



## Anti-NAPLAN Fever Shots All Done

I read an article on-line recently by Kasey Edwards (<https://www.watoday.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/why-parents-should-guard-against-naplan-fever-20180506-p4zdnx.html>) who was concerned that NAPLAN fever had taken hold at her daughter's school and she was trying hard not to catch it. In her article Kasey outlined articulately the number of ways she disliked NAPLAN. Apart from the "NAPLAN fever" comment, which is what caught my eye in the first place, she made one other comment which got me very interested (as much as the debate over Nic Nat's penalty). Kasey states as her third reason for disliking NAPLAN as,

**"Placing unnecessary stress and pressure on children for little to no educational gain. Kids as young as eight at my daughter's school are having anxiety attacks and not wanting to go to school for the practice tests."**

Now this is the one comment around the whole NAPLAN debate that I find the most intriguing. As a staff we have spent a great deal of our meeting time over the last 12 months discussing the most appropriate instruments to use to measure the progress (notice the use of that word as opposed to something like "level of attainment") our students are making. If you consider we need to take into account the K-6 continuum and it really isn't possible to measure Kindy kids with a test suitable for Year 6 kids then the task to establish a schedule is quite challenging. Of course teacher judgement is THE BEST method of determining a child's progress, however we find that if it is supported by a formal test then our confidence in reporting to you (Mum and Dad) is greatly enhanced.

At the risk of opening that old chestnut about the perceived lack of hours teachers work as opposed to the excessive holidays they get, the establishment of a school assessment schedule should have, as its foundation, a belief that any instrument used should give accurate and relevant information and the number of instruments used should be minimal (that is we don't use multiple tests that give you the same information). Really; how many ways do you need to weigh the pig? So our current version of what we call a Whole School Data Collection Regime contains eight different measurement instruments. It is designed to provide us with information on the progress our students are making from K-6 and the data collection exercises are spread out across the school year. It is not designed to implement an onerous assessment regime that creates distress and confusion for students nor is it designed to create stress and work fatigue for teachers. What it is designed for is to give us accurate and timely information so that we can:

1. Assess where each individual student is up to
2. Plan for future learning experiences to build on the knowledge they developed
3. Report accurately to parents on their child/ren's progress

Now I'm getting to the point I'm attempting to make. Yes, our testing regime does contain NAPLAN as one of its data collection tools. I mean really why wouldn't it? The validity of the test/s has been established across a very large cohort and over an extended period of time. For what NAPLAN tests, at a point in time, for specific year levels of students, it provides really accurate information on nearly all students tested and it has as a part of its "package" exceptional diagnostic tools that assist us to pinpoint exactly where individual or groups of students need support in Literacy and Numeracy and it provides a very good reporting to parents mechanism. BUT as good as NAPLAN is, it doesn't give information on all students across K-6 (only years three and five) and it only tests Literacy and Numeracy achievement. So yes, it is part of our assessment regime, but it is only one of eight ways we gather information across the whole school. So in going back to the title of this ramble, unless I've not been paying attention to the signals in our school, I'm pretty sure there hasn't been an outbreak of NAPLAN fever at Applecross Primary School. Why not you might ask! Well, if you have time and are not completely bored by my writing style, I suggest you go and get a cup of tea, come back and read on because I'm about to attempt to explain to you what's contained in the antidote we give to the students here at Applecross to make them immune from NAPLAN fever.

**# Warning: We don't provide parents with the antidote; it is suitable for children only.**

Last weekend I made pizzas. What's so unusual about that I hear you asking! Not much really, the weather is still perfect for eating outdoors, we have a wood fired pizza oven and it was our turn to entertain some old friends (as in people we have known for a long time). Now, this wasn't the first time we had made pizzas in the outdoor oven but we have never been satisfied with the result because we couldn't get the base right. "Get them from a bread shop" someone said, so we did and found that they were too thick and the pizzas came out like a savoury topping on a sponge cake. If you lived in Rome that's ok because that's what you would prefer. It wasn't the result we were looking for, so we took some else's advice and bought them in a package from a supermarket. These were better but very thin and dense so the pizzas turned out like a savoury topping on a piece of burnt cardboard. Not to be deterred and unable to satisfy this inner urge I have to "have a go at it myself" I proudly announced that I would hand make the pizza bases. Now, the person who normally gives permission for me to undertake such foolish endeavours looked directly at me with a mild panic in her eyes and said "ok but you had better have a practice beforehand". I can appreciate her position; can you imagine sitting around the outdoor table at 7.30pm after deliberately not eating the nibbles (apparently they are fattening) and really looking forward to some home-made pizza from a wood fired oven when the host announces you had better fight over the olives and hummus because the dough he was mixing to make the pizza bases has turned into something that resembles a rubber discus. That mild panic look from earlier on would instantly turn to "in approximately three seconds I am going to..." (well, I'll leave that to your imagination).

Well none of that happened. I was smart enough to search out a book that was titled "The Perfect Pizza" and followed the dough recipe for wood fired pizzas. To my amazement it turned out just like the book said it would. Naturally I took all the praise for the pizzas as they came out of the oven. During the evening someone asked me how I had developed the skill to make pizza dough. My response was I didn't know I could until that day but what I do know is that it's ok to have a go at anything (that approach does get me into trouble especially with home renovating) and if it doesn't turn out right that's ok because there is always another way to try to make it better.

Our wonderful Art teacher Mrs Hellemar said to me recently during one of my many forays into the Art Room that she was really noticing the change in the children when they come to her classes. When I asked for more information on the subject she said she felt it was related to the timing of our change to letting the children become more creative in the playground by installing the Nature Play area as well as changing our in-class culture by encouraging the children to engage in cooperative, enquiry based learning experiences where they have the flexibility to experiment, have a go and plan with their peers to solve tasks. Mrs Hellemar feels that this approach has subtly instilled in our students the confidence to have a go and to be creative in their approach to tasks in the Art Room. Ultimately for me as the leader of Applecross this observable increase in confidence being shown by our students is confirmation that we are developing independent, inquisitive young learners who are confident to have a go at a task even though they may not have the perceived knowledge and skills to complete it on the first attempt. In our K-2 students we are developing the skills and confidence to engage in tasks through an enquiry based learning approach. Granted, this isn't the only approach we use but it is a vital one in developing independent learners for life. In our Years 3 to 6 students we are reinforcing the concept that you have the skills to have a go, you know how to cooperate with your peers and therefore we will present you with fairly complex challenges so that you can use your skills to learn and discover. You never know, we may be developing pizza making champions of the future.

Now back to NAPLAN fever. Hopefully you can see the antidote is not delivered through a soothing cup of milo or a well-timed mindfulness session but instead it begins in Kindy and takes a number of years to develop immunity through exposure to the virus in the form of challenges to children's knowledge and problem solving capabilities. Sure, Milo and relaxation sessions are short term fixes for the fever, but the problem is the children tend to need one when they next face a challenge. It is more important to expose them to the environment of challenges so that they build up immunity.

Happy pizza making.

Kind regards

**Kim Guelfi**