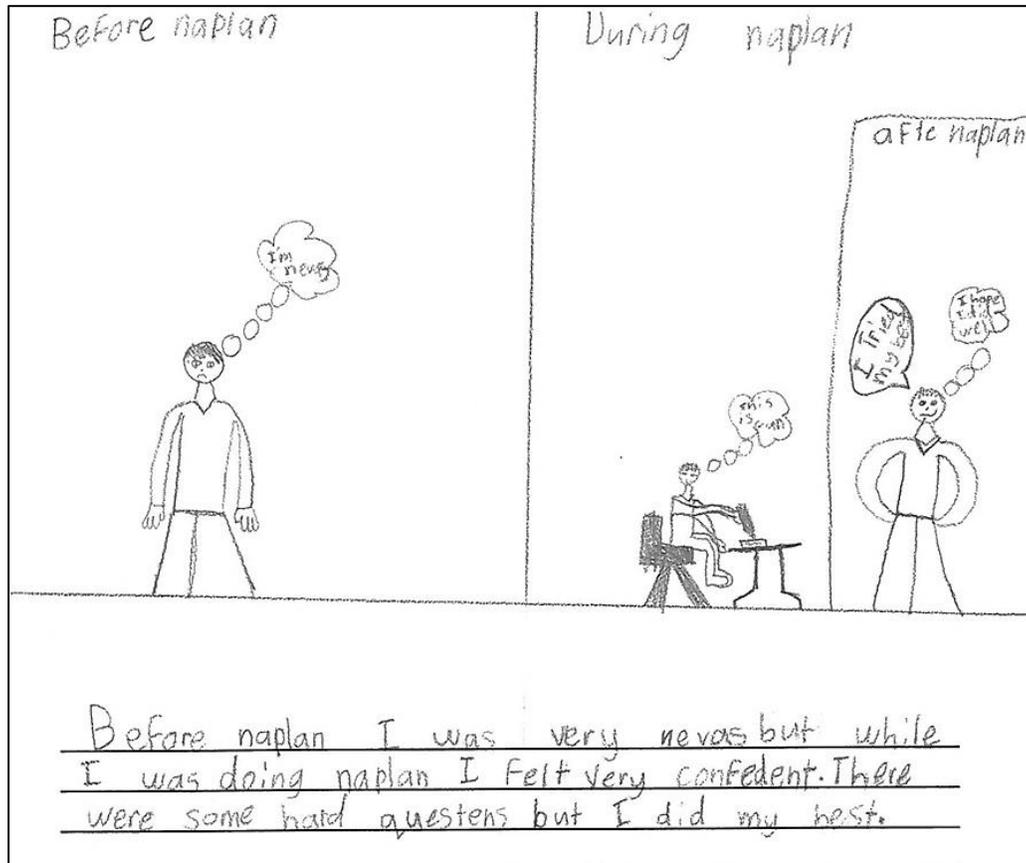


Figure 6.12 Response representing confidence

While very few children described feeling confident during the tests, several children in both schools described feeling confident that that they would achieve a good score, for example, 'when I completed the test I was happy and confident about my marks' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). Similarly, a child in Year 7 also described feeling confident that he had achieved good results during the focus group discussion.

Well after the tests I had a great feeling of self-satisfaction, like that's over with now and I've done it and I've tried my hardest and I've done my best, and I always know that well, I'm not going to get the worst marks, because like, not to be a brag or anything, but I try my hardest and I do my best and I'm sure that I'll get good marks. (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

These children's responses further augment the finding that children's emotional responses to NAPLAN may be partly related to the extent to which they believed they would be successful.

A few children described feeling proud of themselves. For example, in Figure 6.13, created by a child in Year 3 in the higher SES school, this child's written description conveys that 'during NAPLAN I felt very proud of myself'. This written description converges with the drawing which represents a happy facial expression and confident body gesture, with a direct gaze that is intended to engage the viewer. While he is sitting in isolation as per NAPLAN's formal testing protocols, he is not represented as alone, with another child subordinately positioned further away in the drawing through reduced size and the use of lead pencil rather than colour.

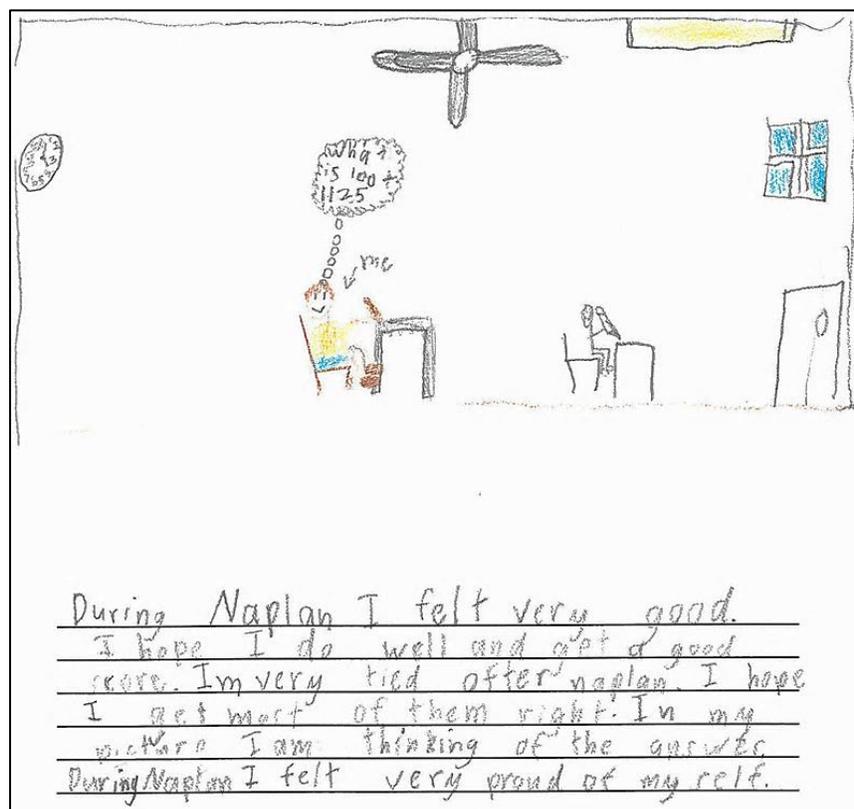


Figure 6.13 Response describing pride

In some cases, these children's descriptions of feeling proud related to their belief that they would achieve a good score. For example, one child reported, 'I felt really proud of myself, because at the end of the test I thought I might have got a high score' (Year 3 child, lower SES school) within his written description.

The Year 7 children's descriptions of feeling proud related more commonly to the way they were able to control their negative emotions during NAPLAN. For example,

Before NAPLAN I felt really nervous and queasy and during the test I kept thinking that I wouldn't finish but I got my head down and finished. After NAPLAN I felt really good and calm. I felt really proud of myself.

The children's pride in their ability to control their negative emotions during NAPLAN was also evident during the focus group discussion, when some of the children conveyed their appreciation of their teachers' efforts to help them develop their 'mental toughness'. For example, 'Mr [Teacher A] is pretty cool ... at the end of the test he was going on about mental toughness and about how we acted pretty calm during the test'. During classroom observations following one of the NAPLAN tests, the teachers reinforced the children's pride in this achievement, commending them because 'there was no hysteria. We got our heads down and got it done. You're an excellent group of kids; you come across a challenge and you deal with it really well' (Year 7 Teacher A, higher SES school).

There was evidence to suggest that this discussion may have been part of an overall approach of using NAPLAN as a means of preparing the children for the experience of formal exam situations in secondary school. Year 7 Teacher B explicitly described NAPLAN as a means of preparing for the formal examinations of secondary school, conveying that, 'the thing about it is you have to ... teach the exam skills, and that can be good because that's what's going to happen in high school'. During the focus group discussion, it was evident that some of the Year 7 children appeared to be resigned to the stress they would experience and appreciated this opportunity to prepare for these formal exams.

I think NAPLAN is actually really good because, you know, there's lots of stress, we're going to feel that stress heaps and heaps and heaps of times in high school, you know with all the assignments you do and all the major tests. I think it's really good preparation for high school. Especially in Grade 7. (Year 7 child, higher SES school)

Wyn (2014) and her colleagues found that the use of NAPLAN to prepare children for formal examinations appears to be widespread. However, they emphasise that 'this was never part of the intended role or design of NAPLAN, and one would have to question whether this is the most effective training for the rigours of formal examinations' (p. 31).

Effects of NAPLAN on learning

Just over ten per cent of the children reported positive learning outcomes as a direct result of NAPLAN, with between 12 and 17 per cent of the Year 3 and 5 children reporting such outcomes within their drawings and written descriptions, as compared with 6.5 per cent of the children in Year 7. This is consistent with Wheelock et al's (2000) finding that younger children are more likely to portray themselves as diligent and persistent test takers.

The first of these positive learning outcomes, reported only by a few Year 3 children in the lower SES school within their drawings and written descriptions, was that NAPLAN is 'good for learning'. The classroom observations provide evidence to suggest that these children's reports may have been a reiteration, at least in part, of the teacher's view that the tests are 'all about thinking'. As described in Chapter Five, this theme was observed to be both unique to this class and a common topic of conversation within the classroom. However, a few children appeared to genuinely agree with their teacher regarding this view of NAPLAN. For example, the drawing in Figure 6.14, which constructs a particular relationship with the viewer through the child's direct gaze, demonstrates convergence between the positive facial expression represented in the drawing and her written description that NAPLAN as 'all right' because 'it was good learning'.

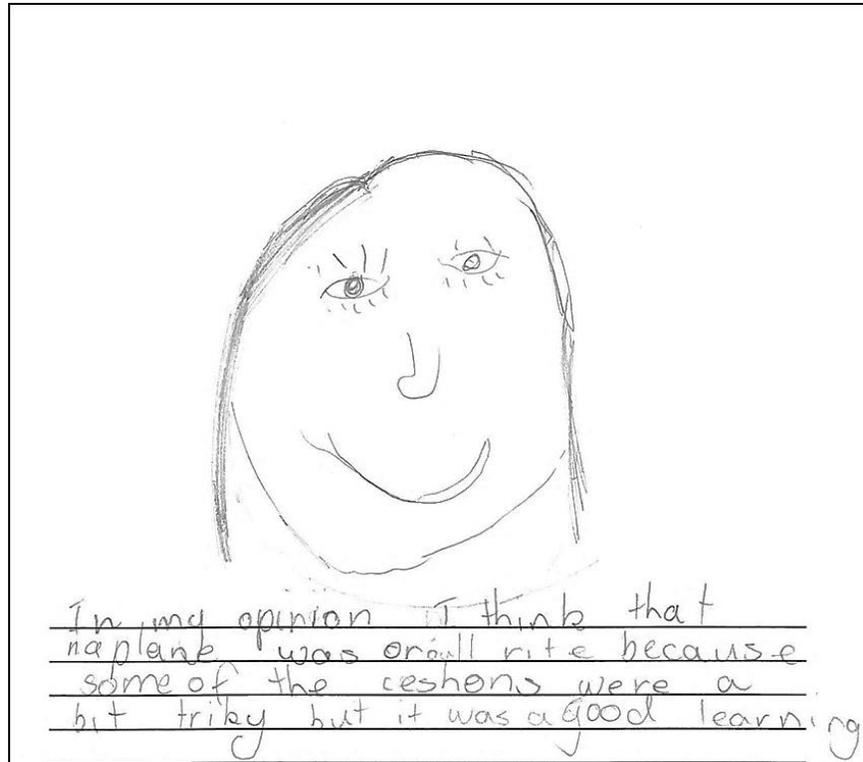


Figure 6.14 Response describing NAPLAN as 'good for learning'

This agreement with the teacher's view was also evident during the focus group discussion, as the children described their teachers' explanations of NAPLAN as 'a really good learning thing to help us learn and get more stuff in our brain' and 'it's a really good exercise for your brain to learn numbers and spellings, all sorts of new words'. One child added that 'it's also good for your fingers, for exercising your fingers, 'cause there's [sic] so many questions that your fingers just get stronger and stronger'. These children's responses appear to support Wyn et al's (2014) argument that the approach taken by individual schools in regards to NAPLAN may influence children's responses to the tests, as the teacher's positive 'take' on NAPLAN was adopted by at least some of the children.

Six per cent of the children reported positive learning outcomes in terms of engagement within their drawings and written descriptions. Year 3 children in the higher SES school were most likely to report engagement through descriptions that 'I did my best', although

negative themes were also present in the majority of these responses. For example, the Year 3 child in the higher SES school who created the drawing and written description in Figure 6.15 has drawn a disproportionately small representation of herself, as signified by the large amount of white space on the page. Experts in children's drawings generally agree that 'the larger the object, the more importance it has in the overall picture' (Albers, 2009, p. 12). Thus, when children draw themselves as very small, they may be conveying low self-confidence, personal inadequacy or powerlessness (Malchiodi, 1998). However, while she also conveyed that she felt nervous and that some of the questions were difficult within the written description, she also reported engaging with NAPLAN by doing her 'best'.

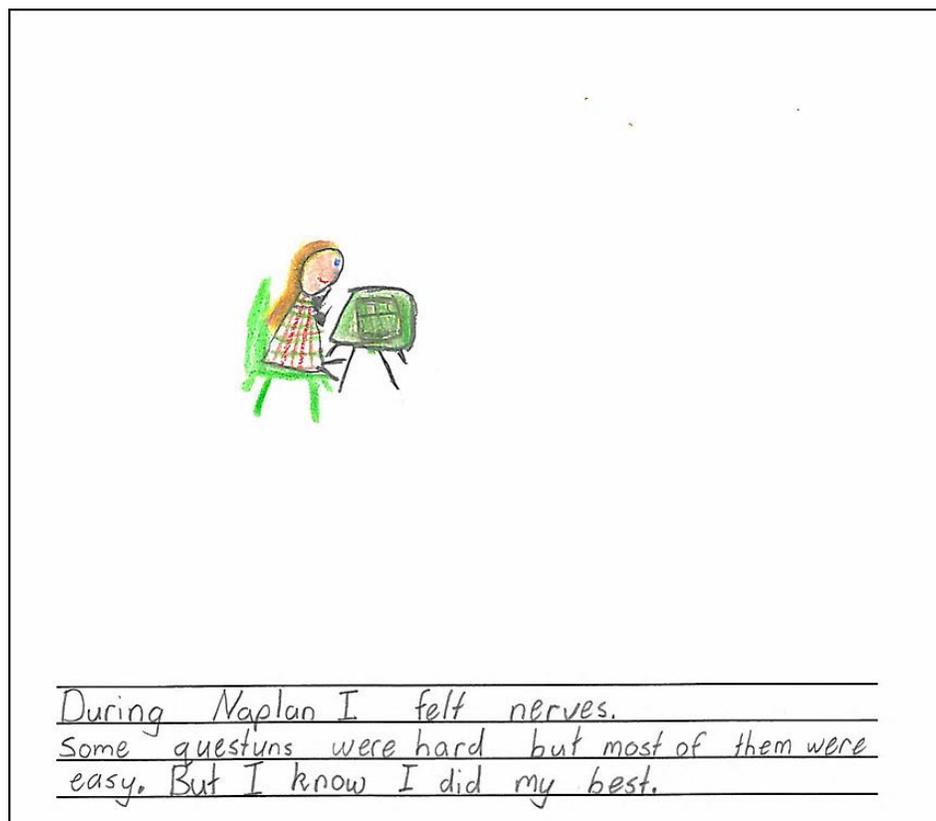


Figure 6.15 Response reporting engagement with NAPLAN

The children in the lower SES school were only slightly less likely to report engaging with NAPLAN than their higher SES counterparts within their drawings and written

descriptions. However, there was a qualitative difference in their reports, as while the children in the higher SES school reported doing their best, the children in the lower SES school were more likely to report that NAPLAN was interesting or challenging. For example, one child reported within their written description that 'I feel ok when I am doing NAPLAN because the hard questions I find challenging and the easier questions I feel good' (Year 3 child, lower SES school). Another child similarly wrote that 'I ... felt interested when doing the test in NAPLAN' (Year 5 child, lower SES school).

This equivalence in the frequency of children's reports of engagement within both schools was unexpected, given the findings of research that suggest NAPLAN has a greater impact in lower SES schools. However, these reports of engagement were more prevalent among the younger children, which aligns with research that suggests younger children are more likely to report such engagement (Wheelock et al., 2000).

Negative themes

The following section provides the analysis of children's negative drawings and written descriptions about NAPLAN. This begins with a consideration of the children's negative emotional responses, which pertain primarily to some children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, and their experiences of disjuncture between NAPLAN and their everyday school lives. This is followed by a discussion of the negative learning outcomes reported by the children within their drawings, written descriptions, focus group discussions and the classroom observations. These negative learning outcomes include some children's disenfranchisement with and consequent disengagement from NAPLAN and its associated preparation.

Emotions

Some children contributed negative emotional responses within their drawings and written descriptions which lacked specificity in their content. For example, 'I don't like it!' which was conveyed by a few children in the lower SES school, and 'I hated NAPLAN' (Year 7 child, higher SES school). Wheelock et al (2000) similarly found that some children contributed what they termed, 'nonspecific' negative responses, such as 'I hate

MCAS', or 'This test is stupid'. Several children, predominantly in Year 7, included direct appeals to 'please stop NAPLAN' within their drawings and written descriptions, although they cannot be shown here because these children requested that their responses not be published. In a few cases, requests to stop NAPLAN were depicted through a large red cross or the 'no symbol', as represented by a red circle with a diagonal line crossing from left to right, drawn over a representation of the test. These drawings converged with written descriptions such as, 'although people say it is nothing, for some it is and for me it means a lot. Please stop NAPLAN!' (Year 7 child, higher SES school) Another child simply drew a large red cross utilising most of the available space on the page, with the accompanying description, 'I don't like NAPLAN. I don't think any person would. I don't want to do it ever again' (Year 3 child, lower SES school).

Some of these children appeared to find it difficult to articulate the reasons for their dislike of NAPLAN through their written descriptions. However, analysis of their drawings revealed several specific negative themes. For example, the Year 3 child in the lower SES school who created the response in Figure 6.16 conveyed only that 'I don't like it!' within his written description.

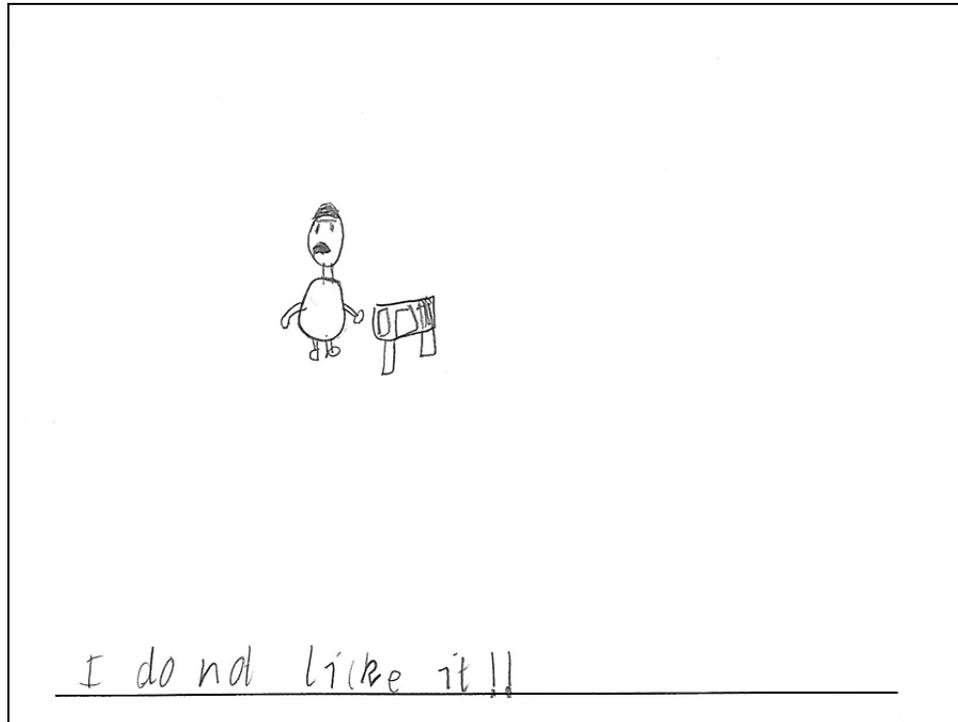


Figure 6.16 Response representing negative emotion

The analysis of the drawing, however, revealed the themes of isolation, negative emotion and powerlessness. The most palpable of these is this child's powerlessness, as conveyed through his disproportionately small representation of himself. This is accentuated by a lack of framing, generating a large amount of white space; thus conveying isolation, which is also represented through the absence of anyone else in the drawing. The emotion of sadness is conveyed through his unhappy facial expression featuring a downturned mouth, which is darker than his other facial features, thus increasing its salience within the drawing.

While representations of isolation were to be expected to some degree, given the protocols of standardised testing, consideration of these children's experiences of NAPLAN as disjunctive with their everyday school lives were taken into account during the analysis of the drawing. As described in Chapter Five, these children's daily experiences of school had a particular focus on their dialogic interactions with their

teacher and peers, which at times resulted in profoundly creative responses from the children. The abrupt shift in pedagogical relationships engendered by NAPLAN therefore generated an experience of isolation which was discordant with this child's everyday school life.

The following sections examine in more detail, several specific negative emotions which were included by the children in their responses.

Confusion

Many of the children's negative emotional responses to NAPLAN, which are discussed in the subsequent sections, may be attributed to some extent to the confusion surrounding the tests. As described in Chapter Five, there was evidence to suggest that this confusion, which was represented through the use of question marks within the children's drawings, related partly to the idiosyncrasy of the tests, which included unfamiliar vocabulary and/or content. Similar reports of confusion were also received from children in US research, who found standardised tests to be 'tricky' or confusing (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). However, there was evidence to suggest that much of the children's confusion regarding NAPLAN related ultimately to 'the government's poor communication of the intended purpose of NAPLAN' (Back et al., 2010, p. 22).

As described in Chapter Four, this failure to provide clear and consistent information to the community about NAPLAN is manifest in the multiple and often contradictory adult constructions of the purposes and significance of NAPLAN, which are compounded by the media narratives about NAPLAN of distrust, choice and performance described by Mockler (2013). Within this context of multiple ambiguities, paradoxes and dissonances, it is evident that attempting to provide the children not only with accurate information, but to ensure the consistency of such information, presents a considerable challenge. The children's consequent confusion was particularly evident in one teacher's description of her attempt to explain the purposes of NAPLAN to the children in her class several weeks before the tests.

I said ... 'they need to know what you have trouble with, because then they might give us money to help'. And then the kids went, 'so we should do bad?' And I said, 'No, no, don't do bad.' So it's a bit tricky. (Year 5 teacher, lower SES school)

The confusion experienced by these children appears to indicate their awareness of an important yet incomprehensible relationship between NAPLAN results and obtaining money for their school. This understanding of a link between schooling and money may reflect the proselytization of particular ideologies, which consistently frame education discourses within the popular media, and exert a significant influence on the wider social context in which children and their families experience schooling and NAPLAN.

The data analysis presented in Chapter Five suggests that the children's confusion was compounded by the disjuncture between NAPLAN and their everyday experiences of school. This disjuncture encompassed every facet of school life, including dialogic interactions and relationships with teachers and peers, tasks and the thinking skills required to complete them, and the feedback received by the children on their tasks and assessments. There was evidence to suggest that the transactional interplay between these factors led many Year 7 children to question the purpose of a test that appeared to be not only a waste of time, but stopped them from learning new things as they prepared and sat for the tests. For example, the response in Figure 6.17 poses the question frequently asked by the Year 7 children, 'What's the point of NAPLAN?'

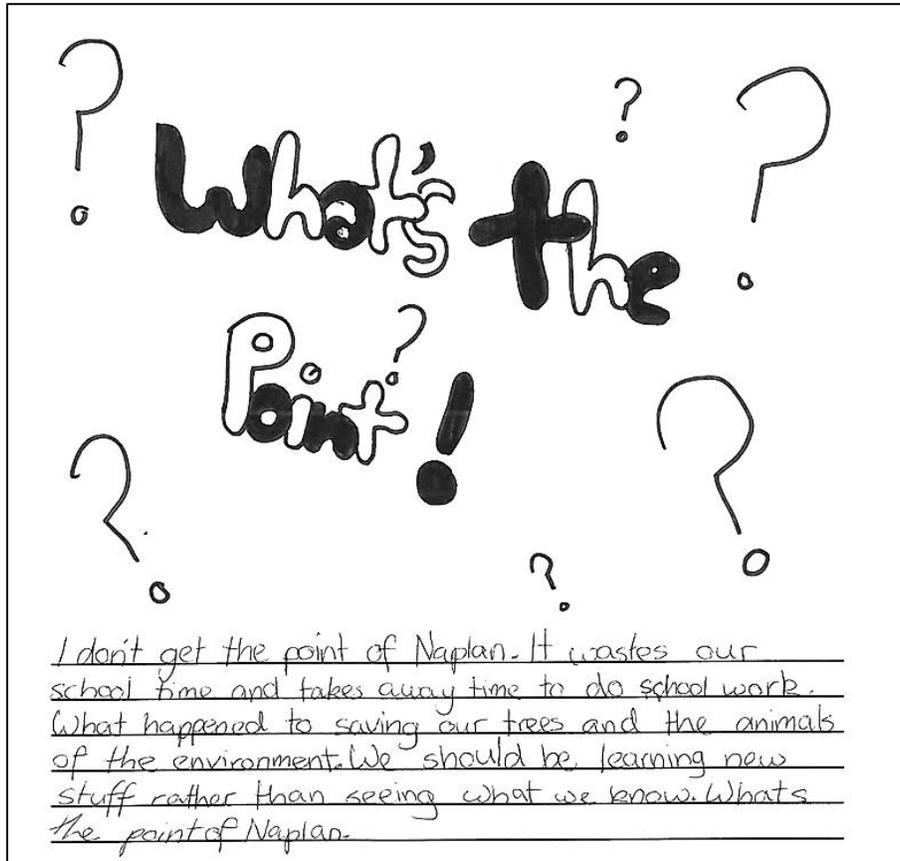


Figure 6.17 Response asking 'What's the point of NAPLAN?'

This question was also posed by children and young people who participated in Australia's Whitlam Institute Report (Wyn et al., 2014), but was difficult to find within the responses of children and young people in US research. The review of the literature suggests that this is likely the result of the explicitly high-stakes nature of standardised testing in the US, where children and young people unambiguously face consequences such as grade retention or the requirement to attend summer school, in the event of poor performance.

Anxiety

The children's anxiety was represented through facial expressions featuring wavy-line mouths and/or drops of perspiration in the children's drawings, and/or described through

the words 'nervous', 'scared', 'stressed' or 'worried' in their written descriptions. While nervousness was the most prevalent expression of anxiety, some children incorporated multiple expressions of anxiety into their written descriptions. For example,

I felt scared and worried because if there is a word you don't know or if the teacher is collecting it and you haven't finished I get worried. I get scared because before the test I say I'm not going to pass I'm not. I also get scared because some words I can't spell and some I forget. Sometimes I haven't checked it and I get worried and scared. (Year 3 child, lower SES school)

While as described previously, the 'newness' of the experience led a few Year 3 children to describe NAPLAN as 'exciting' within their drawings and written descriptions, others variously described anxiety. For example: 'How I felt was I didn't really like it very much. It felt like very scary for me' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). Anxiety was particularly prevalent in the drawings and written descriptions of the Year 3 children at higher SES school, with just over 70 per cent of these children representing and/or describing some form of anxiety within their response, as compared to approximately 30 per cent of the children in the other classes.

The two themes of intensive test preparation and parental aspirations to enrol their children into their secondary school-of-choice, which have been discussed at various points in the thesis, may provide insights into the question of why anxiety was more prevalent among the responses of these children. While intensive test preparation was a successful strategy for alleviating the anxiety of some children, as intended by the teacher, several parents reported that it was difficult to settle their children's fears regarding NAPLAN 'when the entire year's focus to that point appeared to be NAPLAN preparation' (Parent of Year 3 child, higher SES school).

Overall, anxiety was reported by almost half of all the child participants in the study, with close to 40 per cent of the children in Year 7 explicitly referring to stress or pressure. For example, the drawing in Figure 6.18 incorporates strong symbolism through the placement, salience and the absence of framing of the elements within the image. The most salient of these elements are the large eyes, which engage the viewer directly and

are additionally emphasised through the use of yellow colour. The wavy line shape of the mouth is similarly enhanced through the use of yellow colour, indicating a focus on anxiety, which is enhanced further by the representation of tears and question marks. The absence of any framing of the face or body disconnects the elements of the image, which may represent disjuncture. The only exceptions to this are the connected elements of this child's hand, pencil and test paper, which may signify that the test is the source of this child's anxiety. This child's drawing converges with his written description that: 'When NAPLAN was over I felt like weights had been lifted off my back'.

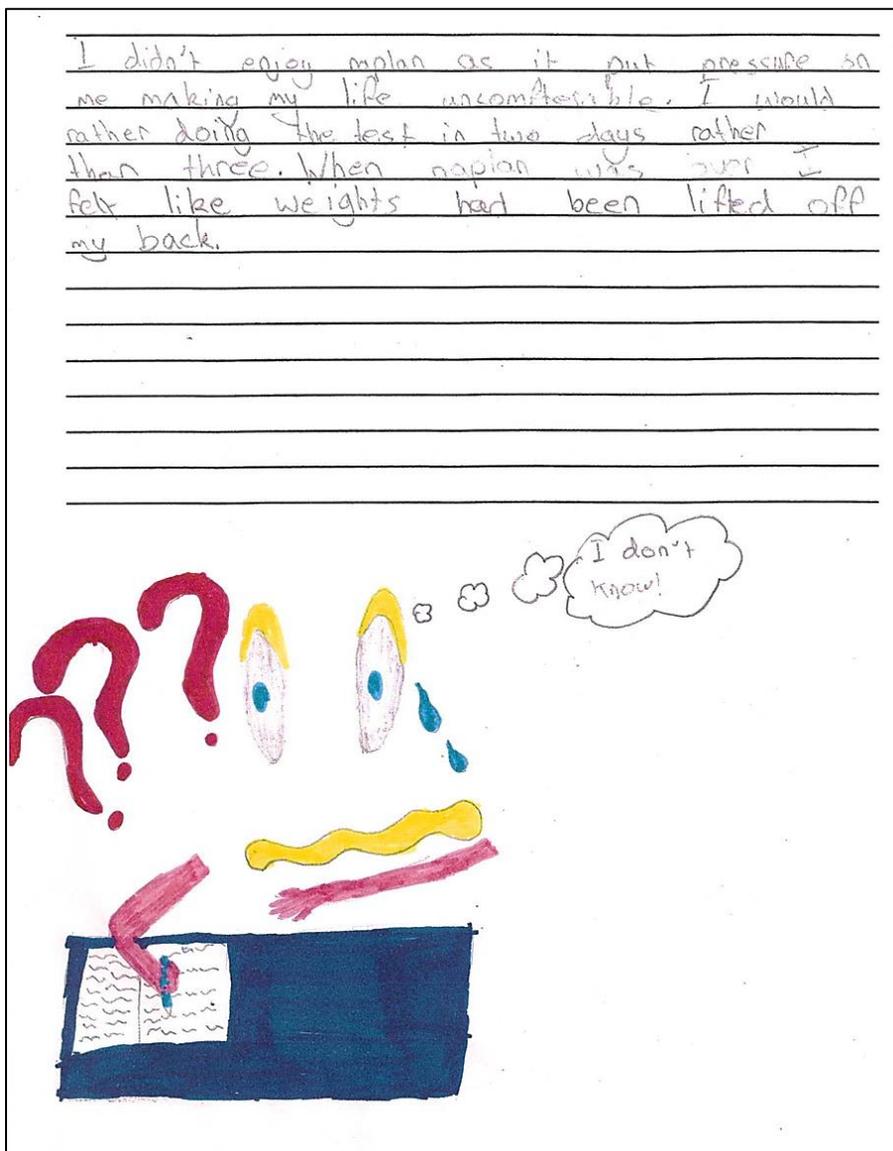


Figure 6.18 Response representing and describing anxiety

Many children described feeling anxious before the tests in their narrative drawings and written descriptions. For example, 'Before NAPLAN I was super worried and didn't want to do the test' (Year 3 child, higher SES school), and 'At first when I got the NAPLAN test I was very worried' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). In some cases, this anxiety appeared to be limited to nervousness before the tests, which subsided once the tests were underway. This was evidenced in several written descriptions, for example, 'During NAPLAN I felt nervous at the start and then I started to get the hang of it. Then I started to be confident and happy with myself and at the end I felt really proud of myself' (Year 3 child, higher SES school).

The children's drawings and written descriptions indicate that the anxiety engendered by NAPLAN related to a number of themes. The first of these was the strict time limit in which the children were required to complete the test, which is a concern also commonly expressed by children in US research who reported that there 'was not enough time to finish' (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 253). For example, several children in Year 7 reported within their written descriptions that 'I was scared I would get lots of the test wrong and I wouldn't finish in time', and 'During the NAPLAN I was stressed and worried that when there was 5-10 minutes left that I wouldn't finish the test'. Several Year 3 children, particularly in the lower SES school, also described fearing that they would 'run out of time' to complete the tests, conveying within their written responses that 'I felt a little worried because I didn't get a few questions and there wasn't much time left, so I didn't know if I was going to do them all', and that 'I might cry because I haven't checked it'. As described in Chapter Five, this time limit was one of the most palpable disjunctions between NAPLAN and everyday school, as the children were typically able to continue with another activity, which also allowed all children sufficient time to complete given tasks. During NAPLAN however, the provision of extra time is considered cheating, except in cases of disability adjustment or where an interruption has occurred (ACARA, 2012b).

While most children described their fear of running out of time within their drawings and written descriptions, a few reported that the tests took too long. For example, 'it's nerve-wracking because you've got to do the test, and sit silent for 40 minutes, or 65. I

don't like sitting quiet, like that for a long time' (Year 7 child, higher SES school, during focus group discussion), and 'they take a long time and it's hard to sit still' (Year 5 child, lower SES school). These written descriptions highlight further the alien experience of sitting in isolation for an extended period, which contrasted with the children's typical experience of engaging in dialogic interactions with their teachers and peers, regardless of whether given tasks were collaborative or individual in nature.

Some children expressed anxiety in relation to their test performance within their drawings and written descriptions, echoing several parents' reports that their children 'tend to worry about the final result' (Parent, higher SES school). For example, 'I felt very scared and worried and I thought I would get them all wrong' (Year 3 child, lower SES school), and '... the last day I was thinking how did I do? I was scared and nervous' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). There was evidence to suggest that at least some of this anxiety may be a manifestation of the confusion surrounding NAPLAN. This uncertainty was particularly evident during the focus group discussion with the Year 7 children, when one child described his unanswered questions regarding the consequences of poor NAPLAN performance:

Well I was fine on the first two days but then on the third day, my stomach like, dropped, like this is it. What if you don't do well? What if you've done really well in everything else and you fail this? What are you going to do? Like, my brain just went into psycho mode and it was just, it was weird.

The children's uncertainty regarding potential consequences of poor NAPLAN performance appears to be due, at least in part, to the intense emphasis on comparative performance within the community, which is generated by the political and media discourses surrounding the publication of results on the MySchool website. This was evidenced in the written responses of several Year 7 children who emphasised that they 'don't want to be below the average or fail a subject', 'could be ranked low' or that 'I don't like being put under pressure to the fact that our results were going to be compared'.

At the personal level, some children expressed anxiety within their drawings and written descriptions in relation to being viewed as foolish if they achieved poor results, despite the fact that individual results are not published on the MySchool website or in league tables. For example, the response in Figure 6.19, created by a child in Year 5 in the lower SES school, represents anxiety through droplets of perspiration and a nervous facial expression incorporating a wavy-line mouth and wide eyes. The written description confirms that this child's anxiety related specifically to her concerns that others might view her as 'a fool' if she achieved a poor result.

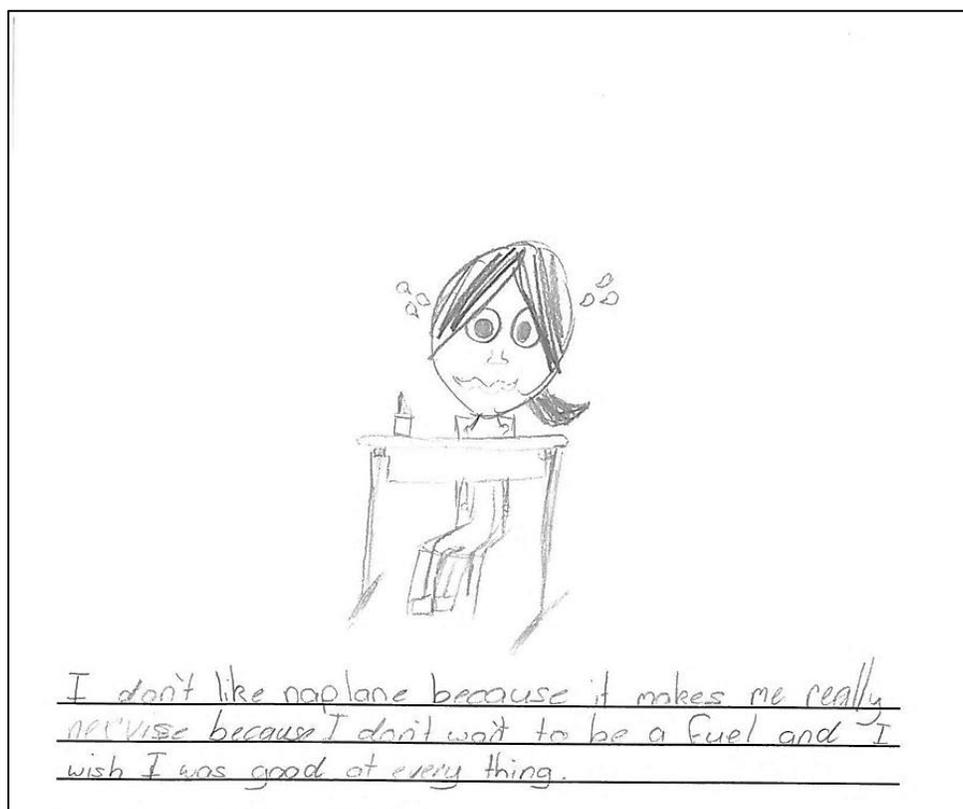


Figure 6.19 Response depicting anxiety relating to personal judgement

These types of drawings and written responses support the findings of research that suggests anxiety relating to comparative performance induces task irrelevant cognitions, because 'as soon as students compare themselves with someone else, their

mental energy becomes focused on protecting their own sense of well-being rather than anything new' (William, 2011, p. 128).

High levels of anxiety were experienced by a few children who had constructed serious consequences of failing the tests, as evidenced in their drawings, written descriptions and focus group discussions. As described in Chapter Five, these consequences ranged from failure of a subject, to grade retention, school exclusion, and finally, for some of the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, a future of unemployment and poverty if they performed poorly on their Year 3 NAPLAN tests. The anxiety experienced by these children in relation to their constructions of NAPLAN as high stakes was unambiguously conveyed through their drawings and written descriptions.

For example, the belief of one Year 3 child in the higher SES school that she would have to 'repeat Year 3 until I got better scores' was clearly conveyed within her drawing and written description. Her consequent anxiety was conveyed in her representation of herself, which featured a nervous facial expression relating to her concerns about her future. This future was represented by a paper with the year '2015' situated within a 'thought bubble', which appears to relate to the length of time she believed she would have to repeat Year 3 (see Figure 6.20).

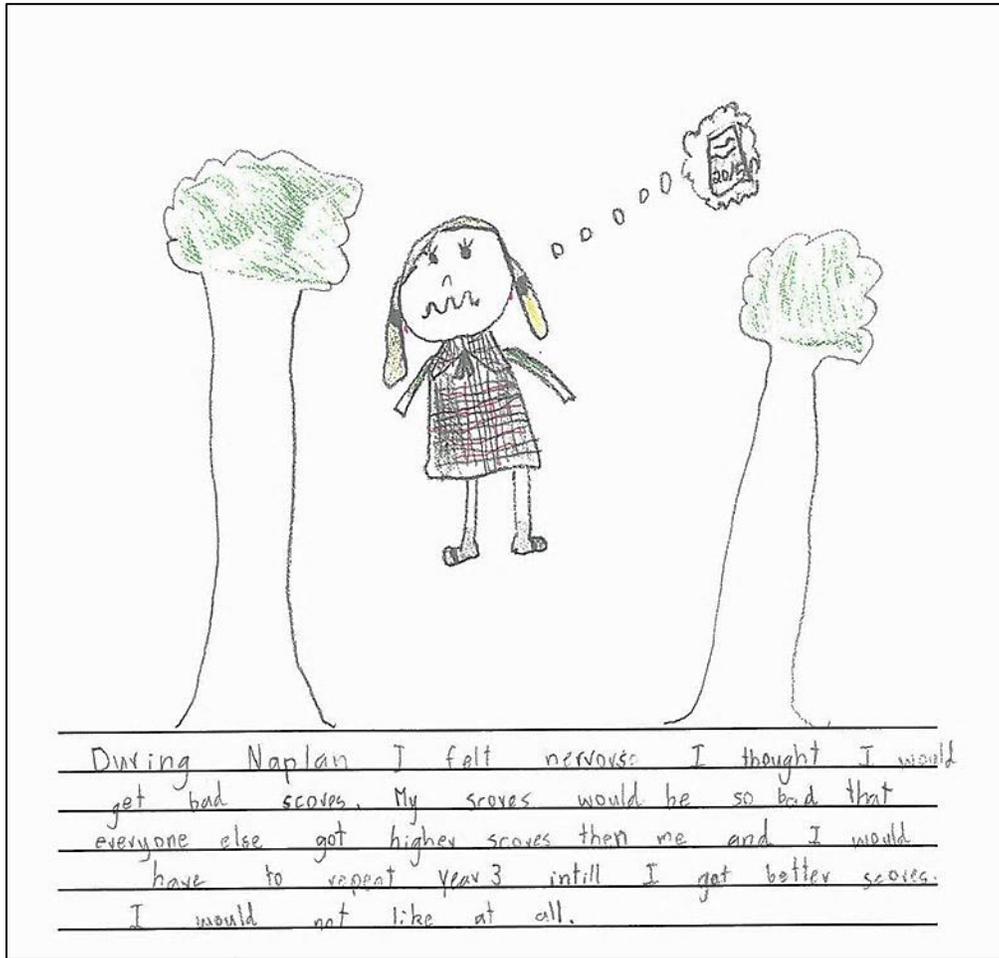


Figure 6.20 Response representing a construction of NAPLAN as high-stakes

There was no evidence of adult suggestion that such consequences would be associated with poor NAPLAN performance. However, as described previously, the confusing context of multiple contradictions and dissonances, in addition to the lack of cohesion between NAPLAN and everyday school life, and the absence of clear and consistent information to the contrary led some children to construct their own consequences of poor test performance. These constructions of NAPLAN generated elevated levels of anxiety in some children, prompting concerns relating to long-standing evidence within the literature that (1) anxiety is 'an important factor is producing discrepancies between potential and performance' (Sarason, Davidson, Lighthall, Waite, & Ruebush, 1960, p. 2); and (2) the negative effects of high-stakes

testing on children's well-being (Alexander, 2010; Dulfer et al., 2012; Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). The negative effect of NAPLAN on some children's well-being was evidenced in several reports from children and parents that anxiety engendered by the tests was manifest in physical responses.

Physical responses

Physical responses were reported by over 15 per cent of the children. These data suggest that for some children, the anxiety experienced during NAPLAN was mild. For example, one child reported that, 'before NAPLAN I get little tingles in my stomach. But when I'm in the test the tingles in my stomach go away' (Year 3 child, lower SES school). For other children, elevated levels of anxiety generated more intense physical responses. Similar reports of physical responses were evident in Wyn et al.'s (2014) study, with children and young people reporting symptoms such as hyperventilating, sweating, feeling faint, dizzy or sick, crying, headaches, including migraines, and heat rash.

Several children reported experiencing multiple physical responses as a result of their anxiety within their written descriptions. For example, 'Every time I dread having to complete another NAPLAN test. The thought of it gives me butterflies in my stomach and I feel sick' (Year 7 child, higher SES school), and 'I felt sick in my stomach because I had butterflies as well and I do not like NAPLAN because I get tired after NAPLAN is over' (Year 5 child, lower SES school). A few children reported within their written descriptions that 'I'm very tired after NAPLAN' (Year 3 child, higher SES school), indicating that they found the experience to be emotionally draining. For others, this fatigue was the outcome of sleeplessness caused by anxiety in the lead-up to the tests. For example, one child in Year 7 reported within his written description that 'I lost a lot of sleep the night before reading and was not happy the next morning. I felt sick and tired ... after the test I was SO! [*sic*] happy, all the stress had gone away and I could get a good night's sleep'. During the focus group discussion with the Year 5 children in the lower SES school, one child conveyed that his inability to sleep stemmed from the pressure he placed upon himself to achieve a good result.

I don't really like NAPLAN because; I can't help it ... because I put a lot of pressure on myself to get it all right. And it makes me nervous and it goes for almost all week, so I don't get much sleep and that affects my work.

Two children in Year 3 described shaking as a result of fear within their drawings and written descriptions, with one child replacing the word 'shaking' with 'shivers' as he conveyed that, 'Each second my brain was telling me to do it. My hands were aching, I had butterflies in my stomach, I had shivers in my legs, struggling not to give up' (Year 3 child, higher SES school). The other child, who was situated in the lower SES school, represented shaking in her visual text by drawing arcs which emanated from her drawing of herself to the edge of the page, utilising all of the available drawing space (see Figure 6.21). This is supported by her written description, 'When I am scared I am shaking'.



[When I am scared I am shaking and when I am scared I am quiet at that time]

Figure 6.21 Response representing and describing shaking

A few parents of Year 3 children in the higher SES school also described symptoms of physical responses in their children, which were engendered by anxiety.

Her experience of the first lot of testing was very unpleasant. Day 1 got off the bus, burst into tears telling me how terrible she is. Day 2 getting ready for school, I find her sitting on the toilet in tears so anxious and nervous about the day ahead.

My daughter had nightmares and wet the bed in the nights leading up to NAPLAN which she hasn't had for in excess of 5 years!

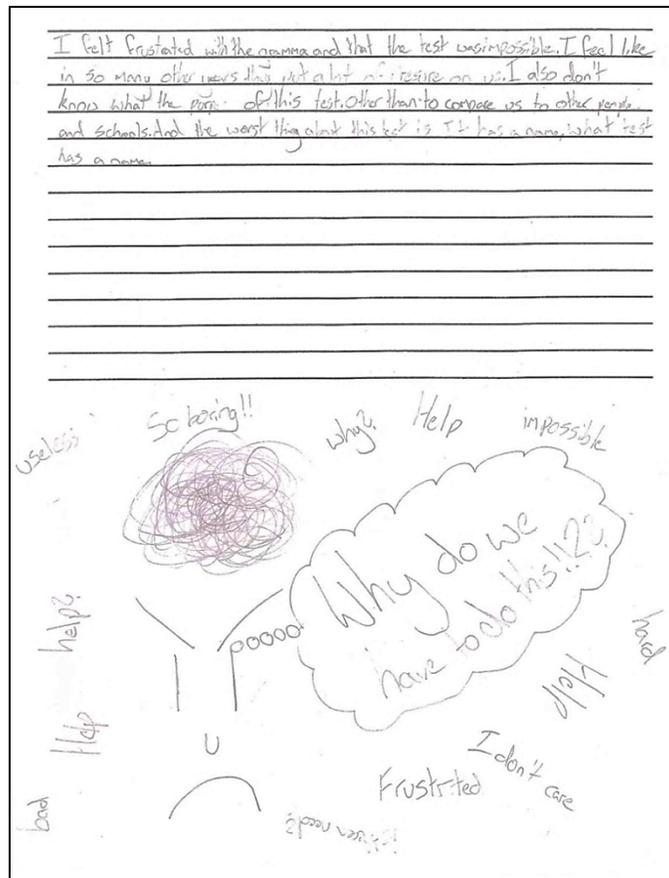
While these physical responses were not reported by the children through their drawings, written descriptions or focus group discussions, it must be recognised that these are sensitive personal issues, which children may not wish to disclose to a relatively unfamiliar adult.

Anger

Anger was the second of two dominant negative emotions to emerge from the analysis of the children's drawings and written descriptions, reported by almost 40 per cent of the children in Year 7. These data suggest that the children's anger was directed at NAPLAN's violation of the curricula, pedagogies, assessments and daily classroom discourses which comprised their everyday experiences of school and therefore their expectations of how school should be. Some children's angry responses were directed at multiple violations of the children's expectations of school. For example, 'I did not like NAPLAN because everything about it was bad. It was boring, hard, annoying, a waste of time and much more. I hated it so much!' (Year 7 child, higher SES school) This response is indicative of disruptions of this child's everyday school life in regards to engagement, tasks which were within this child's capabilities and productive use of time for learning.

In the drawing and written response in Figure 6.22, which was created by a child in Year 7 in the higher SES school, this child's anger is expressed in several ways. The first of these was the large scribble directly above the representation of the angry facial

expression, which features inwardly downturned eyebrows, and a downturned mouth, which was framed by words describing the reasons for her anger. These included NAPLAN's level of difficulty and the pressure she experienced, which appears to relate to comparative performativity. The main focus of the response however pertains to the confusion surrounding the purpose of the tests, which is evidenced in her questions, 'Why do we have to do this?' 'Is there a need?' and her statement, 'I don't know what the point of this test is'. Her several references to needing help added to her disenfranchisement with and consequent disengagement from NAPLAN, which is evidenced in her assertion that 'I don't care'.



I felt frustrated with the grammar and that the test was impossible. I feel like in so many other years that this put a lot of pressure on us. I also don't know what the point of this test is other than to compare us to other people and schools. And the worst thing about this test is its name. What test has a name?

Figure 6.22 Response depicting anger

Reports of anger relating to NAPLAN's difficulty were common within the drawings and written descriptions of the Year 7 children, with some reporting that they felt angry or annoyed because 'some of the questions I hadn't heard before', or that the tests were particularly difficult. This was vividly represented in the drawing in Figure 6.23, through this child's representation of his facial expression, which features a downturned mouth showing teeth and inwardly downturned eyebrows. The face is emphasised through the use of red colour, being the only coloured area in the drawing, and the rigid body posture, clenched fists and broken pencil also convey anger. His written description, which includes the phrase 'I was so peeved', converges with the drawing, while his concluding statement, 'it made me want to relax and swim in my underpants in my pool' indicates disengagement from NAPLAN, which will be discussed further in the chapter.

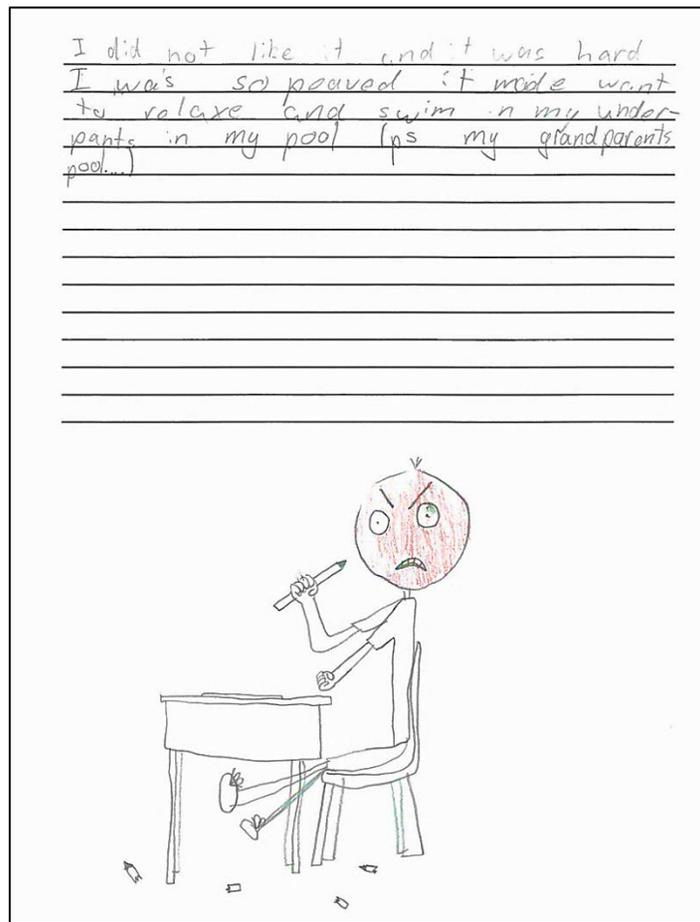


Figure 6.23 Response depicting anger in relation to NAPLAN's difficulty

In most cases, the Year 7 children's reports of anger related to the violation of their expectation that 'we should be learning new stuff'. These children's experience of NAPLAN and its associated preparation led them to conclude that NAPLAN 'wastes class time and stops us from learning new things', and that 'it doesn't help us in any way'. These children's reports align with those of children and young people in US research who described being angry because 'time in testing was stolen from their learning' (Wheelock et al., 2000, p. 5).

In two cases, this anger manifested in reports of wanting to destroy the tests within children's written descriptions that 'I really felt like tearing it up and walking away', and 'it made me feel like getting a flame-thrower and turning it into charcoal'. Similar expressions of destructive resistance were also expressed by children and young people in US studies of high-stakes testing regimes (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000).

The prevalence of such antipathy towards NAPLAN was however low compared to equivalent responses to the high-stakes tests which were generated in response to the US Bush administration's No Child Left Behind policy such as the MCAS, TAKS or TAAS, as reported in research (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). The findings of US research suggest that these types of responses are more prevalent in areas where the stakes are higher for the children and young people who take the tests (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). It is therefore reasonable to surmise that the lower frequency of these types of responses reflects a combination of NAPLAN's design as a low-stakes test and the mediation provided by BCE. However further research would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Sadness

Close to 15 per cent of the children conveyed sadness in their drawings, through facial expressions featuring a downturned mouth, which sometimes included representations of tears. The children's written descriptions indicate that these experiences of sadness related to several themes relating to loss which were described in Chapter Five. The first of these was the loss of the goal to achieve well. For example, 'I felt a little sad

because I thought I got a bad result' (Year 3 child, higher SES school), which supports Wheelock et al's (2000) finding that some children were pessimistic about their testing experience; anticipating failure or a poor score. As described earlier in the chapter, there was also evidence to suggest that some Year 3 children in particular experienced sadness in relation to the loss of their dialogic interactions with their teacher and peers during the tests.

These feelings of sadness arising from isolation in particular were also expressed by some of the older children in their drawings and written descriptions. For example, in Figure 6.24, created by a child in Year 7 at the higher SES school, this child conveyed that '[NAPLAN] made me feel sad, lonely and isolated' within her written description. This description converges with her representation of herself framed within the deep pit, together with bones, rubbish and a cockroach, indicating that this isolation was an unpleasant experience. Here, she is holding what appears to be a test booklet and asking for help, unable to reach the ideal of the beautiful nature and freedom which is represented in the top of the drawing. The question, 'why?' in the speech bubble, additionally reflects the confusion experienced by many children in regards to the purpose of NAPLAN.

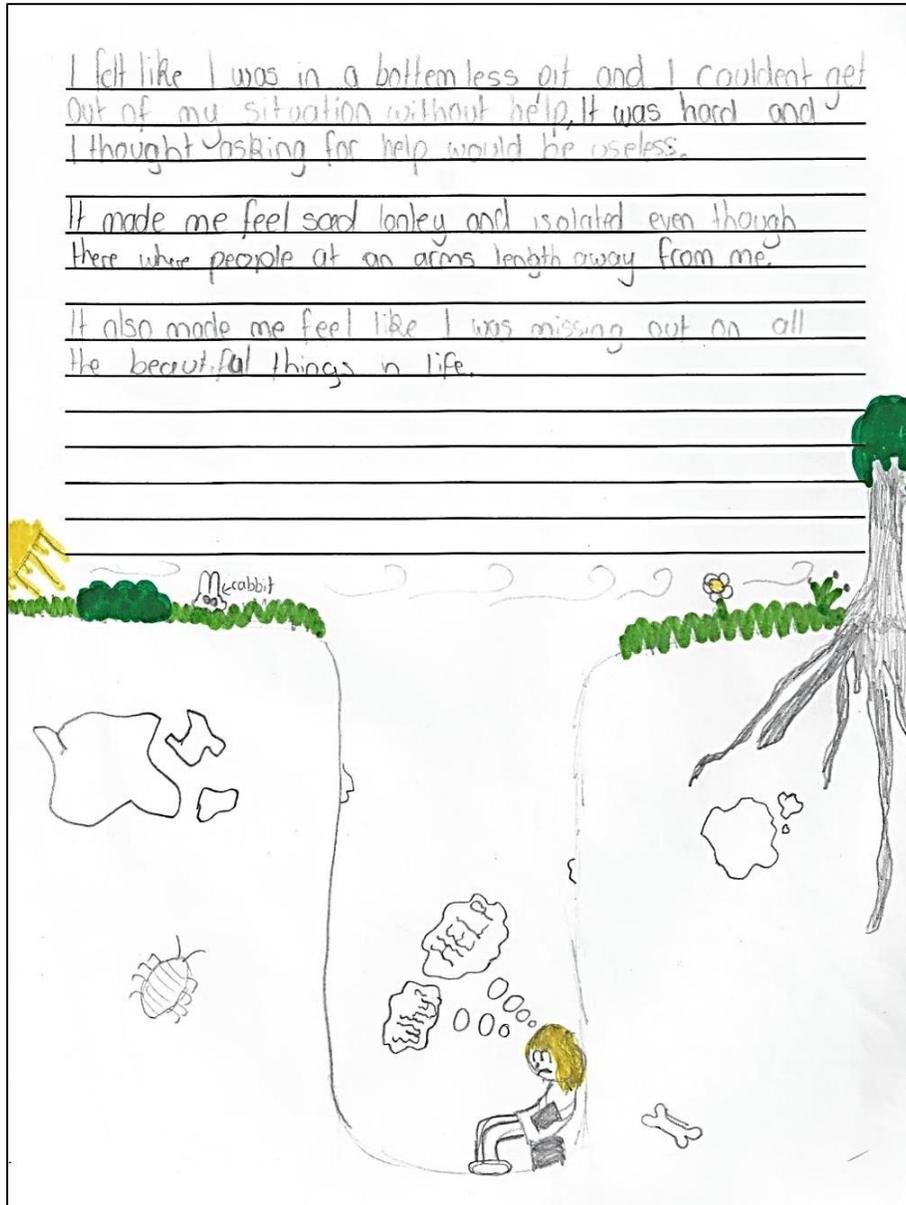


Figure 6.24 Response depicting sadness

A few other children in Year 7 included appeals for help within their drawings, as was also found in children's drawings in the Wheelock et al (2000) study, in which children represented themselves as praying for the arrival of help, which was distinct from directly asking the teacher for help.

That these appeals for help were situated within representations of isolation in the children's drawings, suggests that such appeals relate to the absence of the typical classroom dialogue in which the children were commonly observed to engage during the course of their everyday school lives, as they sought to clarify, refine and expand their conceptual understandings.

Negative learning outcomes

The transactional interplay between the confusion surrounding NAPLAN's purposes, its lack of cohesion with everyday school life and the negative emotions that were consequently engendered, led some children to conclude that NAPLAN was a waste of time that hindered their learning. As a result, more than 40 per cent of the Year 7 children, who had the greatest experience of NAPLAN, became disenfranchised with and consequently disengaged from the tests or any associated preparation.

These children described their disengagement from NAPLAN through representations and written descriptions of being bored, that they did not care about NAPLAN, or were distracted by thoughts about holidays, pets, going shopping, the popular band 'One Direction', or feeling hungry while they were completing the tests. Similar responses were found in Wheelock et al.'s (2000) study, in which children and young people represented themselves as bored or daydreaming about things unrelated to the MCAS, with older children and young people more likely to represent themselves as bored.

Many Year 7 children's disengagement from NAPLAN was distinctly evident in classroom observations taken during a practice test immediately after the Parliamentary sitting described in Chapter Five. Observations recorded during this time provided a distinct contrast to the children's high level of engagement during the Parliamentary sitting, with the first child claiming he had finished after five minutes and many children displaying palpable signs of apathy towards the task.

One of the girls is showing her friend a note written on a scrap of paper: 'I'm SO BORED' ... Two boys are reading novels; another is pretending to put a pencil up his nose. Two girls smell a scented eraser, and one is pretending to lick it as though it is an ice block. Another girl is passing a note to a friend ...

After the time allowed had lapsed, the children moved to the floor to work through the answers with Year 7 Teacher A. When they had completed the marking:

Teacher: Those can go into ...

Some children: THE BIN!

Teacher: Ok, in the bin.

Most children are enthusiastically throwing their tests in the bin. One child has crumpled his up and is jumping on it. (Excerpt from classroom observations, 23/4/2012)

The above observations suggest that the negative shift in the children's level of engagement was engendered by the equivalent shift from the higher order thinking skills which were required to develop and propose a new bill for the Year 7 Parliament, to the basic skills utilised in the test drill. This vignette supports concerns raised by teachers within research that NAPLAN does not '[promote] classes where students are engaged and on task' (Thompson, 2012, p. 4), and raises critical questions relating to the quality of learning outcomes during the lead up to NAPLAN, which comprises a substantial portion of the school year.

Disproportionately negative impact of NAPLAN in low SES schools

As described in Chapter Five, the children in the higher SES school had greater experience of taking tests than their lower SES counterparts, with some children in Year 7 reporting that testing was their preferred method of assessment. Adding to this inequity, these children also had greater familiarity with the vocabulary of the tests, reflecting concerns within the literature that 'many standardised tests are biased because their questions require a set of skills more likely to be possessed by children from a privileged background' (Kohn, 2000, p. 324). These inequities negate the common defence of high-stakes testing which ostensibly purports to achieve greater equity in education by '[providing] a kind of level playing field, an equal opportunity for all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skill' (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 13).

The mediation provided by BCE enabled the teachers in the lower SES school to maintain their customary curricula and pedagogies despite the school's relatively poor

NAPLAN performance. While these data suggest that this resulted in fewer children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, and minimised the disruption to the teaching and learning cycle as experienced by these children, the Year 5 children in particular experienced profound disjuncture between their everyday experiences of inquiry-based learning and NAPLAN.

For the children in this class who experienced learning difficulties as a result of psychological disorders such as anxiety, Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), the disparity between inquiry-based learning and NAPLAN's inflexible format and test protocols engendered an escalating series of negative emotions. At times, these emotions were manifest in emotional outbursts and 'meltdowns', as the days of testing continued. This was evidenced in the teacher's description:

The first one went really well; well it was a struggle to start with, but other than that, ok. They got into it. Then the middle one, hmm, it got a little bit worse, and then the third one was just horrible'. (Year 5 relief teacher, lower SES school)

For two of these children, the anxiety caused by NAPLAN produced more volatile responses, which resulted in negative consequences that engendered negative shifts in these children's relationships with their teachers and peers, augmenting their alienation and negative emotion. While it may be argued that the change of teacher relatively close to the testing week may have intensified the anxiety experienced by these children, there was evidence in each case to suggest that NAPLAN was the primary cause of this anxiety.

For the first of these children, 'freaking out' in one test and repeatedly writing 'fuck you' on the test paper were reported by the relief teacher as likely the result of the stress associated with NAPLAN, as 'I haven't seen her like this before this week' (Year 5 relief teacher, lower SES school). The teacher's report was supported by classroom observations, in which there was no evidence of similar behaviours during the weeks leading up to the tests. Her emotional response to spending the subsequent day in the principal's office to complete the final test in further isolation from the other children was evident in her drawing (see Figure 6.25).

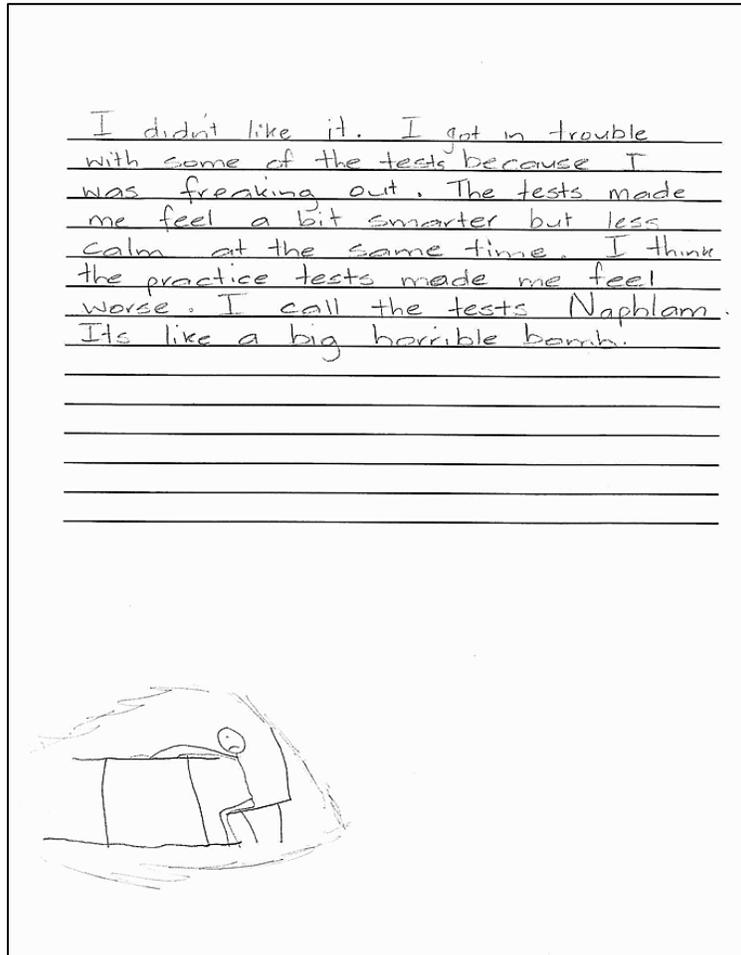


Figure 6.25 Response from a child with learning difficulties

Her use of a jagged line to frame her representation of herself at a desk highlights her isolation from her teacher and peers, while her facial expression features a downturned mouth, representing the sadness which was engendered by the experience.

For the second child, negative emotional responses, including outbursts, were observed on several occasions during the lead-up to NAPLAN, particularly after the arrival of the new teacher. However, the repeated outbursts caused by his inability to cope during the solitary experience of NAPLAN were reported by the school officer as a significant regression in his behaviour. The threat of missing out on computer time, which was described in Chapter Five, temporarily deferred the interruptions experienced by the

other children. However, the following continuation of the excerpt from the classroom observations taken during the numeracy test demonstrates that his anxiety continued to intensify during the course of the test, with detrimental consequences.

25 minutes into the test, child 1 has started shading bubbles. After approximately 10 minutes:

Child 1: Mrs [teacher], this is too hard!

The teacher came over and read 2 questions for him ... he continued to struggle

Child1: This is hard!

Has closed his test booklet ... drawing lines on one of his fingers with his pencil

Child 1 has pulled his jacket over his head and zipped it closed. The teacher asked him to pull the zip down for his own safety, and offered to read another question for him.

Child 1: It's too hard!

Teacher suggests that he can guess.

Child 1: No.

The teacher continues to encourage him.

Child 1: But I don't have a pencil!

She gives him one. He does not continue.

Child 1: *Is punching himself repeatedly in the head, angrily saying I can't do it! I can't do it!*

... 5 minutes before the end of the test, child 1 is taking things out of his desk. The teacher rushes over and tells him to put them back and close his desk.

Child 1: *Responds angrily: What's wrong with looking for something?*

The teacher explains he cannot have anything out until the test is finished and reminds him that he will lose computer time if the behaviour continues. Child 1 ignores her and continues to look through his desk. (Excerpt from classroom observations 17/5/2012)

After the test had been handed in, the children were asked to draw what it was like to do the test, at which time this child approached the researcher, clearly distressed. The following excerpt from the researcher's personal field notes outlines this child's disclosure of self-injury, which had not been evident during the classroom observations.

As the children were completing their drawings, Child 1 showed me his finger, saying that it hurt, asking what he could put on it. He had not drawn lines on his finger as I had thought, but had cut lines into it with the pencil. When I asked him about a few larger cuts, it became apparent that when he had been going through his desk towards the end of the test, it had been to get a pair of scissors, which he had used to make these larger cuts. While they were not deep enough to cause bleeding, he was distressed and immediately referred by myself and the school officer, who was also present at the time of the conversation, to the teacher who referred the matter to the school's learning support unit. (Excerpt from researcher field notes, 17/5/2012)

This critical incident was unexpected for several reasons. The first of these is NAPLAN's espoused design as a low-stakes test, as there are no consequences such as grade retention or the requirement to attend summer school in the event of poor test performance. Second, the high level of mediation provided by BCE, which resulted in the principals and teachers experiencing the tests as low-stakes and as such, the children did not experience the same pressure to perform well as children in schools where such mediation is not readily available.

The final reason is the lack of reports of similar incidents within the literature. One plausible reason for this may relate to the nature of research which is conducted with children in regards to their experiences of high-stakes testing. Such research is not only sparse, but does not tend to involve extended periods of classroom observations, rather relying on singular interviews, focus group discussions or the children's drawings. This child did not participate in the focus group discussion or describe his self-injury within his drawing or written description, which was transcribed by the school officer due to his learning difficulties; reporting only that 'It's not really fun. I didn't mind the reading test. They take a long time and it's hard to sit still. I enjoyed typing on the computer, it made it easier. I felt a bit angry'. Research pertaining to self-injury suggests that

unless children choose to reveal such behaviour, it is directly observed, or scarring is visible, it is difficult to identify self-injuring children and young people (Simpson, 2015).

In their work on child and adolescent self-injury, Madge et al. (2011) found that on the one hand, a combination of psychological characteristics and stressful life events substantially increase the risk of self-injuring behaviours. On the other hand, their findings also suggest that the relationships between this child's self-injury, his psychological characteristics and the stressful event of NAPLAN cannot be assumed to be causal, as other relevant factors outside these data may have contributed to this instance of self-injury. Nevertheless, while other relevant factors may have impacted upon this child's negative experience of NAPLAN, research pertaining to self-injuring behaviours confirms that 'all instances of self-injury must be taken seriously and perceived as a threat to the individual' (Simpson, 2015, p. 91). While this child's injuries did not require medical attention, his adverse response raises critical questions regarding the effects of mandated external testing on children who suffer from 'a disorder ... [which] includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability' (*Disability Discrimination Act*, 1992, 4 (1)).

These critical questions relate to the protocols associated with disability adjustments. As described in Chapter Four, disability adjustments aim to support children and young people's access to NAPLAN. However, while provisions are made for children with physical disabilities, psychological disabilities were not referred to, and thus catered for, within the 2012 National Protocols for Test Administration.

Key findings

The findings within this analysis suggest that while not all children experience NAPLAN as negative or high-stakes, the tests are impacting significantly on primary school-aged children. The negativity surrounding NAPLAN is entrenched in two core themes found throughout the data analysis. The first of these is the lack of cohesion or alignment between NAPLAN and the children's everyday experiences of school, as described in Chapter Five. Second, this disjuncture was experienced within a confusing context of multiple contradictions and dissonances relating to the purposes and significance of the

tests, as described in Chapters One and Four. The key findings of Chapter Six are outlined below.

Children's responses to their NAPLAN experience were overwhelmingly negative

Despite the strategies implemented by BCE to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, the children's responses were overwhelmingly negative, with 89 of the 105 children including at least one negative theme within their response, and 54 contributing entirely negative responses. Most of these negative responses were contributed by the Year 7 children, which supports research that found by the time young people reach Year 9, they are no longer interested in NAPLAN (Wyn et al., 2014). These findings therefore suggest that the more children and young people experience NAPLAN, the more likely they are to become disenfranchised with, and consequently disengage from the tests. The data presented here suggest that this is largely due to the children's inability to see any purpose in a test that appears to hinder their learning outcomes.

However, while the frequency of entirely positive drawings and written descriptions was comparatively low, comprising fewer than 10 per cent of the children's overall responses, more than 40 per cent of the children included at least one positive theme within their drawing and/or written description. Paralleling the themes within the negative drawings and written descriptions, these positive responses related primarily to emotion and learning outcomes, which related predominantly to engagement with NAPLAN through descriptions that 'I did my best'.

NAPLAN has a particularly negative impact on children with learning difficulties

Although these data suggest that children in the lower SES school were more likely to contribute positive drawings and written descriptions, those with learning difficulties associated with psychological disorders experienced the greatest difficulty in coping with the disparity between their everyday experiences of school and NAPLAN's inflexible format and test protocols. For these children, their inability to cope produced negative emotions which at times were manifest in emotional outbursts and 'meltdowns', occasioning negative consequences that augmented their alienation from

their teacher and peers. For one child, this anxiety culminated in an instance of self-injury.

Conclusion

The review of the literature presented substantial evidence to suggest that the effects of Australia's accountability agenda may be analogous to those experienced in England and the US (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013), from which much of Australia's accountability agenda is drawn (Lingard, 2010). While as described and analysed in Chapter Four, BCE implemented several strategies to mediate these unintended negative consequences of NAPLAN, the findings presented in Chapter Five suggest that the children experienced NAPLAN as disjunctive with their everyday experiences of school within a confusing context of multiple contradictions and dissonances pertaining to the significance and purposes of the tests. The findings of this chapter suggest that the interplay between these factors resulted in inordinately negative responses from the children, which related primarily to emotions and learning outcomes. While negative themes dominated the overall drawings and written responses, not all of the children experienced NAPLAN as a negative event, with some children contributing positive or predominantly positive responses, which equally related to the dominant themes of emotion and learning outcomes.

The juxtapositioning of these core themes of emotion and learning outcomes in both the positive and negative categories suggest that there may be a link between the children's experience of NAPLAN's impact on their learning outcomes and their emotional responses to the tests. This is particularly evident in the responses of the Year 7 children who conveyed anger in their responses. As described previously, these children conveyed that NAPLAN was a waste of time that hindered rather than supported their learning, engendering disenfranchisement with and consequent disengagement from the tests or any associated preparation. The analysis provided in this chapter also demonstrates the usefulness of children's drawings, writings and focus group discussions for ascertaining their experiences of and responses to NAPLAN.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

An important motivation for this research was the gap in the Australian literature regarding children's experiences of NAPLAN. This study is the first of its kind to be conducted in Australia and utilises children's drawings and their discussions about them to include children's experiences in research about NAPLAN.

This concluding chapter begins with a brief summary of the research questions that framed the study. The design of the study is also outlined, and a summative account is then provided of the analyses of the data, which were conducted in Chapters Four, Five and Six. A discussion focusing on specific findings is provided before making connections to the findings of cognate research. Some implications of these findings are then considered and recommendations for further research are noted. A final comment brings the thesis to a close and answers succinctly the overarching question: 'What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?'

Thesis summary

In the midst of the heated and often contentious debate surrounding NAPLAN, it is evident that children's own accounts of their NAPLAN experiences remain largely absent from the literature, the media and public discussion. This is so despite the commitment within the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians to achieve the highest level of collaboration with *all* stakeholders in the education of young Australians.

An extensive review of the relevant Australian, English and US literature revealed that the negative effects of high-stakes testing regimes, which may not be generated by the tests *per se*, but by how the results are used, are evident at all levels of education. In Australia, at the national, state and systemic levels, pressures associated with comparative performance engender 'gaming of the system', resulting in some distortion and corruption of the data. These pressures to perform are then transferred to the school level, where differential test preparation, educational triage and exclusionary

practices not only exacerbate the misuse of the test data, but significantly affect teachers' curricula and pedagogies. This impact is evidenced in the shift to more didactic pedagogies and test preparation, ultimately resulting in somewhat impoverished learning outcomes, particularly for children in schools serving low SES communities. Finally, while substantive research pertaining to the effects of high-stakes testing regimes on children remains sparse and largely limited to adult accounts, the negative effects of these pressures to perform and shifts in teachers' professional practices on many children is a strong pattern within the available data, as is the conspicuous absence of contrary evidence.

This lack of substantive investigation of the effects of NAPLAN on children led to the overarching research question of this research that framed this study: *What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?* In order to contextualise the children's responses, I drew from the literature to develop the following sub-questions:

- (1) *To what extent can systems mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN?*
- (2) *How do children experience NAPLAN within the classroom?*
- (3) *How do children respond to their experiences of NAPLAN?*

Attempting to include children's accounts of their experiences within a society that continues to view children as not yet competent 'becomings', to be invested in, protected, and 'developed' in particular ways for the good of the country and its future economic prosperity, presented a substantial challenge. Adding to this challenge is the reality that there is no ubiquitous or single set of children's experience of NAPLAN, because children experience the tests within unique matrices of cultural, social, economic and personal contexts. These are positioned within the pressures noted above and at particular intersections of global-national-local policy frameworks.

Thus, in an endeavour to answer the research questions, the children were positioned ontologically, together with adults, as constitutionally unfinished, fellow human beings, and thus also as competent and valid research participants. Within this ontological positioning, an attitude of what might be seen as 'methodological immaturity', defined as privileging open-ended processes over predefined techniques, was adopted within an

enactivist epistemology to examine the multiple constructed realities of NAPLAN through a critical investigation of the contexts in which these different realities are manifest. Within this ontological and epistemological positioning, the study drew from the notion of ethical symmetry to explore 105 children's lived experiences of NAPLAN within an instrumental case study in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different SES communities (one higher, the other lower) during the 2012 school year.

The children's experiences were recorded through their drawings about NAPLAN, with the children as the primary interpreters of their images. Focus groups were also carried out with the children to explore their ideas about learning experiences in which they felt they learnt best, the extent to which they felt lessons and their teachers changed in the lead-up to the tests and their experiences of taking the NAPLAN test. Because children's experiences of NAPLAN do not occur within a vacuum, classroom observations were also conducted, semi-structured interviews were held with parents, teachers, principals and system staff and executives, and the teachers kept a diary for the duration of the school year to document their daily practices, noting how much attention was directed to NAPLAN. The researcher's field notes were also utilised, in combination with artefacts such as photographs and excerpts from school newsletters. The analysis of these data produced a wide range of themes, which incorporated several key findings in relation to each research question and to the overarching question that framed the study.

Answering Research Question #1

The first research question asks: *To what extent can systems mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN?* The review of the literature demonstrates that Australia's experience of the unintended consequences of NAPLAN largely parallels those of the high-stakes testing regimes in England and the US, despite ACARA's consistent assertion that NAPLAN was intended to be a low-stakes test. These unintended consequences include some distortion and corruption of the test data, and negative impacts on teachers' professional practices, such as the narrowing of curricula and pedagogies, particularly in low SES schools.

In order to mediate these perceived negative effects of the tests, BCE developed an overall approach to being 'data informed' rather than 'data driven', by implementing several low-stakes strategies. These strategies included use of test data as a means of triangulating with other data produced by school-based assessments, and diagnostic use of NAPLAN data to identify curricular and pedagogical strengths and weaknesses, rather than for the purposes of marketing or accountability. The provision of Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teachers (LNITs) to those schools which performed poorly on a range of indicators, including NAPLAN, aligns with ACARA's intention to provide support rather than aggressive intervention for poorly performing schools.

However, BCE's intersection with wider societal and global-national-local policy contexts makes it impossible for the adults or children to experience NAPLAN in unmitigated isolation from current political and policy discourses such as the articulation of higher achievement standards, top-down, test-based modes of accountability and control in government schooling systems, and extensive media coverage of NAPLAN. Through this positioning, BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN are in turn mediated by a number of factors that push NAPLAN in a high-stakes direction. These include the need to utilise NAPLAN data to obtain federal government funding, and state system pressures on schools, principals and teachers around NAPLAN performance as part of a new accountability regime. Extensive media coverage of NAPLAN performance, including publication of league tables, added to these pressures, along with some parental expectations, and the perceived *de facto* usage by some Catholic secondary schools of NAPLAN scores as a selection device. All of these factors within the children's wider schooling and societal contexts affect their experiences of NAPLAN, raising important questions regarding consequential validity.

Nevertheless, as my research evidence clearly demonstrates, the principals and teachers in both schools essentially experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes, with several staff describing NAPLAN results as 'just a part of the story'. This was to be expected in the higher SES school where results were consistently strong. However, the assumption that NAPLAN would become high-stakes in the event of low or declining performance was not supported by staff in the lower SES school, who reported that they

were not under pressure to improve their NAPLAN results. It was here that the apparent success of BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN was most evident, as the teachers in the lower SES school were able to continue utilising inquiry-based pedagogies, despite the school's comparatively poor NAPLAN performance. This provides a significant contrast to the reported experiences of teachers in government schools, which suggests that maintaining such an approach is very difficult within the current high-stakes climate of performativity (Comber & Nixon, 2009).

The relative success of BCE's strategic mediation of NAPLAN was also apparent in the lack of any evidence of cheating or educational triage in the study schools. Although the Year 5 teacher at the lower SES school had considered exempting several children from the tests on the basis that she believed they would not be able to cope with the testing protocols, she did not recommend to parents that these children be formally withdrawn in order to maximise the school's comparative performance.

Given that the principals and teachers experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes, it was reasonable to hypothesise that the children in these schools would also experience NAPLAN as low-stakes. However, analysis of the data generated through classroom observations, as well as analyses of interviews and focus group discussions with the adult and child participants in the study suggest that this was not always the case. Rather, the dynamics at work within and between the multiple contradictions and dissonances emanating from the government, BCE and the popular media messages about NAPLAN, rendered attempts to provide children with clear and consistent information about NAPLAN ineffectual, resulting in confusion among the children with regards to the purposes and impacts of the tests. This confusion ultimately gave rise, in some cases, to children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, despite ACARA's claim that NAPLAN is a low-stakes test, BCE's mediation of the tests, and the lack of adult suggestion that negative consequences such as personal judgment, failure or even grade retention or school exclusion would be associated with poor NAPLAN performance.

Children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes were intensified for the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, as parents in this school tended to aspire to enrol their children in their Catholic secondary school-of-choice. During the focus group discussion in this classroom, some children reported that achieving good results was important for getting into good high schools. A few children also believed that exclusion from these elite schools, purportedly on the basis of poor NAPLAN performance, would ultimately result in a future adult life of poverty and homelessness.

While NAPLAN is intended to be a low-stakes test, in some cases children experience the tests as high-stakes. The extent to which children construct NAPLAN as high-stakes varies, as this study has clearly demonstrated, and thus it is necessary to consider how children's constructions of the test vary across different contexts.

Answering Research Question #2

The second research question that framed the study was: *How do children experience NAPLAN within the classroom?* Through focus group discussions and classroom observations, it was evident that the children experienced NAPLAN within unique classroom contexts, ranging from didactic to inquiry-based pedagogical approaches. Despite the differences in the teachers' pedagogies, the children's everyday school lives encompassed a wide range of learning experiences, such as developing and proposing a new bill for the Year 7 Parliament, measuring lengths and angles of shadows several times during the day, planning a movie marathon and creating brochures advertising the history, present and potential future of the school's local area.

These learning experiences were observed to simultaneously involve the children in the processes of higher order thinking skills and continual discourse with their teachers and peers, as they worked to consolidate and refine their conceptual understandings. An inherent part of this diversity in learning experiences was the utilisation of a variety of assessments, ranging from short weekly tests, to complex assignments such as designing the layout of the upcoming school fair and, particularly in the Year 5 classroom of the lower SES school, inquiry-based assessments.

NAPLAN is distinctly different from school-based assessments in several ways. These differences encompass NAPLAN's idiosyncratic format, which was represented in detail in some of the children's drawings, in addition to its level of difficulty, which was described by some of the children in their written descriptions and represented in drawings through the use of question marks to indicate confusion. Through classroom observations, it became clear that the Year 3 children in the lower SES school were most likely to experience NAPLAN as unusually difficult, as a result of their unfamiliarity with the assumed vocabulary of the tests. In their written descriptions, several children in Year 7 also reported that NAPLAN tested unfamiliar content. The lack of feedback, which was discussed by a few Year 7 children during the focus group discussion, but not by any of the adults in the study, also distinguishes NAPLAN from the children's everyday school lives. This added to the confusion surrounding the purpose of the tests, leading many Year 7 children in particular to ask, 'What's the point [of NAPLAN]?' within their drawings and written descriptions.

NAPLAN's testing protocols require very different practices than those that form part of children's experiences of everyday school. The first of these, which was represented and described in many of the children's drawings and written descriptions, was the requirement to sit in isolation. More specifically, this isolation involves the absence of daily classroom dialogue observed to be used by the children to clarify and refine their understandings, regardless of whether tasks were individual or collaborative in nature. Second, while the children in the higher SES school had greater experience of taking school-based tests than their lower SES counterparts, classroom observations suggested that these children were accustomed to continue reading a novel or working on a current assignment when they had completed such tests; a practice that also provided sufficient time for all children to complete tests.

These differences between NAPLAN and everyday school life, including school-based assessments, resulted in test preparation, which was observed in all classes, ranging from intensive preparation which began in the sixth week of the first term, to comparisons of strategies within mixed ability groups in the more immediate lead up to NAPLAN. While this preparation was laudably intended by the teachers to minimise

anxiety, the drawings and written responses of the Year 3 children in the higher SES school, as well as their focus group discussion, suggested that for some children, this focus on the tests paradoxically contributed to their constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes.

While most teachers emphasised that they did not ‘teach to the test’, the classroom observations confirmed that this preparation caused disruption during the testing period to permeate into the children’s everyday school lives during a substantial portion of the school year in the lead-up to the tests. This was evidenced in negative shifts to predominantly solitary NAPLAN practice, from developing the thinking skills required to complete complex tasks to the basic skills utilised in test drills and dialogic interactions which helped to clarify and refine conceptual understandings and provide feedback. Further, analysis of the interviews with teachers and parents found that the issue of NAPLAN preparation in particular positioned some children within discordant parent-teacher relationships, as some teachers and parents blamed each other for the anxiety experienced by children in regards to NAPLAN.

These shifts in tasks and classroom discourses were also observed to engender negative shifts in child-teacher-peer relationships, particularly for those children who experienced psychological difficulties and therefore found it difficult to cope with the testing experience. During observations taken during one of the NAPLAN tests, it was clear that two children with psychological difficulties were unable to cope with the test, resulting in emotional outbursts that impacted upon the ability of the other children to complete the tests. The drawing completed by one of these children showed that the ensuing consequences of her outburst, which included completing the remaining tests in the principal’s office, augmented her negative experience and alienation from her teacher and peers. For the other child, this experience culminated in an instance of self-injury.

Through a combination of data sources, it was evident that the intensive test preparation experienced by the Year 3 children in the higher SES school reduced the disjuncture between NAPLAN and everyday school, but increased children’s

constructions of the tests as high stakes, and risked narrowing curricula and pedagogies. The experience of the Year 5 children in the lower SES school conversely suggests that minimal test preparation reduces constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes and the risk of narrowed curricula and pedagogies, but increases the disjuncture between the tests and everyday school practices.

Answering Research Question #3

The third framing research question was: *How do children respond to their experiences of NAPLAN?* Analysis of the various data sets suggests that the disjuncture experienced by the children as a result of NAPLAN and its associated patterns of preparation, contributed further to an already emotionally-charged context of confusion surrounding NAPLAN. It was therefore unsurprising that emotion was found to be the dominant modality within the children's drawings and written descriptions, with more than 90 per cent expressing emotion in their responses.

While entirely negative responses greatly outnumbered entirely positive responses, positive themes were more common in the drawings and written descriptions of the children in this study compared to those created by children in the US (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). This may be explained in part by the strategies implemented by BCE to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, such as diagnostic use of the data for the purpose of triangulation, rather than for marketing or accountability purposes. This could also be due, arguably, to NAPLAN's design as a low-stakes test, which, unlike certain US testing programs, has no immediate consequences for children (ACARA, 2014).

The higher frequency of positive themes within these children's drawings and written descriptions as compared with those of children in US studies initially appears to be relatively encouraging, given research which suggests strong symbiotic relationships between high-stakes testing regimes, negative emotional responses and poor performance (Alexander, 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). However, these findings suggest that the extent of this positive outcome is significantly impeded by multiple factors, which combine to produce a lacuna between the laudable policy intentions of

implementing NAPLAN as low stakes test and the experience of this implementation by children.

Analysis of the children's drawings and written descriptions suggests that the two common modalities of emotion and learning outcomes, which related primarily to the children's level of engagement with NAPLAN, were closely linked. Thus, children who reported positive emotion within their drawings, written descriptions and focus group discussions also tended to report that NAPLAN had a positive effect on their learning.

Conversely, children who reported that the tests impacted negatively on their learning tended to also report negative emotion within their drawings and written descriptions, which was also evidenced in the classroom observations. This was particularly evident in Year 7 children's representations and descriptions of anger within their bimodal responses, which were closely associated with reports that they did not understand the purpose of the test and that it hindered their learning by disrupted curricula, pedagogies and dialogic interactions, which comprised their everyday experiences of school and therefore their expectations of how school should be. Further, the classroom observations, together with the children's drawings and written descriptions, suggested that by the time children reached Year 7, they tended to report that NAPLAN was a waste of time, resulting in their disengagement from the tests and/or associated preparation.

However, the children in this study did not express the same level of hostility towards NAPLAN, either through their drawings and written descriptions, or the focus group discussions, as their counterparts in US research (Foster, 2006; Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). This was evidenced in the comparatively low incidence of children's reports of wanting to destroy the tests, which indicates less antipathy towards NAPLAN than tests which are explicitly high-stakes for the children who take them.

My analysis of the children's drawings and written descriptions, together with the focus group discussions and classroom observations, suggest that Australian children's experiences of confusion in regards to NAPLAN do not appear to be shared by English or US children who take high-stakes tests such as the SATs, TAAS, TAKS or MCAS

(Alexander, 2010; Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). This is most likely to be due to the explicitly high-stakes nature of standardised tests in these nations, which is unambiguously communicated to the children and young people, who face consequences such as grade retention, or the requirement to attend summer school, in the event of poor performance.

In this study, despite comparatively positive responses, overall there was still a greater frequency of negative responses in the children's drawings and written descriptions, with many children reporting anxiety, as the result of confusion and/or their constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, and the disjuncture between NAPLAN and everyday curricula, pedagogies, dialogic interactions and relationships. While for some children this anxiety was mild, other children experienced elevated levels of anxiety that were manifest in physical responses such as sweating, shaking, feeling sick, butterflies, descriptions of being unusually tired when NAPLAN was over, and some reports of sleeplessness. A few parents of Year 3 children in the higher SES school reported that their children experienced crying, nightmares and bed-wetting as a direct result of anxiety caused by NAPLAN.

The similarities in the themes within negative responses from the children in this study and those of children in US and English research is most clearly evidenced in the dominant theme of negative emotion. However, while negative emotions experienced by children in England and US studies relate to the explicitly high-stakes nature of the tests in those nations, Australian children's negative emotions are engendered by their own constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, in the absence of clear and consistent information to the contrary.

A summary of the data analyses, provided in Figure 7.1, highlights the five core themes within the children's responses, which are indicated by a darker frame and bolded text. This diagrammatic representation was developed from analysis of the themes within the data, as well as of the relationships within and between these themes. It shows that the central theme of emotion relates to the lack of clear and consistent information,

constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, the disjuncture between NAPLAN and everyday school life, and learning outcomes.

Summary of findings: Children's lived experiences of NAPLAN



Figure 7.1 Summary of findings

Focusing on the findings

Teachers in both schools experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes

BCE's positioning within wider neoliberal political and policy trends, market logics and media discourses produced some dissonance with the organisation's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN. Nevertheless, through interviews with senior system executives and staff, and the principals and teachers in both schools, it was evident that the principals and teachers in these schools experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes. This finding was expected in the higher SES school, where results were consistently strong. However, the belief of staff within the higher SES school that the test would become high stakes in the context of poor performance was not supported by the reports of those in the lower SES school that they were not under pressure to improve their NAPLAN results. The relative success of BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN was therefore most evident in the lower SES school, where teachers were able to continue implementing inquiry-based pedagogies and assessments to engage children who experienced learning difficulties in their learning, despite the school's comparatively poor NAPLAN performance.

Some children construct NAPLAN as high-stakes

Given that the principals and teachers experienced NAPLAN as low-stakes, it was reasonable to hypothesise that the children in these schools would also experience the tests in this way. However, the dynamics at work within and between the multiple discourses emanating from government, BCE and the popular media, made it difficult for the adults to provide the children with clear and consistent information about the purposes of NAPLAN and the usage of data. This gave rise to some children constructing NAPLAN as high-stakes, as evidenced in the analyses of the children's drawings, written descriptions and focus group discussions. This was so despite ACARA's claim that NAPLAN is a low-stakes test, BCE's attempts to mediate the perceived negative effects of the tests, and the lack of adult suggestion that consequences such as failure, grade retention or school exclusion would be associated with poor NAPLAN performance.

Intensive test preparation may reduce disjuncture

The classroom observations confirmed that the teachers' approaches to NAPLAN preparation were varied, but equally founded on the principle of minimising the children's anxiety in relation to the tests. The Year 3 teacher in the higher SES school adopted the commonly reported approach of investing time in NAPLAN practice tests (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013; Wyn et al., 2014), thus making NAPLAN a familiar part of everyday school life. This strategy was an effective one for some children, as evidenced in the relatively high proportion of these children who expressed positive emotion in their drawings and written descriptions, despite pressure from many parents in relation to their aspirations to enrol their children into 'elite' Catholic secondary schools, which they believed used Year 3 NAPLAN results as a *de facto* selection device. However, several parents' reports of their children crying, bed-wetting and experiencing nightmares in the lead-up to the tests, suggest that this preparation paradoxically contributed to some children's anxiety as a result of the increased focus on the tests, which intensified their constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes.

Minimal test preparation may reduce constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes

Most teachers left test practice 'until last', thus curtailing the focus on the tests, albeit to varying degrees. While analysis of the children's drawings, written descriptions and focus group discussions suggests that this approach resulted in fewer children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, it is unclear whether this was the result of reduced preparation alone or, more likely, combined with the absence of parental aspirations to enrol their children into 'elite' secondary schools. This was evidenced in the comments of several children in Year 7 during the focus group discussion that 'I already know I'm in a good high school'.

This approach also minimised the impact of NAPLAN in these classrooms, because teachers continued to utilise their customary curricula and pedagogies. However, the classroom observations suggested that this approach had the unintended effect of generating abrupt shifts in the tasks and thinking skills required to complete them, in addition to the classroom discourses that were an inherent part of everyday school life.

Thus, despite the reduced frequency of children's constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes, many children expressed anxiety and/or associated emotions of stress, sadness or anger in response to their experience of NAPLAN as an intrusive event in their school lives.

Children's experience of NAPLAN in lower SES schools

Analysis of the children's drawings, written descriptions, focus group discussions and classroom observations suggests that the children in the lower SES school were more likely to find NAPLAN difficult, for several reasons. First, these children were more likely to be unfamiliar with the assumed vocabulary inherent within the tests. This raises concerns within the literature that many standardised tests may be culturally biased, which ultimately results in the greater likelihood for children from middle and upper class families to succeed, because their cultural capital matches that assumed in the construction of the tests (Hursh, 2008).

Second, these children had less experience of formal testing than their higher SES counterparts and their teachers tended to focus on inquiry-based pedagogies and assessments to engage those children with learning difficulties. These children experienced more profound disjuncture between their everyday experiences of school and NAPLAN.

While explicit reports of anxiety within the children's drawings and written descriptions were less frequent in the lower SES school, there was evidence to suggest that some of these children found it difficult to clearly articulate their response to NAPLAN. This was evidenced in the higher frequency of non-specific negative descriptions such as, 'I don't like it!' (Year 3 child, and Year 5 child, lower SES school) and 'I don't want to do it ever again' (Year 3 child, lower SES school) among these children. This appears to be likely due to their experience of the tests as an unfamiliar event, caused by the combination of a lack of clear and consistent information and the disjuncture between NAPLAN and their everyday school lives.

The drawings and written descriptions which were conflicted, ambiguous or reiterative, appearing to repeat the views of the teacher, were created almost exclusively by children in the lower SES school, suggesting that NAPLAN engenders greater insecurity for children in these communities. Further, this insecurity may be the reason that over 40 per cent of the Year 3 children in this school, as compared to eight per cent of Year 3 children in the higher SES school, specifically requested that their responses not be published. The impact of NAPLAN's overriding authority on teachers is evident in teachers' reports within research that 'there's this authoritative voice coming through this piece of paper ... quite a powerful kind of voice' (Comber, 2012, p. 130), which Comber likens to the positioning of teachers as ventriloquists' dolls. These drawings and written descriptions therefore suggest that the invisible authority of NAPLAN disempowers them further within an already confusing context of mixed messages, abrupt disjuncture in their school lives and, for some children, their positioning within discordant parent-teacher relationships.

NAPLAN and children with psychological disabilities

The classroom observations confirmed that the disconnect between the flexibility of inquiry-based learning, with its inherent focus on dialogic interactions, and NAPLAN's inflexible format and test protocols was particularly difficult for children with psychological disabilities. During classroom observations undertaken during the numeracy test in the Year 5 classroom at the lower SES school, the anxiety of these children was manifest in outbursts and 'meltdowns', resulting in consequences which augmented these children's alienation from their teacher and peers. In one case, this anxiety culminated in an instance of self-injury.

Similar incidents were not found within the review of the literature. One plausible reason for this may relate to the fact that there is limited research of this kind, which additionally does not tend to involve extended periods of classroom observations and particularly observations of students actually sitting the tests. Research pertaining to self-injury suggests that unless children choose to reveal such behaviour, it is directly

observed, or scars appear on open locations on the body such as arms or legs, it is difficult to identify self-injuring children and young people (Simpson, 2015).

Limitations of the study

During the course of the data analysis, it became evident that there were several limitations within the design and findings of this study. The first of these is the finding that the children in the lower SES school experienced less test preparation, which appears to be incongruous with research suggesting that in low SES communities, NAPLAN 'changes teachers' work, the curriculum and pedagogy on offer to the children who are statistically most at risk' (Comber, 2012, p. 133). On the one hand, it may be argued that the reduced levels of test preparation in this school may be due to the relative success of the mediation provided by BCE.

However, it is crucial to recall that, while this school was situated below the average ICSEA value of 1074 for BCE schools in 2011, it was above the mean of 1000 for all Australian schools. Thus, while this school is positioned as having a relatively low level of socio-educational advantage within BCE, it is more generally representative of average SES schools in Australia. This appears to suggest that intensive NAPLAN preparation is less likely to occur in average SES schools, because they do not face the problems of either parental aspirations to enrol their children in 'elite' secondary schools, or the requirement to demonstrate improved NAPLAN performance to obtain National Partnerships funding. More research is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

This case study was intended to enhance insights into how NAPLAN may be affecting children more generally. The focus of the research was, of course, children's experiences of NAPLAN as represented and reported by children themselves. While children within different SES communities and with differing learning needs were reasonably well represented, both communities were demonstrably lacking in cultural and linguistic diversity, with no children from Indigenous, ESL, migrant or refugee backgrounds participating in the study.

Recommendations

The higher prevalence of positive themes within the children's responses, as compared with those of children in comparable US research (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000), indicates that NAPLAN's original design as a low-stakes test, as evidenced in the absence of consequences of poor performance such as grade retention, has had some positive effect. However, in the research schools this may also be due, at least in part, to the systemic mediation provided by BCE. The following recommendations are therefore proposed in order to build upon this positive element, which could minimise repetition of the negative effects of high stakes testing in other contexts.

Provide children with clear and consistent information about NAPLAN

The need to provide children with unambiguous information about NAPLAN, in language they can understand, is evidenced in the anxiety associated with children's confusion surrounding the purpose of the tests. This recommendation is supported by research that suggests that 'in schools where tests were carefully explained, the children were more positive about them' (Alexander, 2010, p. 149). As it is not possible to anticipate the needs of every child, children should also be provided with opportunities to ask questions about the test and its purposes and usages, with an expectation that their questions will be taken seriously and answered accordingly.

Develop disability adjustments for children with psychological disabilities

This study provides evidence to suggest that NAPLAN's inflexible test format and protocols are particularly problematic for those children who suffer from psychological disabilities. To this end, it is also recommended that disability adjustments be developed for those children who experience psychological disabilities within current testing protocols.

Diagnostic data should be shared with the children

Children currently receive a result indicated by a dot positioned within the reported bands for their year level, which can be compared with national and school averages.

However, they do not receive any of the in-depth diagnostic data provided to teachers. It is therefore recommended that these data be shared with the children and young people who take the tests. This recommendation is tempered by the understanding that the provision of such feedback should be situated within a ubiquitous approach to assessment for learning, which necessarily precludes a disproportionate focus on NAPLAN. In this way, NAPLAN data may be utilised more productively together with school-based assessment data for intelligent accountability purposes, as described by Lingard (2009). The approach to such feedback should be decided upon collaboratively with the children and young people who take the tests; to allow for the preferences of children and young people within individualist or collectivist cultures and different SES communities (Hattie, 2011; Luque & Sommer, 2000). This sharing of the data may also provide the children with an answer to their question: 'What is the point of NAPLAN?'

Replace information on current website with national data sets

Evidence from this study and other research suggests that constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes are essentially the result of a disproportionate focus on comparative school performance data on the MySchool website. Further, the focus on a single assessment *of* learning occurs at the expense of assessments *for* learning, which can support improved learning outcomes, as opposed to summative tests and a focus on the simplistic raising of test scores.

It is recommended that the current NAPLAN regime, which involves full-cohort, annual testing, be modified to a sample-based monitoring program to complement the current three-yearly sample testing in Science Literacy, Civics and Citizenship, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy, which also form part of the NAP. This would remove the rationale for test preparation, thus eliminating the problems associated with the current under-sampling of the curriculum and over-sampling the population, and decrease the stakes of NAPLAN, while increasing the validity and reliability of the test data.

Suggestions for further research

This study was informed by the commitment within the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians to ‘achieve the highest possible level of collaboration with ... *all* stakeholders in the education of young Australians’ (own emphasis) (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5). I take that commitment to mean that children’s perspectives should be included in policy development in education. This rationale, together with the scarcity of research which seeks to account for children’s experiences of their schooling, signals the need for further research in which children are situated together with adults as competent and valid research participants; not only to be heard, but to take seriously what they say.

While this study sought to include the experiences of children within diverse SES communities, the lower SES school’s positioning within BCE was nevertheless slightly above the overall average ICSEA value. The disproportionately negative responses of some children within this school community additionally indicates an urgent need to expand this research to ensure that the 80 per cent of these children who are classed as disadvantaged situated in government schools (Gonski et al., 2011) are also equitably represented as equal stakeholders in this policy. More research is needed about their experiences of NAPLAN. The same is the case in respect of ethnically and linguistically diverse schools and for schools serving Indigenous communities.

One of the fundamental issues in the disjuncture between NAPLAN and the children’s everyday experiences of school is the protracted delay in the release of results, which renders NAPLAN ineffectual for informing teaching (Wu & Hornsby, 2012) and sharing the diagnostic data with the children. ACARA has taken this critique on board, and is consequently working towards the online delivery of NAPLAN from 2017. The effects of such implementation in classrooms provide another avenue for further research in the event that such delivery is implemented.

Conclusion: What are children's lived experiences of NAPLAN?

This research endeavoured to explore, in a comprehensive and tangible way, how primary school-aged children experience NAPLAN. The study attempted to do this through data collection with children through their drawings, writing and focus group discussions, using an approach that regarded the children as active and informed participants in the research. This is an original contribution of this doctoral research and the first study of its kind in Australia. As there is no universal children's experience of NAPLAN, I drew from the notion of ethical symmetry to develop a case study involving 105 children and their parents, teachers, principals, and senior systemic staff involved more broadly in the children's schooling, in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different SES communities in Brisbane. This provided an ideal starting point for researching the ways in which NAPLAN affects children and provided an opportunity to explore the extent to which systems can mediate any perceived negative effects of the tests. The type of data collected from the children also enabled a data-based account of how children in the two research schools experienced NAPLAN.

Claims that NAPLAN is high-stakes have been consistently dismissed, due to the fact that no consequences are said to flow for children as a result of the tests and because of key differences between the Australian and English/US standardised testing models. On this basis, ACARA asserts that children's experiences of NAPLAN as high-stakes are 'due to teachers transferring their stress to their students' (McGaw, 2012, Testing misconceptions, para. 5). My research data do not support this assertion. Rather, they suggest that children construct NAPLAN as high-stakes in the absence of clear and consistent information regarding the various purposes of the tests, within a confusing context of multiple contradictions and dissonances emanating from various sources, including the government, school systems, schools, perceived secondary school selection practices, teachers, parents and the media.

These constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes were compounded by the children's experiences of disjuncture between NAPLAN and their everyday school lives. This disconnect engendered negative shifts in every facet of school life, including the

thinking skills required to complete complex tasks to the basic skills utilised in test drills, the dialogic interactions which helped to clarify and refine conceptual understandings and provide feedback, to predominantly solitary NAPLAN practice. As a result, some children also experienced negative shifts in their relationships with their teachers and peers.

While these constructions of NAPLAN as high-stakes and the extent to which the children experienced test preparation were varied, the children's responses within their drawings and written descriptions were overwhelmingly negative, with 89 of the 105 children including at least one negative theme within their response, as compared with 44 children who contributed at least one positive theme. For children with psychological difficulties, this disjuncture between everyday school and NAPLAN's inflexible format was particularly difficult. At times, these children's negative emotions were manifest in outbursts and 'meltdowns' which augmented their alienation from their teacher and peers.

By exploring children's experiences of NAPLAN through the lens of the children's own accounts of their experiences, it is evident that by and large, for multiple reasons documented throughout this study, children construct NAPLAN as high-stakes, despite the intention to develop and deal with the tests as low-stakes by both ACARA and BCE. The research has also demonstrated the effectiveness of using children's drawings, written descriptions and focus groups as a way of knowing and understanding the multiple ways children experience NAPLAN. Acknowledgement of children's views and experiences would make a positive contribution to future developments in national testing in Australia and be in line with the Melbourne Declaration, which argues that all stakeholders should be included in education policy development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Ethical clearance approval



The School of Education
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 000268

7 November 2012

Ms Angelique Howell
School of Education

Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

S/N: 42611116

Ethical Clearance Number: 12-053

Dear Angelique

I am pleased to advise that on the 6 November 2012 ethical clearance was granted for your project "A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different socioeconomic status communities".

I would also like to remind you that any correspondence associated with your project (consent forms, information sheets etc.) must be printed on official UQ letterhead (available from the School of Education Front Office).

If you have any questions regarding this matter please do not hesitate to contact me.

I wish you well with your studies.

Yours sincerely,


Christel Schoenberger
Senior Administrative Officer
(Postgraduate & Higher Degrees)



A11.096 MK:cf ref:184

30 January 2012

Ms Angelique Howell
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Phone: (07) 3033 7000

North Lakes
12 Endeavour Blvd
Phone: (07) 3490 1700

Springwood
5-7 Laurinda Crescent
Phone: (07) 3440 7900

**Fr Bernard O'Shea
Inservice Centre, Wilston**
19 Lovedale St
Phone: (07) 3033 7111

**Ngutana-Lui Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Cultural
Studies Centre, Inala**
100 Lileac St
Phone: (07) 3033 7200

Dear Ms Howell

The Brisbane Catholic Education Research Committee met on 23 January 2012 and considered your request to conduct the research project "*A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practice of year three teachers in Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic communities*".

Approval was granted by the committee to contact principals of the schools seeking their involvement in the project, however concern was expressed about the misleading nature of the project's title as the research will address only **some** year three teachers in **some** schools. It was suggested that the title be amended to reflect this.

Please note that participation in your project is at the discretion of the principal.

If you have any further queries, please contact me on (07) 3033 7427.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Knox
Research Coordinator
Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane

Copy *Professor Robert Lingard*
Dr Sam Sellar

Teaching Challenging Transforming

Appendix 2

Adult Participant Information Sheets



School of Education
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR SENIOR BRISBANE CATHOLIC EDUCATION STAFF

The impact of NAPLAN on teachers and students: A study in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different socioeconomic status communities

About the project

This study aims to explore the ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' curricula and teaching methods, and the extent to which this impact is different in varying socio-economic status communities. This study also explores students' responses to and perceptions of the tests. It is not the purpose of this study to judge staff or schools in any way, but to develop rich accounts of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of NAPLAN and the ways in which it affects what and how they teach.

Benefits of the project

Through gaining an understanding of the different ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' practice and students, the project will generate new knowledge that will better equip teachers, school leaders and systems to negotiate the obligations of NAPLAN while maintaining a focus on quality learning outcomes within the unique contexts of individual schools. It will also provide teachers with opportunities for professional reflection.

The research team

My name is Angelique Howell. I will be conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Queensland in conjunction with Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor) and Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor).

What I am inviting you and your staff to do

I will conduct this research in two Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) schools, which serve diverse socio-economic status communities, during the course of the 2012 school year. During this time, a range of staff and students within BCE will be invited to participate in the study. I will invite you to participate in an interview to gain insights into BCE's beliefs and values regarding NAPLAN and teaching and learning, the support structures provided to schools by BCE in relation to NAPLAN and the alignment of NAPLAN testing with these beliefs and structures. I am also interested in collecting copies of documentation pertaining to NAPLAN, including letters and information sent to schools.

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy

Interviews will be recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed into written form. Interview transcripts and notes made by the research team will be de-identified and securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland (Rm 533, Bldg 24). Data will be stored for five years after the project ends before being destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this data. Any information you provide will remain anonymous during storage, analysis and reporting. You may ask to review your interview transcripts and to receive a summary of the project findings.

Right to refuse or withdraw from the study

Should you wish to participate, I will ask you to provide written consent. Participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw from the project. You may therefore choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions of any type. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any contributions you have made will be destroyed.

This study has been cleared in accordance with the ethical review guidelines and processes of the University of Queensland. These guidelines are endorsed by the University's principal human ethics committee, the Human Experimentation Ethical Review Committee, and registered with the Australian Health Ethics Committee as complying with the national statement. You are free to discuss your participation in this study with me or my advisors (details below). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved with the study, you may contact the School Ethics Officer on 3365 6502.

Feedback and results of the study

A short summary of findings will be made available to you at the conclusion of the project and you may also request a copy of the full thesis and any other publications. If you wish, I would also be happy to present a seminar of the findings to your staff.

Contacts

If you need to clarify any of the above points either now or later, or if any issues arise, please do not hesitate to contact me or my advisors:

Angelique Howell (PhD Student Researcher)
Tel: 0434 280 460
Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 7343
Email: r.lingard@uq.edu.au

Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 6497
Email: sam.sellar@uq.edu.au

I welcome your participation in the project and thank you for considering my invitation. If you agree to participate in the project, please sign both copies of the consent form. Retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.

Kind regards

Angelique Howell

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRINCIPALS

A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic status communities

About the project

This study aims to explore the ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' curricula and teaching methods, and the extent to which this impact is different across varying socio-economic status communities. It is not the purpose of this study to judge staff or schools in any way, but to explore rich accounts of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of NAPLAN and the ways in which it affects what and how they teach.

Benefits of the project

Through gaining an understanding of the different ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' practice in schools, the project will generate new knowledge that will better equip teachers, school leaders and systems to negotiate the obligations of NAPLAN while maintaining a focus on quality learning outcomes within the unique contexts of individual schools. It will also provide teachers with opportunities for professional reflection.

The research team

My name is Angelique Howell. I will be conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Queensland in conjunction with Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor) and Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor).

What I am inviting you and your school to do

I would like to work with you and your school over the course of the 2012 school year. My research will comprise three stages: the Pre-NAPLAN, NAPLAN testing and Post-NAPLAN phases. This will involve 1 year 3, 5 or 7 teacher and 1 corresponding year 2, 4 or 6 teacher keeping a diary for the duration of the year to briefly record the amount of time spent teaching, planning or otherwise preparing for NAPLAN and any other observations and reflections pertaining to NAPLAN which they feel may be relevant (15 - 20 min per week). The year 3, 5 or 7 teacher will also be asked to participate in an interview for approximately 15 minutes once per week from February – May and again on two occasions in October. On these days, I will also carry out structured and semi-structured observations of lessons during one teaching session. After one of the NAPLAN tests, the children in the year 3, 5 or 7 class will be asked to spend 30 minutes drawing a picture of their NAPLAN experience and writing about their drawing.

I would also like to conduct semi-structured interviews with you during each phase of the study to gain insights into your beliefs and values regarding education, your approach to maximising learning outcomes for the students in your school and the ways/to what extent you feel NAPLAN is impacting upon your school. I will also ask for copies of documentation pertaining to NAPLAN including letters and information sent to parents.

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy

Interviews will be recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed into written form. Interview transcripts and notes made by the research team will be de-identified and securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland (Rm 533, Bldg 24). Data will be stored for five years after the project ends before being destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this data. Any information you provide will remain anonymous during storage, analysis and reporting. You may ask to review your interview transcripts and to receive a summary of the project findings.

Right to refuse or withdraw from the study

Should you wish to participate, I will ask you to provide written consent. Participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw from the project. You may therefore choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions of any type. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any contributions you have made will be destroyed.

This study has been cleared in accordance with the ethical review guidelines and processes of the University of Queensland. These guidelines are endorsed by the University's principal human ethics committee, the Human Experimentation Ethical Review Committee, and registered with the Australian Health Ethics Committee as complying with the national statement. You are free to discuss your participation in this study with me or my advisors (details below). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved with the study, you may contact the School Ethics Officer on 3365 6502.

Feedback and results of the study

A copy of the teachers' case studies will be given to them and a copy of the findings of the project will be given to your school. I can also present a seminar of the findings to the staff if you wish.

Contacts

If you need to clarify any of the above points either now or later, or if any issues arise, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following people.

Angelique Howell (PhD Student Researcher)
Tel: 0434 280 460
Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au.

Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 7343
Email: r.lingard@uq.edu.au.

Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 6497
Email: sam.sellar@uq.edu.au

I welcome your participation in the project and thank you for considering my invitation. If you agree to participate in the project, please sign both copies of the consent form. Retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.

Kind regards

Angelique Howell

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR YEAR THREE, FIVE AND SEVEN TEACHERS

A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic status communities**About the project**

This study aims to explore the ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' curricula and teaching methods, and the extent to which this impact is different across varying socio-economic status communities. It is not the purpose of this study to judge staff or schools in any way, but to explore rich accounts of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of NAPLAN and the ways in which it affects what and how they teach.

Benefits of the project

Through gaining an understanding of the different ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' practice in schools, the project will generate new knowledge that will better equip teachers, school leaders and systems to negotiate the obligations of NAPLAN while maintaining a focus on quality learning outcomes within the unique contexts of individual schools. It will also provide teachers with opportunities for professional reflection.

The research team

My name is Angelique Howell. I will be conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Queensland in conjunction with Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor) and Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor).

What I am inviting you to do

I would like to work with you over the course of the 2012 school year. My research will comprise three stages: the Pre-NAPLAN, NAPLAN testing and Post-NAPLAN phases. This will involve you keeping a diary for the duration of the year to briefly record the amount of time spent teaching, planning or otherwise preparing for NAPLAN and any other observations and reflections pertaining to NAPLAN which you feel may be relevant (15 - 20 min per week). I will also invite you to participate in an interview for approximately 15 minutes once per week from February – May and again on two occasions in October. On these days, I will also carry out structured and semi-structured observations of lessons during the morning or between morning tea and lunch, whichever suits you best. After one of the NAPLAN tests, I will ask your students to spend 30 minutes drawing a picture of their NAPLAN experience and writing about their drawing, and some students will be invited to participate in a focus group discussion.

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy

Interviews will be recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed into written form. Interview transcripts and notes made by the research team will be de-identified and securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland (Rm 533, Bldg 24). Data will be stored for five years after the project ends before being destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this data. Any information you provide will remain anonymous during storage, analysis and reporting. You may ask to review your interview transcripts and to receive a summary of the project findings.

Right to refuse or withdraw from the study

Should you wish to participate, I will ask you to provide written consent. Participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw from the project. You may therefore choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions of any type. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any contributions you have made will be destroyed.

This study has been cleared in accordance with the ethical review guidelines and processes of the University of Queensland. These guidelines are endorsed by the University's principal human ethics committee, the Human Experimentation Ethical Review Committee, and registered with the Australian Health Ethics Committee as complying with the national statement. You are free to discuss your

participation in this study with me or my advisors (details below). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved with the study, you may contact the School Ethics Officer on 3365 6502.

Feedback and results of the study

A copy of your case study will be provided to you at the conclusion of the study and a copy of the findings of the project will also be provided to your school.

Contacts

If you need to clarify any of the above points either now or later, or if any issues arise, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following people.

Angelique Howell (PhD Student Researcher)
Tel: 0434 280 460
Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au.

Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 7343
Email: r.lingard@uq.edu.au.

Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 6497
Email: sam.sellar@uq.edu.au

I welcome your participation in the project and thank you for considering my invitation. If you agree to participate in the project, please sign both copies of the consent form. Retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.
Kind regards

Angelique Howell

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR YEAR TWO, FOUR AND SIX TEACHERS

A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic status communities**About the project**

This study aims to explore the ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' curricula and teaching methods, and the extent to which this impact is different across varying socio-economic status communities. It is not the purpose of this study to judge staff or schools in any way, but to explore rich accounts of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of NAPLAN and the ways in which it affects what and how they teach.

Benefits of the project

Through gaining an understanding of the different ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' practice in schools, the project will generate new knowledge that will better equip teachers, school leaders and systems to negotiate the obligations of NAPLAN while maintaining a focus on quality learning outcomes within the unique contexts of individual schools. It will also provide teachers with opportunities for professional reflection.

The research team

My name is Angelique Howell. I will be conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Queensland in conjunction with Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor) and Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor).

What I am inviting you to do

I would like to work with you over the course of the 2012 school year. This will involve you keeping a diary for the duration of the year to briefly (15 min per week) record the amount of time spent teaching, planning or otherwise preparing for NAPLAN and any other observations and reflections pertaining to NAPLAN which you feel may be relevant. I will also invite you to participate in an interview for approximately 15 minutes in October.

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy

Interviews will be recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed into written form. Interview transcripts and notes made by the research team will be de-identified and securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland (Rm 533, Bldg 24). Data will be stored for five years after the project ends before being destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this data. Any information you provide will remain anonymous during storage, analysis and reporting. You may ask to review your interview transcripts and to receive a summary of the project findings.

Right to refuse or withdraw from the study

Should you wish to participate, I will ask you to provide written consent. Participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw from the project. You may therefore choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions of any type. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any contributions you have made will be destroyed.

This study has been cleared in accordance with the ethical review guidelines and processes of the University of Queensland. These guidelines are endorsed by the University's principal human ethics committee, the Human Experimentation Ethical Review Committee, and registered with the Australian Health Ethics Committee as complying with the national statement. You are free to discuss your participation in this study with me or my advisors (details below). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved with the study, you may contact the School Ethics Officer on 3365 6502.

Feedback and results of the study

A copy of your case study will be provided to you at the conclusion of the study and a copy of the findings of the project will also be provided to your school.

Contacts

If you need to clarify any of the above points either now or later, or if any issues arise, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following people.

Angelique Howell (PhD Student Researcher)
Tel: 0434 280 460
Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au.

Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 7343
Email: r.lingard@uq.edu.au.

Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 6497
Email: sam.sellar@uq.edu.au

I welcome your participation in the project and thank you for considering my invitation. If you agree to participate in the project, please sign both copies of the consent form. Retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.

Kind regards

Angelique Howell

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of year three teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic communities

About the project

This study aims to explore the ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' curricula and teaching methods, and the extent to which this impact is different across varying socio-economic status communities. It is not the purpose of this study to judge staff or schools in any way, but to explore rich accounts of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of NAPLAN and the ways in which it affects what and how they teach.

Benefits of the project

Through gaining an understanding of the different ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' practice in schools, the project will generate new knowledge that will better equip teachers, school leaders and systems to negotiate the obligations of NAPLAN while maintaining a focus on quality learning outcomes within the unique contexts of individual schools. It will also provide teachers with opportunities for professional reflection.

The research team

My name is Angeliqwe Howell. I will be conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Queensland in conjunction with Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor) and Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor).

What I am inviting the children to do

I will be coming into your child's classroom once per week from February – May and again for two weeks in October to interview your child's teacher and to observe some lessons. The focus of these discussions and observations is the teacher and his/her practice, not the children. Although I will introduce myself to the children at the beginning of the year, so that they will feel comfortable with me being in their classroom, I will not be contributing to or participating in any lessons in any way. During these times, I will make every attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible.

After one of the NAPLAN tests, the children will be asked to draw a picture of their NAPLAN experience and to write about their drawing. I am asking for your consent to collect your child's drawing and writing and to invite your child to participate in a small discussion group. These activities are a reflective response to the children's experience of NAPLAN, not a part of the test and all drawings and writing will be collected anonymously. Although this will be a class activity, only the drawings/writing of those children who have agreed to participate and have written parental consent will be used in the study. Of those children who have agreed to participate and have written parental consent, some will be asked if they wish to be part of a small discussion group to talk with me and some of their classmates about their NAPLAN experience.

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy

The focus group discussion will be recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed into written form. Discussion transcripts and notes made by the research team will be de-identified and securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland (Rm 533, Bldg 24). Data will be stored for five years after the project ends before being destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this data. Any information you provide will remain anonymous during storage, analysis and reporting. You may ask to review the discussion transcript and to receive a summary of the project findings.

Right to refuse or withdraw from the study

Should you wish to allow your child to participate, I will ask you to provide written consent. Participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw from the project. You and your child may therefore choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions of any type. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any contributions your child has made will be destroyed.

This study has been cleared in accordance with the ethical review guidelines and processes of the University of Queensland. These guidelines are endorsed by the University's principal human ethics committee, the Human Experimentation Ethical Review Committee, and registered with the Australian Health Ethics Committee as complying with the national statement. You are free to discuss your participation in this study with me or my advisors (details below). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved with the study, you may contact the School Ethics Officer on 3365 6502.

Feedback and results of the study

A copy of your case study will be provided to you at the conclusion of the study and a copy of the findings of the project will also be provided to your school.

Contacts

If you need to clarify any of the above points either now or later, or if any issues arise, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following people.

Angelique Howell (PhD Student Researcher)
Tel: 0434 280 460
Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 7343
Email: r.lingard@uq.edu.au

Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 6497
Email: sam.sellar@uq.edu.au

I welcome your participation in the project and thank you for considering my invitation. If you agree to participate in the project, please sign both copies of the consent form. Retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.
Kind regards

Angelique Howell

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different socioeconomic status communities**About the project**

This study aims to explore the ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' curricula and teaching methods, and the extent to which this impact is different across varying socio-economic status communities. It is not the purpose of this study to judge staff, schools, or school communities in any way, but to explore rich accounts of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of NAPLAN and the ways in which it affects what and how they teach.

Benefits of the project

Through gaining an understanding of the different ways in which NAPLAN is impacting upon teachers' practice in schools, the project will generate new knowledge that will better equip teachers, school leaders and systems to negotiate the obligations of NAPLAN while maintaining a focus on quality learning outcomes within the unique contexts of individual schools. It will also provide teachers with opportunities for professional reflection.

The research team

My name is Angeliqe Howell. I will be conducting this research as a PhD student at the University of Queensland in conjunction with Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor) and Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor).

What I am inviting you to do

I am asking if you would like to join in a small, informal discussion group for about 45 minutes, to talk about your feelings and ideas about the purposes and importance of NAPLAN. This can take place at school, either after morning drop-off or after school, or at another venue agreed upon by the group in the evening, if this is easier for you.

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy

The focus group discussion will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed into written form. Discussion transcripts and notes made by the research team will be de-identified and securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland (Rm 533, Bldg 24). Data will be stored for five years after the project ends before being destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this data. Any information you provide will remain anonymous during storage, analysis and reporting. You may ask to review the discussion transcript and to receive a summary of the project findings.

Right to refuse or withdraw from the study

Should you wish to participate, I will ask you to provide written consent. Participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw from the project. You may therefore choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or repercussions of any type. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any contributions you have made will be destroyed.

This study has been cleared in accordance with the ethical review guidelines and processes of the University of Queensland. These guidelines are endorsed by the University's principal human ethics committee, the Human Experimentation Ethical Review Committee, and registered with the Australian Health Ethics Committee as complying with the national statement. You are free to discuss your participation in this study with me or my advisors (details below). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved with the study, you may contact the School Ethics Officer on 3365 6502.

Feedback and results of the study

A copy of your case study will be provided to you at the conclusion of the study and a copy of the findings of the project will also be provided to your school.

Contacts

If you need to clarify any of the above points either now or later, or if any issues arise, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following people.

Angelique Howell (PhD Student Researcher)
Tel: 0434 280 460
Email: angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au.

Professor Robert Lingard (Principal Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 7343
Email: r.lingard@uq.edu.au.

Dr Sam Sellar (Associate Advisor)
School of Education
University of Queensland
Tel: 3365 6497
Email: sam.sellar@uq.edu.au

I welcome your participation in the project and thank you for considering my invitation. If you agree to participate in the project, please sign both copies of the consent form. Retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.

Kind regards

Angelique Howell

Appendix 3

Participant Information Sheet: Children



School of Education
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00026

INFORMATION SHEET CHILDREN

Project: NAPLAN and Primary Teachers

My name is Angelique. I am doing an important project about NAPLAN and would really like your help.

After one of the NAPLAN tests, your teacher will ask you to draw a picture about NAPLAN and to write about your drawing.

This is not a test and no-one will check your work. Your name will not be on it, so no-one will know it is yours. I just want you to tell me about what it is like to do NAPLAN, which means that there is no right or wrong answer.

I would like to put some of the drawings and writing into my project to show other people what children think about NAPLAN. I would also like to talk to some of you about what you think of NAPLAN in a group.

You do not have to have your work in my project and you do not have to talk to me in a group if you do not want to. These are things I will only ask you to do if you really want to and if your parents or guardians say it's okay too.

You can change your mind at any time. Just let your teacher know. If you have any questions, you can send me an email at

angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au.

Thank you for giving me your time to read this sheet.

Angelique

Appendix 4

Adult Informed Consent Forms



School of Education
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00026B

Informed Consent Form for Interview Participants (Senior Brisbane Catholic Education Staff)

Project title: The impact of NAPLAN on teachers and students: A study in two Queensland Catholic primary schools

Principal Advisor: Professor Robert Lingard
Associate Advisor: Dr Sam Sellar
Student Researcher: Angelique Howell
Contact: Angelique Howell angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Please read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate that you have read and understood them, and provide your name, signature and date:

- I understand that I may be asked to participate in an interview that will be audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified for later analysis.
- I understand that the transcription and original recording will be securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Only the research team will have access to this data.
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published but I will not be identified and all personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without consequence and any data collected will be destroyed in this case.
- I understand that I can review my interview transcripts and a summary of project findings.
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research
- I have read the attached Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and voluntarily agree to take part.

Name of Participant.....

Signed.....

Date.....

School (if applicable).....

Would you like a summary of the research findings when the project is completed? Yes No

Thank you for your participation.

Informed Consent Form for School Principals

Project title: A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of three year three teachers in Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic communities

Principal Advisor: Professor Robert Lingard
Associate Advisor: Dr Sam Sellar
Student Researcher: Angelique Howell

Contact: Angelique Howell angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Please read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate that you have read and understood them, and provide your name, signature and date:

- I understand that members of my school community may be asked to participate in interviews that will be audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified for later analysis.
- I understand that the transcriptions and original recordings will be securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Only the research team will have access to this data.
- I understand that children within my school community may be asked to contribute samples of work that will be de-identified
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published but neither my school nor members of the school community will be identified and all personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw my school's participation in the project at any stage without prejudice and any data collected will be destroyed in this case.
- I understand that I can review a summary of project findings.
- I have read the attached Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and consent to my school being involved in the development of a case study and/or the design and evaluation of strategies for improving educational outcomes in my school.

Name of school principal.....

Signed.....

Date.....

School.....

Would you like a summary of the research findings when the project is completed? Yes No

Thank you for your participation.

Informed Consent Form for Year 3, 5 and 7 Teachers

Project title: *A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic status communities*

Principal Advisor: Professor Robert Lingard
Associate Advisor: Dr Sam Sellar
Student Researcher: Angelique Howell
Contact: Angelique Howell angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Please read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate that you have read and understood them, and provide your name, signature and date:

- I understand that I will be asked to participate in interviews that will be audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified for later analysis.
- I understand that the transcription and original recording will be securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Only the research team will have access to this data.
- I understand that the researcher will conduct some structured and unstructured observations of my lessons.
- I understand that I will be asked to keep a diary for the purpose of keeping notes for the duration of the project.
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published but I will not be identified and all personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without consequence and any data collected will be destroyed in this case.
- I understand that I can review my interview transcripts and a summary of project findings.
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research
- I have read the attached Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and voluntarily agree to take part.

Name of Participant.....

Signed.....

Date.....

School (if applicable).....

Would you like a summary of the research findings when the project is completed? Yes No

Thank you for your participation.

Informed Consent Form for Year 2, 4 and 6 Teachers

Project title: *A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic status communities*

Principal Advisor: Professor Robert Lingard
Associate Advisor: Dr Sam Sellar
Student Researcher: Angelique Howell

Contact: Angelique Howell angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Please read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate that you have read and understood them, and provide your name, signature and date:

- I understand that I may be asked to participate in an interview that will be audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified for later analysis.
- I understand that the transcription and original recording will be securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Only the research team will have access to this data.
- I understand that I will be asked to keep a diary for the purpose of keeping notes for the duration of the project.
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published but I will not be identified and all personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without consequence and any data collected will be destroyed in this case.
- I understand that I can review my interview transcripts and a summary of project findings.
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research
- I have read the attached Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and voluntarily agree to take part.

Name of Participant.....

Signed.....

Date.....

School (if applicable).....

Would you like a summary of the research findings when the project is completed? Yes No

Thank you for your participation.

Informed Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Project title: *A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in three Queensland Catholic primary schools within varying socio-economic communities*

Principal Advisor: Professor Robert Lingard
Associate Advisor: Dr Sam Sellar
Student Researcher: Angelique Howell

Contact: Angelique Howell angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Please read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate that you have read and understood them, and provide your name, signature and date:

- I understand that my child may be invited to participate in a discussion that will be audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified for later analysis.
- I understand that the transcription and original recording will be securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Only the research team will have access to this data.
- I understand that my child may be invited to contribute their drawing/writing of their NAPLAN experience to the project.
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published but my child and their school will not be identified and all personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that my child may withdraw from the research project at any stage without consequence and any data collected will be destroyed in this case.
- I understand that I can view a summary of project findings.
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to my child from her/his participation in this research
- I have read the attached Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and voluntarily agree to my child participating.

Name of student..... Age.....

Name of Parent/Guardian.....

Parent/Guardian Signature.....

Date.....

Informed Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Project title: *A study of the differential impact of NAPLAN on the professional practices of teachers in two Queensland Catholic primary schools serving different socioeconomic status communities*

Principal Advisor: Professor Robert Lingard Associate Advisor: Dr Sam Sellar
Student Researcher: Angelique Howell

Contact: Angelique Howell angelique.howell@uqconnect.edu.au

Please read the following statements, tick the boxes to indicate that you have read and understood them, and provide your name, signature and date:

- I understand that I will be invited to participate in a discussion that will be audio recorded, transcribed and de-identified for later analysis.
- I understand that the transcription and original recording will be securely stored in the School of Education at the University of Queensland. Only the research team will have access to this data.
- I understand that information gained during the study may be published but I will not be identified and all personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without consequence and any data collected will be destroyed in this case.
- I understand that I can view a summary of project findings.
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me by my participation in this research.
- I have read the attached Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and voluntarily agree to participate.

Name of Parent/Guardian.....

Parent/Guardian Signature.....

Date.....

School.....

Would you like a summary of the research findings when the project is completed? Yes No

We appreciate your contribution to the project.

Appendix 5

Children's Assent Form



School of Education
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00028

Assent Form Children

Would you like me to put your drawing and writing in my project?

YES NO

Would you like to talk to me and some of the other children in your class about NAPLAN?

YES NO

Remember, I would only like you to do these things if you really want to and you can change your mind at any time. Just let your teacher know.

Write your name here

Date

Appendix 6

Children's participation data

Year Level/ School	# Children in class	# Declined	% Declined	# Participated	% Participated
Year 3 Higher SES school	26	2	8%	24	92%
Year 7 Higher SES school	54	8	15%	46	85%
Year 3 Lower SES school	19	1	5%	18	90%
Year 5 Lower SES school	18	1	6%	17	94%
Totals	117	12	11%	105	89%

Appendix 7

Informed consent data parents and children

Year Level/ School	# Total	# Full consent to publish	% Full consent to publish	# Parental consent only	% Parental consent only	# Child consent only	% Child consent only	# No consent	% No consent	# Child request NFP	% Child request NFP
Year 3 Higher SES school	24	12	55%	4*	9%	0	0%	8	27%	2*	8%
Year 7 Higher SES school	46	27	60%	0	0%	3	6.5%	13	28%	3	6.5%
Year 3 Lower SES school	18	7	37.5%	0	0%	3	19%	0	0%	8	44%
Year 5 Lower SES school	17	8	47%	0	0%	5	35%	1	0%	3	18%
Totals	105	54	53%	2	4%	11	12%	22	19%	16	16%

NFP denotes 'Not For Publication'. In these cases, the children were willing to contribute to the study, but did not want their contribution published.

*In two of these cases, the children had parental consent, however requested that their contribution be NFP. Parental consent was therefore discounted.

Appendix 8

Indicative areas for interview questions

Senior BCE Staff:

These questions are intended to explore the extent to which systems are able to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN.

- Participants' demographic data – experience, qualifications, etc.
- Beliefs regarding education and teaching and learning
- Alignment of NAPLAN with these beliefs
- Alignment of MySchool with these beliefs
- The extent of any increased focus on staffing in Years 3, 5 and 7 and/or Years 2, 4, and 6.
- The extent of any government sanctions or rewards regarding NAPLAN results
- Provision of any inducements or imposing of any penalties for consistently low performing schools
- Specific directives regarding NAPLAN
- The importance of NAPLAN results for Catholic schools

Principals:

These questions are intended to explore further the extent to which systems are able to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, by examining the extent to which principals in BCE schools are impacted by NAPLAN.

- Participants' demographic data – experience, qualifications, etc.
- Beliefs regarding quality education and teaching and learning
- Unique character of the school
- Overall approach to maximising the learning outcomes
- Alignment of NAPLAN with these beliefs and approaches
- Alignment of MySchool with these beliefs and approaches
- The extent of any increased focus on staffing in Years 3, 5 and 7 and/or Years 2, 4, and 6.
- Communication with teachers and parents re: NAPLAN
- The extent of parental support for NAPLAN
- The importance of results
- The extent of any pressure to maintain or lift NAPLAN results

Teachers:

These questions are intended to explore further the extent to which systems are able to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, by examining the extent to which teachers in BCE schools are impacted by NAPLAN. They are also intended to explore the extent to which teachers believe that their curricula and pedagogies are impacted by NAPLAN.

- Participants' demographic data – experience, qualifications, etc.
- Beliefs regarding quality education and teaching and learning
- Overall approach to maximising the learning outcomes
- Alignment of NAPLAN with these beliefs and approaches
- Alignment of MySchool with these beliefs and approaches
- The extent of parental support for NAPLAN
- The importance of results
- The extent of any pressure to maintain or lift NAPLAN results
- Provision of support systems for teachers in regards to NAPLAN
- The extent to which NAPLAN data are useful
- The extent to which NAPLAN data are utilised in planning curricula
- The extent to which children are prepared for NAPLAN
- The extent to which curricula and pedagogies are impacted by NAPLAN and its associated preparation

Parents:

These questions are intended to explore further the extent to which systems are able to mediate the perceived negative effects of NAPLAN, by examining the extent to which parents of children in BCE schools are impacted by NAPLAN.

- Beliefs regarding a 'good' education/school/teacher/ lessons
- The extent to which NAPLAN aligns with these ideals
- The extent to which NAPLAN has had any positive or negative effects on the school
- The extent to which their child/children's behaviour changed in the lead-up to the tests or during the testing week.
- The extent to which NAPLAN results are regarded as important
- The extent of any NAPLAN preparation undertaken at home
- Expectations for NAPLAN preparation at school
- The extent to which parents pressure their child to achieve strong NAPLAN results

Children:

These questions are intended to explore the children's views of their experiences of NAPLAN, and the extent to which their school lives change as a result of the test.

- The types of lessons children feel help them to learn best
- The extent and ways in which the children's school lives change in the lead-up to NAPLAN: changes in curricula, pedagogies, relationships.
- Parental views of NAPLAN and its importance
- Parental support
- The extent to which NAPLAN preparation occurs at home and at school
- The extent to which children believe that their NAPLAN results are important
- Children's experience of the tests – level of difficulty, feelings, belief that they would attain a good result, etc.

Appendix 9

Teacher Diary

Term: _____ Date: _____

Key:

Drill = writing name and name of school in capital letters, shading bubbles, rules of the tests

Practice = familiarity with format, language, response types, practice tests

1. Amount of teaching time (in hours) spent this week on NAPLAN drill

0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5
10

If more than 10 hours, please specify: _____

2. Amount of teaching time (in hours) spent this week on practice for the reading test:

0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5
10

If more than 10 hours, please specify: _____

3. Amount of teaching time (in hours) spent this week on practice for the writing test:

0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5
10

If more than 10 hours, please specify: _____

4. Amount of teaching time (in hours) spent this week on practice for the language conventions test:

0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5
10

If more than 10 hours, please specify: _____

5. Amount of teaching time (in hours) spent this week on practice for the numeracy test:

0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5
10

If more than 10 hours, please specify: _____

6. Were any of your lessons focused on curriculum content which was brought forward to align with the NAPLAN tests? (i.e. did you teach anything this week that you would normally teach later in the year or that would normally be taught next year)

YES NO

7. If so, which test/s was/were the focus of any curriculum content brought forward to align with the NAPLAN tests?

Reading Writing Language Conventions Numeracy All

8. Amount of non-teaching time spent on activities relating to NAPLAN? (E.g. paperwork, preparation, marking practice tests)

0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5 5.5 6 6.5 7 7.5 8 8.5 9 9.5
10

If more than 10 hours, please specify: _____

9. Was NAPLAN raised at this week's staff meeting?

YES NO

10. If so, how much time was spent discussing NAPLAN?

11. If so, what topics were discussed?

12. How would you rate the pressure you were under this week to ensure that the students maintain/improve last year's NAPLAN results?

No pressure Some pressure Significant pressure Extreme pressure

13. Where is this pressure coming from? (Mark all sources that are relevant to you)

Parents Media Other teachers Principal BCE DET

Other (Please specify): _____

Additional comments/reflections/observations:

Appendix 11

Classification of children's bimodal responses

Year level/ school	Total Participants		Positive responses		Predominantly positive responses		Counterpoised/ Neutral responses		Predominantly negative responses		Negative responses		Conflicted Responses		Ambiguous responses		Reiteration of teacher's views		Total			
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Year 3 Higher SES school	24	100%	2	8%	2	8%	10	42%	1	4%	8	33%	1	4%							24	
Year 3 Lower SES school	18	100%	3	17%	1	5.5%	3	17%	1	5.5%	7	39%	2	11%			1	5.5%			18	
Year 5 Lower SES school	17	100%	3	18%	1	6%	2	12%	1	6%	7	41%			3	18%					17	
Year 7 Lower SES school	46	100%	1	2%	1	2%	11	24%	1	2%	32	70%									46	
TOTAL	105	100%	9	9%	5	5%	26	25%	4	4%	54	51%	3	3%	3	3%	1	1%			105	
At least 1 positive theme			9		5		26		4		-										# 44	% 42
At least 1 negative theme			-		5		26		4		54										# 89	% 85
Amb/ Conf/ Reiterate													3		3			1			# 7	% 7