

NAPLAN impact on student wellbeing: Voices from Remote Aboriginal Community Schools

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NAPLAN has been implemented within Australian Schools since 2008, and there have been numerous studies of the testing process and impact on curriculum and schools. The researchers had been working on a four- year project in the metropolitan area examining the impact on student wellbeing from diverse perspectives including students. They found that school, family and community contexts played some part in how students viewed NAPLAN and its impact on their wellbeing. Yet in their explorations of the research literature there were gaps and silences about the impact of the tests on the wellbeing of those who encounter NAPLAN in remote Aboriginal school community contexts. To begin to redress this gap, the researchers expanded their study to gain perspectives of stakeholders in remote community contexts. Voices of principals, teachers, parents, students, and community members regarding the value of NAPLAN, as well as the impact the tests have on wellbeing of all engaged with the process are presented.

Using phenomenological and critical race theoretical lenses, the research was implemented in two phases. In the first phase a mainly qualitative approach was used incorporating surveys, interviews and yarning carried out on two remote community school sites in Western Australia. In phase two, a focus group of 12 community school principals was held at a community school conference to discuss the findings of phase one. Through these processes, the research identified concerns regarding the ‘whiteness’ of a larger number of the questions posed in the NAPLAN tests; the disaggregation and reporting of data for Aboriginal students; the impact the tests have on students and stakeholders; the high stakes nature of NAPLAN scores on scholarship attainment; the timing of the tests in the school year; and, the length of tests and how they are administered. While a small study, the findings from this research provide important considerations for policy-makers to listen to the unintended consequences of NAPLAN in remote community contexts and the voices of Aboriginal students, families and educators. Gathering multiple voices can assist in the reimagining of how these tests could be developed and implemented in ways that allow for other ways of knowing, doing and being.