

# Stage 2 Child Studies – 2013

## External Assessment

### ASSESSMENT TYPE 3: INVESTIGATION

**SACE Registration  
Number:**

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**Topic:** “Early testing of a child’s ability in literacy and numeracy can adversely affect a child’s social and cognitive development and their well-being”.

**Word Count:** 1,999

This **investigation** is assessed using the following specific features:

Investigation and Critical Analysis	Evaluation
ICA1	E4
ICA2	
ICA3	

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## Introduction

In the early years of primary school children have to deal with unprecedented levels of pressure as they face frequent tests (Cassidy, S 2008). In today's contemporary society opinions are divided as to whether testing does in fact hinder a child's social and cognitive development and well-being. Children's lives are being disadvantaged by the government's insistence that schools focus on literacy and numeracy testing at the expense of creative teaching (Klenowski, V & Wyatt-Smith, C 2012).

## Scope

*The overall aim of this investigation is to test the following hypothesis:*

***“Early testing of a child's ability in literacy and numeracy can adversely affect a child's social and cognitive development and their well-being”.***

Extensive preliminary research unmasked that there are a range of opinions regarding whether children should be assessed on literacy and numeracy ability at an early age. There is a possibility that testing may have a negative effect on a child's development and well-being. For the purpose of this investigation the main focus was the South Australian Education System and testing in this state with reference to the National Assessment Program of Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which focuses on the areas reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy. This study is related to the area of study-Contemporary and Future Issues, as it involves contemporary issues related to well-being, education, literacy, and numeracy.

*The following focus questions will be used to help guide this investigation:*

1. Does high-stakes testing restrict a child's education?
2. Does testing affect social and cognitive development?
3. How does testing affect a child's well-being?

## *Methodology*

In order to gain knowledge of the topic and formulate responses to the selected focus questions Adelaide parents and caregivers were surveyed and teachers interviewed. These were completed to gain opinions and background information concerning the topic. Additionally, the primary findings were supported by perusing, analysing and evaluating a wide range of secondary sources, such as websites and government publications. The newspaper was used (electronically) to source relevant information and statistics. There is potential bias represented in the interviews, surveys and articles, which may affect the reliability, credibility and validity of the research. However these were necessary and provided relevant information to formulate responses. Thus were not seen as a limitation of this investigation.

Ethical research was considered through informing participants of what the intentions for the use of the data and responses were. Permission was gained to use their responses and I acknowledged all sources cited in this investigation

## ***Does high-stakes testing restrict a child's education?***

High-stakes testing like the NAPLAN aims to provide parents, teachers and the government with a snapshot of how students are progressing through their schooling. However it is only a snapshot of a moment in time and evidence suggests that it restricts a child's education (Interview 1, July 2013).

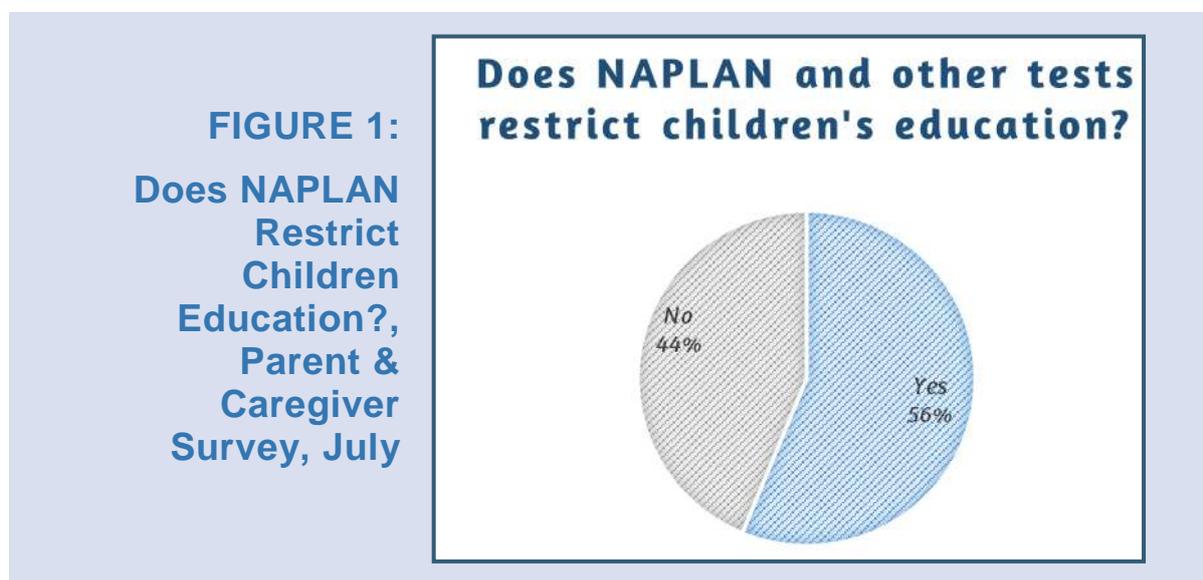
NAPLAN testing can lead to the narrowing of curriculum and neglecting of non-NAPLAN subjects (Klenowski, V & Wyatt-Smith, C 2012). As shown in a study by the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) sixty percent of 1,353 principals surveyed, stated their school spends less time teaching non-NAPLAN subjects in the lead up to the tests (Cobbold, T June 2013). This suggests that it becomes all about academia and the social, emotional, spiritual aspects of learning can disappear.

One principal, in particular, expressed that staff are spending time teaching in a manner that benefits NAPLAN results and students are completing more tests and are spending longer periods of time working in preparation for these (Cobbold, T June 2013). This suggests that teachers are trying to get students used to the conditions and environment of tests instead of working on improving the areas that students struggle with.

An interview with a literacy coordinator (full name provided), revealed that teaching to tests, such as the NAPLAN can lead to a student's creativity being lessened and children being unable to think for themselves (Interview 1, July 2013). This suggests that testing only encourages the use of direct instruction teaching, which involves students being spoon fed information and does not allow for students to find information, think and solve problems for themselves.

Another interviewee (full name provided) suggested that testing is needed in schools. So that they can analyse the overall data to see what learning gaps exist and then address and monitor the students at risk (Interview 2, July 2013). However, it was suggested that tests could be more student friendly and not be the only means of assessment. Open-ended tasks, which are hands on and child related should be used to aid teaching and gain a deeper understanding of each child's development (Interview 2, July 2013).

In a survey of 18 parents, it was shown that there was much debate as to whether high-stakes testing restricts education. Figure 1 shows that more than half of the parents surveyed believe the NAPLAN and other tests restrict the education of a child (Parent & Caregiver Survey, July 2013). Additionally, the survey uncovered that some parents see this as only one way of assessing a child's skills and ability.



Even though opinions among parents and caregivers differ slightly, it is clear that the NAPLAN and other high-stakes tests can restrict a child's learning and may lead to creativity being lessened resulting in children that are unable to think for themselves.

## ***Does testing affect social & cognitive development?***

Testing does affect social and cognitive development. However, debate occurred over whether testing really affects a child socially.

Communicating is interacting with each other, talking and practicing social skills. Testing does not allow for this, therefore it is not conducive to learning as a social activity (Interview 2, July 2013). Additionally, students who may not be competent writers, are unable to demonstrate knowledge of the content to the best of their ability, as compared to verbal assessments (Interview 2, July 2013). Another interviewee (full name provided) said that there may be a social aspect involved as parents may allow their child to play with other children that could potentially increase their child's test scores (Interview 1, July 2013). In a classroom atmosphere, students are well aware of their peer's test score and may exclude those with lower test scores and form cliques (Interview 2, July 2013), which may result in some children's social development being affected.

Students demonstrate deeper learning when they can show transference by taking the concept, idea and knowledge learnt and using it in another way related to real life. This suggests tests do not stimulate cognitive development, as no transference of knowledge occurs (Weimer, M 2012). If a person wants to understand a concept it can be aided using the procedure which is taught but this does not mean it has been understood. If a practical activity is undertaken by a child, they must apply their knowledge and demonstrate a deeper level of understanding. Thus being able to transfer their knowledge and progress cognitively.

Testing may not stimulate cognitive development as there is only one answer and the student is required to memorise, learn and problem solve the answers to questions (Interview 2, July 2013). Albeit, students often remember facts for a test but, after a period of time they may have forgotten these facts. They have not gone through the transference stage of learning and no connection as to how the concept is used in life is made. The fact is that testing, only tests how well students regurgitate and memorise what has been spoon feed to them and does not allow for them to think for themselves (Interview 1, July 2013).

Research has proven inconclusive as there is supporting evidence on both sides that suggests that cognitive and social development is sometimes stimulated as a result of testing. Further research is required for a conclusion to be drawn.

## *How does testing affect a child's well-being?*

A study by the APPA revealed that principals believe that the greatest impact of the NAPLAN and other high-stakes testing is on student's health and well-being (Cobbold, T June 2013). Much debate surrounds the extent of the impact.

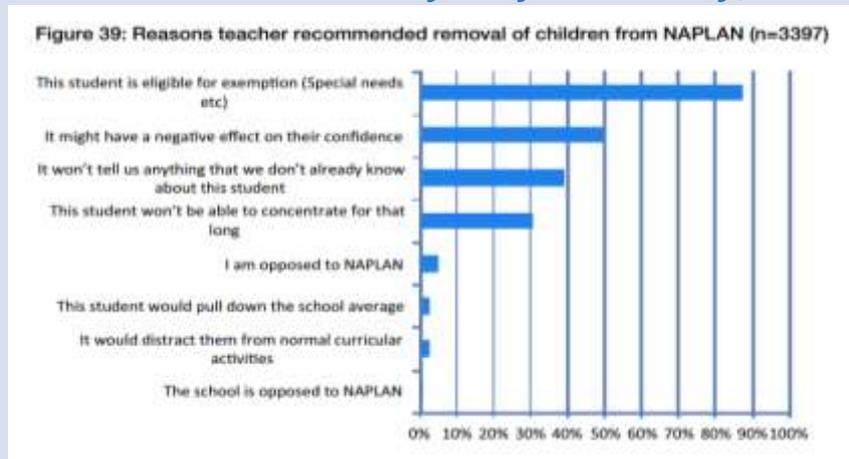
Possible consequences of testing not just high-stakes testing on children are stress, nervousness, expressing fear of failure, physical ailments, self-esteem issues and anxiety. This may lead to disengagement, absenteeism, apathy and behavioural problems in some children (Parent Survey, 2013 & Cobbold, T June 2013). On the other hand, if the child does well they may be rewarded for their efforts. In these tests, results are paramount and parents of students as young as 8 years old are seeking tutors to assist in test preparation and in gaining the highest achievement possible (Greens MPs, 2013). This means parents see the NAPLAN tests as vital aspects in their child's education and are trying to lessen the impact that tests and the lead up has on a child.

The extent of the impact on students in the early primary will vary from child to child and depend on how the child feels towards the subject being tested. If a child is confident about the content and the subject being tested, the experience will be more positive (Interview 2, July 2012). However if they dislike the subject and are struggling with content they misbehave to be withdrawn from tests (Interview 2, July 2012). Depending on their confidence level students will experience various levels of anxiety before, during and after tests (Dulfer, N et.al 2013).

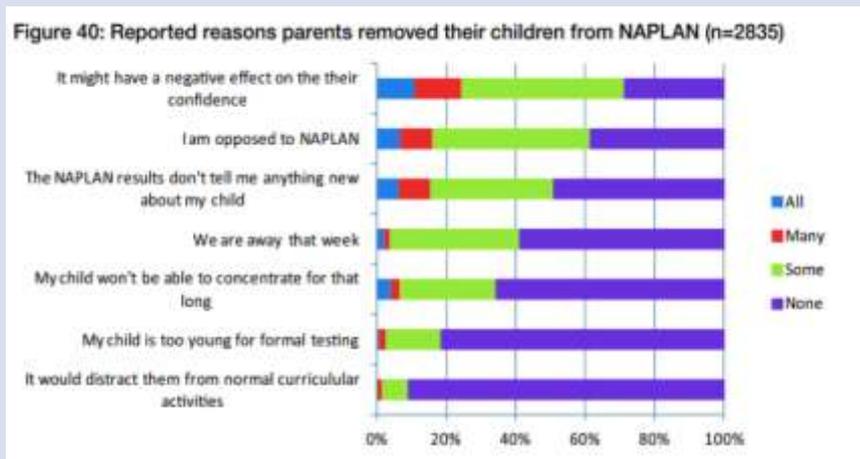
In some cases where parents and teachers are concerned about anxiety and the effect that testing has on the child they may remove the child from the test (ACARA, 2011). For

students with learning difficulties or disorders, this style of testing, reinforces their academic struggle and in the case of the NAPLAN that they are behind their peers (Cobbold, T June 2013). A range of reasons surfaced as to why students may receive exemption from NAPLAN tests through both parent's and teacher's recommendations, these are shown Figure 2 and 3.

**Figure 2: Possible Reasons to Remove Students (Teachers), Whitlam Institute- Western Sydney University, Nov. 2012**



**Figure 3: Possible Reasons to Remove Students (Parents), Whitlam Institute- Western Sydney University, Nov. 2012**



NAPLAN and other high-stake testing models obviously have an impact on the health and well-being of a child, ranging from stress to confidence issues. Through reading and analysing all sources available, it is clear that no single child is affected by tests in the same way nor to the same extent.

## Conclusion

After conducting this investigation, it is evident that the hypothesis was partially supported by the findings presented. It was proven that the NAPLAN and other high-stakes testing models can restrict children's learning and may lead to the student's creativity being reduced and in turn being unable to think for themselves. It was inconclusive as to whether cognitive and social development is affected as a result of testing. Further research is required for a conclusion to be made. Finally, all children experience some impact to their well-being but will not be affected in the same way nor to the same extent.

The findings presented in this study may have limitations. The sample size of experienced teachers was rather small (2) due to time constraints and lack of response. It was inadequate to be representative of the opinions of all teachers in South Australia. The sample size needs to be increased for findings to more definitive. The opinions of the parents and caregivers are unlikely to be representative of the whole population (parents/caregivers in South Australia), since there were only 18 participants replying. If the number of respondents and locality was increased it may become more representative. There was bias present in both the interviews and the survey but these were necessary to form conclusions.

It is recommended that alternative assessment types such as verbal assessments are given to children who may struggle with or find tests difficult. Different assessment types would allow the development of other needs, like social needs and alleviate the pressures and impact testing has on the child's well-being. Thus, helping to widen the curriculum and enable all children the opportunity to show their understanding of the content being assessed to their full potential. The removal of the NAPLAN results from the My Schools website, would ease pressure for parents, children and teachers to achieve good results.

# ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Primary Sources

INTERVIEWS	
Reference	Summary / Opinion
Interview 1 (full name provided), Literacy Co-ordinator, Local Primary School (name provided), Online Interview, 23 July 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Originally a survey. Due to lack of response it was formed in to an interview.</li> <li>✓ Provide views of teacher regarding the NAPLAN and testing.</li> <li>✓ She is an older teacher, with more experience strengthening her opinions</li> <li>✓ Parent influence of who children hang out with. Higher score more likely to have more friends.</li> </ul>
Interview 2 (full name provided), Numeracy Co-ordinator Local Primary School (name provided), Online Interview, 23 July 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Originally a survey. Due to lack of response it was formed in to an interview.</li> <li>✓ Her opinions were strengthened by her experienced teaching and the role she held.</li> <li>✓ Insight cognitive and social effects of testing, mainly negative.</li> <li>✓ Suggest alternative for testing.</li> <li>✓ Transference learning.</li> </ul>
SURVEY	
Reference	Summary / Opinion
Survey of Parents and Caregivers, July 2012, Sample 17 Adelaide citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stated opinions of parents and caregivers</li> <li>✓ Suggested that the parents and caregivers think the NAPLAN is a key aspect of a child's education and learning.</li> <li>✓ Insight into age or grade of first test and parents feelings on this.</li> <li>✓ Analysed reaction of children to tests.</li> </ul>

## Secondary Sources

### GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

\*\*\*These are all produced by outside organisation which will eliminate bias taught the NAPLAN

Reference	Summary / Opinion
Effects of NAPLAN. 2012. <i>Effects of NAPLAN (Executive Summary)</i> . [online] Available at: <a href="http://effectsofnaplan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Executive-Summary.pdf">http://effectsofnaplan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Executive-Summary.pdf</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Suggest there was positive and negative impact to the NAPLAN test.</li> </ul>
Jstor.org. 2013. What Do Primary School Children Think About Tests?. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1001558?uid=3737536&amp;uid=4582993577&amp;uid=2134&amp;uid=2&amp;uid=70&amp;uid=3&amp;uid=4582993567&amp;uid=60&amp;purchase-type=article&amp;accessType=none&amp;sid=21102499203781&amp;showMyJstorPss=false&amp;seq=5&amp;showAccess=false">http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1001558?uid=3737536&amp;uid=4582993577&amp;uid=2134&amp;uid=2&amp;uid=70&amp;uid=3&amp;uid=4582993567&amp;uid=60&amp;purchase-type=article&amp;accessType=none&amp;sid=21102499203781&amp;showMyJstorPss=false&amp;seq=5&amp;showAccess=false</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Insight in to how students (children) feel about tests.</li> </ul>
Klenowski, V. & Wyatt-Smith, C. 2012, The impact of high stakes testing: The Australian story, <i>Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice</i> , vol. 19, no. 1, pg. 65-79.	<p>Suggested the following...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Narrowing curriculum.</li> <li>✓ Neglected curriculum areas.</li> <li>✓ Neglected higher-order thinking skills due to inability to assess via testing.</li> <li>✓ Teaching to test.</li> <li>✓ Commercially driven education sector.</li> </ul>
Whitlam Institute. 2012. <i>The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families</i> . [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.whitlam.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/409735/High_Stakes_Testing_An_Educators_Perspective.pdf">http://www.whitlam.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/409735/High_Stakes_Testing_An_Educators_Perspective.pdf</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide reason for withdrawal from NAPLAN from Parents and Teachers perspective.</li> <li>✓ Gave actual circumstance to which student can be removed from tests.</li> <li>✓ Suggest impact on wellbeing.</li> </ul>

### ARTICLES

Reference	Summary / Opinion
The Australian 2013. <i>NAPLAN fails test as study shows negative impact</i> . [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/naplan-fails-test-as-study-shows-negative-impact/story-e6frg6n6-1226523786094">http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/naplan-fails-test-as-study-shows-negative-impact/story-e6frg6n6-1226523786094</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Said some school set six or more practice tests for school.</li> <li>✓ Suggested that the student's wellbeing was deemed a concern.</li> <li>✓ Most students will feel stressed to some extent.</li> </ul>

<p>The Independent. 2008. <i>Our children tested to destruction</i>. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/our-children-tested-to-destruction-779790.html">http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/our-children-tested-to-destruction-779790.html</a> [Accessed: 31 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide controversial statement for introduction.</li> </ul>
<p>Sydney Morning Herald - online. 2013. <i>NAPLAN is fine but the way we use it is broken</i>. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.smh.com.au/comment/naplan-is-fine-but-the-way-we-use-it-is-broken-20130512-2jflz.htm">http://www.smh.com.au/comment/naplan-is-fine-but-the-way-we-use-it-is-broken-20130512-2jflz.htm</a>   [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Preparation tools- widely available.</li> </ul>
<p>Yahoo News. 2012. <i>NAPLAN fails, say teachers</i>. [online] Available at: <a href="http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/wa/13571838/naplan-fails-say-teachers/">http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/wa/13571838/naplan-fails-say-teachers/</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Suggested that school spend too much time on prepare, sometimes the whole first term and even the previous year.</li> <li>✓ Said that, "Teachers generally haven't found that NAPLAN has improved the literacy and numeracy of their students".</li> </ul>
<b>WEBSITE</b>	
<b>Reference</b>	<b>Summary / Opinion</b>
<p>Conversation Media Group. 2012. <i>Testing the test: NAPLAN makes for stressed kids and a narrow curriculum</i>. [online] Available at: <a href="http://theconversation.com/testing-the-test-10965">http://theconversation.com/testing-the-test-10965</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Suggested the NAPLAN is a way of policing schools performance.</li> <li>✓ NAPLAN stresses children and narrows the curriculum.</li> </ul>
<p>Faculty Focus. 2012. <i>Deep Learning vs. Surface Learning: Getting Students to Understand the Difference</i>   Faculty Focus. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/deep-learning-vs-surface-learning-getting-students-to-understand-the-difference/">http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/deep-learning-vs-surface-learning-getting-students-to-understand-the-difference/</a> [Accessed: 31 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Help me understand how students learn best.</li> <li>✓ Information on transference learning.</li> </ul>
<p>Greensmps.org.au. 2013. <i>Putting NAPLAN to the test</i>   Greens MPs. [online] Available at: <a href="http://greensmps.org.au/NAPLAN">http://greensmps.org.au/NAPLAN</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Suggested that in these tests, results are key and parents of student as young as 8 years old (in year 3) are seeking tutors to assist in test preparation.</li> </ul>
<p>Nap.edu.au. 2008. <i>NAPLAN</i>   NAP. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/naplan.html">http://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/naplan.html</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<p>Background information on the NAPLAN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Gave insight in to why the Government uses the NAPLAN.</li> <li>✓ What happens to results?</li> <li>✓ Exclusion and exemption.</li> </ul>

<p>Save Our Schools. 2013. <i>Save Our Schools Canberra: Principals Say NAPLAN Has a Negative Impact on Schooling</i>. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.saveourschools.com.au/league-tables/principals-say-naplan-has-a-negative-impact-on-schooling">http://www.saveourschools.com.au/league-tables/principals-say-naplan-has-a-negative-impact-on-schooling</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provided statistics regard different school area and school types in relation to the NAPLAN.</li> <li>✓ Principal's views.</li> <li>✓ Suggest there is a negative effect on student with disabilities in learning.</li> <li>✓ It is possible that if the student stresses, teachers and parents will also stress.</li> <li>✓ In the lead up to NAPLAN, it becomes 'all about academia' and the social/emotional/spiritual aspects of learning seem to take a back seat.</li> </ul>
<p>Tudorhouse.nsw.edu.au. 2012. <i>Is NAPLAN improving schooling?</i>   <i>Headmasters Blog</i>. [online] Available at: <a href="http://www.tudorhouse.nsw.edu.au/blog/is_naplan_improving_schooling">http://www.tudorhouse.nsw.edu.au/blog/is_naplan_improving_schooling</a> [Accessed: 30 Jul 2013].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Gave both sides of the argument on whether the NAPLAN is improving the Australian Schooling System.</li> </ul>