Middle years students perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN: The student voice

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<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
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<td>ACSA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum Studies Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Training</td>
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<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<td>HPE</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
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<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage</td>
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<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient</td>
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<td>MYRAD</td>
<td>Middle Years Research and Development Project</td>
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<td>MYSA</td>
<td>Middle Years of Schooling Association</td>
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<td>MYEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>NAEP</td>
<td>National Assessment of Educational Progress</td>
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<td>NAGB</td>
<td>National Assessment Governing Board</td>
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<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<td>NEMP</td>
<td>National Education Monitoring Project</td>
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<td>National Middle School Association</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Program for International Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>QCAR</td>
<td>Queensland Curriculum Assessment and Reporting</td>
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<td>QCARF</td>
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<td>QTU</td>
<td>Queensland Teachers Union</td>
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<td>Tender Loving Care</td>
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<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.

Signed:  .................................................................

Katharine M. Swain

March, 2014
Dedication

I wish to dedicate this PhD to my parents,

Sean Swain

1931 – 2008

and

Wendy Swain

You believed in me.
Acknowledgements

The journey of this doctoral program I liken to riding a roller coaster. Courage is required to enter the unfamiliar zone and once the ride commences there is no way to escape. As each bend, twist and curve removes you further from your comfort zone you experience the excitement and exhilaration of the highs and defeat and frustration of the lows. There are times when confidence is lost and you wish the journey would end. However, you do not ride alone and those who share your journey remain with you and deliver you safely to the end. Without their support you could never have accomplished such a feat.

To all who travelled with me:

Firstly I would like to send a special thank-you to my supervisors, Professor Donna Pendergast and Professor Joy Cumming. I could not have succeeded without your invaluable support and wealth of knowledge. You have taught me so much and have guided and encouraged me throughout. Even in the toughest moments you never allowed me to give up.

Secondly, I extend my gratitude to the managers, teachers, parents and most of all the children who participated in this study and thank-you for your time and your honesty.

To my family:

My PhD has been my priority for a long time and therefore I was not always available to be as others wanted me to be. To my children James and Stephanie who must have felt at times that they did not have a mother, I thank you for your understanding.

A heartfelt, special thanks to my mother Wendy, whose home cooked meals and millions of cups of coffee kept me going. I am sure I would have starved without you. Mum was always there to encourage me and help push me through the many writers’ blocks.

I am very grateful to my sister Rebecca who devoted many hours aligning the large document, adding and deleting references, checking and rechecking table numbers, figure numbers, and page numbers, just to name a few tasks.
Thank-you to my cousin Frank for the hours devoted to editing. Your interest in my study made me feel valued and motivated to continue.

Finally:

To those who built hurdles in front of me, you taught me to jump higher, Thank-you.
Abstract

The impetus for this research is an apparent philosophical mismatch between the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Middle Schooling, which advocates for an intentional approach to teaching and learning incorporating signifying practices that are optimal for learners in the middle years. NAPLAN has come to the forefront of measures of achievement agendas in Australian schools. It is a test driven approach to student assessment that was introduced in 2008 and which signalled a significant accountability shift in outcomes for school education. Positioned predominantly across the middle years, NAPLAN testing is at odds with middle year’s practices which support authentic and reflective assessment. Advocates for and critics of NAPLAN testing recognise that schools attempting to reach national benchmarks may resort to practices such as ‘teaching to the test’, thereby affecting middle years curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices, and potentially moving away from practices regarded to be optimal for learners. This contradictory agenda presents a quandary for middle year’s educators.

To date, little attention has been paid to middle year’s students’ experiences, perceptions and reactions to the introduction and implementation of NAPLAN. This void takes the form of a clear absence of student voice in the range of spaces where it might be possible to include voice, such as in the research arena. This case study in two Queensland schools used qualitative methods of data collection including: formal interviews; semi-structured focus group interviews; observations; and students’ words and drawings, thereby privileging student voice in an attempt to craft a deeper understanding of NAPLAN from the students’ perspective. Without hearing the stories of the lived experience of the students themselves, they are silenced and we remain ignorant to their perspectives and assume they have nothing to contribute. As van Manen notes, “nothing is so silent than that which is taken-for-granted” (van Manen, 1997, p.112).

Findings from this study reveal that the implementation of NAPLAN has particular effects on teaching and learning and hence the experiences of middle year’s students in the two Queensland schools. Data analysis reveals a strong relationship between the implementation approach to NAPLAN adopted by the school and the experience of
middle year’s students attending that school. Generally results suggest that middle year’s students experience both physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN practices and procedures.

Research findings highlight similarities and patterns in the way middle years students perceive and react to the implementation of NAPLAN. The findings point to the need for further research privileging student voice and thereby enabling a broader insight beyond that provided in this case study research. This study makes a unique contribution to the existing research on middle year’s education, high stakes assessment and particularly the NAPLAN experience.
Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to topic

This thesis investigates the implementation of the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and its impact on students’ lived experiences in the crucial middle years of schooling. By privileging student voice, this study attempts to craft a deeper understanding of middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN and the potential effects on their development as lifelong learners.

Assessment and accountability are much debated topics in educational research worldwide and the Australian schooling system, having undergone major change during the first decade of the twenty-first century (MCEETYA, 2008), has joined the debate. A shift towards an assessment-driven approach to educational accountability occurred when in the Year 2000 the Australian Government announced that all education authorities should provide evidence on school standards through the privileging of measures that include: external assessment, and reporting literacy and numeracy performance against national benchmarks. The expectation was that such accountability measures would lead to improved educational standards, including the possibility of performance-based pay for teachers (Ingvarson, 2007).

Historically, education in Australia has been viewed as the responsibility of each state and territory. As the main source of education funding, the Australian federal government has gained state and territory agreement for the development of the Australian (national) Curriculum, by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), and its implementation across all states and territories by 2014 in all early and middle years of schooling (Foundation to Year 10) though it has stalled in achieving this goal. Using similar funding power, the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has been developed as the national accountability system used to gauge student achievement and progress (ACARA, 2010b). Preceding the implementation of NAPLAN testing in Australian schools in 2008 and the national curriculum, each state and territory undertook its own testing program against the agreed national literacy and numeracy benchmarks (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011). The national test program, NAPLAN, was
introduced on the basis that the newly introduced assessment regime would provide all stakeholders with information which could be used to improve student learning (Gillard, cited in Donnelly, 2009) and would provide ‘greater transparency and accountability for the performance of schools (ACARA, 2010b; Gillard, cited in Donnelly, 2009).

NAPLAN involves testing Australian school students attending Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, between ages eight and fifteen, in predominantly the middle years of schooling, and is designed with the intent of measuring performance in order to facilitate a focus on improving student achievement (ACARA, 2010b). The tests assess students annually in reading, writing, language conventions, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. NAPLAN tests are designed to measure student learning by asking specific questions covering a limited number of cognitive skills and knowledge, within a prescribed timeframe. NAPLAN tests are standardised, norm-referenced tests conducted in the school setting under strict administration principles and nationally agreed protocols to ensure integrity and consistency of test delivery (ACARA, 2010b). NAPLAN tests are discussed more fully in Section 2.3.6.

In 2008, a public website, www.myschool.edu.au, was also introduced to provide reports on NAPLAN outcomes for every Australian school. Already considered high-stakes testing because of the links between NAPLAN results and government funding, the publication of school data increased the high stakes and consequentially changed the way NAPLAN was perceived by systems, schools and teachers. This research study investigates perceptions of increasing pressure NAPLAN places on schools and teachers as they strive to meet national benchmarks, while exploring the consequential effects on curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in middle years classrooms. As the middle years of schooling are considered critical to adolescent development, it is important that research explores a possible mismatch between current national assessment practices and middle years philosophy. Research privileging student voice provides an opportunity to probe middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to educational reform such as NAPLAN implementation and the significance of such reform on middle years students’ school experiences.

1.1.1. An assessment and accountability approach

Researchers in the field of education such as Lobascher (2011) and Polesel, Dulfer and Turnbull (2012) note that the introduction of national testing (NAPLAN) is a signifier
of a shift towards an assessment driven approach to curriculum and an accountability driven education system. Reporting of students’ results and overall student performance become the focus of the assessment (Lobascher, 2011; Polesel et al., 2012; Swain & Pendergast, 2013) and accountability, in particular, may become a central issue on the education agenda rather than improving student learning experiences (Swain and Pendergast, 2013). In essence, NAPLAN encompasses assessment ‘of’ learning rather assessment ‘for’ learning. Contrasting with this accountability focus on assessment, the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (2008) specifies that the key purposes of education should be about improving students’ goals in conjunction with agreed national learning objectives, and reflect the values of society, indicating the role for assessment as a process for educational enhancement. The Declaration does not itself mandate annual standardised testing of students for accountability purposes but does set the goal of high standards for all. The Australian Curriculum expects teachers to address the diversity of learners, matching their learning with their current level of progress (ACARA, 2013). There appears to be an underlying tension between assessment which enhances student learning and assessment for the purpose of gauging performance of schools and teachers.

1.1.2. A philosophical mismatch

Of particular concern to middle years researchers such as Carrington (2006) and Pendergast and Bahr (2010) is a possible mismatch between twenty-first century assessment practices which include standardised, norm-referenced testing, and Middle Years philosophy, raising issues regarding middle years students’ learning and teaching (Carrington, 2006). It could be argued that little ground has been made in terms of designing assessment for educational purposes since Bloom, who is regarded as a leader in educational assessment, made this prophetic statement thirty years ago:

> [T]he normal curve is a distribution most appropriate to chance and random activity. Education is a purposeful activity and we seek to have students learn what we would teach. Therefore if we are effective, the distribution of grades will be anything but a normal curve. In fact, a normal curve is evidence of our failure to teach (Bloom, 1981).

1.1.3. Children’s voices

In the late 1900s, research indicated that students were being excluded from decision making and change efforts of schools, “the voices of children…have been missing from
the whole discussion” of school improvement (Kozol, 1991, p. 5). An early champion for ‘student voice’, Fullan (1991, p. 170) asked, “[W]hat would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” Educational authorities could be far better served by asking the students what they think instead of treating them as individuals with no presence or power (Danaher, 1994). Fullan (2001), supporting Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace’s (1996) argument for the inclusion of students’ perspectives in conversations about education and education reform, suggests that:

> [W]e hardly know anything about what students think about educational change because no one ever asks them…. The information is negligible as to what students think of specific innovations that affect them. To say that students do not have feelings and opinions about these matters is to say that they are objects, not humans (pp. 182 – 189).

Fielding (2004, p. 309) acknowledges that “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together”. The missing ‘voice’ of the students applies to research and commentary about NAPLAN testing. This confirms Fullan’s (2001) statement, which acknowledges the low level of importance or significance afforded students. Although awareness of the significance of the marginalised position of students was recognised in the 1900s, little has changed as calls for research that recognises ‘student voice’ have re-emerged on the educational landscape in the new millennium.

Advocates such as Cook-Sather (2006), Fielding (2004), and Gunter and Thomas (2005) strive to reposition school students from silent, passive recipients to authors of their own understanding and assessors of their own learning. Contemporary research indicates that much has been reported on the views of Australia’s current national assessment initiative from the dominant, political voice, but to date, insufficient attention has been paid to ‘student voice’ concerning national assessment matters directly affecting them. A review of the literature delivers only a small number of theoretical or empirical studies which examine this phenomenon.

### 1.2. Aim and research question

While researchers, politicians, educators, teachers and other adults argue over the purposes for national standardised testing, the student voice remains silenced. It is in
this vacuum that this study aims to unlock their silence and privilege student voice in matters affecting their education, specifically in terms of their perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. This is achieved by focussing on the ‘student voice’ of middle years students attending two Queensland schools and their experience of NAPLAN testing.

‘Student voice’ refers to students as subjects actively involved in their own education, as well as the education of others and is used as a means to explore the students’ experiences in relation to NAPLAN preparation and testing in the middle years of schooling, specifically Years 5 and 7. Using a qualitative paradigm, the study aims to answer the overarching question:

How do students in the middle years of schooling perceive and react to NAPLAN preparation and testing?

1.3. Research methodology

The methodology most suited to this study is a case study, with qualitative data collection including focus groups (semi-structured interviews) and students’ words and drawings, supported by observations and structured interviews. This approach allows for investigation of the actual words of the students and others (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1997); offering varied perspectives and a more complex picture of social phenomena. An interpretive approach is used to address the research question enabling emphasis to be placed upon describing and explaining human agency, and the social construction of the cultural worlds that people occupy (Neuman, 2000); how people may or may not be able to influence their environment.

By privileging student voice, this study attempts to situate students in a position of power. Whether this power will allow them ‘human agency’ is questionable. Karl Marx’s perception of human agency explained by his profound claim that, ‘[M]en make their own history, but do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves’ is described by Hewson and Sinclair (1999) as collective human agency; that which arises from a collection of social beings. Hewson and Sinclaire (1999) divide human agency further to include proxy human agency whereby individuals act on behalf of others, and individual human agency as the capacity of individuals to act independently to make their own free choices. According to Hartsock (1990), human agency generally refers to
the capacity of individuals to act independently to affect change through individual decision making.

This repositioning of power offering students human agency challenges historical traditions and structures in an education system. Structure refers to those factors that seem to limit or influence opportunities that individuals have to affect change (Hartsock, 1990). The institutional structure of education as a political organisation limits the human agency afforded students as structure can determine or limit an agent and his or her decisions. Giving power to students involves them comprehending their developed perceptions of the structures and circumstances of their environment.

In this study, the students are the people in the changing education and school systems where resistance has become virtually impossible, where the students have become passive objects (Hartsock, 1990), where students are powerless and without human agency.

1.4. Data collection and analysis

The two schools selected for the study are unique sites where different approaches to NAPLAN testing and preparation for NAPLAN are practised. This study seeks to explore the impact of NAPLAN implementation on middle years students in these schools. Curriculum, pedagogy and school-based assessment practices may vary between the two schools due to school-based decision making. By privileging middle years students’ voice over the period of a year, this study set out to determine middle years students’ perception of any such changes, and their reaction to the consequential impact of these changes.

Privileging middle years students’ voices means positioning them as central to the study. The students are therefore the focus of the two case studies. Data collected from parents, teachers and school managers is used to provide insight into the adults’ perceptions of those of the middle years students in relation to NAPLAN testing. Privileging middle years students ‘voice’ involves collecting measurements from a sample student population. It was decided to include the Year three students; although not defined as belonging to the middle school, these students would have no prior understanding of NAPLAN, therefore, may offer insights which could be used for
comparison purposes. As the students are the major focus of this study they are involved in data collection throughout the study. The research population also includes parents, middle years teachers and two managers; the Principal of a Queensland government school and the School Facilitator (official title) of a Queensland independent school. Although the student population was selected via criteria, the parent, teacher and management populations were purely voluntary. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.5. Summary

Following is a brief overview of the 8 chapters which constitute this thesis.

Chapter 2 introduces literature relevant to the middle years student, educational assessment practices, NAPLAN, and student voice. The Literature Review points to the absence of ‘student voice’ in relation to high-stakes assessment and emphasises why their voice is important, providing a platform for this research.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology, including details of the research design and data collection and analysis. This chapter provides information regarding the stages of the study, the chosen data sites and population, fieldwork undertaken and the processes used, and justification of the chosen analytical procedure.

Chapter 4 presents the results and analysis of the structured interviews with the managers, the classroom observations, and the teacher and parent semi-structured focus group interviews in order to position the reader in the research project.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the core of this thesis presenting student data collected from each school site. One chapter is dedicated to each school site. Both chapters probe the student data results and discuss the findings of the study in response to the research question - How do students in the middle years of schooling perceive and react to NAPLAN preparation and testing? Chapters 5 and 6 conclude with a summation of findings.

Chapter 7 discusses commonalities and divergences between students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing from each research school.

Chapter 8 presents identified links between the level of NAPLAN focus adopted by a school and the students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. Also addressed in Chapter 8 are the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the study.
Chapter 1 has set the scene for this study, explaining the background, introducing the research questions, and providing a rationale for the study in the context of twenty-first century education. This chapter also briefly outlined the research design, methodology and proposed analytical procedure for the study.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Analysis of literature exploring theoretical studies in the field of middle years education and assessment has led to the identification of a substantive issue, the absence of ‘student voice’ in matters regarding NAPLAN implementation and middle years students, which this study set out to investigate. This issue is identifiable through the review of literature which provides a comprehensive overview of three main research strands that inform this study: middle years education; assessment with a focus on NAPLAN; and student voice.

This review is organised into three key areas. The first section, 2.2, discusses middle years education by exploring literature to identify themes and issues related to young adolescents. As well as explaining middle years terminology and outlining signifying practices, this section also explores middle years schooling globally, nationally, and at a local level, presenting research which has informed middle years policy and middle years education in relation to assessment. Section 2.3 presents a conceptualisation of assessment, examining its complexity through various definitions, forms and purposes. Also discussed are changes that occur to curriculum and pedagogy when assessment is high stakes, and the practice of using assessment to gauge the quality of schools and their staff. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority’s (ACARA) National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) will be examined. NAPLAN testing is explained through discussion of various perspectives, and its purposes and procedures. This section shares perceived issues in relation to NAPLAN. Section 2.4 discusses current literature related to ‘student voice’ as this review and overall research focuses on the lived experience of the students themselves and the absence of their ‘voices’ in matters affecting their futures. The final section, 2.5 will provide a summary of the literature review.

2.2. Middle years education

This section provides an overview of middle years education globally, nationally and locally and explores existing literature to identify themes and issues related to the
education of young adolescents. It examines current discourses about middle schooling and identifies the middle school and the middle years students, including their individual characteristics and needs. To contextualise the later consideration of the research question—How do students in the middle years of schooling perceive and react to NAPLAN preparation and testing?—the discussion includes issues to be considered for assessment practices to be effective in the context of young adolescent education.

2.2.1. Middle years terminology
In order to engage in this discussion, understanding some key words is required.

The term ‘middle schooling’ is well-used both in common vocabulary and in educational discourse, however, a review of the literature reveals a variety of interpretations. While the interchangeable terms, ‘middle schooling’, ‘middle school’, and ‘middle years’ are encountered widely in educational literature they are not well defined. For the purpose of this study, Australian definitions have been utilised where possible.

According to Chadbourne and Pendergast (2005), ‘middle schooling’ is the adoption of a whole philosophy to accommodate the physical, social, emotional and educational needs of a unique group of students. For the purpose of this study ‘middle schooling’ will refer to the educational philosophy underpinning the impetus for educational change for young adolescents (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005); changing more than just bricks and mortar by providing, “an organisational unit, separate from primary and secondary school, which provides education for students in the middle years” (Carrington, 2002, p. 2).

Young people in the middle years are often broadly characterised by the term ‘young adolescents’. Bahr (2005) suggests that there is no defined meaning of ‘adolescence’ globally and curriculum documentation refers to a variety of age groups as the ‘middle years’. Education Queensland has no approved definition for ‘middle years’, however, according to the Queensland School Curriculum Council, the middle years are considered to be school Years 5 to 10, typically students are aged 10-15 years.

The professional organisation Adolescent Success formerly the Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA), the Australia-wide peak body organisation dedicated exclusively to the education, development and growth of young adolescents, in 2008
released the Position Paper on *Middle Schooling: People, Practices and Places*, which defined middle schooling as “an intentional approach to teaching and learning that is responsive and appropriate to the full range of needs, interests and achievements of middle years students in formal and informal schooling contexts” (MYSA, 2008, p. 1). The middle years are described as from around age ten to fifteen, spanning the years from childhood to adolescence. For this discussion, ‘young adolescents’ and ‘middle years’ will encompass all students in the 10 to 15 years age bracket or the school Years 5 to 10. The *MYSA Position Paper* specifies three elements necessary for middle schooling:

1. Clear philosophy relevant to the context

2. Comprehensive range of signature practices to engage young adolescents in relevant, meaningful and challenging learning, along with organisational initiatives to facilitate their implementation, such as:
   - higher order thinking strategies
   - integrated and disciplinary curricula that are negotiated, relevant and challenging
   - heterogeneous and flexible student groupings
   - cooperative learning and collaborative teaching
   - small learning communities that provide students with sustained individual attention in a safe and healthy school environment
   - emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships through extended contact with a small number of teachers and a consistent student cohort
   - authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations
   - democratic governance and shared leadership
   - parental and community involvement in student learning

3. Evidence-based approach with clearly articulated outcomes, such as:
   - developing current and lifelong learning attributes
   - enhanced academic outcomes
   - creation of a love of learning. (MYSA, 2008, p. 1)

Highlighted in this list is specific reference to the nature of assessment that is recognised as producing optimal learning and engagement for young adolescents.

**2.2.1.1. Authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations**
As well as powerful knowledge, an integrated curriculum, higher-order critical thinking and problem solving, authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations embedded in a real-world context is identified as important for successful schooling for young adolescents, not just by MYSA but by key researchers in the field (Barratt, 1998; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Lingard, 2005; NMSA, 2003). In conjunction with authentic and reflective assessment, which includes a variety of assessment methods for scaffolding and assessing students’ thinking skill development (Hilton & Hilton, 2010), is authentic instruction (Lingard, 2003) which involves learning and teaching that excites students in twenty-first century classrooms by engaging them with work of intellectual quality (Horan, 2010; Lingard, 2003) where they are able to identify the links to their world. To best cater for adolescents’ developing cognitive needs, the establishment of high expectations is needed along with the required support and quality learning enabling students to achieve such expectations (Crosswell, Bahr, Pendergast & Newhouse Maiden, 2010; Lingard, 2003; NMSA, 2003).

In Australia, national standardised tests are pen-and-paper tests (Garrick & Keogh, 2010) with high-stakes attached. Critics of national high-stakes assessment practices such as Cumming, Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2011) and Plank and Condliffe (2013) warn of many unintended negative consequences of attaching high-stakes to assessment including narrowing the curriculum, where teachers merely drill test content to achieve improved test results; where the curriculum lacks depth (teaching-to-the-test), where teachers coach students how to become successful test-takers (test wisdom) and where teachers focus learning and teaching on select groups of students to achieve maximum improvement, none of which involves high levels of academic rigour. Some preparation of students to participate in the types of tests is advised. Clearly lack of prior experience could equally invalidate the student outcomes.

Identified as characteristic of middle years students is disengagement from their learning. Tasks requiring little challenge can encourage non-participation and under-achievement (Hilton, & Hilton, 2010). Alternatively, the development of middle years students’ intense curiosity utilising a large range of intellectual pursuits, where students are challenged and engaged, can result in high achievement (Crosswell et al., 2010; Lingard, 2005). A study conducted by Swain and Pendergast (2013) using Bloom’s
Revised Taxonomy to analyse the intellectual level of questioning in the 2009 NAPLAN literacy tests found that, on the whole, the tasks required low levels of cognitive ability.

Educational reform designed to accommodate the needs of the Australian middle years student still appears to be high on the political agenda. The implementation of the Australian National Curriculum and ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the middle years have prompted Queensland to relocate Year 7 students to secondary schools aligning the Queensland school structure with the majority of Australian schools.

By 2015 Year 7 students in Queensland’s state, Catholic and independent schools will engage in ‘Junior Secondary’ schooling (Queensland Government, 2010), which will include students from Years 7, 8 and 9 and will be based on practical approaches as well as the evidence base on teaching young adolescents. Professional development has been offered to in-service teachers electing to teach in Junior Secondary schooling and universities are encouraged to guide pre-service teachers in this area. This significant reform follows ‘Six Principles for Junior Schooling’ developed by the Queensland Government.

1. Distinct identity
2. Quality teaching
3. Student well-being
4. Parent and community involvement
5. Leadership
6. Local decision making

(Queensland Government, 2010)

The guiding principles include specific purpose built areas and events designed for this age group, increased contact with fewer teachers than senior high school and pastoral care, middle years pedagogy including authentic assessment, and site specific and student specific decision making. However, while NAPLAN still exists in Queensland schools there is no guarantee that the unintended negative consequences of such
assessment practices will not over-ride the guiding principles associated with this state educational reform. ACARA’s (2013) explanation of the purpose of Australia’s NAPLAN testing as being not only to report student achievement but to improve student learning may be at odds with recommendations for successfully educating middle years learners.

Importantly, while aspects of the middle years philosophy have been clearly defined in Australia there appears to be no universal consensus on all aspects of middle schooling philosophy internationally (Bahr, 2005).

2.2.2. International perspectives
In the United States of America (USA) educationalists such as Charles W. Eliot (President of Harvard College) searched for better ways to meet the needs of middle years’ students as early as 1872 (George, Stevenson, Thomason & Beane, 1992). However, middle schooling reform did not emerge until the 1960s (George & Shewey, 1994; Moore & Stefanich, 1990) and is considered by many to be USA’s most extensive educational reform of the 20th century (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Development and acceptance of middle schooling in the USA have not been universal with some believing it is not the saviour of the young adolescent it was expected to be (Dinham & Rowe, 2007).

Carrington (2002) suggested the perceived failure of the USA’s middle years movement to be a misdirected focus targeted towards ‘at risk’ groups (minority urban communities, lower socioeconomic profile students, poorly performing students). In this sense, middle years’ reform was often seen as an experiment in the provision of alternative education for at risk students (Carrington, 2002); concentrating on poorer socio-economic areas with high African-American and Hispanic populations (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Main and Bryer (2005) agree with Carrington suggesting that implementation of Middle Years reform is the problem. They propose that a combination of incomplete implementation by teachers, uncertain administrative leadership, and little consideration for the local needs of the school and the community has seen a more recent shift against Middle School reform in the USA. Rising concern with the outcomes of middle schools has seen a swing in some states to K-Grade 8 schools (Dinham & Rowe, 2007, p.32) followed by secondary school. Research evidence on middle schooling in the USA is mixed with findings indicating existing
issues such as transitions from junior schools to middle schools and then again to senior schools cause problems that negatively affect students; progress on academic outcomes is uneven; conditions for learning are sub-optimal; the vision for middle schooling has not been fully implemented; and waning parental support. However, Dinham and Rowe (2007) suggest that there may be promise for the future. If whole-school reforms and professional development identified in the USA research as promising models for addressing academic and developmental needs of adolescents are fully implemented, and the developmental needs of middle years students do not take second place to a focus on academic achievement fuelled by an emphasis on increased accountability through academic testing, middle schooling may be successful in American schools. However, McEwin and Green (2011) warn that ‘[t]he problem may lie with implementing and maintaining these developmentally responsive programs and practices in the face of standardized testing pressures…’ (p.30) resulting in a return to their two tier system.

Although pressure began to grow for purpose-built schools for middle years students in England in the 1950s, the implementation of intentional approaches to middle years education was not made possible in England until the Education Act of 1964. The early 1970s witnessed many English schools reorganised into a three tier system: first, middle, and upper schools. Although age ranges varied between education authorities, The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education England, 1967) indicated that middle schools would provide the most appropriate form of education for students aged eight to thirteen years. By the end of the 1970s many English middle schools had been established.

A review of England’s established middle schools in 1979 to 1980 revealed that middle schools were experiencing many of the same strengths and weaknesses also found in England’s primary and secondary schools. Secondary School style conventions and pressures, for example subject compartmentalisation, were influencing middle school practices and therefore the long-standing division between primary and secondary education still existed. It was proposed by some educators such as Hargreaves (1986) that if middle schools were to further develop the curriculum, methods and attitudes commonly found in English junior schools, for example integrated curriculum, the concept of middle schooling may succeed in becoming a new and progressive force.
The economic recession of the early 1980s resulted in cutbacks in education spending in England and a ‘general disenchantment’ with education took hold (Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980 p. 41). During this same period the decrease in the number of school aged children was impacting middle school intakes and like most schools in England middle schools were forced to face and cope with the consequences of falling numbers and financial constraint. The difficulties inherent with being positioned in the middle were exacerbated. A reduction in student numbers saw the number of middle schools halved. By the 1990s a series of ‘Black Papers’ had been released which argued for a return to traditional teaching methods in England’s schools (Gillard, 2008).

A selection of international reports significantly impacted the middle schooling reform in Australia, including Turning Points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century, published by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989). As well as identifying a substantial number of American students as at-risk of being ill prepared for adulthood, this report provided a vision for middle schooling. The eight elements were:

- Creating a community for learning
- Teaching a core of common knowledge
- Ensuring success for all students
- Empowering teachers and administrators
- Preparing teachers for the middle grades
- Improving academic performance through health and fitness
- Reengaging families in the education of adolescents
- Connecting schools and communities. (Carnegie Council, 1989)

In the US, a further influential report, Turning Points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century (Jackson & Davis, 2000), contained seven recommendations for middle schooling with a strong focus on curriculum, instruction and assessment. In 2003 the National Middle School Association (NMSA) released a position paper, This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents. The paper outlined eight characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents and six program elements (NMSA, 2003). Significant for its extensive, critical review of middle school international literature, Teaching and Learning in Middle Schooling—a report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Dinham & Rowe, 2007) located substantial evidence of the potential positive effects of an enlightened approach to middle schooling.
While the middle school movement in England can be traced over 60 years and in the United States of America (USA) over more than a century, the middle schooling orientation adopted within the Australian middle schooling context as “an intentional approach to teaching and learning that is responsive and appropriate to the full range of needs, interests and achievements of middle years’ students in formal and informal schooling contexts” (MYSA, 2008) is different, and in comparison, relatively new.

2.2.3. Middle years education in Australia

The Middle School movement in Australia has seen the emergence of influential studies and reports which have resulted in policies and action plan development by state educational authorities. The National Middle Schooling Project conducted in South Australia in the 1990s developed out of growing concerns about student disengagement. This project provided significant direction for programs and strategies developed for many schools across Australia (Barratt, 1998; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2007). Also influential in highlighting a multi-layered approach to reform strategies for curriculum, pedagogy, and school organisation and structure was Cormack and Cumming’s (1995) report, *From Alienation to Engagement*, a project managed by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) commencing in 1994 and focusing on issues related to the alienation of students in school Years 5 to 8.

For more than a decade there have been a number of Australian middle schooling reports. The *National Middle Schooling Project* developed principles and practices commonly considered conducive to the development of the young adolescent (Cumming, 1998). At the same time, Barratt (1998) aimed to identify a collective view of the needs of young adolescents such as: identity, relationships, purpose, empowerment, success, rigour and safety. Barratt (1998) identified the underpinning values of middle schooling school-based practices as well as three key strategies: powerful knowledge, integrated curriculum, and authentic assessment, to meet the needs of young adolescents. The *Middle Years Research Development (MYRAD) Project* (2002) used general design elements provided by Hill and Russell’s (1999) *Systemic, Whole School Reform of the Middle Years of Schooling* as a basis for their program designs (Hill & Russell, 1999). As well as listing the principles of middle schooling Chadbourne (2001), in a project commissioned by the Australian Education Union, identified and considered related middle schooling issues. This study was followed by a
Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) funded project aimed at investigating the success of existing state and territory initiated literacy and numeracy programs for a number of target groups. The reports, *Beyond the Middle: A report about literacy and numeracy development of target group students in the middle years of schooling* (Luke et al., Vols 1 & 2), identified the need for a new ‘research development and practice with a stronger focus on engagement and demand’ (Luke et al., 2003). A further project funded by the Department of Education and Training (DET) (Victoria) and conducted by the University of Melbourne 1998-2001, *Middle years research and development project (MYRAD)*, identified and recommended practices and strategies in the key areas of: teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment, and school organisation (MYRAD, 2002).

In 2005, Pendergast et al., commissioned by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), set out to explore the promotion of lifelong learning in the middle years. *Developing Lifelong Learners in the Middle Phase of Learning* (Pendergast et al., 2005) not only identified the key elements–structures, cultures, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, leadership and relationships–but also a refined model for sustainable school reform including three broad phases which linked middle schooling with lifelong learning: initiation, development and consolidation. *Scaffolding Literacy in the Middle Years* (Culican, Milburn & Oakley, 2006), a project funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training, identified and reported the need for further research into middle schooling assessment, assessment of literacy approaches and their impact on the transition of middle years students to upper secondary.

In 2008 three significant publications were produced. The first, *QCAR Framework Evaluation Project (Phase 1)* (Goos et al., 2008) reported findings from the evaluation of the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework undertaken by the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), international assessment literature, and data sources for tracking QCAR framework over time. The second was the *MYSA Position Paper–Middle Schooling: People, practices and places* (MYSA, 2008), which supplied a definition of the middle years along with elements of middle schooling including:

- a clear philosophy;
• a range of relevant, challenging and engaging practices;
• an evidence-based approach (MYSA, 2008).

This report used the concepts of people, practices and places to highlight the parameters necessary to attend to the needs of young adolescents for effective middle years education. Its purpose was to enhance learning and teaching by identifying and responding to the unique needs of the young adolescent by engaging committed educators as a means of developing a love of learning and positioning school as a significant component of the middle years students’ lives (Pendergast, 2010, p. 9). Finally, a study involving 83 government schools aimed at setting up a monitoring system focusing on the middle years students’ progress in a selection of Key Learning Areas, was commissioned by the Department of Training and the Arts, Queensland Government. The *Longitudinal Study of Teaching and Learning in Queensland State Schools* (Stage 1) (Mills et al., 2009) reported on areas including: pedagogy; assessment; performance; the alignment of pedagogies, assessment and performance; school environment; and equity.

Findings from these studies resulted in increased awareness of the specific characteristics and developmental needs of young adolescents. Contemporary research identified the onset of early adolescence as signaling for many students a reduction in learning outcomes and a marked increase in the gap between low and high achieving students (Lingard, Ladwig & Mills, 2001). Early adolescent students may also develop behaviour problems including depression and substance abuse (Brighten, 2007; de Jong, 2003; Fuller, McGraw & Goodyear, 2002). According to Carrington (2006), these issues are connected with disengagement and underachievement, and alienation from school. As early adolescence is identified as a significant stage where adult life skills are developed, it is considered to be important that these years are not identified as just troublesome and challenging for teachers, but are viewed as a period of opportunity for sophisticated skill development where increased levels of abstract knowledge can be introduced (Buckingham, 2007; Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2006; Roeser, van der Wolfe & Stobel, 2001).

Early adolescents experience development more rapidly than at any other time in their lives, excluding infancy (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1996), and have significantly different needs from those students who are older and younger
(Education Queensland, 2004). These needs are also significantly different from those fulfilled by traditional education systems in the past (Carrington, 2006) resulting in a possible mismatch between the requirements of the 21st century adolescent and traditional classroom practices.

There have been dramatic changes in society and rapid changes for young adolescents of today (Barratt, 1998; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2010; Schurr, 2004). For example, the 21st century student is likely to do most of their shopping electronically, may inhabit space shuttles, may be able to determine the intelligence of their offspring, will be employed in jobs not yet invented and will have 3 to 5 career changes in their life time (Carrington, 2006; Pendergast, 2010; Schurr, 2004). Young adolescents have the world of information at their fingertips enabling them to communicate around the globe (Carrington, 2006; Pendergast, 2010; Schurr, 2004). People almost everywhere can access the news instantly and with a 24-hour news cycle, time zones are no longer a concern and geography is no longer an isolator (Pendergast, 2005). Students feel the excitement of the new information age and global society, and the changes and developments in technology. The way we access and use information requires schools to respond (Carrington, 2006; Pendergast, 2010; Schurr, 2004). Despite these social changes over the last decade, there had been only moderate change in this area of schooling (Barratt, 1998; Carrington, 2006; Pendergast, 2010; Schurr, 2004).

Middle years research has resulted in the development of a shared vision for Australian middle years students’ education, however, most state and territory governments and educations systems in Australia have developed and implemented middle school approaches and programs, rather than middle schools per se (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). There are relatively few middle schools in Australia; middle years initiatives are carried out within the existing P-6 and 7-12, or P-12 school structures. Although the 2002 Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project (cited in Dinham & Row, 2007) showed positive advances in many areas, finding also indicated the need for further development in as many areas (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Findings from the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training’s commissioned review of middle schooling in Australia (2003) found a need:

1. for a generation of middle years conceptualization and research pathways;
2. to fund a co-operative, multi-partner professional development strategy on middle years school innovation;
3. to focus systematic activities on renewing mainstream pedagogy in middle years schooling;
4. to align school-based innovations in middle years pedagogy assessment to focus on student outcomes;
5. to integrate and align approaches to assessing and reporting on social and academic student outcomes;
6. to commission research into patterns of school leadership for the middle years that sustain improved student outcomes; and
7. to support and research distinctive middle years teacher education programs and career pathways. (Cited in Dinham & Rowe, 2007)

The 1980s to the 1990s saw middle schooling in Australia approached with great enthusiasm, however, such enthusiasm was not matched with systematic implementation. Many middle schooling initiatives were, ‘ad hoc, localised, fragmented, ‘grab bags’ of strategies; undocumented, unevaluated, and with little evidence of impact on student achievement’ (Dinham & Rowe, 2007, p. 41). For middle schooling to survive in Australia, the next phase requires systematic co-ordination, ongoing evaluation, and support from governments to fund initiatives such as teacher professional development (Dinham & Rowe, 2007).

The middle years are crucial years of schooling and impact students’ attitudes to lifelong learning (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Pendergast and Bahr, 2010). How critical these years are is summed up by the explanation provided by MCEETYA (2008) in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.

[T]he years are an important period of learning, in which knowledge of fundamental disciples are developed, yet this is also a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning. Student motivation and engagement in these years is critical, and can be influenced by tailoring approaches to teaching with learning activities and learning environments that specifically consider the needs of middle years students. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 10)

2.2.3.1. A Queensland perspective—Research informing policy
In 1999 the Queensland State Education 2010 document (QSE 2010) was developed (Education Queensland, 2000). This document seeks to align 21st century education policy with the changing nature of society. It highlights the following features:
• explosive growth in communication and information technology,
• increased student diversity,
• changes to families, cultures and economies (Education Queensland, 2000).

The policy document recommends Queensland State Schools be ‘re-conceptualised’ as part of a new ‘learning society’ and elaborated further the changes for teachers under the heading of ‘The Middle School Reform Agenda’, with the following recommendations:

• Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of young adolescents.
• Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
• Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
• Organise relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
• Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students the best.
• Provide a safe and healthy environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
• Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development. (Education Queensland, 2000)

A review by Luke and Freebody (2000) identified strengths and weaknesses in the way literacy was taught in Queensland schools. While making reference to the lack of preparedness of Queensland schools in relation to educational futures, Luke and Freebody (2000) emphasised the critical importance of these challenges for Queensland State education and offered new pathways for charting the repertoire of practices students require. The Literate Futures Strategy was implemented over a period of stages during 2001–2004. Schools were provided with materials and professional learning opportunities in developing whole school literacy strategies.

*The Middle Phase of Learning, A Report to the Minister* (2003) (Queensland Government, 2003) recommended schools and school systems implement a renewed vision of the Middle Phase of Learning. This report urged the establishing or strengthening of management structures to ensure accountability for a greater degree of alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices of upper primary
and lower secondary schooling. The report also suggested immediate and systematic professional learning and development of teachers and principals. This included recognising and supporting their strategic role in delivering the desired outcomes for the Middle Phase of Learning. The report further identified the need for reconsideration of pre-service teacher education programs and finally that those teachers working in the Middle Phase of Learning should be recognised and rewarded (Queensland Government, 2003).

Education Queensland developed the *Middle Phase of Learning State School Action Plan* (2004) which included guidelines directed towards middle years reform within the existing two tiered system and involved more than changing bricks and mortar. They emphasised democratic governance and community involvement to maximise student achievement and included strategies for developing a love of learning through appropriate and relevant curriculum and student engagement (Education Queensland, 2004). As many consider teachers as the catalyst to make a difference, a major focus was on staffing middle grades with developmentally aware, supportive teachers (Education Queensland, 2004) who possessed such characteristics as warmth, enthusiasm, optimism, flexibility and spontaneity, and as well as a thorough knowledge of subject matter and a wide repertoire of pedagogic strategies (Schurr & Forte, 2009). A further point addressed the need to prepare beginning teachers to teach in the Middle Phase of Learning so that they are knowledgeable about the distinct learning needs and characteristics of the early adolescent and are able to supply an appropriate and supportive classroom environment (Carrington, 2006; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007).

In recent years in Queensland, the *Flying Start White Paper* recommended, endorsed and implemented the move of Year 7 into secondary schools with the introduction of a Junior Secondary sector for Years 7-9 which incorporates six guiding principles: distinct identity; quality teaching; student well-being; parent and community involvement; leadership; and local decision-making (Queensland Government, 2010). This is the result of ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the middle years, the current transition at the beginning of the crucial Year 8, and the poor performance—when compared to other states and territories in Australia—of Queensland students in NAPLAN testing (www.myschool.edu.au).
Queensland Government funded studies have identified and acknowledged issues related to the Middle Phase of Learning for over a decade, resulting in documented recommendations and the development of productive pathways for addressing such issues. A study of the literature indicates a need for further research into the implementation of these recommendations. This study raises interesting questions about the impact of NAPLAN in Queensland schools and a possible mismatch with the current assessment regime coinciding with the new national curriculum. The research serves as a reminder that it is paramount to provide opportunities for the development of positive curriculum, assessment and pedagogical experiences that do not reinforce cycles of failure. It provides a platform for further research into creating supportive school structures for middle years students. The literature indicates that teachers, teacher educators, administrators and policy makers have shown serious intent to address the specific needs of middle years students as they progress through school to ensure that they remain engaged with learning and achieve well, but must look at past experiences in relation to attaching high-stakes to assessment practices.

2.3. **Assessment**

Assessment in its many forms is used in various venues such as: the workplace, the medical arena, agencies granting licences, and in schools from early years through to post-graduate study. Section 2.3 draws on the research associated with educational assessment and examines educational assessment practices, procedures and purposes through the lens of Middle Years philosophy and the expectations of assessment practices that align with recommended Middle Years practices.

Assessment is an invaluable resource for linking wider society to the world of education and can be altered to fit specific needs: teacher needs, school needs, local, state and government education board needs, and not least of all students’ needs (Broadfoot & Black, 2010). In general terms the literature defines ‘assessment’ in an educational sense as encompassing all activities undertaken by students, teachers and educational authorities that provide information about student learning and in turn inform future learning, teaching and policy decisions (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carr et al., 2000; Crooks, 1988; Natriello, 1987; Sadler, 1989).

2.3.1. **Defining assessment**
Research literature on educational assessment is extensive, however, definitional problems and perspectives on assessment, are also plentiful (Anderson, 2002; Broadfoot & Black, 2010). Rowntree (1987) viewed assessment in education as:

…occurring whenever one person, in some kind of interaction, direct or indirect, with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, or abilities and attitudes of that other person (p. 4).

Some, such as Anderson (2002) simply suggest that assessment involves a full range of processes and procedures for gathering information about student learning so that informed decisions can be made. Educational authorities such as, the Department of Education and Training, Queensland, use the term assessment when referring to information collected by teachers about students’ learning during both formal tasks—carried out as structured information gathering for summative purposes—and informal tasks—carried out as part of an everyday teaching/learning activity (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007). Others do not view assessment quite so simplistically, with research ranging from a focus on assessment for formative purposes to guide future teaching and learning to assessment for summative purposes to grade and report student achievement.

Wineberg (1997), viewing assessment from an administrative perspective, proposes that educational assessment represents a commitment to high academic standards and school accountability. Black and Wiliam (1998) declare that assessment is at the centre of the learning process and therefore is a central aspect of teaching. Touching on the significance of this relationship, Earl and Katz (2005) explain assessment as complex, dynamic and highly intricate and argue that it should not be viewed as a singular entity, but as having a reciprocal relationship with teaching and learning. Others, for example, Airasian and Russell (2008) and Shepard (2000) also view assessment as a process. Airasian and Russell (2008) expand the notion of assessment as merely gathering information to encompass ‘strategic selection, synthesis and interpretation of information to aid classroom decision making’ (p. 2). Shepard (2000) explains assessment as a process which is carried out during instruction for the purpose of improving learning and teaching; a process which does not commence at the conclusion of the learning. Diagnostically, assessment provides vital information at the point of planning when teachers are identifying curriculum intent (Black & Wiliam, 2009;
Cowie & Bell, 1999; Shepard, 2000). Formatively, assessment plays an important role when teachers are deciding how the learning will evolve (learning experiences) and, for summative purposes, when determining what evidence will demonstrate student learning (assessment method) (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Cowie & Bell, 1999; Shepard, 2000). It is therefore realistic to assume that assessment is cyclical and only concludes at the end of a learning cycle in preparation for the next learning and teaching cycle (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Harlen, 2005; Wiliam, 2011).

James and McCormick (2009) describe educational assessment as a process to promote learning autonomy which when constructed and employed skilfully can lead to improved quality of learning for students. Burke (2009) agrees and suggests that assessment at its best has the potential to encourage student self-awareness and consequentially the development of independent learning (Burke, 2009). According to Crooks (1988), assessment is one of the most potent forces affecting student learning. The types of assessment employed in an educational environment are plentiful although basically belong to one of two paradigms: psychometric assessment or performance assessment.

### 2.3.1.1. Psychometric assessment/testing

Assessment approaches can take many forms. The approach that commonly underpins assessment such as NAPLAN testing is a psychometric approach to measuring knowledge or other attributes. Psychometric assessment uses standardised instruments, and measures a perceived objective or attribute (Cumming, 2012). Norm referenced approaches through percentile rankings or against criterion referenced standards can be used to profile an individual student’s achievement in comparison to their peers or to an expected standard (Cumming, 2012). Psychometric assessment is conducted using a test that involves standardised administration, has norms and a formal interpretive procedure. It is typically multiple-choice, where students choose from three to five provided responses, and is used to evaluate student performance, even when criterion referenced, in comparison to other students or between one group of students and another (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008). There are advantages and disadvantages of using psychometric testing (Cumming, 2012; Stiggins, 2005).

Providing students, as well as teachers and parents, with an easy to grade mechanism for determining how they compare to their peers is one of the advantages of
psychometric testing (Cumming, 2012). Another advantage of psychometric testing is that it provides insight into what concepts need to be re-taught and reviewed (Brown, Irving & Keegan, 2007). Information gathered from psychometric testing is used to make administrative decisions with regard to programs and other aspects of the system or to make decisions about the student (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008).

Despite widespread support from educational authorities of standardised tests, there have been a number of criticisms. Critics of psychometric testing argue that equitable assessment that strives to identify as validly and reliably as possible what students know and can do should offer students opportunity to demonstrate or perform what they know and can do (Rowntree, 1987). Gronlund and Waugh (2008) suggest that psychometric assessment consisting of standardised achievement tests, aptitude tests, and many other traditional style assessments do not challenge students to formulate their own answers nor do they further assess a student’s knowledge base of a subject. Other critics strongly argue against such testing which diminishes the use of assessment as a tool to directly assist student learning and suggest that such assessment should not exist (Wyse & Torrance, 2009) and that which does should be summarily shredded (Popham, 2009).

Another disadvantage of psychometric testing raised by Gronlund and Waugh (2008) is that such tests are developed externally and are therefore not useful in measuring student achievement of the learning taking place in the classroom at a school level across a range of subjects or year levels. They are most often achievement tests designed for a particular grade level and most commonly for English (literacy) and Mathematics (numeracy). Popham (2009) also identifies the issue that psychometric tests may be set by those who do not teach with no knowledge of the school curriculum. They are often commercially produced and are accompanied by an instruction manual for administering and marking (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008, Popham, 2009). Broadfoot and Black (2010) add to these criticisms in relation to large-scale test programs, especially national test programs which are developed and interpreted beyond the school site but which are administered within the school site. Broadfoot and Black (2010) express concern that traditional test-based assessment focuses on specific knowledge or skills, decontextualises assessment from the classroom and halts learning when assessing.
Psychometric tests have restrictive limitations regarding time and place and generally involve the use of paper-and-pencil standardised tests which have relatively low levels of task realism and task complexity (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008). Falk and Darling-Hammond (2010) highlight three criticisms of this style of assessment:

1. students select a single correct answer therefore skills requiring higher order thinking and performance are not assessed;
2. it discovers students’ deficits and does not provide valuable information regarding how the task was approached;
3. it presents a narrow picture of the curriculum with only superficial coverage of content.

Cumming (2012) also raises the point that psychometric testing does not allow for student demonstration of task mastery.

Although psychometric assessment is able to measure a plethora of attributes it is time consuming and costly and does not assess the full gamut of curriculum or developmental expectations of 21st century education. NAPLAN testing covers literacy and numeracy only, is in standardised form, and is administered under strict conditions. Whilst the range of tasks that can be assessed using paper-and-pencil tests stretches from simple to complex, an alternative is required when skills cannot be adequately assessed using this method.

2.3.1.2. Performance assessment

The alternative to psychometric testing is performance assessment which allows for demonstration of a variety of learning that has taken place. Performance assessment is usually school and classroom based and focuses on the doing, where quality and mastery are assessed by teacher observation and judgment. Queensland has participated in school-based assessment practices for high stakes purposes since the 1970s, longer and to a greater extent than other Australian states, and views school-based assessment in itself as an approach which reflects an attempt to encourage school centered innovation (QSA, 2010).

A benefit of conducting assessment at the school level is that teachers are treated as professionals and teachers play a central role in decision making and development of
assessments that are linked to learning (McCollow, 2006). Harlen (2005) proposes that the most effective and reliable assessments are those involving teachers in the assessment construction. Advocates for school-based performance assessment, such as McCollow (2006), Sadler (1989) and Wiliam (2011), suggest that involving teachers in the design of assessment activities, within the learning process, allows opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning through preferred performance. This may well result in increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes. McCollow (2006) proposes that most effective curriculum innovations are those which are school-based and in which curriculum and assessment objectives are in harmony. Performance assessment which is conducted well allows room for students to be included in the assessment process and take ownership, plan and evaluate their own learning (McCollow, 2006). Performance assessment which is school-based is advantageous to teachers because it informs the learning and teaching (Sadler, 1989) and benefits students because assessment is directly linked to learning (McCollow, 2006). An increase in teacher involvement in assessment may ensure better curriculum coverage and therefore improved construct validity, that is, the match between what is intended to be learned and what the assessment is assessing (Broadfoot & Black, 2010), as it involves, ‘the particular behaviours, thought processes or talents that are said to be assessed (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005, p. 168).

Disadvantages of performance assessment are associated with reliability, that is, consistency of scoring and grading. Sadler (1998) raises the issue of reliability and comparability of teacher judgements when assessment is performance based and suggests that teachers should be allowed time to make judgements, reflect on their judgements and interact professionally. He suggests that by participating in internal and external moderation teachers develop improved understanding of assessment and classroom practice. Furthermore, Sadler (1998) emphasises that the moderation process is not limited to providing reliable assessment results but also the opportunity to bring about improved pedagogical and curriculum practice.

Lingard, Ladwig, Mills, Bahr, Chant and Warry (2001) also warn that if school-based performance assessment practices are not managed carefully they may result in failure to deliver intellectually challenging and relevant learning experiences. To address this
issue Airasian and Russell (2008) suggests rigorous, multiple forms of assessment that require students to apply what they are learning to real world tasks, including:

- standards-based projects and assignments that require students to apply their knowledge and skills;
- clearly defined rubrics (or criteria) to facilitate a fair and consistent evaluation of student work;
- opportunities for students to benefit from the feedback of teachers, peers, and outside authorities (Airasian and Russell, 2008).

Cumming (1998) recommends methods of performance assessment which allow students to demonstrate and record their learning. He states that assessment involving the collection of student work samples which are organised and used as representative of student work give students more opportunity to demonstrate a range of strengths in a variety of tasks. Advocates for performance assessment such as Carrington (2002), Chadbourne and Pendergast (2005), and Stowell (2000) argue that assessment should enhance both student learning, and the teaching and learning process, and by allowing students to represent their knowledge in a variety of ways on a variety of tasks as suggested by Cumming (1998), a much better picture of student ability can be achieved.

As we offer new learning experiences to our students we need to alter our assessment practices to effectively capture the range and complexity of this new learning (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005). Assessment practices must be, contemporary to address the new goals of learning and the aims of the curriculum such as problem solving and collaboration, and comprehensive; in that they must cover a wide range of knowledge, skills and processes (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005). To achieve assessment reliability there must remain consistency in curriculum and consistency of learning expectations without which appropriate assessment cannot be considered.

There are many sound instructional practices that are part of the repertoire of good teaching. The purpose of assessment is to validate or ensure achievement of objectives and to improve instruction, if necessary, by means of identification and subsequent remediation of problems (Popham, 2009) and to ensure students achieve targeted learning goals within a set time frame (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006). Student progress towards achieving learning goals is monitored (Popham, 2009) by comparing students’
results against syllabus standards that remain constant over time (QCARF, 2007). However, Stiggins (2005) warns that, if assessment is to remain a highly valuable resource, syllabus standards must remain constant, provide information for stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning process, and compare what students know and can demonstrate against pre-determined standards (Stiggins, 2005). Brown et al. (2007) suggest that schools, teachers and parents use this information to gauge students’ academic strengths and weaknesses, that communities rely on these scores to judge the quality of their educational system, and that state and the federal governments in the US use these results to determine effectiveness of school administrators and teachers in public schools, therefore the necessity for valid and reliable results is paramount.

An alternative to measurement which is limited to quantitative procedures, performance assessment employs a full range of procedures to obtain information for a variety of purposes. These are the types of assessment with which teachers and students are comfortable and experienced within their classrooms as ways of providing evidence of student learning and achievement. A major focus in research on assessment and assessment practices concerns the purpose of the assessment.

2.3.2. Purpose of assessment

Not unlike perspectives on assessment, the purposes of assessment and interested parties appear to be in abundance (Earl & Giles, 2011). There are numerous ways to classify assessment purposes and practices. Assessment and reporting can have a variety of specific purposes both in the instructional and administrative areas, each having a different focus. Some purposes provide information directly linked to teaching and learning which if applied appropriately can result in teaching students better, while others provide information for a more administrative function (James & McCormick, 2009).

Anderson (2002) explores the purpose of assessment from the teachers’ perspective, declaring that classroom assessment has a major role in ‘informing teaching’ and ‘justifying decisions made’ (p. 23). From a student centered point of view, Earl and Katz (2005) identify student motivation as a primary purpose of classroom assessment. In accordance with this view, Airasian and Russell (2008) nominate ‘improvement of student learning’ as a key purpose (p. 6). In a similar way, Hill (2008) defines assessment as ongoing, emphasising the importance of improving learning and teaching.
so that students are able to reach their true potential through goal setting and goal achievement.

Each type of assessment has different uses, goals, and benefits, and can be formal or informal. By looking at each form of assessment one can ascertain the best type of assessment to choose in each situation (Brown, 2008). When the link between the type of assessment selected and the purpose for conducting the assessment is identified, teachers are able to individualise instruction and lessons specifically to address student needs (Earl & Giles, 2011). Earl and Giles (2011) suggest the three main purposes of assessment include: ‘assessment for learning’, ‘assessment as learning’ and ‘assessment of learning’. Assessment for learning, historically identified as formative assessment (Black & William, 1998; Clarke, 2005), includes all tasks undertaken by teachers and students to provide information which informs future learning (Earl & Giles, 2011). Assessment as learning involves students taking ownership of their own learning by self-assessing to identify learning gaps as well as receiving and responding to feedback from their teachers (Earl & Giles, 2011). Assessment of learning, identified as summative assessment (Earl & Giles, 2011; Ussher & Earl, 2010), occurs at the completion of a learning cycle or task and can be school-based/internal or external (Earl & Giles, 2011; Harlen, 2005; Ussher & Earl, 2010). A further purpose of assessment identified by Earl and Giles (2011) involves those experiencing the assessment and the relationship with the assessment; assessment in learning. Consistent in all, is the assumption that different assessment frameworks have different target audiences, are used for different purposes, and use different procedures to collect information (Anderson, 2002; Airasian & Russell, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brown, 2008; Clarke, 2005; Earl, 2005; Earl & Giles, 2011; Hill, 2008; James & McCormick, 2009).

While the purposes of assessment are plentiful, an element of all definitions include two general categories of assessments: formative which is generally described in the literature as instructional and informal, and summative which is in the main described as administrative and formal. However, definition of the terms ‘formative’ and ‘summative’ is problematic and the terms are often loosely defined and misunderstood (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Stake (2004) uses the following analogy to explain the difference between the two categories of assessment:
Employing Stake’s analogy, formative assessment occurs when time is still available to make adjustments to ensure a quality outcome occurs for example, if the cook tastes the soup and discovers a need to add salt or if the guests suggest the cook add more salt to future batches, that’s formative. In contrast summative assessment is a point in time decision where success, failure or quality of the product is assessed, when it is too late to make adjustments to the current product.

Division between formative and summative assessment is not always clear. Some such as Harlen (2005) suggest value in maintaining the distinction between formative and summative assessment and although suggesting each has a distinctive purpose recognises that each is not independent of the other. It is often necessary to supplement formal assessment with informal assessment, and vice versa, in order to obtain sufficient evidence for an assessment; in this respect, assessment events can serve both summative and formative purposes (Harlen, 2005). There exists an interrelationship between the two; one can use the same assessment for different purposes. Rather than a dichotomy, formative and summative assessment can be thought of as being at opposite ends of a continuum along which all assessment lies (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This view, defined in international literature as ‘assessment for learning’ (formative) and ‘assessment of learning’ (summative), has gained prominence.

2.3.2.1. Assessment ‘for’ learning—formative assessment

Established as a valuable form of assessment by Black and Wiliam in 1998, formative assessment was historically used by teachers to adapt their teaching, which implied that the learner was a passive recipient (Bell & Cowie, 2001). However, further research evidence suggests that if used effectively formative assessment can support and promote learning in part because of the quality of interactive feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Harlen, 2005) and involves the students as active participants in the teaching and learning process.

Informal assessment is defined by Haney and Madaus (1989) as a procedure for obtaining information that can be used to make judgments about characteristics of students or programs. Informal assessments consist of projects, presentations,
experiments, demonstrations, portfolios and asking questions during class, or through informal observations of interaction for the purpose of enhancing the learning and teaching (Wiggins 1998). Stiggins (2005) expands the list to include performance assessments, checklists, and interviews with students, games, and other non-standard, everyday types of assessment. The processes involved allow teachers to make judgments about student learning, pace, complexity and teaching process and are usually carried out during the teaching and learning process (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Stiggins (2005) suggests that diagnostic and formative informal assessments, sometimes referred to as criterion referenced measures or performance based measures, should be used to inform instruction, providing opportunity to offer students immediate feedback. Results are not always documented, but they do provide an indication of student progress where in this sense, formative assessment is pedagogy and clearly cannot be separated from instruction. It is more than teachers collecting information/data on student learning; it is using the information to enhance learning and teaching (Black & Wiliam, 2009). When formative assessment is incorporated into classroom practice, it provides the information needed to adjust teaching and learning so that assessment affects learning positively, enhancing instruction (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 2009). It is that which is often done at the beginning or during the learning process, thus providing opportunities for immediate evidence of student learning (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006). Descriptive feedback is the most significant instructional strategy to move students forward in their learning as it provides students with an understanding of what they are doing well, links to classroom learning and gives specific input on how to reach the next step in the learning progression (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008). Formative assessment is part of the instructional process which informs both teachers and students about student understanding at a point when timely adjustments can be made (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 2009), when more salt can be added to the soup if required (Stake, 2004).

Although informal, formative assessment can be the heart of teaching, Stiggins (2005) dismisses the suggestion that there is anything random about it and suggests that teachers are aware of this information gathering process and data that can be obtained. Gronlund and Waugh (2008) suggest that when teachers are better informed of achievements and difficulties experienced by their students, they are able to make more
informed decisions about goal setting to suit student needs, and methods of teaching that will maximise student learning. There are, however, some decisions to make regarding the type of assessment to be given, specifically:

1. Instructional placement; Where are the students at? What to teach the students?
2. Formative evaluation; What pace and pedagogy will promote student learning?
3. Diagnostics; What difficulties are impeding the learning process?

(Gronlund & Waugh, 2008)

Formative assessment also allows teachers to intervene, to change course when assessments show that a particular lesson or strategy is not working, or to offer new challenges to students demonstrating mastery of a skill or concept (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008). The purpose of this technique is to improve quality of student learning and if properly implemented can be a powerful tool for improving student learning (Scriven, 1991), allowing teachers the opportunity to make appropriate modifications or adaptations to instructions to enable all students to achieve the same access and opportunities for success in learning (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006). Stiggins (2005) explains that formative assessment is not often included in formal grading of work, and indeed many critics believe that it should not be as these are low stakes assessments for students and instructors; however, this is not to say that formative assessment is the easy way out.

Some consider formative assessment more complex than summative assessment (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008) and that formative, rather than summative, assessment has the greater potential to improve learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Harlen, 2007). Informal assessment does not have time or place limitations, however, that is not to say that it is easy to administer or replaces formal assessment, as it can be difficult to evaluate and time consuming for teachers (Stiggins, 2005). Good (2010) cautions that a dependence on qualitative data may limit assessment opportunities and may lead to vague and imprecise results and suggests that informal assessment may be more suitable for assessing social skills which develop over time. Summative, formal or standardised measures which are more psychometric should be used for evaluative purposes, to assess overall achievement, to compare a student's
performance with others at their age or grade, or to identify comparable strengths and weaknesses with peers (Good, 2010; Stiggins, 2005).

2.3.2.2. Assessment ‘of’ learning–summative assessment

According to Good (2010), formal assessment is broken down into separate groups: norm referenced tests and criterion referenced tests, each carrying their own purposes, advantages and disadvantages. Administrative or formal assessment is not primarily concerned with instructional practices but with how much is learned. Good (2010) suggests that summative assessment’s primary purpose is to assess the level of learning attained. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshal and Wiliam (2003), viewing summative assessment from a similar perspective, argue that formal assessments, as in standardised tests, have their place in gauging the school, state or country’s knowledge as a whole. Good (2010) further supports this when describing summative assessment as assessment which is given at the end of a unit of work, a term, a semester, or course, that which is designed to judge the extent to which learning has taken place. While this form of assessment may not be acceptable to all stakeholders, such assessment is necessary to gather required data to communicate to legitimate stakeholders in the education process (Good, 2010).

Classic education authors Bloom, Hastings and Madaus noted in 1971 that summative assessment happens too far down the learning path to provide information at a classroom level or to make instructional adjustments and interventions during the learning. Gronlund and Waugh (2008) add that summative assessment such as that used in NAPLAN is not regarded as having any intrinsic learning value. It is usually undertaken at the end of a period of learning in order to generate a grade that reflects the student’s performance. However, the Australian expectation is that NAPLAN will serve multiple purposes, summative for accountability reporting, and formative to guide teachers and students (ACARA, 2011). Summative assessment is commonly defined as ‘assessment of learning’ that has taken place. Its purpose is comprehensive in nature, provides accountability and is used to check the quality of learning at the end of the program (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008; Stiggins, 2005); the final, moment-in-time assessment of the soup, when it is too late to alter the taste (Stake, 2004).

Some refer to assessment tools or tasks as formative or summative, however, Black and Wiliam (1998, 2009) suggest that it is not the instrument which is formative or
summative, but how and when the data is used and for what. Consistent with Black and Wiliam (1998, 2009), Harlen (2007) explains that assessment tools which are summative can be used for formative purposes, indicating that the purpose of the assessment is not determined by the assessment tool. Broadfoot and Black (2010) agree when they assert that the distinction lies not in the assessment tool, but in what teachers actually do with the information they gather, how the information is used to inform instruction, and how it is shared with, and engages students.

Popham (2011) raises the important point that whether the assessment is psychometric or performance-based, for formative or summative purposes, the dynamics change when the assessment becomes high stakes because the term has distinct connotations for teachers and school administrators. The term ‘high-stakes assessment’ can be used to describe assessment that involves interest beyond those who sit the tests. ACARA (2011) states that the purpose of NAPLAN testing is to improve student learning, however, there are high-stakes attached.

2.3.3. **High-stakes assessment–a brief history**
Accountability assessments such as Australia’s NAPLAN, and the yearly testing in the USA under No Child Left Behind, are frequently described as high-stakes assessment. In Australia NAPLAN is high stakes for schools and for state and territory education systems. In the USA, tests are high stakes for schools, teachers and, in some cases students. A number of concerns have been raised in educational research on negative impacts of high stakes assessment on learning.

2.3.3.1. **High-stakes testing–improving quality of learning**
High-stakes testing for educational accountability has increased in the last two decades. Broadfoot and Black (2010) propose that student achievement on high-stakes accountability assessments, both public national examinations and standardised testing which are composed and interpreted beyond the confines of the school, have become the legitimate currency for judging the quality of the education process. Agreeing with Broadfoot and Black (2010), Popham (2011) states that the solo measurement instrument now used in the USA when evaluating teacher performance and distinguishing between ‘winning and woeful’ schools is student performance on high-stakes accountability tests. The pitfalls of such a practice to audit schools’ performance and that of their pupils are many (Broadfoot & Black, 2010) and therefore the use of
such instruments for gauging the quality of teacher instruction is inappropriate (Popham, 2011).

Criticism of high stakes standardised testing, such as NAPLAN, takes many forms. It is argued that high-stakes testing does not lead to improved student results. Findings from Plank and Condliffe’s 2008-2010 study, where ‘classroom quality’ of 23 classrooms in eight Baltimore City public schools was examined through three domains—emotional support, classroom organisation, and instructional support—suggest that “classroom quality is lower when classrooms are under greatest pressure to increase test performance” (Plank and Condliffe, 2013, p. 1153). Unlike classroom organisation which was least affected by high-stakes assessment, Plank and Condliffe discovered that the pressures of test preparation affected adversely teachers’ and students’ ability to “generate the warmth, emotional connection and sensitivity that they might generally desire” (p. 1169). Furthermore they found that teachers offered lower levels of instructional support during the period leading up to high-stakes assessment and rated low in quality of feedback (p. 1175).

Ainsworth and Viegut (2006) advocate for formative assessment, arguing that it is the immediate feedback which is particularly effective for improved student learning as weaknesses can be addressed immediately and the gap between the achievers and the non-achievers narrowed, while the overall achievement of students is developing at an appropriate pace. ACARA’s (2010) expectation that NAPLAN will improve student achievement is questionable as immediate feedback of student achievement is not available. Australian school students participate in NAPLAN testing in May and the results are not available until September at the earliest. While a change to testing process and feedback is anticipated for 2015, with a move to computerised online, adaptive testing and faster reporting outcomes, at present the value of NAPLAN data is very limited for formative purposes.

2.3.3.2. **High-stakes assessment—narrowing the curriculum**

Harlen (2005) and Shepard (2003) warn that amongst the many negative consequences of attaching high-stakes to assessment is that it can result in narrowing of the curriculum. Wyse and Torrance (2009) agree that using tests to benefit learners leads to teachers merely drilling content and narrowing the curriculum to focus only on those concepts and levels of cognitive skills required to achieve improved test results. Critics
of high-stakes assessment such as Broadfoot and Black (2010), and Harlen and Deakin-Crick (2003), warn that assessment systems lose much of their dependability and credibility when high-stakes are attached to them. The punitive use of standardised tests interferes with the learning and teaching process by encouraging teaching-to-the-test thus altering the validity of data collected and can result in turning students off formal learning forever (Broadfoot & Black, 2010). Indeed, in high-stakes testing regimes it is common for teachers to adopt surface rote teaching where regurgitation of mere facts is the outcome and the curriculum lacks depth and complex knowledge required for problem solving and decision-making (Harlen & Deakin-Crick, 2003) and explicit scaffolding of learning experiences in which students participate (Hardy, 2013). Pedulla et al., (2003) suggest that high stakes assessment does not necessarily ensure that the curriculum will be followed, but rather can become the curriculum, and a narrow version of that. Hardy (2013) in his research involving a school in north Queensland concluded that NAPLAN was impacting teacher practice. He found that some teachers engaged in explicit teaching about NAPLAN, including NAPLAN-like activities such as familiarity of NAPLAN test style and ensuring students were able to fill in the answer sheet correctly (Hardy, 2013). According to Hardy, such activities were ‘employed to further improve NAPLAN results’ (2013, p. 75). Hardy (2013) warns that, ‘as a social act, the very process of counting necessarily influences, indeed ‘creates’, the world in which it is undertaken’ (p. 68).

Maintaining traditional assessment practices can reduce the effectiveness of contemporary pedagogical models (Pedulla et al., 2003). Brown (2008) suggests that a reduction in stakes, so that the assessment becomes a tool for teaching, learning and feedback, reduces the negative impact associated with data collected for accountability purposes. Students and teachers receive incorrect messages from high-stakes testing and the unintended negative effects of the high-stakes accountability uses often outweigh the intended positive effects (Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Harlen & Deakin-Crick, 2003; Hohensinn, Kubinger, Reif, Schleicher and Khorramdel, (2011); Pedulla et al., 2003; Plank & Condliffe, 2013). Broadfoot and Black (2010) explain that practising for tests leads to ‘test wiseness’ which will affect the consistency of the test results with repeated testing thus reducing test reliability, however, they advise that ‘test wiseness’ is not their only concern.
2.3.3.3. **High-stakes assessment—‘test wisdom’**

A second and related concern is that, even if high-stakes testing regimes improve performance in tests, they do not necessarily improve learning outcomes. That is, an increase in test scores is not indicative of an increase in student learning (Wiliam, 2008). Haladyna, Downing and Rodriguez (2002) warn that test practising may lead to ‘test wisdom’ which will affect the consistency of the test results with repeated testing. ‘Test wisdom’ is described by Hohensinn et al. (2011) as a student’s capacity to use the characteristics of the test and/or the test situation to receive a high score. As touched upon previously, teaching to the test displays students’ ability to achieve high results in test taking and consequently may result in a false representation of the cognitive level of the child. A number of researchers agree that ‘test wisdom’ results in more informed and better guessing in multiple choice tests (Frey, Petersen, Edwards, Pedrotti & Peyton, 2003). They suggest that coaching and practice can help raise students’ scores simply by getting students used to the types of questions and by practising test style, thereby developing a skill set related to ‘test wisdom’ rather than a display of cognitive ability. A further issue raised in the literature is reliability and uses of the results.

‘Test wisdom’ is therefore recognised as a threat to validity and the validity of test score interpretation resulting in students achieving inflated results on skills where no mastery exists (Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Frey, Petersen, Edwards, Pedrotti & Peyton, 2003). A concern is that teachers may incorrectly read this ‘test wisdom’ as an indication of student learning, interpreting that their students have mastery of these skills and move on to the next level. Their students, however, may experience difficulty having not achieved depth of understanding of concepts and may be overlooked in terms of potential intervention. Stiggins (2005) asserts that the results are largely misinterpreted as such claims of improved standards achievement lack supporting evidence. A margin of error exists in all assessment, be it in task construction, task administration, task scoring instructions or agreement in judgment in scoring (Stiggins, 2005), however, the results are often used as if the information is quite precise (Assessment Reform Group, 2006; Wiliam, 2008). This in turn misleads the teaching and learning process which highlights the consequences of misusing the data.

2.3.3.4. **High-stakes assessment—‘test anxiety’**
Hohensinn et al. (2011) argue the opposite of ‘test wiseness’ is ‘test anxiety’. Broadfoot and Black (2010) note that, if anxiety affects test performance, it can be regarded as a source of invalidity which will distort the test scores. Hohensinn et al. (2011) similarly argue that students cannot perform to the best of their ability when they are upset or anxious. They further submit that a student’s level of anxiety is dependent on the student’s perception of cognitive demands. From this perspective, the use of the test scores may be problematic. Hence, the interpretation and use of test scores must be carefully considered when high-stakes are attached. Item-level information used inappropriately can lead to misunderstanding of student capability (Messick, 1998).

Broadfoot and Black (2010) suggests that student’s attitudes to learning and the strategies they use to further their own learning may be affected by the way assessment is conducted, therefore, if ‘test anxiety’ does interfere with optimum performance the anxiety might be reduced by making tests less ‘test-like’. Whether ‘test wiseness’ or ‘test anxiety’ affects test results, students will only experience an increase in achievement through teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

2.3.3.5. High-stakes assessment—reduced teaching time
A further concern of the impact of high-stakes assessment is reduction in teaching time. Black and Wiliam (1998) illustrate this effect using the analogy ‘it does not matter how much time the farmer spends measuring the pig; the pig will not get any fatter if the farmer does not feed it’. When teaching time is diverted to developing test skills and sitting tests, the time allocated to teaching is reduced. Critics of high-stakes assessment practices, such as Broadfoot and Black (2010) and Stobart (2008), support the concern that this culture of constantly measuring student performance reduces valuable teaching time and that the accountability movement that places inordinate value on test scores to ensure reaching a single benchmark will lead to the practice of ‘teaching to the test’ instead of teachers focussing on areas needing development and even neglecting the child. Plank and Condliffe emphasise this concern, noting that “[P]olicies centered on high-stakes testing have, in many cases, achieved the goal of influencing day-to-day classroom activities” (2013, p. 1153). When the nature of the assessment is high-stakes, the teacher pedagogy and learning experiences are subverted to mimic more closely the assessment with the result becoming more significant than the students taking the test.

2.3.4. Assessment policies and accountability in Australia
The key purpose of accountability assessment is described as being about the establishment and raising of standards of learning (QSA, 2009; Stobart, 2008). Included is the intention to gather valid and reliable data to inform policymakers and the community about the success of schooling and government initiatives. However, research indicates that the negative effects of accountability assessment through external testing outweigh the positive intentions (QSA, 2009) and when accountability for educational outcomes is measured solely using a moment-in-time, national, full-cohort test, validity and reliability of the assessment data are questionable, such that it cannot be analysed by policy makers in meaningful ways (QSA, 2009). The differences between standardised, norm referenced testing programs and classroom based assessments have been extensively studied. The assessment ‘as’ measurement paradigm has historically left students out of the assessment process where teachers and students are not directly involved in making decisions concerning the assessment procedures or the purposes for the assessments (Earl & Giles, 2011). According to the QSA (2009), assessment that is high-stakes and for accountability purposes has an effect on curriculum. When assessment results are used for the purpose of public accountability what is taught by teachers and the mode of delivery used by teachers are affected (QSA, 2009).

It is not the nature of the test but the use, referred to by Rowe (2004) as the secondary function of the tool, to assess teachers and school administrators that dictates the high-stakes nature of these tests. Outcomes are used to make comparisons about students, schools, states and territories (Lowrie & Diezman, 2009). According to ACARA (2010), as well as improving student achievement, reported outcomes of national high-stakes assessment allow the Australian public to evaluate how their schools are operating and to develop a national view point on student achievement. These assessments can be drawn on to advise future policy development, resource allocation, curriculum planning and to detect where curriculum intervention programs are required. According to MCEETYA (2008), in Australia the high-stakes assessment NAPLAN is also intended to provide rich data about individual student performance.

This century demands that students develop numerous skills (Boyd, 2000; James & McCormick, 2009). A knowledge economy flooded with technical advancement requires students with refined higher-order thinking skills who are able to demonstrate
the ability to identify the links between diverse concepts (Boyd, 2000; James & McCormick, 2009). According to the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (2008), to become a literate citizen of the 21st century students require such skills as self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, flexibility and adaptability, and a capacity to exercise judgement. Moreover, they require such skills as planning and organising, flexible thinking, communicating, teaming, creative thinking, innovation, problem-solving and engaging in new disciplines. Boyd (2000) suggests that these skills that are so highly valued in today’s business world cannot be measured by multiple choice or short answer tests, but it is through performance that their achievement is gauged. He argues for assessment of the process as well as the product so that students’ meta cognition (how they think) and their meta learning (how they learn) can be taken into consideration (Boyd, 2000). According to Chudowsky and Pellegrino (2003), the major purpose of full-cohort results is to determine if a full cohort of students has reached minimum standards and therefore the results can rarely be used for any valuable purpose like assisting the teaching and learning process of individual students. Stiggins (2005) warns that the results are largely misinterpreted and such claims of improved standards achievement lack evidence to support them.

Although national standardised tests are a relatively new phenomenon in Australia; students in Australian schools are now participating in a considerable number of national and international tests (QSA, 2009). Aggregated results on these tests are reported at state and territory level. However, the National Education Reform Agreement, Council of Australian Governments flags intentions to measure school performance and track individual students’ performance over time COAG (2013). The only student results available to measure school performance are the results from the full-cohort tests of National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). ACARA is an independent authority responsible for:

- a national curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 in specified learning areas;
- a national assessment program aligned to the national curriculum that measures students’ progress;
- a national data collection and reporting program (ACARA, 2010b).
ACARA collected and published data on the ‘MySchool’ website launched in January 2010 providing NAPLAN outcomes from 2008. ‘MySchool’ provides information about approximately 10,000 schools (ACARA, 2014a). This information can easily be located using school name, location or sector. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is used to group schools together statistically to enable meaningful comparisons between like schools (ACARA, 2014a). Information on the ‘MySchool’ website includes:

- consistent information about all schools;
- performance averages of students on NAPLAN;
- schools belonging to specific areas (ACARA, 2014a).

Although there has been much discussion amongst key stakeholders regarding the introduction and implementation of national standardised testing in Australia, the literature fails to evidence research involving student voice regarding such assessment regimes.

2.3.4.1. Assessment in Queensland—A recent history

For the purpose of obtaining a thorough understanding of where Queensland is situated in relation to educational assessment in the year 2013, it is important to understand Queensland’s educational journey through the last decade. Education Queensland (2000) argued that the standard of education and skills of its citizens needed to be equal to that of the best standards in the world. The Queensland State Education 2010 document (QSE, 2010) was created to develop strategies for future education reforms in Queensland to ensure state success in the knowledge economy of the future (Education Queensland, 2000). Previous to 2008 when the new curriculum framework, the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework (QCARF), was implemented in Queensland schools, teachers attempted to cover too much material which hindered in-depth learning and resulted in superficial coverage (QSA, 2007). There was lack of clarity about what must be taught, a lack of comparability between schools across the state, a lack of exemplars of good assessment tasks, and parent confusion with regard to reporting student achievement. According to the QSA (2007), QCAR, a component of the Smart State Strategy, was a framework designed to define what was considered essential learning for Years 1 to 9 with a set of standards to assess student achievement. The QCARF also supported teachers’ everyday assessment
practices, provided easy-to-read reports for parents and introduced statewide assessments in the middle years (QSA, 2007).

Large cohort assessment practices, where students are assessed against their peers, are not new to Queensland’s middle years students. Prior to the implementation of NAPLAN testing, Queensland students in Years 3, 5 and 7 participated in state-wide literacy and numeracy tests annually, administered by the QSA. The outcomes of the state assessments were not as high-stakes as for NAPLAN. While the outcomes were used to examine school performance, schools were as likely to benefit from additional funding if they demonstrated poor performance and appeared to be in need, as chastised for their low outcomes. Students did receive individual reports of their results comparing them to identified standards, and hence, indirectly their peers.

Experts in the field of middle years education such as Chadbourne and Pendergast (2005) and Stowell (2000) suggest that due to the large differences in development middle years students should be assessed individually not in comparison to their peers. Non-competitive assessment and exhibitions of student work promote middle years students learning more productively than comparison. Herein lies the mismatch between the nature of high-stakes assessment and assessment practices that best meet the needs of young adolescents and contribute to the agendas of assessment ‘for’ and ‘as’ learning.

2.3.5. Assessment in the Middle Years

Assessment has been viewed as an endpoint to learning in the past, and for many teachers it still remains an addition to, rather than an integral part of, learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 1988, 2006; Sadler, 1989, 1998; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004). In the middle years assessment should be an integral part of curriculum planning and classroom practice requiring an alignment of pedagogy and assessment practices (Carrington, 2002). Carrington (2002) makes the distinction between assessment that aligns social and academic outcomes in the middle years and tests which are at odds with the middle school principles. Nationally, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) identifies one of its eight inter-related action areas as ‘enhancing middle years’ development’, which aligns with the 10-15 year age group of interest in this study, in particular highlighting the need for educational approaches that are suitable for young adolescents:
The middle years are an important period of learning, in which knowledge of fundamental disciplines are developed, yet this is also a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning. Student motivation and engagement in these years is critical, and can be influenced by tailoring approaches to teaching with learning activities and learning environments that specifically consider the needs of middle years’ students. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 10)

To ensure the development of productive citizens able to accommodate the requirements of the twenty-first century middle years assessment should be authentic (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005). Middle years assessment should involve explicit links between the curriculum and the testing and utilise a cyclical approach whereby the process tests what has been taught and leads back to better informed teaching and learning (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005). The diverse range of social skills that are so highly valued in today’s business world are best gauged through performance and cannot be measured through multiple choice or short answer tests (Boyd, 2000) — such as those included in the NAPLAN test format.

Education Queensland infers that students who only have access to assessment tasks that require low levels of knowledge and cognition are limited to demonstrations of learning at D or E standard (QSA, 2007). Findings from a recent analysis conducted by Swain and Pendergast (2013), using Bloom’s revised taxonomy as a valuable tool to identify characteristics in the 2009 Years 5, 7 and 9 NAPLAN literacy tests which might benefit the development of the middle years’ students, concluded that a high percentage of the questions required only lower order knowledge and/or factual recall. Bloom’s lower levels of thinking offer opportunities for students to achieve a maximum of a ‘D’ grade. To achieve an ‘A’ grade, an assessment task should include questions requiring students to demonstrate conceptual knowledge, reflection, reasoning and communication skills in order to compare and contrast effectively, higher levels of thinking included in Bloom’s continuum. These types of questions requiring students to utilise reflection and reasoning tools so as to move from one representation to another were not evident in the NAPLAN tests interrogated (Swain & Pendergast, 2013).

If, as suggested by Dulfer et al. (2013), “the NAPLAN testing regime is plagued by unintended consequences... such as, narrowing the curriculum and teaching strategies” resulting in teachers focusing on NAPLAN test content (p. 5) and NAPLAN test content lacks questions requiring the higher levels of Bloom’s continuum (Swain & Pendergast,
Adolescents need to be given opportunities to function at the higher levels of cognition (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005), or as Nagel (2010) suggests, when the adolescent brain undergoes synaptic pruning whereby unused synapses are discarded, middle years students are at risk of losing crucially important higher order skills such as analysing, evaluating and creating.

Curriculum in the middle years should include worthy intellectual tasks (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013). Assessment in the middle years should be linked to the curriculum in that it directly examines student performance on worthy intellectual tasks (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013). As student engagement is critical in the middle years, it is paramount that curriculum is rich with experiences which challenge students on intellectually rigorous tasks which involve higher-order thinking skills. It is critical that the assessment links directly to the learning taking place in the classroom and the middle years students are able to identify the links.

Authentic assessment, unlike paper and pencil testing, presents the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities. Furthermore, it must reflect the real-world context and include situations that students will be confronted with outside the school context so that middle years students are able to discover links to their real world and as a result view education as purposeful (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013).

2.3.5.1. Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment, indicated in the literature as conducive to the middle years philosophy, is based upon the premise that assessment should primarily support the needs of learners (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005; Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013). The word ‘authentic’ is used in much of the literature often with a variety of interpretations.

Making assessment meaningful and related to the students’ world inside and outside of the classroom, including students’ interests and cultural backgrounds enables assessment to be linked to the learning and teaching process (MYSA, 2008) and
engages middle years students who are prone to disengagement, underachievement, and alienation from school (Carrington, 2006, MYSA, 2008). Authentic assessment, unlike traditional assessment, presents the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities and must reflect the real-world context and include situations that students will be confronted with outside the school context (Bahr, 2005). The best assessments always teach students and teachers alike the kind of work that most matters; they are enabling and forward-looking, not just reflective of prior teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998) where students are required to be effective performers with acquired knowledge and complete assessment tasks as part of their instruction (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005). Authentic assessment tasks are meaningful, real-life, adult-like and of long-lasting value and attend to whether the student can craft polished, thorough and justifiable answers, performances or products and are more fair and equitable than other more tradition forms of assessment (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005).

Engaging middle years students in their own learning is as critical as for older students. One of the ways that students can be engaged in monitoring and evaluating their own learning is to ensure that the nature and expectations of assessment are clarified up front. The use of criteria on tasks that are ‘up front’ and given to students at the same time as the task is one way of engaging students in their own development (Huba & Freed, 2000) while achieving validity and reliability by emphasising and standardising the appropriate criteria for scoring (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005).

Authentic assessment is also reflective of actual learning in and beyond the classroom. It focuses on student performance, is able to capture the quality of a student’s work and takes into account personal histories of students thus engaging them in assessment tasks that are meaningful (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005). Hence, in terms of implications for NAPLAN where tests are administered almost exclusively to middle years students, it would be ideal if the signifying practices underpinning pedagogy in the middle years—including authentic and reflective assessment and opportunities to demonstrate higher order thinking strategies—were mirrored in the NAPLAN testing regime, thereby aligning the learning and the assessment approaches.

2.3.6. NAPLAN
In Australia, the introduction of the *National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) in 2008 marked the nationalisation of Australia’s accountability-driven education agenda (Swain & Pendergast, 2013). Administered in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, the standardised tests sit predominantly across the grades commonly known as the ‘middle years’. The publication of whole school NAPLAN results on the MySchool website and the consequential media coverage have resulted in NAPLAN becoming high-stakes assessment (Lobascher, 2011 pp. 9–11). The introduction of NAPLAN has been a source of debate and argument (Polesel, Dulfer & Turnbull, 2012), however, both advocates for and critics of NAPLAN note the potential of the test regime to impact on teaching and learning practices, especially as schools and systems strive to reach benchmarks.

The intention of the accountability program is that NAPLAN should not be overemphasised in schools but be seen as one measure of a school program. Advice to parents is that teachers should ensure that students are familiar with test formats and provide appropriate support and guidance. NAPLAN is intended to assess skills students are already learning through their overall curriculum (ACARA, 2014b). The NAPLAN administration handbook for principals advised that

> The provision of broad and comprehensive teaching and learning programs is the best preparation that schools can provide for their students. Excessive coaching and test preparation are not condoned (ACARA, 2011, p. 20).

### 2.3.6.1. A description of NAPLAN

Originally, school systems were only required to provide financial accountability to receive public funding. Measures of literacy and numeracy achievement have been in place to demonstrate educational accountability since 2000 (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011). Originally tests were developed in each state and territory. Since 2008, state-based tests against benchmark standards have been replaced by the NAPLAN testing. NAPLAN is a substantial educational reform (Polesel et al., 2012), through which the current accountability policy and practices are enacted (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011). ‘NAPLAN has served as a key accountability instrument for the federal government to be able to measure and monitor demonstrable improvements in students’ academic results in the respective states and territories’ (Hardy, 2013, p. 70). The NAPLAN tests are set by the *Australian Curriculum,*
Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), but are managed by the central curriculum and assessment authority in each state, in Queensland the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA). NAPLAN was introduced as a non-compulsory assessment tool to “identify if all students have the literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community” (ACARA, 2010c, p. 1) and to address the academic gap emerging between students and the inequities evident in divergent outcomes between schools. According to ACARA, NAPLAN aims to provide a measure of:

- how individual students are performing at the time of the tests,
- whether or not young people are meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks, and
- how educational programs are working (Dulfer et al., 2013).

ACARA (2010) regards NAPLAN testing as beneficial to students stating:

NAPLAN provides information for parents, teachers and schools on individual student performance. This information is used to determine how well students are performing and as a means of identifying areas of need requiring assistance. National testing enables consistency, comparability and transferability of results across jurisdictions (ACARA, 2010b).

Individual student NAPLAN reports are supplied through state authorities from data provided by ACARA. These reports are intended to demonstrate student achievement and allow for individual student intervention where required. Along with individual student results, ACARA also provides classroom cohort, year level cohort, and whole school NAPLAN results, aggregating NAPLAN data (ACARA, 2008). ACARA (2008) explains that NAPLAN data provides the Australian people with an annual national snapshot of state and territory educational performance, predominantly literacy and numeracy. National reporting through the MySchool website (www.myschool.edu.au) supplies not only individual school NAPLAN outcomes but also comparisons to ‘like’ or ‘statistically similar’ schools, that is, schools identified on a range of measures as having students from similar cultural and economic circumstances (Cumming et al., 2011).
The overarching expectation of NAPLAN testing is the improved accountability of teachers and schools and ultimately, it is expected, improved outcomes for all learners (ACARA, 2010b). Hardy (2013) suggests that, ‘NAPLAN provides useful insights into at least some aspects of students’ understanding, at least as such understanding can be approximated into the form of a nation-wide, predominantly standardised test’ (p. 75). Hardy highlights that ‘the process of producing quantitative measures of students’ learning in the form of national standardised test results produces statistical indicators of learning which are socially valued’ (p. 75). Critics such as Donnelly (2010) argue that the NAPLAN MySchool model is ‘counter-productive and educationally unsound’ (p. 21). Wu (2011) agreeing with Donnelly (2010) suggests that the use of assessment NAPLAN data to hold individuals and institutions to account is flawed, unreliable and unsuitable, and should not be used to measure school performance. Dulfer et al. (2013), add to the criticism warning that the publication of results which encourage outsiders to pass judgement on the quality of those being held to account can lend itself to manipulation and have damaging consequences because the structure of assessment and accountability fears also influence what people do.

2.3.6.2. The impact of NAPLAN
Experts in the field of educational assessment, such as Dulfer et al. (2013), question the value of NAPLAN as an instrument to measure all that is felt to be important in education, and if ultimately NAPLAN results provide valid information that will help students to improve. Gonski (2011) expressed concern that “an excessive focus on what is testable, measureable and publically reportable carries the risk of an imbalance in the school curriculum” (p. 217). The introduction and implementation of NAPLAN can be likened to the well-known American experience of high-stakes testing.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the consequential advent of federally mandated high-stakes testing in America the question of whether high-stakes testing affects curriculum has been highly contested (Au, 2007). Evidence from Au’s review of 49 quantitative studies addressing the impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum suggests a significant relationship between the implementation of high-stakes testing and changes to curriculum. Specifically these changes are associated with curriculum content, structure and knowledge within the content, and the pedagogical practices associated with communication of that content (Au, 2007). Au’s research evidenced
some curriculum expansion, increased curriculum integration, and an increase in student centred-instruction as a result of implementing high-stakes testing, however, this was in the minority. In the majority, evidence from Au’s 2007 review of 49 quantitative studies addressing the impact of high-stakes testing suggests that high-stakes testing has a predominant effect of narrowing curriculum content to involve only those subjects included in the tests, resulting in lecture-based knowledge delivery of fragmented ‘bits and pieces’ of knowledge learned for the sake of the tests themselves (Au, 2007, p. 264). Results from a recent survey of 8300 Australian teaching staff commissioned by the Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, conducted by Dulfer et al. (2013), reflect those of the high-stakes testing experience in the USA.

Dulfer et al. (2013) found that teachers reported NAPLAN as impacting their teaching style and content choices, and that NAPLAN had led to a reduction in timetabling of other subjects in their schools; two-thirds believed it had led to less time to focus on other subjects. Teachers reported one of the many unintended NAPLAN consequences is the narrowing of teaching strategies and of the curriculum (Dulfer et al., 2013). They reported that key learning areas such as: art, music and language were less likely to be addressed due to the increased NAPLAN focus. Gonski (2011) raises the concern that key educational goals independence, confidence, initiative and teamwork are learned through elements of the curriculum that are not readily measured by an external test (p. 217).

Dulfer et al. (2013) explain that their survey results indicated one-third of the teachers surveyed set more than seven practice tests prior to the NAPLAN testing period and 80 per cent reported test preparation as adding to an already overcrowded curriculum. Teachers reported a reduction in ‘face-to-face’ teaching time with one-half reporting that their pedagogy had changed and was more test-driven. Of the teachers surveyed, 39 per cent reported they were teaching by rote and were administering weekly NAPLAN practice tests as a method of increasing NAPLAN results. Dulfer et al, argue that findings from the study indicate that NAPLAN has led to ‘teaching to the test’ whereby teachers were narrowing the curriculum in order to test children (Dulfer et al., 2013). As one Senate inquiry submission stated:

[T]he time spent preparing students for this test, analysing results and setting narrow targets has become counterproductive. That is to say, the
time spent preparing and administering the NAPLAN has taken away valuable teaching and learning time that is better spent on supporting student learning… The high-stakes nature of the NAPLAN has also served, in many schools, to narrow curriculum offerings… If the high-stakes nature continues a narrowing of focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes… the NAPLAN will inevitably become the focus of many schools (NAPLAN Senate inquiry submission) (Cth Australia, 2010).

Teachers surveyed also indicated that other unintended negative NAPLAN consequences included negative impacts on students’ health and well-being; staff morale, and school reputation and capacity to attract and retain students and staff (Dulfer et al., 2013).

The literature indicates that evidence has emerged of the impact NAPLAN is having on the Australian curriculum, pedagogy, staff morale, schools’ capacity to attract and retain staff and students and more importantly students’ health and well-being (Dulfer et al., 2013). 90 per cent of teachers reported students feeling stressed prior to testing.

2.3.6.3. **Threats to NAPLAN data—A level playing field?**

Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008) warn that data from high-stakes tests are gathered from a playing field that is anything but level. Although the accurate number of incidences is unknown, the media continues to report about teachers and administrators cheating during NAPLAN. Along with test wiseness, curriculum narrowing, test anxiety and inconsistent student participation affecting the reliability of NAPLAN results, Cobbold (2012) suggests that in an attempt to improve whole school results in some schools low-achieving students are removed from testing. In New South Wales (NSW) the NAPLAN tests have been dogged by claims that some schools request under-performing students stay at home on the test days (Hosking, 2012). There is anecdotal evidence of schools encouraging parents of lower achieving students to withdraw them from NAPLAN tests or keep them home on test days (Cobbold, 2012). Dulfer et al. (2013), refer to this behaviour as schools resorting to ‘game-playing’ to improve assessment outcomes. ACARA states that NAPLAN is intended to be used to identify strengths and areas of improvement for students, for the development of student learning programs which will support student learning needs, including extension of high achieving students (ACARA, 2010b). However, a further concern raised in the
literature is referred to as ‘triaging’, where teachers concentrate their teaching on students near benchmarks to get them over the line, leaving behind students most at risk (Dulfer et al., 2013; Jennings & Dorn, 2008), the low achieving students and the high achieving students. Whether it is fair to label this behaviour as cheating is questionable, however, Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner and Rideau (2010) argue that educators who are placed under tremendous pressure to improve student results are reduced to cheating. “If a teacher’s performance is judged, in whole or in part, on the basis of their students’ test results, certainly they are given an incentive to cheat” (Phelps, 2005, p. 49). Nichols and Berliner (2007) suggest that high-stakes testing almost always corrupts those who are judged by the results. Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner and Rideau’s 2010 study of test-related cheating practices of teachers in Arizona in relation to the high-stakes testing associated with the No Child Left Behind Act found that “more than 50 per cent of respondents reported having known colleagues who had cheated, and more than 50 per cent reported having engaged in these practices” (p. 24). They discovered that the corruption occurred in varying degrees:

- Cheating in the First Degree where students’ test answers had been deliberately changed, teachers had supplied their students with the correct answers, or teachers and/or administrators had altered students’ details to render their tests invalid.
- Cheating in the Second Degree which was considered to involve more subtle ways of cheating such as encouraging students to redo problems, hinting to students to recheck their answer again, distributing ‘cheat sheets’, or leaving visible learning resources.
- Cheating to the Third Degree involving teaching to the test and test-wiseness (pp. 5-7).

Whether the ‘cheating’ with regard to NAPLAN results which is said to be occurring in Australian schools is as Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner and Rideau’s explain as ‘cheating to the First Degree, Second Degree or Third Degree, the behaviour is threatening the accuracy of NAPLAN data.

Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) President Kevin Bates questions ACARA’s intention to identify students’ needs using NAPLAN testing data. He suggests that to do so would require accurate results and adds that NAPLAN results may be skewed by
something as simple as students’ ability to colour in (ABC News, 2012). He indicates that NAPLAN test design requires students to colour the corresponding ‘bubble’ from a selection of responses given. As two-thirds of the NAPLAN tests are marked electronically, a student’s ability to colour in the answer ‘bubble’ while staying completely within the lines will impact the results. Bates argues that the computer is unable to read responses which are not completely encased within the lines and therefore these student responses would remain unmarked, resulting in the student not receiving a score for that response (ABC News, 2012). A further concern and possible explanation for poor student performance in NAPLAN testing raised by teachers and educators is the lack of handwriting skills. Sonja Walker, an English teacher and occupational therapist from NSW Northern Beaches, claims that 90 per cent of her students’ handwriting skills have deteriorated with the growing use of keyboards and other technical devices (Starke, 2013), students under pressure to perform may produce illegible handwriting. Students’ needs cannot be identified by tests which produce inaccurate data (Dulfer et al., 2013; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Jennings & Dorn, 2008).

2.3.6.3.1. Increasingly aware parents
Groups of educational campaigners have been encouraging parents to use their right to refuse permission for their children to participate in NAPLAN testing. An increasing number of parents are reported to be withdrawing their children from participating in the NAPLAN testing (More ACT students, 2012; Cobbold, 2012). Parents are becoming increasingly aware of their right to non-participation despite the efforts of education authorities to suggest the tests are mandatory (Cobbold, 2012).

Evidence of the decline in student participation is seen in the overall percentage of Year 3 and Year 9 students in Australia who were withdrawn from the numeracy component of NAPLAN. According to ACARA (2012) non-participation due to withdrawal increased from 0.5 per cent in 2008 to 1.9 per cent in 2012 for Year 3 students and 0.3 per cent in 2008 to 1.4 per cent in 2012 for Year 9 students (Fig 4.1 and 4.2). A decline is also present in the data supplied by ACARA (2012) indicating the percentage of Queensland’s Year 3 students withdrawn from the numeracy component of NAPLAN from 0.3 per cent in 2008 to 2.4 per cent in 2012 and Queensland’s Year 9 students from 0.5 per cent in 2008 to 2.8 per cent in 2012. The increase in students withdrawn accounts for a small, but declining trend in the percentage of students sitting the
NAPLAN tests since 2008. The percentage of students present for the Year 3 numeracy tests across Australia fell from 94.6 per cent in 2008 to 93.1 per cent in 2012 and from 91.8 per cent to 89.8 per cent in Year 9 (ACARA, 2012).

As Cobbold (2012) notes, although the percentages of students withdrawn are still small, the rapid growth poses a threat to the reliability of NAPLAN results for inter-school comparisons, inter-jurisdictional comparisons and trends in indicators of student
achievement’ (p. 2). There is evidence of growing official concern about the reliability of NAPLAN results (Cobbold, 2012). In 2011 the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs commissioned work on participation rates by a strategic policy working group with the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The COAG Reform Council report (2010) emphasises the importance of high participation in NAPLAN for the reliability of results, suggesting that accurate NAPLAN reporting of student achievement in literacy and numeracy is dependent on consistent participation rates. The report went further to suggest that those students who do not participate in NAPLAN testing are likely to achieve at a different level than those who do participate (COAG, 2010). Accountability assessments that emphasise reliability and consistency may not be as reliable and consistent as intended.

This particular literature fails to address possible causes of such decline. It may be reasoned that the community has lost faith in NAPLAN, or that parents are better informed regarding their choice to allow or disallow their children participation, or other factors, perhaps including students’ perceptions and experiences of NAPLAN.

Declining participation may not be considered the only threat to accuracy of the NAPLAN results. Dulfer et al. (2013) suggest that in reality attaching high-stakes to assessment results in a plethora of unintended consequences. When such simple issues are said to affect the reliability of the results, attaching high-stakes such as educational funding may have dangerous consequences (Dulfer et al., 2013).

2.3.6.4. NAPLAN–a key funding indicator
NAPLAN and publication of school data have greatly increased the high-stakes nature of tests for schools and teachers. In 2007 the new Labor government promised an ‘educational revolution’ (Mockler, 2014) and increased educational transparency through the development of ‘myschool.edu.au’ enabling ‘everyone to learn more about Australian schools and Australian schools to learn more about each other’ (ACARA, 2010a). The publication of the NAPLAN results changed the intensity of the tests to high-stakes (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013) as schools could “be judged according to the school-wide average scores of their students” (AERA, 2012). The publication of MySchool resulted in the Australian media constructing and publishing league tables (Mockler, 2013). Using the MySchool data, newspapers published many articles where
teachers and schools were positioned in the articles, and anyone who argued against the league tables were portrayed as untrustworthy. Newspapers were seen as the protectors against the lazy and self-interested school teachers, unions and governments (Mockler, 2013, p. 7). The publication of the NAPLAN information in the public arena places teachers under the spotlight (Mockler, 2014) and success or failure hinges on the quality of the teacher in front of the class (Gillard, cited in Mockler, 2014). MySchool provides parents with the opportunity to compare schools NAPLAN results before making decisions about their child’s education. This parental choice can have significant impacts on government school teachers’ and principals’ job security and funding for schools (Polesel et al. 2012).

The development of school resourcing standards and loading for funding frameworks relies heavily on NAPLAN data (Gonski, 2011, p.57). The government requires evidence of ‘improvement’ from schools and school systems in return for enhanced funding (Gillard, cited in Mockler, 2014; Mockler, 2014), which will have impact on teachers’ classroom practice. Gonski (2011), warns that:

[I]t is important that accountability for the expenditure of funds in schools does not solely rely on the evidence and data that are provided by external tests such as NAPLAN. While literacy and numeracy are core elements of the curriculum, other broader schooling outcomes can be strong indicators of school improvement and the quality of education (COAG, 2013, p. 211).

Linked with funding and policy decisions, pressure for improving scores has vastly impacted teachers, their practices, and the curriculum, narrowing the curriculum and diminishing time for quality teaching and learning. Mockler (2014) argues that ‘the growing links between perceived school and teacher quality and standardised test results, made high stakes through the publication of results via technologies such as My School website, can be seen as taking effect in a number of ways’ (p. 136). Reports of teachers employing strategies such as ‘teaching to the test’ to further improve NAPLAN results are clearly well-founded as practising programs dominate the curriculum to the neglect of rich and important areas (Dulfer et al., 2013). Hardy (2013) suggests the adoption of such strategies by teachers in an attempt to improve students’ NAPLAN results is not surprising as schools are ‘under close surveillance concerning their NAPLAN results’ (75).
2.3.6.5. **Evidence of little progress**

Although NAPLAN has been implemented in Australian schools since 2008 and with the intention of identifying student strengths and areas requiring improvement, and the development of learning programs to support identified needs, including those of high achieving students (Dulfer et al., 2013), there is little evidence of progress in this regard. The Federal Government’s MySchool website suggests that for some groups of students very little has changed. In Queensland, for example, the results for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 showed little to no improvement from 2008 to 2012 in the domains of reading, spelling, and grammar and punctuation (see [www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)), though there were marginal improvements reported for the 2012 annual assessment process.

When discussing the NAPLAN 2012 final results for 1,000,000 students across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (around 200,000 in Queensland) and the little improvement since 2008, the Federal Education Minister, at the time, Peter Garrett stated, “there should not be a single education minister in the states nor a senior education bureaucrat who can take any comfort from these NAPLANs” (Curtis, 2012). The 2012 NAPLAN data indicated few specific gains, although the numeracy levels had been maintained. Results portrayed persistent achievement gaps from students from varying socio-economic backgrounds, and between indigenous and non-indigenous backgrounds. To this Mr Garrett stated that “[T]oo many disadvantaged students were being left behind” (Curtis, 2012). Students from non-English speaking backgrounds consistently outperformed those from English speaking backgrounds in all areas tested with the exception of reading. Girls outperform boys in reading whereas boys continue to outperform girls in the maths key learning area. City students outperform country students where half of the students from extremely remote communities failed to meet the minimum standards. Indigenous students were reported as being two years behind non-indigenous students. Peter Garrett stated that although pleased with evidence of some ‘gentle inclines’ he was disappointed with the picture of disadvantage (Marszalek, 2012).

Christopher Pyne, Education Spokesman for the Federal Government in Opposition at the time, in support of Mr Garrett suggested that NAPLAN was an important diagnostic tool and directed blame at teachers. Mr Pyne implied that teachers should learn to use it properly. He added that “there is no reason to throw NAPLAN out the window because the teachers are doing the wrong thing. They shouldn’t be ‘teaching to the test’, they
should be teaching students just as they always do” (Hosking, 2012). However, David Pisoni Education Spokesman for the State Government in Opposition in South Australia, views NAPLAN through an alternative lens and is reported as saying “[I]t’s really about testing the system more so than the students. What we don’t measure, we can’t improve…” (Holderhead, 2013).

In their inquiry into the effectiveness of NAPLAN, Dulfer et al. (2013), looking at the ‘best interests of the child’, studied standardised external testing in terms of impact on young people. Of the 8300 teaching staff surveyed a significant number reported students feeling stressed prior to NAPLAN testing and students being sick, crying or experiencing sleepless nights (Dulfer et al., 2013). To this Peter Garrett, Federal Education Minister at the time, in defence of the National Government’s stance on NAPLAN testing, stressed that “students do not need to learn beyond what was in the curriculum and that there was no justifiable reason students should experience stress or that other key learning areas should suffer” (Hosking, 2012). Furthermore, he added that he believed the research to be of little value saying that the “self-selecting” survey represented only a small number of union members (Hosking, 2012).

Research indicates that the impact of NAPLAN on some students raises questions about the diverse factors that impact upon student success and the ways in which the NAPLAN regime (and related practices) support or undermine attempts to respond to the particular needs of middle years students. It is within this context that this study of middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN was undertaken.

2.3.6.6. A mismatch?–NAPLAN and Middle Years Philosophy
Significantly challenging for schools is the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures to meet the needs of students in the middle years. Carrington (2002) argues that teachers should be encouraged to align pedagogy and assessment practices because assessment in the middle years should be viewed as an integral part of curriculum planning and classroom practice. She makes the distinction between assessment that aligns social and academic outcomes in the middle years and traditional tests which are at odds with the middle school principles and the signifying practices. Because NAPLAN testing is conducted in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, it is a significant feature in the educational landscape that stretches across the middle years, which typically include Years 5-10, hence, it is pertinent to understand the theory underpinning middle
schooling principles and the suite of signature practices which are regarded as providing an appropriate education for young adolescents, in particular with respect to assessment practices (Swain & Pendergast, 2013).

Coinciding with the NAPLAN agenda, a renewed focus on teaching and learning for students in the middle years is also on the national—and subsequently the state–agenda. Of particular note are recommendations including higher-order thinking strategies and authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations. A central platform of middle years’ pedagogy is development of higher order thinking which focuses on problem solving (Swain & Pendergast, 2013). It entails contexts where the thought processes needed to solve problems and make decisions represent a complex level of thinking whereby students transform information and ideas so as to understand and discover new meaning (Wheeler & Haertel, 1993). By using skills that involve analysing, classifying, organising, hypothesising and concluding, students are able to manipulate information and ideas. It is therefore the role of the teacher to provide opportunities for students to engage in such activities, both in the learning and assessing domains. This century demands students with developed higher-order thinking skills who are able to demonstrate the ability to identify the links between diverse concepts. Moreover, they require skills such as planning and organising, flexible thinking, communicating, teaming, creative thinking, innovation, problem-solving and engaging in new disciplines. Students will need to develop and refine these skills so as to achieve in an information-based economy flooded with technical advancements (Boyd, 2000) and conflicting messages. Most importantly for middle school students, learning and assessment need to be designed to ensure continued student engagement with the process of schooling.

More than a decade ago, related concerns were raised as a result of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard, Ladwig, Mills, Bahr, Chant, & Warry, 2001), which revealed that Education Queensland schools were providing their students with supportive environments; however, they provided a relatively low level of intellectual demand, connectedness to the world and recognition of diversity. The evidence from this study of the literature also suggests that the middle years remain subject-centric with low levels of ‘productive pedagogy’ and curriculum integration.
2.4. **Student voice**

Since the 1960s, removing the restraints from the silenced and marginalised to allow opportunities to voice their opinions and be heard has distinctively focused on women (McLeod, 2011). The late 1900s and early twenty-first century have seen a shift of focus and has included dialogue regarding the exclusion and inclusion of the neglected and marginalised voices in education (McLeod, 2011). Over the last 15 years research has called for change in education arguing for a cultural shift which repositions students from under-representation to a position allowing their inclusion in matters affecting their education (Gunter & Thomson, 2005). Very little is known about students’ perceptions of and reactions to educational change because they are seldom consulted (Fullan, 2001), therefore, inquiry into students’ perspectives of school experiences is paramount (Haney, Russell & Bebell, 2004).

This interpretive research study aims to give voice to middle years students, to investigate and privilege their perspective of the implementation of NAPLAN and develop a unique understanding of the happenings in the middle years classroom context, in two Queensland schools.

2.4.1. **Removing the chains**

Contemporary research indicates that education is about change–being open to change, being willing to change. Opportunity for students to emerge from the traditional role of consumers not worthy of consultation (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004) to a position where their voices are privileged as important elements in understanding teaching and schooling in general (McCallum, Hargreaves & Gipps, 2000), is allowing the generation of valuable knowledge which may form the basis for positive action (Atweh & Burton, 1995). To rescue and release the voices of the silenced (McLeod, 2011) in school systems which have evolved over two centuries and have distanced themselves from students (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder & Reay, 2004) involves valuing students as capable people, becoming aware of their knowledge, skills and interests, and allowing opportunities for their participation in goal setting and learning pedagogy (Levin, 1994).

Student voice is directly linked to teacher voice and any attempt to remove the shackles restraining students from active participation in matters affecting their education would involve the inclusion of their muted teachers (Gunter & Thomson, 2005). This emerging
way includes initiatives to involve students more in their school experience (Cook-Sather, 2006), for their perspectives to be recognised and valued (McLeod, 2011). However, it is not easy to eliminate the exclusion which has been embedded in a system (Gunter & Thomson, 2005), and implement a change requiring a cultural shift which supports the repositioning of students (Cook-Sather, 2006), nor is it clear what is being summoned in the notion of ‘student voice’ (McLeod, 2011).

2.4.2. What counts as voice and whose voices are listened to?

For some, allowing voice is as simple as providing an opportunity to speak, but for others it signifies engagement in organisations, structures and communities (Hadfield & Haw, 2001), the acceptance of involvement, opinion and active participation (Cook-Sather, 2006). In an attempt to privilege student voice many researchers have employed observation as a method of viewing students’ perceptions of their education. However, Haney, Russell and Bebell (2004) suggest that observers fail to illuminate realities of the classroom environment and are limited to the observer’s interpretation of the environment, but argue also that student voice need not necessarily involve speech. They suggest children’s drawings as a medium offering insight into students’ everyday situations involving classrooms, schools and learning.

Whether through speech, observation or drawings, Holdsworth (2000) asserts that voice is defined by the relationship between voice, agency and action. McLeod (2011) refers to agency, adding that allowing voice is not just allowing speech but involves the acceptance of power and agency, a voice that is non-dialogical and recognised as mattering. Cook-Sather (2006) also includes power and agency when describing voice as having presence, power and agency within a democratic environment and having opportunity to be heard to the extent of having influence over outcomes. Historically power related structures in education belonged to the teachers or the bureaucrats’ conceptions of learning (McLeod, 2011). Allowing student voice acknowledges a rebalancing of power that includes the student (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Cook-Sather (2006) suggests that reform efforts involving the inclusion of student voice and the engagement of their entire beings requires a commitment to critical pedagogy which opens spaces and minds to speech but also requires a redistribution of power involving ‘rights’, ‘respect’ and ‘listening’.
2.4.3. Why listen to voices?

Voice in educational discourse adds real world significance to legislation and policy (Gunter & Thomson, 2005; McLeod, 2011). However, privileging student voice can often be viewed as tokenistic, whereby students are allowed participation in decision making regarding particular matters such as toilets and tuckshops but not allowed an audience in important educational matters affecting their schooling (Gunter & Thomson, 2005). This approach to student voice sits neatly within the leader-centric structure of schools (Cook-Sather, 2006).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child passed in 2002, identifying the increasing role young people should have in expressing their views as they developed capacity (Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2010), saw English schools developing more flexibility with regards to student voice as a means of improvement (Cook-Sather, 2006). Alternately, student voice was merely discussed as a means of following legislated policy in America, and was not recognised as the shift pushed for by advocates of student voice (Cook-Sather, 2006). This tokenistic method of privileging student voice can be described by Holdsworth (2000) who views student voice on a six level scale.

- Speaking out
- Being heard
- Being listened to
- Being listened to seriously and with respect
- Incorporating student views into actions taken by others
- Sharing decision-making, implementation of action and reflection on action with young people (p. 358).

Holdsworth (2000) notes that ‘being listened to’ and ‘being listened to seriously and with respect’ do not appear until half way up the scale, therefore students may be allowed to speak, but are not being listened to. Lodge (2005) explains different approaches to privileging student voice as being related to the purpose of the privilege. She identifies four reasons for privileging student voice.

1. Quality control: students are a source of feedback for programs and procedures implemented by external authorities.
2. Students as a source of information: information is provided by students for others to act upon.

3. Compliance and control: student voices are used to serve institutional ends.

4. Dialogue: students are considered important in the decision-making process and fulfil the role of active and valued participant who is included in ongoing discussions and decisions-making.

Fielding (2004) identifies four roles played by student voice in educational research and indicates that the purpose of each role determines the adult/student relationship. The ‘student as a source of data’ requires a commitment from the adult to pay attention to student voice. The ‘student as an active respondent’ means moving beyond the accumulation of passive data and requires listening to and hearing student voice. Fielding’s third position involves the ‘student as a co-researcher’ whereby the student develops more of a partnership with the adult. Finally the ‘student as the researcher’ positions the student in the role as leader and not just respondent.

McLeod (2011) identifies four common purposes for student voice in educational discourse. The first, ‘voice-as-strategy’, McLeod explains is used to achieve power, transformation and equity. ‘Voice-as-participation’ in learning is described as a democratic process, while ‘voice-as-right to be heard’ is having the right to have your say. The final purpose for student voice described by McLeod (2011) is ‘voice-as-difference’ which promotes inclusion, respects diversity and indicates equity. In this instance voice is used to promote the more positive outcome of wider participation (McLeod, 2011).

**2.4.4. A positive view of student voice**

Jenkins and Pell (2006) suggest a link between student alienation from school and student voice. They assert that when teachers privilege student voice and respond to what students have to say the dominant power imbalances between adults and young people alter and students become more connected to school. Respected students who feel important in their classroom are more able to develop quality relationships and create a mutual learning environment with their teachers (Cook-Sather, 2006). Privileging student voice means students are able to speak on their own behalf about their interests and beliefs (Cook-Sather, 2006) and to express their views and opinions,
or their likes and dislikes which could result in enhancing student self-esteem (Logan & Skamp, 2008). Students and teachers become partners in learning (Fielding, 2004), when students are given the right to have what they say matter (Cook-Sather, 2006). When students speak and teachers genuinely listen to their voices, teachers are able to improve their practice (Rogers, 2006). McLeod (2011) cautions against unintentionally silencing many as a consequence of attempting to privilege voice and reminds us that many women were unintentionally silenced as a consequence of privileging women’s voices, causing feminists to question the value of voice (McLeod, 2011).

2.4.5. The down-side

Privileging student voice may have the reverse outcome from that which is intended and serve to unintentionally silence many. The danger resulting from such an outcome is the portrayal of a false sense of commonality (McLeod, 2011). There is no singular student voice, no uniform united entity (Cook-Sather, 2006), some voices speak louder than others (McLeod, 2011) and some may be silenced as a result of fear (Cook-Sather, 2006). Issues that appear surmountable to some students may be simplified as silent students may be over-looked (Cook-Sather, 2006). This brings to light a concern about representation and power (McLeod, 2011), and the failure to capture the voices needed. Cook-Sather (2006) warns of the danger of silencing some students by shifting power to others and developing a hierarchy amongst students as this can negatively impact the silenced and reduce their participation. There is always the danger when students speak as representative of others that the privileged voice does not represent the silent (Cook-Sather, 2006). Maybe the privileged voice belongs to who speaks the loudest and not who represents the most (McLeod, 2011). In this instance student voice may be used as a weapon against the students themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006).

A further issue raised in the literature is related to the acceptance of what students say because what students say may not be liked or welcomed (Gunter & Thomas, 2005). Some may not be prepared to listen to what they do not want to hear (Cook-Sather, 2006) and may resist the challenge of power (Haney et al., 2004). Therefore, adults may feel the necessity to retain power and invite students to speak while still controlling what they say. In this scenario, the agenda is still set by the adults who decide what is and is not addressed. Some believe giving students too much power could mean that they will ask the difficult questions or raise the difficult issues (Gunter & Thomas,
If teachers, schools and educational authorities are serious about privileging student voice they must be prepared to release the power to develop partnerships with their students (Fielding, 2004) and acknowledge their students as active participants whose contributions matter (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Logan and Skamp (2005) draw attention to the significance of listening to student voice and acknowledging what is said as important. They suggest that not to do so may result in a decline of student attitude and connectedness with school. McLeod (2011) warns against ignoring the importance of listening and suggests that the opposite of speaking is listening, both socially embedded practices which involve engaging in and with the perspectives of others. Therefore privileging student voice means remembering the significance of listening and hearing what is said, shifting the responsibility from the speaker to the listener (McLeod, 2011). Where there exists a lack of teacher voice in educational reforms (Gunter & Thomson, 2005), and the measure of success is gauged by student achievement on standardised tests, where not a student voice is heard (Cook-Sather (2006)—What might a cultural shift that repositions students look like?—remains the unanswered question.

2.5. Summary

Contemporary literature in the field of middle years education indicates that much has been achieved in Australia to accommodate the needs of Australian middle years students, such as defining many aspects of Middle Years Philosophy and plans to relocate Queensland’s year seven students to secondary school, aligning them with the majority of Australian school systems. However, it would appear that there are still many hurdles to jump if middle schooling reform is to be completed.

Middle years curriculum should include worthy intellectual tasks (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013) and should include authentic assessment linked to the curriculum in that it directly examines student performance (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013). Furthermore, the curriculum, assessment and pedagogy triad must reflect the real-world context and include situations outside the school context so that middle years students are able to discover links to their real world and the purpose of education (Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010;
As the middle years are considered critical in the emotional as well as physical development of the young adolescent, it is imperative that they remain motivated and engaged in their learning (MCEETYA, 2008).

As NAPLAN becomes embedded into the educational landscape there has been a lack of research into the impact NAPLAN might have on the wellbeing of students and their family circumstances (Dulfer et al., 2013). Quality valid assessment is that which has strong validity links to the learning that is intended and the focus of the classroom. Positive assessment identifies student needs and directs further teaching and assessment by privileging diagnostic information on student strengths and weaknesses to inform the learning and teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998). However, assessment that narrows the curriculum and drives teaching and learning practices to focus on ‘what is on the test’, with excessive practice of standardised test formats and items, is negative (Dulfer et al., 2013). Evidence that the high-stakes nature of NAPLAN tests and MySchool reporting is having a negative impact on Australian classrooms has emerged. The nature of assessment depends on the uses to which the results of that assessment are put, particularly if the results are to be used in high-stakes situations. QTU President Kevin Bates suggests that “Queensland teachers would be happy to see the NAPLAN tests gone tomorrow—they have no faith in the tests themselves” (Form flaw threatens, 2012).

The literature from the field emphasises that a supportive environment for middle years’ students is essential, but these students also require intellectual challenge to remain engaged. Activities need to display relevance, purpose and connectedness to the real world. The literature does not indicate that the assessment methods identified as consistent with middle years principles are compatible with the assessment practices of NAPLAN. Nor does the literature address the middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. It would appear that the middle years students’ voice is not considered important regarding curriculum, pedagogical and most importantly assessment matters affecting their educational experience. Listening to and hearing student ‘voice’ on matters associated to NAPLAN may enlighten educators and guide the view of how assessment might look in middle years classrooms, and which assessment practices are best suited to middle years students.

Opportunities for teachers and their students to collaborate in reform activities or to negotiate learning and teaching pedagogy are shrinking (Gunter & Thomson, 2005).
Repositioning students whereby provision is made for them to express their perceptions and reactions to their educational experience opens up the curriculum and pedagogy to choices (Gunter & Thomson, 2005). Reform in education historically involved revisiting past mistakes, having forgotten or ignoring already experienced disasters (McLeod, 2011). This type of reform involving a shift in power, away from dominated adult decision-making to collaborative student/adult problem solving, decision-making and long-term goal setting, challenges education systems to realise a new approach (Gunter & Thomson, 2005). Enacting this change involves acceptance, courage, commitment and change (Gunter & Thomson, 2005). The driving force behind such change is to eliminate the discrepancy between what is said and what is done (Cook-Sather, 2006), by encouraging students to remain connected and engaged through involving them in the problem-solving and decision-making process while empowering them to accept personal ownership of their education. If it is accepted that students have legitimate fundamental rights, to ignore their voices is to violate their rights (Cook-Sather, 2006). Listening to and responding to students’ perceptions and reactions to the consequences of educational reform such as NAPLAN is therefore paramount.
Chapter 3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 outlines the epistemology, theoretical perspectives, and methodology used in this study to address the research question. These three components of the research framework are related and each informs the other (Crotty, 1998). The aim of this research was to privilege the voice of middle years students in relation to NAPLAN testing. Addressing the overarching research question:

How do middle years students perceive and react to NAPLAN preparation and testing?

involved case studies in two Queensland schools. Participants included students in Years 3, 5 and 7, their school management, their teachers and parents. A case study approach was used to explore areas that are integral to the day-to-day lives of middle years students, focusing on a particular set of students, involved in a particular program, in particular school settings, at a particular time. It was paramount that the participants were respected and that the research framework adopted was empowering for the participants.

3.2. Theoretical paradigm

A theoretical perspective is the way in which we understand and construct meaning within our world. Often elements of a variety of theoretical perspectives, each not always mutually exclusive of others, exist in a study and collectively become a lens through which to view the research (Crotty, 1998). The particular way ‘Interpretive research’ views activities inside schools and classrooms was adopted as the best approach to address the purpose of the research in this study.

3.2.1. Interpretivism

Interpretive research covers a range of methodological activities, although the two data collection approaches most commonly used are, interviewing and some form of observation, usually taken over time. Interpretive researchers aim to understand the beliefs people have as they act in certain situations, described by Neuman (2000) as, “an
empathetic understanding of the everyday lived experience of people in specific historical settings” (p. 70). The interpretation, interaction, negotiation and decision making processes which may occur within social, physical or ideological parameters may or may not be ‘set’ by others outside of the context of any individual’s immediate experience (McIntyre, 1995, Neuman, 2000). However, this focus on the construction of meaning is not to imply that interpretive researchers assume that individuals have complete freedom to negotiate whatever actions or outcomes they choose (McIntyre, 1995). Behaviour is about the identification of social rules that govern social facts, cause and effect are mutually interdependent and inquiry aims to understand individuals rather than to generalise (McIntyre, 1995). Interpretive research involves noticing and describing everyday events from various points of view of the actors themselves.

In this study, positioning the students as the actors, and listening to, hearing, and privileging their descriptions of their everyday lived experiences, provided an interpretive theoretical lens offering the opportunity to explore middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN.

3.3. Research methodology

Interpretive research, an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a social being (Bell, 2008), usually engages qualitative research methods as a means of collecting and analysing extensive narrative data to gain insights into a situation of interest (Gay, 1996).

3.3.1. Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative research asks questions and collects participants’ views through words and images. From the data, themes develop and meaning is interpreted from the information. Qualitative research approaches offer flexibility, and display the researcher’s bias and thoughts (Creswell, 2007; Bell, 2008). Applying qualitative data collection methodology to this research study enabled the exploration of current views of the participants through words and images.

An in-depth understanding of the context demanded the selection of a variety of data collection methods. Qualitative research which focussed on more than one ‘unit’, in this research study a selection of Year 3, 5 and 7 students attending two Queensland schools
involved in NAPLAN testing and preparation, was best represented by a collective case study.

3.3.2. Collective Case Study

Case study methodology has a long history in educational research. Experts such as Freud and Piaget typically used case studies to develop their theories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case studies can be usefully employed in most areas of education where the study involves close examination of “people, topics, issues and programs” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Researchers employing case study methodology as “a preferred strategy when ‘how’, ‘who’ ‘why’ or ‘what’ questions are being asked, or when the investigator has little control over the events” (Bell, 2008, p. 365) may be more interested in the activities of a group than the group’s shared patterns of behaviour (Burns, 1997). Stake (2000) explains the research group or focal point of a case study as a ‘bounded system’. Extending his definition to include case study research involving more than ‘one bounded system’, Stake (2000) uses the term, ‘collective case study’. This research study is “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection” (Creswell, 2007, p. 476), employing Stake’s collective case study methodology, where more than one bounded system becomes the focal point. Collective case study methodology allowed this research to include two bounded systems, two Queensland schools, and Years 3, 5 and 7 students involved in NAPLAN testing. Each system exhibited patterned behaviour, had its own context (Lincoln, 1995; Stake, 2000; Creswell, 2007), and included a selected community within that context.

Qualitative data collection methods selected for this collective case study included: semi-structured focus group interviews, observations, structured interviews, and student words and drawings. The focus on qualitative data collection methods allowed identification of emerging themes, which provided better opportunities for understanding ‘student voice’ with regard to the research question. Data collected from school management, teachers, parents and classroom observations, when added to the rich student data collected through semi-structured focus group interviews, and student words and drawings, offered a clear indication of the students’ perceptions and reactions to, NAPLAN testing and preparation.
3.4. Research sites

Describing the way things are requires understanding of how they may have become that way and how a community feels about the way things are (Gay, 1996). To understand the events occurring within the research sites it was necessary to obtain a clear and thorough understanding of the context in which the events were occurring. By including data collection from management, teachers and parents in each school, a window into the context and into the adults’ perceptions of NAPLAN was opened, including their perceptions of the processes and procedures adopted to accommodate NAPLAN.

A collective case study approach enabled the selection of two research sites. Two South East Queensland Primary Schools were selected for the study on the basis of predetermined selection criteria including:

- **An existing pre-established relationship**
  Prior to the research a pre-established relationship had developed with a Queensland State School, Maryvale, through long-term employment and with a Queensland Independent School, Silverstone, through previous research and visits to undergraduate pre-service teachers completing practical experience in the school environment. It was anticipated that the pre-existing relationships with the research sites would aid in seamless entry.

- **Comparison Government/Independent school**
  Maryvale is a Queensland State School, funded by state and federal governments. Silverstone is a Queensland Independent School, funded by a combination of private and government funding. Including schools belonging to alternative systems allowed for comparison.

- **Alternate approach to NAPLAN implementation**
  Considering the purpose of the research study was to privilege ‘student voice’ in relation to perceptions and reaction NAPLAN, schools sites perceived to have adopted alternative approaches to the implementation of NAPLAN were selected to allow comparison.
Student assessment practices

The selection of two research sites perceived as practising alternative approaches to assessment allowed the collection of comparative data and the opportunity to privilege ‘student voice’ in matters related to educational assessment.

The first research site is referred to as Maryvale State School. Maryvale is a Queensland Government, co-educational, public state school, with an enrolment exceeding 700 students. The school, located in a lower socio-economic area, has a substantial multi-cultural enrolment. Three overarching characteristics guided the decision to include Maryvale as a research site. The first involved an already established relationship with the staff, students and management, which assisted in seamless site access. The second was the principal’s interest in data collection to further improve learning and teaching, and finally, there was a whole school approach to the implementation of NAPLAN preparation and testing which treated implementation and outcomes as serious components of schooling.

The second research site referred to as Silverstone, is a co-educational, independent school with a student enrolment under 300. The school priority is to educate the whole child, which positioned the school as a perfect choice as a comparison research school. Silverstone is situated in a middle-class area with a mixed enrolment comprising all socio-economic groups. As with Maryvale, a pre-existing relationship allowed easy access to the site. Silverstone valued classroom teacher assessment of student progress and used a variety of assessment tools and multiple data collections in order to holistically assess student achievement. The final characteristic assuring Silverstone as an appropriate comparison site for this study was the school community’s decision to continue with the existing curriculum plan and allocate minimal time for NAPLAN preparation. This served to provide a contrasting approach to NAPLAN implementation.

The aim of this research study was to privilege ‘student voice’ in order to discover middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. Therefore the two schools were considered suitable for this collective case study because they were perceived as providing different approaches to NAPLAN preparation and testing,
through which students’ perceptions could be examined. The following section outlines participant data sets included in the study.

3.4.1. Research participants

The term ‘student voice’ demands that attention is afforded and connection realised between students’ speaking and those students experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence, as well as with their having the power to influence, the analysis of, the decisions about, and the practices in, schools. A thorough study of the literature highlighted the missing ‘voice’, in regard to NAPLAN testing and assessment more generally, as that of the students. The purpose of this study was to engage ‘student voice’, to explore middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN.

The participation of teachers, parents and school managers aided in building an holistic overview of the students’ world inside and outside the school environment. Inviting school management, teachers and parents into the study offered the opportunity to establish the perceptions of the adult members of the school community in regard to the role of NAPLAN in the school and its consequences for students. The data obtained was supported by classroom observations, conducted to aid in the data validation process through methodological triangulation. Heeding Darling-Hammond’s (1997) warning, that even strong and important arguments regarding students’ right to learn, focus on teachers’ or other adults’ perspectives of what students need, considerable attention was given to ensuring that the adults’ perceptions of NAPLAN and perspectives of students’ needs, were only used for comparison with the perceptions and perspectives of the students. The variety of data collection approaches used to gather information from a cross section of participants at varying levels of the school community assisted in establishing the context of the study and allowed comparison of perceptions between data sets (Table 3.1).

3.4.1.1. Students

Student selection varied at each site. Maryvale’s principal selected which students attending his school would be invited to participate in the research and therefore only those students were provided permission notices; those who returned with parental/carer permission were included. Following consultation with the school leader, all middle years and Year 3 students attending Silverstone where invited to participate in the study.
and only those returning permission notices with approval from their parents/carers where included (Appendix A).

The study involved 35 students, 17 attending Maryvale and 18 attending Silverstone, selected according to predetermined criteria pertinent to the study. The criteria included:

- Year levels involved in NAPLAN testing
- Parental permission
- Mixed gender
- Mixed ability

As explained in Chapter 2, Year 3 students, participating in NAPLAN testing for the first time, do not sit within the defined middle years age bracket, 10 - 15 years. They were included in the study for the purpose of providing comparison data with students who had prior experience with the NAPLAN processes and procedures. Each group comprised of students from a range of cognitive achievement levels. No knowledge of students’ level of achievement was made available to the researcher prior to interview.

3.4.1.2. Teachers
Teachers included in the study were those involved in teaching the 35 participant students. Eight teachers agreed to participate, four from each study site. Inviting the teachers to participate in the study allowed an opportunity to realise the teachers’ perceptions of NAPLAN testing and preparation, and the school environment, relevant to the students.

3.4.1.3. Parents
Formal explanations of the research study (Appendix B) were sent to each of the 35 families of students selected for the study. Included with the explanation was an invitation for parental participation (Appendix C). Of the 35 families, ten parents of children attending Silverstone accepted. Unfortunately there were no parent participants from Maryvale. Although some parents from Maryvale accepted the invitation to participate in the study, Maryvale parental involvement did not eventuate.

3.4.1.4. Managers
The leaders of both research sites are referred to in this study as ‘school management or managers’. Maryvale’s manager, a man with a long career history working for
Education Queensland, and Silverstone’s manager, a woman, a non-teaching administrator employed on a five year contract, complete the research participants.

A case study researcher’s “first obligation” is to develop a thorough understanding of the case to be studied (Stake, 1995, p. 4), therefore interviews were conducted with the managers from each school to obtain information which supplied an holistic overview of the school structure, culture, key priorities and commitment to NAPLAN testing and preparation.

3.4.1.5. Adult data set
Including the data from the adult school community and classroom observations allowed for data validation. The data provided an opportunity to ascertain consistency of students’ perceptions of the learning and teaching environment with those of the larger school community. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggests that validating the accuracy of findings is, “checking of the credibility… which is of utmost importance” (p. 243). This study utilises data validation to corroborate evidence from the adult perspective with that of the child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
<th>Overview of data population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Data Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Maryvale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section explains the procedure undertaken to obtain access to the research sites, necessary to conduct the study.

3.4.2. Accessing research sites
Establishing credibility and developing positive relationships with the ‘Gatekeepers’ who control access to others, and are sources of information about group members and their activities (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) is important when the purpose of the study requires multiple entries to the research sites (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).
Application for ethical clearance to commence the study was submitted to Griffith University Ethics Committee, for approval. Ethical clearance through Education Queensland’s Central Office was not required as the proposed research did not involve more than one government school. The non-denominational, independent school had no overarching governing body from which to seek approval.

Initial entry into the research sites was gained through professional acquaintances. Established relationships with the acquaintances at each site was important as they offered a ‘way into’ relationships which otherwise might have been more difficult and time consuming. Credibility was already established with ‘gatekeepers’ at each of the study sites.

The process of gaining permission to conduct the research was similar in both contexts. Initial contact was made personally with the appropriate school representatives, who were also the official ‘gatekeepers’. The official ‘gatekeepers’ from both sites were the school managers. A detailed written submission, thoroughly outlining the purpose of the research and the procedures to be employed prior to the commencement and during the study, was expected by the state education authority, Education Queensland, to be submitted directly to the manager of Maryvale. The same document was forwarded to Silverstone.

‘Gatekeepers’ are generally most concerned about the ‘light’ in which they or their organisation will be portrayed (Hammersley, 2007). Therefore the official ‘gatekeepers’ from the two sites were guaranteed complete anonymity.

3.5. Data collection

Data collection occurred in seven stages over 10 months in 2011 at the two sites. Four data collection approaches were used: structured interviews; semi-structured interviews; observations; and words and drawings.

Initial school visits involving the managers of Maryvale and Silverstone were conducted late January, 2011 and early February, 2011 respectively. Further visits involving discussions with the students, teachers and managers, explaining the research project and answering questions as they arose were conducted in March, 2011. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the data collection timeline. Offering explanations and
answering questions enabled the building of relationships of trust, particularly with the students. Although a previous history existed at both research sites, visits to the schools had not been previously carried out in this manner and thus a constant awareness of any relationship deterioration through perceived threat was required.

Table 3.2 Data collection timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011</th>
<th>STAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>03</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>04</td>
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<td>05</td>
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<td>06</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overarching data collection methods in this study, semi-structured focus group interviews, and students’ words and drawings, involve 17 students attending Maryvale and 18 students attending Silverstone, in school Years 3, 5 and 7. Collection of student focus group data prior to the testing period, which commenced the middle of May, was imperative. Capturing the students’ perceptions and reactions of NAPLAN preparation was considered paramount, therefore the initial student data collection process commenced early May 2011. Four student focus groups interviews were conducted at Maryvale, the first included five Year 3 students, the second three Year 5 students, the
third four Year 5 students and the final group included five Year 7 students. Student focus groups at Silverstone comprised of two groups of five Year 3 students, one group of four Year 5 students and a group of four Year 7 students (Table 3.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YEAR 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryvale</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverstone</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selected students from each research site were involved in data collection of words and drawings. Participants were invited to draw pictures and write three words to support their illustrations which demonstrated their feelings at four distinct stages of the NAPLAN process: during NAPLAN preparation, during NAPLAN testing, on completion of NAPLAN testing and upon receiving their NAPLAN results. The first stage of students writing and drawing was conducted following the initial focus group interviews.

Approaches employed for the collection of student data were aligned with structured interviews with school managers from each research site in March 2011 and two teacher semi-structured focus group interviews, each comprising four teachers, a Maryvale group and a Silverstone group, conducted early May, 2011. The teachers involved included those who taught the students participating in the study. Field work also involved data collection during observations of the participant students’ classrooms. Four classrooms at Maryvale, one Year 3 classroom, two Year 5 classrooms and one Year 7 classroom and four classrooms at Silverstone, two Year 3 classrooms, one Year 5 classroom and one Year 7 classroom were observed in the first week of May, with times during the day staggered to avoid bias due to teacher and classroom activities related to the time of day (Table 3.4). There were no parent participants from Maryvale; however, two semi-structured focus group interviews including parents from Silverstone were conducted in October, 2011.
Table 3.4  Classroom observation timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom visits</th>
<th>Morning session</th>
<th>Middle session</th>
<th>Afternoon session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maryvale</td>
<td>8.50am-10.50am</td>
<td>11.30am-1.00pm</td>
<td>1.40pm-2.50pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC1</td>
<td>11.30am-12.15pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC2</td>
<td>9.00am-10.00am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC3</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.15pm-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.50pm-2.50pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverstone</td>
<td>9.00am-11.00am</td>
<td>11.30am-1.00pm</td>
<td>1.30pm-3.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC1</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.30am-12.15pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC2</td>
<td>9.30am-10.30am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC3</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.15pm-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.00pm-3.00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the primary research focus was to privilege the ‘voice’ of middle years students, structured interviews with the managers at Stage 1, focus group interviews with teachers at Stage 3, classroom observations at Stage 4, and focus group interviews with parents at Stage 7, enabled the development of a thorough understanding of the context of the research sites. Furthermore, this data collection offered opportunity to compare the adults’ perceptions and reactions to, NAPLAN testing and preparation with those of the middle years students. Table 3.4 provides further explanation of the data collection timeline.

Employing Creswell’s (2007) data collection strategy, where data is collected across individual’s accounts, within the same account and between accounts from individuals of differing hierarchal positions, for example student to parent to teacher to principal, allowed exploration of the extent to which the students attending each school experience different learning and teaching environments.

Visual representation which further explains the final data population can be seen in Appendices D and E. Each of the data collection instruments and their purpose as tools for data collection in the study are described in the following sections.

3.5.1.  Structured interviews

In order to “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings” (Bell, 2008, p.157), structured interviewing was one selected method employed for
gathering data necessary in this study. Structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask the school managers the big picture questions, while adding interview data to recorded observations further improved the validity of findings. Bell (2008) suggests that this form of data collection is…

…particularly helpful if you are attempting any form of content analysis and need to be able to listen several times in order to identify categories but perhaps it can be most useful because it allows you to code, summarise and to note particular comments which are of particular interest without having to try to write them down during the course of the interview (p.164).

All interviews in this research were audio taped and transcribed verbatim (Appendix F). This made attending to the respondents’ talk much easier than if notes had to be taken at the time of the interview. The small size of the recorder meant that it was fairly unobtrusive. Audio taping interviews using a digital recorder ensured rapport between the interviewer and the participant was maintained. It also enabled focussed concentration by the interviewer on the interviewees’ responses and their use as a basis of further questioning. However, when only the soundtrack of a setting is recorded, non-verbal behaviour such as facial expressions, cannot be captured on tape, therefore notes of any important occurrences were jotted on a notepad.

3.5.2. Semi-structured focus groups interviews

Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted in similar format to those of the structured interviews, however, with groups of participants. Semi-structured focus group interviews were selected as a main method of data collection in this study to enable participants to interact with each other in discussions on and around the research question. This method of data collection provided ‘valuable in-depth information’ about what students thought of NAPLAN ‘their reasoning about why things are as they are and why they hold the views they do’ (Laws, 2003, as cited in Bell, 2008, p. 162).

Each of the twelve focus groups, consisting of eight student focus groups, two teacher focus groups and two parent focus groups, was site specific in that there was no interaction between data sets from the selected schools. Focus groups participated in semi-structured discussions/interviews with conversation prompting and facilitation only when required for continued flow of discussion.
3.5.3. Observations

In order to obtain an holistic overview of school culture and validation of data collected by means of formal interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews, classroom observations were completed at both research sites. The purpose of using systematic observation, a fundamental component of all research methods (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000), was to provide a ‘foothold’ into the students’ world (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991), in particular their world within their classrooms. Observations were carried out in the early stages of the research and served the purpose of providing a vital means of obtaining contextual information about the participant schools, about the teachers, and about their students. Information obtained through observations could be used to validate students’ accounts during the triangulation of research data. This process allowed sensitisation to the research setting and the development of empathy with the participants. Field work conducted in the classroom setting involved systematic observation and field note taking during lessons.

Important indicators of the key components of middle schooling principles and practices, as discussed in Chapter 2, provided a lens through which to view the middle years classrooms involved in the study. Often the teacher’s perception of a productive learning environment is different from that of their students (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007). Focussing observations through the signifying practices of middle years criteria allowed the observer to determine whether or not these middle years classrooms were democratic classrooms where knowledge was socially constructed, where the students had ownership of the classroom and were the centre of the curriculum, and where negotiation and integrated curriculum were common practices. Data gathering through systematic observation presented a reliable method of information gathering by the primary witness. Table 3.5 provides an overview of key components of middle schooling principles and practices identified in the research literature.

These criteria were translated into an open format checklist used for systematic observations of the classroom (described in 3.6.4 Stage 4). Field notes were also taken during observations in anecdotal format as “those rapid jottings of details and dialogue that serve as guide posts for fuller descriptions” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz 1991, p. 69). These included unexpected goings-on which occurred, both physical and social, along with everything that the observer considered notable.
3.5.4. Words and Drawings

To ensure the students’ perspective of life within their classrooms was captured, from the commencement of NAPLAN preparation through to and including the delivery of NAPLAN results, data was collected in the form of students’ words and drawings, moment-in-time observations and the spoken word in focus group interviews.

The purpose of this study was to privilege middle years students ‘voice’ so as to explore their thoughts and feelings with regard to NAPLAN testing. Thoughts and feelings can be difficult to write or to verbalise, however, drawing can offer opportunity to express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). The collection of student
drawings offered an opportunity to explore “the insights and perspectives of those who are perhaps the most assiduous observers of school and classroom life; namely, students” (Haney, Russell & Bebell, 2004, p. 243) and to privilege ‘student voice’.

Students’ drawings have been used as windows into the perceptions of the child for over a hundred years, but rarely for educational use. Theorists such as Freud, Piaget and Gardner used drawings to better understand the social and spiritual lives of children. However, the most common use for viewing children’s drawings has been from a psychological perspective in order to study cognitive development or emotional concerns (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). The review of literature, conducted at the commencement of this study, evidenced minimal research studies utilising student drawings as a method of data collection with regard to school and classroom life. Using student drawings in large scale research, however, has only developed in the last 10 – 20 years.

Haney et al. (2004) started including students’ drawings in both their large-scale and classroom-based methodology in 1994 and have continued to do so as they “offer a rich opportunity to document students’ perspectives” (Haney et al., 2004, p. 267). They warn, however, that reading too much into students’ drawings can be problematic. Without further consultation with the artists it is easy to misinterpret meaning behind individual drawings. To address the potential risk of any misinterpretation of data collected in this research study, using this method, students were asked to write three words to support their drawings. This strategy not only ensured easier analysis, but it also aided the students in maintaining their train of thought. Adopting the process of Haney and colleagues for student drawing analysis, the students’ illustrations were subjected to three stages of coding:

1. Emergent analytical coding

2. Trait coding


The process of drawing analysis undertaken is discussed in more detail in 3.7.2 Emergent analytical coding, Trait coding, and Holistic coding and Holistic review.
Table 3.6, below provides a tabular synopsis of the elements of the research design, including the theoretical paradigm and data analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Paradigm</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Data collection instruments</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Collective Study</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Content Analysis - Thematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Case</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Groups (semi-structured) interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Content Analysis - Thematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Content Analysis - Thematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ (words and drawings)</td>
<td>Emergent Analytical Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trait Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holistic Coding and Review (Haney, Russell &amp; Bebell, 2004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6. Data gathering procedure

As identified in Table 3.2, the data collection process evolved over seven distinct stages. In order to understand the events which occur in an environment it is imperative to understand the environment (Stake, 1995), therefore, structured interviews with the school managers at Stage 1 were conducted to enable an initial picture of the context of each site. Stage 2 related to the development of and data collection from student semi-structured focus group interviews. Included at this stage was the first collection of students’ words and drawings. Stage 3 involved semi-structured focus group interviews with the teachers. Detailed data collection, through observations of teachers and students in their classrooms was conducted at Stage 4. The purpose of the research dictated that Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 were completed previous to NAPLAN testing. Stage 5 involved the second collection of the students’ words and drawing directly after the NAPLAN testing procedure. Stages 6 and 7 occurred in second semester with the final collection of students’ words and drawings (6) and semi-structured focus group interviews with parents completed the data collection process (7).

Although the two research schools were situated in South East Queensland, the sites were 60 kilometres apart. Stages 2, 3 and 4 were completed during two consecutive
days at each site. This intensive data collection allowed immediate comparison of four data collection points. Upon completion of Stage 5, also conducted in May, it was not necessary to return to the research sites again until September/October to complete Stage 6 and Stage 7. The following discussion explains the stages of data collection in greater depth.

3.6.1. Stage 1

As discussed previously the first stage of the research project involved structured individual interviews with the managers from the two schools. Before conducting the interviews consent was obtained from all stakeholders. Interviews were in-depth and direct. A series of previously developed questions ensured the data gathered addressed topics related to the research question. Table 3.7 presents interview questions/prompts and related focus areas. Privacy afforded the interviewees enabled the collection of data that could not be obtained using other methods. Utilising this technique presented an opportunity to ask specific, open-ended questions that were not suitable to be included on a survey. A neutral stance was retained throughout the interview and guidance, rather than manipulation, ensured the authenticity of the interview was maintained (Gay, 1996). Managers were interviewed individually and in a closed venue allowing the participants the privacy to express their views.

Particular consideration was afforded the positioning of furniture in the room to encourage a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere. Approval to record the interviews was obtained and the recorder was placed strategically so as not to be the focal point of the interview, but not to appear hidden. These same considerations were provided during the student focus group interviews.

Table 3.7 Structured interview questions/prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions/Prompts</th>
<th>Focus areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your current job title?</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe your role.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been in this current position?</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your role changed in the last 3 to 5 years?</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors of these changes have made your role easier?</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the implementation of NAPLAN made your job more difficult in any way? If so, how?</td>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6.2. **Stage 2**

As previously discussed it was imperative that Stage 2 was undertaken before NAPLAN testing in May, as the study was concerned with the NAPLAN process—preparation, testing, and results, not just the testing period. Stage 2, undertaken during the NAPLAN preparation period, involved semi-structured focus group interviews with students. These were conducted informally and provided a group situation where individuals were interviewed simultaneously (Madriz, 2000), while being recorded using a small digital recorder. Focus group interviews were selected as the preferred method of data collection to reduce the intimidating effect individual interviews may have on students and to cater for those who would rather communicate in the company of others (Madriz, 2000). The structure of student focus group interviews fostered talk among students. During the conversations participants prompted each other to remember things that they would not have remembered in isolation. Although encouragement and prompting occurred during the students’ conversations, the focus group interviews were still conducted in a semi-structured format.

A study of previous research highlighted issues related to using focus groups as the chosen method of data collection. The first, keeping track of who is talking during multiple interactions, was addressed by introducing numbered cards. Group members were allocated a number which was clearly displayed during the entire process, as turn taking proceeded the number of the speaker was noted. To ensure future identification of participants when transcribing the recorded data, a voice identification task involving group members stating their name, number and a short sentence was conducted. The
second issue, allowing all voices equal weighting, was dealt with by interjecting on occasion and directing prompts towards particular participants. Focus group venues can have an effect on the quality and quantity of the data collected (Madriz, 2000), therefore attempts were made to secure extremely private settings where students could feel safe speaking freely about the school, the teachers and NAPLAN testing.

Stage 2 data collection involved four student focus groups from each research site. Groups were interviewed separately. As a means of building relationships based on trust, students were asked questions regarding their hobbies, likes and dislikes. This data was not used in the analysis process, but served its intended purpose. Following this, students were involved in discussions in relation to their feelings about NAPLAN testing. Students were encouraged to speak freely in a non-threatening environment, which allowed the students a ‘voice’. The questions/prompts used to guide the student focus groups were divided into 3 categories:

1. General questions

2. Assessment questions

3. NAPLAN questions

Questions were used only as a guide as it was considered important to allow for uninterrupted, free flowing conversation at all times. Table 3.8 presents the set of guide prompts developed for and used in the student group interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions/prompts</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>NAPLAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you interested in? It doesn’t have to be about school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like coming to school? Why? Why not?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have lots of days off? Why? Why not?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you like and dislike about school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you are good at your school work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are you learning about in class?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you explain your behaviour at school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you know about NAPLAN?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about NAPLAN?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Has NAPLAN affected your time at school? How?

How do you feel about NAPLAN testing approaching?

What other types of assessment are carried out in your classroom?

If you could design your assessment what would you suggest?

‘Voice’ can be verbal or non-verbal (MacBeath, 2004). Introducing students’ to the methods of data collection provided an alternative method of privileging students’ ‘voice’ whilst at the same time involved a process which might draw on the perspectives of those who are perhaps the primary witnesses of school and classroom life, the students (Haney et al., 2004). Asking students to include words to explain their pictures assisted students in staying focussed and little encouragement was required in order for them to complete the task.

On completion of the focus group interviews, Stage 2 also involved the initial collection of students’ words and drawings to the first prompt:

Draw a picture and write 3 words to support and explain your picture in response to:

How you are feeling during the NAPLAN preparation period.

3.6.3. Stage 3

The teachers’ participation at Stage 3 occurred before the NAPLAN testing period. The teachers’ group interviews involved one focus group per school. Those involved were encouraged to share experiences of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in their classrooms previous to, during and post the implementation of the NAPLAN testing process. Prompt questions were used to ensure the flow of conversation. Questions were designed around NAPLAN practices and procedures and fell into three categories:

- Students
- Teachers
- Pedagogy

At the commencement of the focus group meetings each teacher was issued a number. The number of the speaker was noted each time the speaker changed. The meeting was
followed by a voice identification activity. Table 3.9 outlines prompts used to guide the direction of conversations and the related category of each.

To support the data collected from the teachers and students, and to assess the level of conformity between participants’ accounts of the learning and teaching environment, observations were undertaken in the fourth stage of the data collection.

Table 3.9  Teacher focus group questions/prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompts/Questions</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does NAPLAN affect your students? Explain</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you notice any change in your relationship with the children or student behaviour during the NAPLAN preparation period? Explain</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think NAPLAN affects student attendance?</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your classroom like before the introduction of NAPLAN?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your ideal teaching situation?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has preparation for NAPLAN testing affected student time in relation to: Excursions, Classroom enrichment activities, Student performances, Parent contact etc?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel pressured by the parents to increase your class’s NAPLAN results?</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever felt like transferring to a year level that does not have NAPLAN testing?</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time would you spend per year on NAPLAN testing practice?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that practising for the test is the only way to achieve improved NAPLAN results? Explain</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you are preparing for NAPLAN do you target specific groups of students? Explain</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the test preparation period how much time would you spend on: individual seat work, whole group instruction, basic skills, concept development using hands on activities, critical thinking?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that NAPLAN results impact you personally? Explain</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that NAPLAN results will be used to award teachers and administrators financial bonuses?</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does NAPLAN preparation only occur in those year levels involved in NAPLAN testing?</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think there are better ways of assessing student abilities or is this the best way to achieve valid results? Explain</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.4.  Stage 4

Classroom observations at Stage 4 took place in the NAPLAN preparation period. Valuable classroom observation data was gathered using the predetermined criteria checklist discussed earlier. This involved: anecdotal notes, tally marks, lists, comments and diagrams. Separate visits spanning 45–60 minutes were conducted in the Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms. The criteria for the observations schedule were divided into four
categories: the physical arrangement, classroom atmosphere, students, teachers, lesson content and context, and pedagogy. These categories became more specific as they were deconstructed further into subgroups and then into subsets (Table 3.10). It was not considered necessary to repeat observations in more than one subgroup when overlaps presented themselves, for example, Student/Teacher relationships could be included in four Criteria sets (Atmosphere, Students, Teachers and Pedagogy), however, it only appeared in the Student Criteria set. Maintaining consistency in recording observations was considered more important than in which subgroup they appeared.

Table 3.10 Classroom observation criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria sets</th>
<th>Criteria subgroups</th>
<th>Subsets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Desk formation</td>
<td>Rows or groups (students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Position of teacher’s desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship with student desk format and other furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other furniture</td>
<td>Shelves, computers, electronic white board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other features</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wall displays</td>
<td>Teacher produced, commercially produced or student produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational/ Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Related to which key learning areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atmosphere</strong></td>
<td>Student encouragement</td>
<td>Rewards, praise etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>Present/not present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movement around room</td>
<td>Student/Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to resources</td>
<td>Availability/Positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Positive/Negative display of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation/Engagement in task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collegiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement in instruction</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared decision making</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student/Teacher relationship</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Participation/Engagement</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach to children</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6.5. **Stage 5**

Stage 5 field work was the collection of students’ words and drawings directly after the NAPLAN testing period at the two schools in relation to two further prompts:

Draw a picture and write 3 words to support and explain your picture in response to:

*How you were feeling while you were doing the NAPLAN tests.*

*How you are feeling now that you have completed the NAPLAN tests.*

3.6.6. **Stage 6**

Further visits to the research sites were undertaken in September/October, following completion of NAPLAN testing period.

The final collection of students’ words and drawings occurred early in September 2011, in response to the final prompt:

Draw a picture and write 3 words to support and explain your picture in response to:

*How you are feeling about receiving your NAPLAN test results.*

At this stage most students had viewed their NAPLAN results, however, some had not had the opportunity. During parent focus group interviews some parents indicated that they would not share NAPLAN results with their children.
3.6.7. **Stage 7**

The final Stage was to undertake semi-structured focus group interviews with the parents of the students involved in the study. Focus group interviews with parents at Silverstone were conducted in Term 4, in October, 2011. Although arrangements had been made for parent interviews at Maryvale these failed to eventuate. Two group interviews were required to accommodate the ten Silverstone parent volunteers. Participants were notified of the two times available to attend interviews, although two uneven groups resulted. The first group, coded ‘SPGA’ included three parents, coded SPGA1, SPGA2 and SPGA3, with the second group, coded ‘SPGB’ with seven participants, coded SPGB1, SPGB2, SPGB3, SPGB4, SPGB5, SPGB6 and SPGB7. Appendix E provides further explanation of Silverstone’s data population and relationships between participants.

The structure of the focus group interviews with parent groups from Silverstone was consistent with those previously conducted, in that, interviews were recorded and later transcribed, questions and prompts were used to ensure flow of conversation, each participant was issued a number card enabling turn taking of each speaker to be recorded, and voice identification was conducted at the conclusion of the meeting. The questions and prompts, outlined in Table 3.11, were selected to guide discussion in order to obtain an holistic picture of the parents’ understanding of NAPLAN as well as their knowledge of assessment in education, specifically in their child’s classrooms.

### Table 3.11 Parent focus group questions/prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions/Prompts</th>
<th>Category (specific)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have heard of NAPLAN testing. What do you think of it?</td>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of the NAPLAN reporting process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you, or will you discuss the results with your child or children?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think different stakeholders use NAPLAN results for?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other assessment type is carried out in your child’s classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you could control the type of assessment your child was subjected to how would it look?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think NAPLAN has changed your child’s school experience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you aware of any significant changes in your child previous to and/or during the NAPLAN testing period?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout the stages of the data collection process it was imperative to continually reformulate and reiterate various questions and comments so as to consolidate or refute the degree of validity and worth of the participants’ accounts of school life and events.

Tables 3.12 and 3.13, provide representation of data collection stages over two distinct periods, pre and post-NAPLAN testing.

Table 3.12 Overview of data collection pre-NAPLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011</th>
<th>STAGES</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>STAGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Initial manager meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Initial manager meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Initial participant meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Initial participant meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Stage 1 Management interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Stage 1 Management interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Stage 2 Student focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Stage 3 Teacher focus group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Stage 4 Classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Stage 2 Student focus groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 3 Teacher focus group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 4 Classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.13  
Overview of data collection post-NAPLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>STAGES</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MARYVALE</td>
<td>SILVERSTONE</td>
<td>Yr 3</td>
<td>Yr 5</td>
<td>Yr 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Student words &amp; drawings 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Student words &amp; drawings 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>Student words &amp; drawings 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>Student words &amp; drawings 4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Stage 7</td>
<td>Parent focus group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.8.  Validation Process

Effective and appropriate validation procedures including methods of ‘account’ and ‘methodological’ triangulation were adopted wherever possible (Creswell, 1994). ‘Account triangulation’ (Creswell, 1994) was employed across individual’s accounts, within the same account and between accounts from individuals of differing hierarchal positions. Increasing ‘student voice’ may reinforce power and privilege amongst students (Silva, 2001), therefore listening to adult participant’s perspectives of the same experience helped guide the research. The purpose of this research is not to create student domination, but to allow students the opportunity to engage in discussions and decisions in educational matters affecting them. The level of conformity or divergence in the adult and student data determined the limits of data collection.

In this study the students were the primary participants, however, privileging ‘student voice’ may result in an oversimplified picture of the experience. To minimise this, methodological triangulation was employed. This entailed comparing and contrasting data from student focus group interviews with data collected through observations and finally with data arising from analysis of students’ words and drawings. These forms of triangulation provided a means of checking consistency and congruence of findings.
3.6.9. **Ethical considerations**

Before commencing the study, issues of approval and access considerations were taken into account and addressed. Fontana and Frey (2003) remind the researcher that the participants of the research are human and therefore extreme care must be taken to avoid harming them in any way (p. 88). Shank (2006) following along the same vein, suggests that the researcher needs to do no harm and be honest and open. To ensure ethical conduct was upheld throughout the research study, ethics were reflected upon, and practices such as, preserving anonymity and securing data, were reassessed from the inception of the study to its conclusion.

3.6.9.1. **Preserving anonymity of participants**

Various procedures were put into place in order to preserve anonymity. Firstly, no outsiders had access to the data during the field work process. Notes were considered confidential and pseudonyms were added before any data was presented. Secondly, time itself helped to protect anonymity or at least made identification more difficult. Over time, people forgot what others said and even what they themselves said.

Maintaining anonymity was a consideration throughout the entire research, not only in the write-up. The challenge existed, to present the information in such a way that even the people central to the study were unable to identify the characters in the scene, without removing aspects that made it unique and believable such that the characters would accept the account as it was rendered. Having been assured of confidentiality the participants generally felt freer to talk. This issue touched on the notion of trust.

3.6.9.2. **Trust**

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) emphasize the importance of the establishment of ‘reciprocal’ relationships while gaining entry. Mutual trust, respect and co-operation were dependent on the emergence of an exchange relationship in which information was obtained and participants in the setting could identify something which would make their participation worthwhile. A discreet manner in handling information within the setting, and honouring promises of anonymity in publications was projected. As access to privacy was a privilege it could be withdrawn if trust was not maintained.
3.6.9.3. Presence of the researcher

It is difficult to imagine that presence of an outside observer in a classroom would not produce some impact, although specific evidence of such impact was not available. Seeking to play a minimal role, positioning within the classroom during observations was of utmost importance. Sitting at the back or side of the room enabled the majority of students to ignore the intrusion. This was not always true of the teachers as this positioning was in their direct line of sight for much of the time therefore it was necessary to maintain a position of least intrusion assuring minimal impact.¹

3.7. Qualitative data analysis techniques

There exists a constant form of liaison between fieldwork and analysis, which as an interactive process dictates the collection and sampling of data. Creswell (2007) reminds us that techniques for analysis of information vary widely. Some methods are broad and are used in processing an entire body of information collected, whereas others address a single concern within the design of a study. The methods of qualitative data analysis selected as most suitable for this study were Content/Thematic analysis, and Emergent analytical coding, Trait coding, and Holistic coding and Holistic review. These analytical processes involve placing words, messages and symbols in text to convey meaning free from persuasive influence to a reader (Neuman, 2000).

3.7.1. Content/thematic analysis

Content analysis is utilised in many fields, including education, as a technique for gathering and analysing content in text (Neuman, 2000). This type of qualitative analysis goes back to 1910 when Max Weber suggested it be used to study newspapers (Neuman, 2000). Content analysis is commonly referred to as ‘textual coding’ and is a procedure used by researchers to objectively and systematically count and record procedures in order to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in text (Neuman, 2000). “Probably the greatest strength of content analysis is that it is

¹ The focus of the classroom observations was to identify overall consistency of teacher actions with reported teacher and school approaches to NAPLAN implementation, and the classroom environment. It was not to monitor subtleties in teacher and student interactions and practice. Given the observational data obtained, my presence as an observer appears to have minimum, if any, impact on the classroom practices.
unobtrusive and non-reactive” (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 115) thus ensuring that ‘voice’ is not altered (Berelson, 1952). If the student talk is altered in the process of analysis, the result is the loss of the ‘student voice’.

“To make sense of the text” (Creswell, 2007, p. 244) the analysis and interpretation of transcriptions of students’, teachers’ and parents’ focus group interviews, formal interviews conducted with the school managers, and of observation checklists and field notes, follow Creswell’s six stage model for analysing and interpreting qualitative data.

1. Preparing and organising data
2. Exploring and coding
3. Describing findings and forming themes
4. Representing and reporting findings
5. Interpreting the meaning of findings
6. Validating the accuracy of findings

3.7.1.1. **Preparing and organising data**

Preparing and organising the data involved transcribing the data. Many researchers outsource their transcribing because it is labour intensive and time consuming. To present the opportunity of complete immersion in the data, transcribing was completed by the researcher. Following Creswell’s (2007) recommendations a two inch margin was left on both sides of transcriptions to allow for anecdotal notes, and the questions or prompts were highlighted in bold font so as they were not confused with participant responses. Appendix F provides an example of the transcription process. Step one included reading through the transcripts, and writing notes to record first impressions of emerging patterns and themes. Tables explaining all interviews and observations, data sets, subsets, participants and research sites served to organise the data for analysis. These patterns and themes were then summarised into further tables. Each time the transcripts were read analysis was conducted. To avoid researcher bias two fellow professionals (raters) were added to the research team to assist with the general content analysis. Neither was privileged with information regarding the research sites or the participants. The analysis of the transcribed data followed Creswell’s 5 Stage Coding
Process (2007, p. 251). This cyclical process allowed clear identification of major themes through constantly revisiting the data. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the process. Following Creswell’s suggestion each team member was provided with a complete set of transcripts and independently wrote their initial reactions and any emerging, themes, patterns, words, views or frequently expressed ideas, in the two inch margins provided. In order to situate the team members anecdotal notes, taken during the focus group interviews, were made available. The preparation and organisation process produced more manageable data allowing further exploration.

3.7.1.2. Exploring and coding
Exploring and coding enabled data reduction of the original 70 pages of transcripts. Data analysis and coding can be performed using computer software programs such as, Leximancer, however, these methods remove what may be considered non-consequential text. The focus of the study was to locate and privilege ‘student voice’, therefore it was imperative that all utterances and intonation of utterances were recorded and analysed. To eliminate the risk of important text being deleted as non-consequential, all data was manually coded and analysed. The team trawled the data several times for regularities and patterns. As suggested by Creswell (2007), after the first few readings of the text numerous comments including interesting things had been noted in the margins. Segments of information were created from these notes reducing overall size of the transcriptions. Student data from each research site was analysed separately in order to identify similarities and differences of ‘student voice’ in relation to location. Words and phrases were identified, these formed coding segment labels. Segments were then labelled and reduced again by eliminating any overlaps. Finally data was collapsed further by grouping similar codes to form eight themes including:

- Change
- Students’ perceptions of teachers
- Students’ perceptions of NAPLAN tests
- Time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation
- Students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN
- Recrimination
- Preferred assessment practices
The right to speak.

3.7.1.3. Describing findings and forming themes

Describing findings and forming themes became part of the categorising phase of the analysis. Data from all transcripts was analysed and described through the use of questions. For example, “What occurred in the setting”? (Creswell, 2007, p. 254). Themes were allocated labels such as: “Ordinary themes, Unexpected themes, Hard to classify themes, Minor themes and finally Major themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 257). Following this, further layering was conducted and the number of themes was further reduced to six including:

- Students’ perceptions of their teachers
- Students’ perceptions of NAPLAN tests
- Time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation
- Students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN
- Fear of recrimination
- The right to speak.

3.7.1.4. Representing and reporting findings

Representing and reporting findings entailed the construction of a narrative which explained the interpretation of findings in response to the research question.

3.7.1.5. Interpreting the meaning of findings

Interpreting the meaning of findings is usually concerned with comparing what has been discovered with personal view and/or the views of others evidenced through past studies, however, no evidence of prior studies, privileging ‘student voice’ in matters related to NAPLAN, was found. Therefore, this process viewed major findings in relation to similar studies conducted in the areas of middle years, high stakes assessment practices, and ‘student voice’ in light of the research question. This step culminated with discussions, conclusions and interpretations about the meaning of the data, comparisons with the literature, the limitations of the study and further recommended research.
3.7.1.6. Validating the accuracy of findings

Validating the accuracy of findings involved checking their credibility and accuracy, which was of utmost importance. This study used triangulation of data collection, in that the data was gathered using a variety of qualitative approaches as a method of corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007, p. 243).

![A Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research](image)

As previously discussed Creswell’s six stage model for analysing and interpreting qualitative data was used in analysis of focus group and formal interview transcripts, and the observation checklists and field notes. The following explains the analysis process adopted to decode the data obtained through students’ words and drawings.

3.7.2. Emergent analytical coding, Trait coding, and Holistic coding and Holistic review.

Analysis of data collected at Stages 2, 5 and 7, involving students illustrating their emotions at four phases of NAPLAN—NAPLAN preparation, NAPLAN testing, post NAPLAN testing and delivery of NAPLAN results—through words and drawings, followed the process demonstrated by Haney et al. (2004) in, ‘Drawing on Education: Using Drawings to Document Schooling and Support Change’. Students’ words and drawings were subjected to three stages of coding:
3.7.2.1. **Emergent analytical coding**

Emergent analytical coding was used to identify features contained in the students’ drawings to develop a checklist of features for the purpose of further analysis. Independent raters were again employed to assist. Each independently viewed a sample of student drawings and noted common features. The set of features identified by the three independent raters were then combined, compared and condensed, and a draft coding sheet was developed. Each rater again worked independently to view another sample of drawings. The draft coding sheet was used to note the presence or absence of listed features such as: detail, number of human figures, facial expression and inanimate objects. A final coding checklist was developed by comparing results with only features exhibiting a high level of agreement (Appendix I). Any areas requiring further viewer agreement or consensus were moderated collaboratively. The complete data set was then independently coded by each of the raters.

3.7.2.2. **Trait coding**

Trait coding is an analysis of the extent to which the features identified in the emergent analytical coding occur in the drawings. Haney et al. (2004), award each feature a numerical weighting, however, the analysis in this study used tally marks as a more simplistic method of tabulating the frequency of features. The tally mark method, when applied, determined which categories of features could be discarded, which in turn condensed the coding scheme (Appendix J).

3.7.2.3. **Holistic coding and Holistic review**

Holistic coding and Holistic review combine to complete the analysis. The drawings were coded on a 4-5 point scale based on the representation of a particular aspect, for example, a proportion (Appendix K). Table 3.14 explains the numerical rating given to positive and negative adjectives selected by the students to explain and support their illustrations.
Table 3.14 Coding scale adjectives (Explain how you were feeling while you were doing the NAPLAN tests)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives Positive</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Adjectives Negative</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>excited, great, happy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>afraid, frightened, scared, hate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confident</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>sad, upset</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ready</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>nervous, worried, butterflies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calm, fine, relaxed, cool</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>pressured, overwhelmed, freaked</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>okay, whatever</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>impatient, sweaty, weird, pointless,</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bored, strange, shocked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process was then followed by an holistic review whereby the raters reviewed a set of drawing in response to two questions:

- What patterns do you see in the drawings?
- Why do you think these patterns occur?

As suggested by Haney et al. (2004), the patterns identified at this stage of the coding frequently corresponded with the features documented by the two previous stages.

Once this process had been completed it was necessary to check for evidence of reliability. Haney et al. (2004), recommend several forms of reliability studies including coding reliability. This study involved coding reliability as a method to consolidate inter-rater reliability and stability of information gleaned from more than one rater using the three analysis coding procedures, Emergent analytical coding, Trait coding, and Holistic coding and Holistic review. A subset of 20 student drawings was subjected to coding by the three raters used throughout the data analysis process. Results were examined using percentage agreement. To ensure reliability, Haney et al. (2004) suggest features with less than 80 percent agreement be discarded, however, the results indicated that a high level of inter-rater reliability existed between the raters employed for this study, which allowed the figure to increase to 95 per cent agreement prior to results being discarded. Upon completion of the overall process of coding reliability, results and findings were triangulated using data obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured student focus group interviews. As a result only three percent of student data was discarded, for example, due to lack of rater agreement in relation to interpretation of a notable characteristic change in a students’ illustrations across four prompts.
3.8. Summary

Educational research is attempting to penetrate the subjective world of the individual actor involved in schooling in order to understand the processes of social life and how these are structured. Such research implies a certain type of relationship between the researcher and the researched, as well as between the researcher and the collected data. Data analysis cannot be seen to be distinct or divorced from data collection. The methods of data collection used in this study were employed within the dynamic process of the research act, which is guided primarily by a ‘collective case study’ approach to field work (Stake, 2000).

This chapter demonstrates that the research framework adopted and the theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods used inform each other and are consistent with the purpose of the study. Described in this chapter are the research sites and participants. The theoretical paradigm, interpretivism has been introduced and justified. Also included is a rationale for, and a thorough description of, the approach, collective case study, and the methods used in qualitative data collections: semi-structured focus group interviews, observations, formal interviews, and words and drawings. The discussion then outlined the procedure, from gaining entry to the research sites through to and including the seven stages of data collection. Focus group and interview questions and prompts, observation criteria, and stimulus for students’ words and drawings were explained. Finally, ethical considerations related to the research have been addressed and a description of the data analysis techniques discussed.

The following chapter positions the reader in the research project using results and analysis from structured interviews conducted with the managers from each school, the classroom observations, and the teacher and parent semi-structured focus group interviews.
Chapter 4. Results and analysis: the adult perspective and observations

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents themes which emerged during the analysis of data collected from the adult population at each of the research sites. These include: a paradigm shift; a hidden NAPLAN agenda; positive responses to NAPLAN; NAPLAN curriculum, assessment and pedagogical focus; perceived school community reactions to NAPLAN; and the way forward. Section 4.2 presents the managers’ perceptions of learning and teaching occurring in Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms at their schools. Section 4.3 examines the learning and teaching environment from teachers’ perspectives to examine the degree of commonality and divergence with views of their managers. Section 4.4 reports findings derived from field notes obtained during moment-in-time classroom observations. Section 4.5 discusses parents’ perspectives of the school environment. Section 4.6 presents a comparison of perceptions of the above school community members and classroom observations, and discusses the degree of conformity. The chapter concludes with Section 4.7, a brief summary.

Data collected from school managers, teachers and parents, and observations was primarily obtained to develop a thorough understanding of the case to be studied and the context of the research sites within the study. Stake (1995) refers to such data gathering as “the case study researcher’s first obligation” (p. 4).

4.2. Managements’ perceptions

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, structured interviews were conducted with the Manager of Maryvale State School (MM1) and the Manager of Silverstone Independent School (SM1) in March 2011. Structured interview questions were divided into three categories, ‘professional’, ‘school’ and ‘NAPLAN’. At the commencement of each interview, interviewees provided a brief outline of their professional history and a description of their management role. They explained their school culture and their perception of their school as an educational institution. Questions were directed to interviewees regarding their opinion of NAPLAN, and how NAPLAN was perceived by
their school community. Following this, strategies, processes and approaches adopted by each school to accommodate NAPLAN were discussed. Interviews concluded with conversations regarding overall school assessment practices and student results (Table 3.7). Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 present findings from data collected during structured interviews with school managers. The cases illustrate different approaches to NAPLAN preparation and testing, and resulting variation of learning and teaching environments.

4.2.1. Maryvale’s manager’s perceptions

MM1 has focused his career in the field of education for 23 years, nine of which have been in the role of principal at Maryvale State School. He described his role as:


He explained that the introduction of NAPLAN testing had affected curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices at Maryvale.

4.2.1.1. The NAPLAN shift

MM1 identified that due to NAPLAN the focus had shifted from the improvement of student outcomes to teacher and school management accountability. This shift he added had brought about closer scrutiny of data by all teachers and school leaders and had resulted in shared responsibility and ownership of data. The relocation of responsibility alleviated pressure historically placed solely on school management. However, this shift did not stand in isolation, according to MM1:

[E]verything is a lot more rigid, a lot more prescribed, a lot more accountability, timelines, action plans all around NAPLAN that we never had to do before. Just implementing things around NAPLAN that we didn’t have to do before #… We are sort of focused around NAPLAN tasks and NAPLAN type approach to teaching and learning #…

According to MM1 NAPLAN involved significantly more than just a test to gauge students’ standards of achievement, the hidden political agenda also must be considered.

4.2.1.2. The hidden agenda

MM1 suggested that NAPLAN was portrayed by the Federal government as a resource designed to improve student learning outcomes, however, he argued that the National Government uses NAPLAN for the purpose of comparing perceived educational achievements of Australian states and territories. MM1 emphasised his dislike of undue
pressure NAPLAN placed on schools and furthermore, suggested that bureaucrats, politicians and media allow:

> [P]rofessional people who want the best for their kids to get on with their jobs and only use NAPLAN to assist children to achieve better educational outcomes rather than using the students’ results as a single tool to judge the success of a school.

MM1 suggested that NAPLAN results alone cannot signify Maryvale’s level of effectiveness as an educational institution:

> [T]here are lots of other programs around the arts, around physical education, around the love of learning; which are beyond testing and NAPLAN, which are just as important part of school and it is important not to lose sight of that. School is about the holistic education of the student, it’s not about just the academics.

4.2.1.3. **NAPLAN positives**

Although MM1 reported that the introduction of NAPLAN had some negative consequences, he considered that positive aspects also existed and had evidenced at Maryvale. MM1 advocated NAPLAN preparation practice tests as purposeful ‘formative assessment’ to guide learning and teaching. He indicated that increased specificity around NAPLAN practice testing guided understanding of student learning deficits. MM1 suggested that increased specificity allowed more targeted teaching in problem areas, but proposed that the lengthy period of four or five months between NAPLAN testing and delivery of results rendered NAPLAN impractical as a formative assessment instrument. An emerging benefit commensurate with the identification of student learning deficits was the identification of existing teacher learning deficits. MM1 had conducted professional development seminars at Maryvale in an attempt to address deficiencies which existed in teachers’ knowledge. He explained that collectively:

> [W]e are all together identifying the gaps in our own education and it’s a learning journey for us all. NAPLAN has given us a real way of helping our kids to improve and helping our teachers to improve so it’s really been good for us.

4.2.1.4. **Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy**

MM1 reported that curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices at Maryvale were NAPLAN focused. ‘NAPLAN season’ as described by MM1 encompassed February, March and April and led up to and included the testing period in May. Years 3, 5 and 7
students at Maryvale were situated in learning and teaching environments with little room for freedom, excursions, or further investigation, a curriculum which MM1 described as stifling creativity and fun:

>[O]nce NAPLAN season comes, which is basically the first few months of the year, it’s a very heavy focus on NAPLAN and everything is to do with NAPLAN and there’s very little freedom in curriculum, there’s little chance to go on excursions and little chance to further investigate learning, because you have got to get back to NAPLAN and NAPLAN preparation tasks. So, NAPLAN stifles a lot of creativity in learning and kids don’t like that. Kids want to come to school to learn, but they also want to have a bit of fun and NAPLAN preparation can take a lot of the fun out of learning.

Each year the completion of the NAPLAN testing period signified commencement of NAPLAN preparation for students attending Maryvale in Years 2, 4 and 6. These same children graduated into Years 3, 5 and 7 the following year and would be subjected to a NAPLAN focused curriculum and ‘so the cycle continued’. MM1 described this change to learning and teaching in classrooms at Maryvale as ‘vastly’ different from that to which students were accustomed.

4.2.1.5. MM1’s student community
Although he described them as being the minority, MM1 surmised that Maryvale’s high achieving students might approve of NAPLAN. In contrast, he indicated those who displayed diminished performance in testing situations would detest NAPLAN and some, according to MM1, would actively resist participating by failing to attend school or by ‘running away’. He added that Maryvale’s students would find NAPLAN testing structure foreign compared to assessment practices historically conducted in classrooms. Furthermore, students who attended Maryvale prior to NAPLAN implementation may object to changes that had occurred in their classrooms.

4.2.1.6. MM1’s teaching community
MM1 reasoned that his teaching staff perceived NAPLAN as a valueless compliance task because effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices were not reflected in the way NAPLAN occurred. He suggested his teachers were aware of numerous, authentic alternative data collection methods free from the stresses related to NAPLAN. However, MM1 reiterated his expectation of teacher compliance regarding Maryvale’s NAPLAN focus:
We will design a rigorous program. It becomes more intense the beginning of the year. There are certain types of activities the Years 3, 5 and 7 teachers are expected to do from day one. They will be told, ‘These are the tasks that you need to do’.

Teachers may find NAPLAN information useful, however, MM1 reported that the constant routine of practice test after practice test did not represent productive pedagogy. He surmised that teachers at Maryvale would rather embed ‘best practice’ assessment which was child centered, current and used by teachers to inform their teaching and to offer feedback to students about their learning within the existing classroom curriculum.

4.2.1.7. MM1’s parent community

MM1 proposed that Maryvale’s parent community may not be resistant to NAPLAN. MM1 suggested that those parents who had experienced classrooms of the 21st century would realise that NAPLAN style assessment practices were an uncomfortable fit with 21st century pedagogy and furthermore, these parents would better understand their children’s perceptions of, and reactions to, processes and procedures related to NAPLAN testing. He surmised his parent community probably perceived NAPLAN as a positive form of results gathering and reasoned that parents educated during a period of traditional approaches to education, which involved regular testing, would align NAPLAN with best practice assessment. In light of this MM1 stated that implementation of regular testing at Maryvale had provided improvement in students’ results.

4.2.1.8. The way forward?

MM1 claimed sustained progress in Year 3 and 5 students’ NAPLAN results, which was evidence of Maryvale’s successful focus on NAPLAN preparation. Year 7 students’ NAPLAN results failed to demonstrate such improvement, but according to MM1 the Year 7 teachers were to blame for student’s failure to achieve improved NAPLAN results. He explained his intention to relocate these teachers to alternative year levels the following year.

4.2.2. Silverstone’s manager’s perceptions

The manager of Silverstone Independent School since 2002 (SM1) explained her role as comparable to that of a ‘circus master’ similar to the description of a ‘Jack-of-all-trades’ offered by MM1. She described her role as:
[I] make sure the school is improving in every area. I report to the board and I manage the mandates. I make sure that the teacher mandates and the admin mandates are moving forward.

SM1 explained that moving forward at Silverstone did not include a NAPLAN focus.

### 4.2.2.1. The NAPLAN shift

According to SM1 implementation of NAPLAN testing had minimally impacted curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices at Silverstone.

[I] think it has little value for student learning and little value for teacher effectiveness… The students would think it’s a waste of time and the teachers would think it’s a waste of time, a waste of learning time; really. Our focus is on developing our pedagogy into being student centered and developmental.

### 4.2.2.2. The hidden agenda

SM1 described educational practices at Silverstone as not accommodating government ‘point scoring’ policy hidden behind NAPLAN testing. SM1 described NAPLAN as not being about children, but about political ‘point scoring’ and money:

NAPLAN is not about children improving their results; it’s about checking up on government schools and government teachers and using money to make them conform. The main factor involved in making my job more difficult is government requirements. Engagement of the students, engagement of the teachers in their own learning, student satisfaction and quality use of the students’ time in terms of learning, making sure that their time is valued here at school is how I define the effectiveness of Silverstone as an educational institution, not by NAPLAN.

### 4.2.2.3. NAPLAN positives

SM1 did not identify positive results from NAPLAN implementation but instead described it as…

…a government requirement which takes away teachers’ time for other more important things like taking on leadership roles. When they take on leadership roles it makes my job easier.

Shared responsibility in developing and maintaining a student-centered focus was SM1’s aim, not altering Silverstone’s teaching practices to focus on NAPLAN.

### 4.2.2.4. Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy
With the exception of student report cards Silverstone’s students’ progress was measured formatively which SM1 described as the most successful assessment method for informing future learning and teaching. She reported the occasional use of summative assessment practices for the purpose of gauging strengths and weaknesses of teaching practices leading to future improvement. SM1 explained that NAPLAN was not mentioned to Silverstone’s students until two weeks prior to commencement of the testing period. Instead, she reported:

> [O]ur focus is on developing our pedagogy into being student centred and developmental. We are not changing that because of NAPLAN. I think NAPLAN is of little value for student learning and little value for teacher effectiveness.

Students at Silverstone were involved in NAPLAN practice tests solely for the purpose of familiarisation of test structure and selected genre.

### 4.2.2.5. SM1’S student community

The student community at Silverstone, according to SM1, would view NAPLAN as:

[A] waste of time.

### 4.2.2.6. SM1’s teaching community

Consistent with SM1’s perception of her students’ reactions to NAPLAN she perceived her teachers would view NAPLAN as:


### 4.2.2.7. SM1’s parent community

SM1’s perception of Silverstone’s parents’ views was not unlike that of MM1. SM1 suggested that some parents who belonged to Silverstone’s school community may have been accepting of NAPLAN testing. Not unlike MM1, she surmised that parents’ own education included traditional forms of assessment such as pencil and paper testing which may have influenced their opinions of NAPLAN. However, she reported that increased time spent in classrooms at Silverstone would result in diminished interest in NAPLAN testing:

[I] think it would be mixed. I think that some of our population would be disinterested and it wouldn’t make any difference, but that would be influenced by the media and their own
upbringing and their opinions of summative and standardized testing. I think it would be a mixed bag.

Furthermore, SM1 explained that the clear message of Silverstone’s holistic education was passed on to parents at the time of enrolment.

4.2.2.8. The way forward?
SM1 concluded that NAPLAN need not receive further focus in classrooms at Silverstone because quality curriculum and teaching practices at Silverstone produced student outcomes which were:

[A]bove state average and middle of the road in terms of private schools, we are pretty consistent.

Unlike the interview conducted with MM1 which took over an hour to complete, the interview with SM1 was completed in 20 minutes. SM1 indicated that NAPLAN had very little impact on Silverstone and therefore she did not have more to offer the discussion other than that she thought of NAPLAN as:

[A] moment-in-time test which the government makes us do, it comes and it goes.

4.3. Teachers’ perceptions
As previously discussed in Chapter 3 teachers involved in this study participated in semi-structured focus group interviews.

4.3.1. Maryvale’s teachers’ perceptions
Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with one group of teachers at each school. Questions/prompts were divided into three categories, ‘students’, ‘teachers’, and ‘pedagogy’. Group discussion commenced with conversations in relation to NAPLAN implementation and any perceived consequential impact on student/teacher relationships, student behaviour and student attendance. Having focused on possible effects of NAPLAN testing on students, the focus of topic turned to include possible effects of NAPLAN on teachers personally and professionally. They compared learning and teaching at Maryvale prior to, and post, NAPLAN implementation and discussed their perceptions of, and reactions to, a perceived pedagogical shift.
Teachers at Maryvale reported during their focus group interview, conducted in early May 2011, that preparation for NAPLAN testing commenced at Maryvale in the second week of the school year with two-thirds of every day devoted to practising for NAPLAN prior to the testing period in May. MT4’s perception of NAPLAN testing was somewhat dissimilar to that of MT1 and MT2. A Year 7 teacher, MT4, disputed that NAPLAN testing and preparation affected her students. She reported ‘teaching to the test’ and supported changes to classroom structure and teacher pedagogy to accommodate NAPLAN. Her argument for the curriculum and pedagogical shift addressed the reduction of student stress through familiarisation of NAPLAN structure and testing format. MT4 explained:

MT4: It’s a different structure, so once they get used to the structure, it’s okay. Now with all the practice it’s like we’ve done that a million times so it doesn’t matter. Without these practices leading in, I think our kids could suffer both stress wise as well as results.

In contrast, a Year 5 teacher, MT1, and a Year 3 teacher, MT2, both perceived NAPLAN testing and preparation as impacting students negatively. They suggested that it created unnecessary stress short-term, and consumed a wealth of valuable teaching time which resulted in long-term side-effects. They added that practising for NAPLAN involved introduction of too many concepts over too short a period of time which reduced opportunities to appropriately scaffold student learning for development of deep understanding. Furthermore, MT2 declared:

MT2: There is so much they don't know, seriously…they just have no knowledge… we’re not teaching them. Step-by-step learning…that's what's missing and I believe long-term it's going to be detrimental to them. Those steps have gone.

MT4 claimed that by the time students reach Year 7 they were used to NAPLAN but suggested that this may not be the case in younger grades.

4.3.1.1. Student age and NAPLAN
Forming a united front, all three teachers interviewed from Maryvale collectively disputed the inclusion of Year 3 students in NAPLAN on the grounds that they were too young to be included, although conducting practice tests did ‘ease their suffering’. They reported:
MT4: I have seen the 3s the poor little darlings; they’re like deer in the headlights, that’s what they were.

MT2: In Grade 3 they still need to learn those logical steps. I think Year 3 are too young. I do feel that it is going to affect their later learning because now they are not learning. I’m thankful that we do the practice tests cause if we didn’t it would just be awful. It would be inexcusable to sit them down to do that test next week without any of the practising we’ve done.

MT4 suggested Year 7 student improvement resulting from alterations to the learning and teaching directly reflected successful implementation of the NAPLAN preparation routine adopted by Maryvale. She maintained that student exposure to problem solving strategies in relation to test questions had been followed by increased levels of student achievement. She refuted any adverse influences on Year 7 students and claimed that the benefits over-ride any negative affects which may occur. MT4 stated:

MT4: I actually like NAPLAN, so I guess I am weird.

However, MT4 later stated that some NAPLAN characteristics can cause Year 7 students stress.

4.3.1.2. NAPLAN questioning

Concerns were raised by MT1, MT2 and MT4 regarding the questions included in NAPLAN tests. They argued that the Queensland curriculum did not align with that of the southern states which for these teachers ignited issues in relation to equity. The teachers at Maryvale claimed that their students were placed under duress when tested on concepts which had not been addressed in Queensland schools and were not due to be addressed until the following year. They suggested that restricting students to a limited duration to complete tests which were set above their cognitive level created unnecessary stress and furthermore, MT4 questioned the integrity of including trick questions added in an attempt to confuse students. The three teachers from Maryvale maintained that:

MT1: It’s way too high for them. It’s crazy. There is a lot in the Reading test for them to read for the time they have.

MT2: I just think the whole system is ridiculous. There is so much these kids don’t know. It’s not aimed at our year level because there’s a lot of inferential reading there is no way you can do it in time. I did have children cry because they didn’t finish.
MT4: They put trick questions in, they really do. Their time element is really wrong.

Maryvale’s teachers suggested that the added pressure involved in teaching students how to identify a trick question consumed time better dedicated to more important tasks.

4.3.1.3. NAPLAN and student/teacher relationships

Continual NAPLAN test preparation was reported to impact Maryvale’s student/teacher relationships; however, teachers presented opposing perceptions of resulting repercussions. MT4 viewed changes in her Year 7 classroom as positive for the purpose of easier behaviour management. She contended that NAPLAN preparation positioned her students in test-like situations where interaction was disallowed, thus ensuring simplicity when detecting inappropriate student behaviour. MT4 explained that the process of testing, analysing, addressing weaknesses and re-testing using NAPLAN tests from previous years reassured students that their teachers would provide them with appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding in order to achieve success. According to MT4 this routine assisted in development of student/teacher relationships based on trust.

In contrast, MT1 and MT2 suggested that constant practising for NAPLAN resulted in insufficient time available to provide experiences which assist in development of positive student/teacher relationships. They explained:

MT2: I just think they still need that TLC (Tender Loving Care) and they don't get that. I told the parents that all that TLC is gone, I don't have time for it. I'm a lot shorter as I am so pushed for time. I don't have time to coax them into what we are doing now and have a lovely time or to do what I should be doing, the time is not there.

MT1: They say in first term you should be focusing on behaviour and tuning the children into their learning, but it is really hard to engage the kids when from the start of the year it is NAPLAN, NAPLAN, NAPLAN. How do you engage them, how do you go out and do science experiments? We don't have time.

They added that attempts to cover everything in an already overcrowded curriculum increased pressure.

4.3.1.4. NAPLAN pressure
Teachers at Maryvale admitted to feeling pressured by NAPLAN and all that it entails. They maintained that NAPLAN pressure was not restricted to them as all participants endured high-stakes related to NAPLAN. Expectations placed on school management by higher authorities were shared with teachers who already possessed their own set of high-stakes. This top-down pressure was then passed on to students, who were already experiencing the pressure of high-stakes related to their futures. The teachers explained:

MT1: The pressure comes down the line. MM1 has got pressure on him to achieve results, he puts the pressure on us, and we put the pressure on kids. It doesn’t matter how you go about starting the test and preparing them for it they still feel the pressure, because we have the pressure on us, so therefore they feel that pressure. I have kids who just go, “no, I can’t do it”.

MT2: I get anxious and I do get anxious about how they suffer. I did have 3 children crying at the beginning.

MT4: I think teachers are going to be looked at. You don't get a bonus if you don't achieve results; it will come back to your NAPLAN results and they will drag it all through the laundry. They (the Year 7 students) know how important it is…it might be the opportunity for a scholarship. Private schools near here request the results as soon as they are out and they put a lot of weighting on the results from NAPLAN.

Parent pressure to improve students’ NAPLAN results was not experienced by MT1, MT2 or MT4, although they reported that NAPLAN results affect them personally. They suggested that their value as a teacher was gauged by MM1 using their students’ NAPLAN results. If their students failed to achieve improved NAPLAN results they feared punishment by MM1 by means of transfer to a Year level not involved in NAPLAN testing regardless of how diligently they worked throughout the year. They explained that their students’ NAPLAN results were:

MT4: Pulled apart, they’re scrutinised, not just year level by year level but teacher by teacher. MM1 does graphs and he puts them up in staff meetings and we all know who's who. If MM1 says he doesn't look at it then he is not telling the truth because he looks at it for the next year and says, “Well that teacher did a good job in NAPLAN and I think they're doing a good job leading other people, so I'm going to leave them on that year level where they are. That person didn't so I am going to pull them out and put someone else in there”. I’d do it if I was a principal, have a hard look, a hard look at it and see who is the best fit for that class based on their ability to undertake what I want for NAPLAN. But it is advertised, it is out there and it's assessable on the one school site.
MT2: It is a clear indication of whether you are a crappy teacher or a good one. We all know that we’re compared.

MT4: Yes, we are all compared.

Teachers at Maryvale claimed that NAPLAN results were not indicative of best practice teaching as there were other areas of curriculum equally as important as those addressed in NAPLAN.

4.3.1.5. Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy

According to Maryvale teachers interviewed, curriculum and pedagogy had significantly transformed since NAPLAN implementation at Maryvale. They explained that learning and teaching prior to NAPLAN included whole term integrated unit plans which encompassed curriculum expectations across seven key learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), Health and Physical Education (HPE), The Arts, and Technology. Teachers explained how prior to NAPLAN highly scaffolded concepts were introduced through topics generated from the real world of students. There existed time available for inclusion of explicit teaching of basic skills appropriate to students’ cognitive abilities and preferred learning styles, school camps with curriculum connections to thematic units, art and drama experiences, and learning through discovery and problem solving which included higher order thinking skills. All of these aspects had been eliminated according to teachers at Maryvale and had been replaced with NAPLAN preparation involving ‘teaching to the test’ and ‘test wiseness’ thus narrowing curriculum. The teachers demonstrated genuine concern for their students’ future when reporting:

MT1: We originally did camp in first term and then we were told we had to put back until after NAPLAN because there wasn’t time to do a three-day camp in term one because of NAPLAN preparation. Like maths, rather than doing one concept in depth in one day you will probably cover five or 10 or whatever concepts.

MT2: We taught them we would use a maths book, then you would go to your maths program and you would teach them. Half of them can’t read or write, can’t string a sentence together or more than one sentence, having no idea of the structure of the writing and they come straight into the second week back we are hitting them with these tests and teaching them the strategies of how to sit these tests. You are just teaching them how to know the answer. We are only teaching the NAPLAN tests, basically how to sit them and the strategies involved in answering the questions. You are only teaching them how to answer that
question; you are not teaching them how to do it. They're going to have a lot of missed learning and they will struggle to understand as they get older because a lot of the concepts that they should be taught and really taught, broken down and taught.

MT4: We would teach them. We have that ‘Sound Waves’ text book, but we would have our own spelling program and an individual spelling program to cover concepts not covered in ‘Sound Waves’. We did that and we would test the students and place them into appropriate groups, we would test for reading groups and place them into their appropriate groups. You would be able to do so many art activities and ease children in. You haven't got time for that one-on-one. No, not until after NAPLAN. Not until after NAPLAN, life begins after NAPLAN. It's true (teacher laughs) it's a fact. Yes, we go on an excursion to Parliament house, nothing like that has changed. We just have to work twice as hard so that we can fit it all in. Whatever units (thematic integrated units) you do in term one most of it is scrapped, but there's no time for any of that anymore, the time has gone and now it is just like we attach them to the end of a line and to throw them out really, and just hope that they can hang on.

Each participant identified the absence of important pedagogy such as hands-on manipulative material for students still functioning at the concrete operational stage. They added that student group work had reduced and reported that most instruction was whole class and involved students sitting at their desks the majority of the time. MT2 explained:

MT2: Sitting on the carpet sharing time is gone. They (Parents) were upset because they would say, “Why don't you sit on the carpet and have time to share; tell stories and run language programs that you would run for little ones. Like seven-year-old kids sitting on the mat; sitting and sharing?” That is gone and I can't help it, I can't. I said, “The fun will start after NAPLAN has finished and we can go back to having fun nonsensical stuff”.

Maryvale’s teachers suggested that curriculum, assessment and pedagogy conducive to best classroom practices was not that which was associated with NAPLAN structure. They described ideal teaching situations as environments which allowed for teaching of reading and writing; where appropriate time was available to cover concepts from foundation through to deep understanding.

Upon completion of NAPLAN assessment, Years 2, 4 and 6 students at Maryvale commenced preparation for the following year. However, MT1, MT2 and MT4 indicated their dissatisfaction with students’ skills and knowledge when they entered their classrooms at the commencement of the new school year. They complained of
increased work-load as they were forced to re-teach concepts which should have been addressed by previous teachers. The teachers described their frustration:

MT2:  I felt very critical. I thought, what have you learnt, do you know anything? They just don't know anything. I've looked at it and thought that's a whole load of crap.

MT4:  This sounds really snobby. It wasn't at the standard that we wanted it so we re-taught the whole thing. We found that this year too, even though they had practised. Even with the persuasive task, even though they had had.

MT1:  Even though they had done persuasive text at the end of last year they came to us and we had, they didn't have a clue of the genre. Yes, I've re-taught the whole thing.

Re-teaching knowledge and skills was not the only concern in relation to NAPLAN voiced by teachers from Maryvale.

4.3.1.6.    NAPLAN validity

Maryvale’s participant group of teachers suggested that student data collected from administering multiple practice tests during NAPLAN preparation were used during parent/teacher interviews and surmised that multiple collections of results constituted a more reliable approach to obtaining data as there were demonstrations of distance travelled. However, in comparison, the ‘point-in-time’ NAPLAN tests, according to MT1, MT2 and MT4, produced invalid data because students were able to guess or students may be experiencing other issues which may affect their ability to achieve, which would skew results. Skewing of results raised concerns for teachers from Maryvale as they believed that NAPLAN results impacted the distribution of funding received from governments for intervention to address student needs. They described how skewed results can impact classroom practice:

MT1:  Sometimes it's just a guess…they guess the right answer. I am having issues with a student at the moment that is not getting certain support because she did okay on the last NAPLAN tests, but I think it was guessing. I have one particular child that in the pre-test and post-test went backwards and it wasn't for lack of teaching. She just guessed better the first time and significantly. Sometimes they can guess and get at national standard or even higher.

MT4:  It’s just a pattern down the page isn’t it, especially with reading? I had two who went backwards and when I went back and checked, the ones that she got wrong the first time were different to the one she got wrong the second time and so it was just guesses. I think my data is far more balanced because I know what mine is based on.
Teachers interviewed suggested further point-in-time testing issues which may impact validity of NAPLAN data:

MT1: Sometimes too, you might have a really bright child who is just having an off day, one off day.

MT4: Sick or whatever and their results plummet. I've seen that happen before and sad they suffer from test anxiety.

MT2: He actually has the ability, but in a test he freezes.

4.3.1.7. NAPLAN equity

Another concern raised was with regard to lower ability students, teachers described them as disadvantaged:

MT2: The children who miss it (referring to the understanding of concepts) should be exposed to other ways to learn but it's not happening, there is not enough time.

MT1: Half my class who aren't up to reading at the NAPLAN level so therefore they just miss out because it goes over their head, but we still have to practise. So where you should be taking them back to the basics at their level trying to increase their reading skills they say too bad you have to have a go at this because that’s what’s expected. Your lower ability kids who need to do it again and again to get it, they're just bluffing it.

MT4: You used to be able to look at something and then teach it and then you would revise it and then you would come back and re-teach. You don't get time to re-teach anymore so there's all those lower learning children; the ones with learning disabilities; that are still missing out.

Although identified as ‘missing out’ M1, M2 and M4 considered spending time with low achieving students during NAPLAN preparation a waste of time. Instead they reported their involvement in selecting students positioned close to, but just below state and/or national averages and targeting them with focused teaching in an attempt to elevate students’ positions thus increasing class averages. They explained:

MT1: It's the class sometimes; you've just got a lower class.

MT4: You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink.

MT2: Halfway through term one my focus ...I took the middle to the high group and I taught them. I gave my teacher aide the lows and I solely targeted the middle to the high group and I did that every day. Because if any are going to get better results it will be those
students…I know this is terrible, the really, really, low ones who cannot read instructions to start with, there is no point me working with students who got 2/48 and they cannot read. They struggle to read a sentence, so the teacher aide took these children to answer some questions and I took the middle to high, as in I really thoroughly taught them.

They explained that MM1 expected improved student NAPLAN results and the easiest way to improve the classroom average is to target students who do not need to travel far to move from below to above the average line.

4.3.1.8. NAPLAN for personal use
MT1 and MT2 rarely spoke positively in reference to NAPLAN, however, MT4 had found a personal use for NAPLAN testing and preparation and spoke positively although sometimes conflictingly about NAPLAN testing and preparation:

MT4: I'm using it as a way of promotion, a way of getting up the leadership line because I've implemented programs for NAPLAN and I look at graphs and data. So I've used it to benefit myself. I hope they improve in reading this year because I can use that on my application (teacher laughs).

It would appear that MT4 was not in isolation when utilising NAPLAN for personal reasons. Teachers identified contract teachers at Maryvale who altered their practice test results in order to please management and increase the possibility of a permanent teacher placement.

4.3.1.9. The way forward?
The care these teachers directed towards their students was obvious but they described issues which caused them anxiety as they complied with changes to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices, which they identify as non-conducive to best classroom practice.

4.3.2. Silverstone’s teachers’ perceptions
The implementation of NAPLAN was described by teachers from Silverstone, during their focus group interview conducted in early May 2011, as having had minimal impact on teaching and learning in their classrooms. Silverstone’s teachers reported spending less than an hour a year rehearsing for NAPLAN testing:

ST3: Is there a less than, more than? In a year, less than an hour if I skim through the book.
4.3.2.1. Student age and NAPLAN
Reference was made by Silverstone’s teachers in relation to student age and their ability to cope with perceived pressure related to NAPLAN testing. As traditional testing was not common practice at Silverstone, teachers claimed that students of all ages attending Silverstone would be uncomfortable in a formal testing situation.

4.3.2.2. NAPLAN questioning
The unfamiliar structure of NAPLAN tests and extensive NAPLAN testing period were identified by teachers as their primary concerns. ST4 described her concerns:

ST4: It’s the way it’s set out. It’s not always clear what they’re asking. Some questions can be confusing especially for kids who have been sitting there for hours doing tests.

4.3.2.3. NAPLAN and student/teacher relationships
Silverstone’s teachers indicated that they refused to allow NAPLAN to disrupt learning and teaching or to compromise student/teacher relationships. There was no evidence of a NAPLAN focus at Silverstone; however, teachers explained that NAPLAN test material was integrated within existing curriculum, thus camouflaging any changes to lesson structure or content:

ST3: When I did it I made it in context of what they were already learning so nothing changed for the kids…Our routine stayed the same so nothing else changed. You link it in with the main lesson…they were exposed to it and you made it real for them so they felt confident with it…we just integrated it into what we were already doing, so nothing changed so the kids still loved us…I got one test like one practice test and we cut it into strips and I made it into a game, so it was fun which is good for relationship building.

4.3.2.4. NAPLAN pressure
Silverstone’s teachers reported absence of pressure in relation to NAPLAN and reasoned that it reflected the low level of importance NAPLAN was afforded at Silverstone. Their justification for not experiencing pressure from Silverstone’s parents, to improve students’ NAPLAN results, was the existing understanding between parents and the school that teaching practices at Silverstone were the best way to ensure improved student outcomes. They explained:

ST3: It’s made very clear to the parents our view on, we are about the holistic child and not just about one test.
I think the parents understand that. If they were asking for that when they came to see us, pre-interview stage, we would tell them that this is not the right school for them.

A parent focused on that would not fit at all here.

Three teachers admitted that NAPLAN results affected them personally, but explained it was not related to success or failure. Their concern was in relation to anxiety or stress experienced by parents receiving their children’s NAPLAN results during the school holiday period when school would not be open and they would not be available to answer their questions. ST3 expressed her concern:

Yeah. My only worry is that they get posted in the holidays and like the odd parent might have anxiety over them and you have to deal with that first thing back. In our letter home we put a mention of it. If you have any queries come in. We don’t really get that many but we can get the odd one if the score’s very low.

It would appear that very little change had occurred in relation NAPLAN implementation except during the brief period prior to and during actual testing.

4.3.2.5. A curriculum, assessment and pedagogical shift

Including group, individual or whole class activities where students were offered opportunities to learn from each other and discover solutions to problems using manipulative materials were commonplace in these classrooms. ST3 explained,

We are about the holistic child, not just about one test.

According to ST1, ST2, ST3 and ST4, teaching and learning which existed in classrooms at Silverstone were conducive to best practice. They suggested that placing students at the centre of curriculum presented opportunities for success and encouraged students to develop a love of learning. Teachers explained that students attending Silverstone were surrounded by beauty and were able to learn at their own pace:

We are reaching all the kids… that’s the best thing.

It’s structured to reach all the kids.

They added that assessment practices at Silverstone were ongoing and in the main formative in nature which resulted in valid assessment of student achievement.

4.3.2.6. NAPLAN validity
Teachers from Silverstone involved in the study collectively asserted that nationwide assessment did affect their students negatively by way of test anxiety and stress which could impact their demonstrations of achievement. They reported:

ST2: Some of them were quite stressed out. Some of them did get a bit scared. Some of the parents had to come in and one had to push one of the girls to come in and actually do it. Those poor things couldn’t concentrate and do their best.

ST3: Yes, it was the stress of actually doing a test. We don’t do tests, not in this school, no. Other schools, yes. So those students are more used to it so it’s not a level playing field.

ST4: Yes, because they’re not exposed to any sort of test really, no formal testing. It’s not what we normally do, so it’s a different feel to it.

Furthermore, they suggested that students often correctly guess answers to multiple choice questions thus invalidating results.

4.3.2.7. NAPLAN equity
Teachers from Silverstone indicated that they were aware that some teachers at other schools were ‘teaching to the test’ and teaching to specific groups of students so as to achieve improved student NAPLAN results. ST4 described her view of such a practice:

ST4: You would be better off giving them all more support during the year, for their own benefit.

They stated that they do not engage in such practices.

4.3.2.8. NAPLAN for personal use
A further issue raised by Silverstone’s teachers was the introduction of performance-based pay in the government sector. Although they considered this would not impact their school, they feared for their government school counterparts who would be rewarded or disadvantaged according to their NAPLAN results. ST1, ST2, ST3 and ST4 feared that performance-based pay would negatively impact the teaching profession including far reaching side-effects such as teachers cheating, teachers pressuring students to perform, knowledge becoming power, and the profession would experience massive public sector resignations.

4.3.2.9. The way forward?
Teachers indicated that the way forward from this point was to continue with current structure, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practised at Silverstone because NAPLAN was:

ST3: Not the best way. In fact it’s possibly the worst way. That’s so far away from the best.

All: Laugh.

4.4. Classroom observations

Qualitative data for this study was generated from various sources, as detailed in Chapter 3. Classroom observations at Stage 4 were conducted in May, prior to NAPLAN testing. This data further investigated children’s experiences in relation to NAPLAN testing and preparation adopted by each research site. As outlined in Chapter 3, an observation criteria checklist was developed from literature on middle schooling practices. Anecdotal notes, tally marks, lists, comments and diagrams were used to record information. Observations were conducted in each classroom involved in the study for 45 to 60 minutes. Physical arrangement, atmosphere, students, teachers, lesson content and context, and teacher pedagogy were observed.

Content analysis of observation data utilising Creswell’s six stage model for analysing and interpreting qualitative data (2007, p. 244), as explained in Chapter 3, resulted in reduction of the data set to a manageable four categories:

- Physical
- Atmosphere
- Students
- Teachers

The following sections present data collected in each category. Consistent with the observation checklist the ‘Physical’ category is presented first. The ‘Teachers’ category, which includes explanations of lesson content and context, follows for the purpose of positioning the reader in the classroom. ‘Atmosphere’ is the third category presented and, finally, data from observations in the ‘Students’ category is presented. During the analysis process sub-categories were developed. The Physical category includes furniture arrangement and wall displays. Teacher category involves observations
recorded in relation to teacher pedagogy and engagement, lesson content and context, and reference to testing. Atmosphere, the third category, refers to classroom atmosphere and includes observations of sub-categories such as encouragement and praise, student collaboration, humour, student movement, and access to resources. Finally the Student category includes observations of student engagement and behaviour, relationship with teacher, and evidence of negotiated learning.

As discussed in Chapter 3 classrooms belonging to Maryvale were coded MC1, MC2, MC3 and MC4, those belonging to Silverstone as SC1, SC2, SC3 and SC4. Further explanation of the data population and relationships between participants is available in Appendices D and E.

4.4.1. Maryvale’s Classrooms
Classroom observations conducted at Maryvale involved 45 to 60 minute visits to participating Year 3, 5 and 7 classrooms, MC1 (Year 5A), MC2 (Year 3), MC3 (Year 5B) and MC4 (Year 7) in May 2011. Observation of classroom MC2 was conducted in the morning session from 9.00 am to 10.00 am. MC1 and MC3 observations were conducted in the middle session of the school day from 11.30 am to 12.15 pm and 12.15 pm to 1.00 pm respectively. MC4, the final classroom was observed from 1.50 pm to 2.50 pm in the final session of the school day. Table 3.4 provides a visual representation of periods of classroom data collection.

As discussed in Chapter 3 observations included the physical arrangement, atmosphere, students, teachers, lesson content and context, and pedagogy. Data was gathered using a criteria checklist.

4.4.1.1. Physical
Furniture placement varied in classrooms observed at Maryvale. Tables and chairs positioned in rows constituted classroom layout in MC1 and MC2. MC4’s furniture was arranged in groups and classroom MC3 contained a mixture of the two formats. Noted in all rooms was lack of useable floor space while electronic whiteboard positioning dictated a definite front to each room (Appendices L, M, N and O).

Classroom wall displays included posters, pictures and classroom business. Very few student work samples featured on walls. MC3’s display of four items of children’s work constituted the greatest proportion. MC1’s room displayed three items, MC4’s two, with
no evidence of student work displayed in MC2. Wall displays in all participating classrooms included Literacy and Numeracy posters. Three rooms displayed items such as behaviour reminders and classroom rules, posters related to unit themes, and organisational information including such items as reading groups. Students’ NAPLAN practice test results written next to students’ names were displayed on MC4’s classroom wall.

4.4.1.2. Teachers
Field notes obtained during observations in classroom MC1 described the lesson explanation provided by MT1 as ‘quick and unclear’. The ‘whole class’ lesson was led by a computer program and involved one student pointing to questions displayed on the electronic whiteboard. Concepts covered in the lesson included ‘recognising time, o’clock, ½ past, ¼ past and ¼ to, on digital and analogue clocks’. Those students who were task focused called out answers. Students worked independently while MT1 engaged in an alternative computer activity. MT1’s engagement involved raising her voice to correct student behaviour. Students failed to acknowledge MT1’s attempts to control the class. Justifying poor classroom behaviour and low level expectations MT1 explained:

   MT1: This is the dumb group so you get all the behaviour problems.

No specific reference to NAPLAN was witnessed during this observation; however, the computer generated lesson involved question format consistent with that found in NAPLAN tests.

Initial observation of lesson content observed in MC2 identified curriculum intent as NAPLAN numeracy, however, teaching numeracy skills or concepts was not observed. MT2 at the front of the room addressed the whole class who were sitting at their tables. Each NAPLAN practice test question was dissected as it appeared on the electronic whiteboard. Lesson intent appeared to be focused on identifying clues in the question format which would assist students to discover correct answers and was not about solving numeracy problems. Instructions included such statements as:

   MT2: If there are two lines, then they expect two answers. Ask yourself, why would they ask this?

This further clarified lesson intent as ‘test wiseness’.
A tidy tray piled high with photocopies of NAPLAN tests stood by the classroom door. MT2 explained that these had not been completed because she and her class:

MT2: Had had enough of NAPLAN.

Observation in MC3 involved a NAPLAN Literacy test. Lesson content included strategies which aided students’ attempts to identify the distracters supplied in NAPLAN literacy multiple choice options. These included explanations such as:

MT3: If a multiple choice question ends in the word ‘an’ the answer must begin with a vowel’. If you have no idea what the answer is, choose the longest one.

Other concepts covered during the lesson included: capitalisation; colouring small circles correctly; and ‘the amount of spaces provided for the answer determines the length of the answer required’. The practice test was dissected one page at a time. Each question involved a different concept, no links were identified between concepts and there was no opportunity for students to consolidate each concept before moving on. Several students faced away from MT3 including a boy sitting alone at the end of MT3’s desk who received no teacher acknowledgement the entire lesson. Observed in this classroom was ‘teaching to the test’ regardless of student engagement or disengagement.

The only classroom observation conducted in the afternoon session at Maryvale was in MC4. Whole class instructions were given to students before they commenced working collaboratively in teacher selected groups. Group work observed in this classroom was teacher directed. Each group was designated an animal threatened by extinction. Collectively students within each group identified characteristics of their animal which might contribute to its endangerment; other threats such as habitat destruction were also identified as was the animal’s endangerment and its relationship with humans. The lesson culminated with each group of students presenting their findings to the whole class and answering questions directed to them with regard to their endangered animal. In this classroom students worked in teams and demonstrated mutual respect for each other and their teacher.

As stated previously, this observation session was conducted in the final session of the school day, however, students reported that the previous two sessions had involved NAPLAN practice testing, consistent with the teachers and MM1 reporting that two-
thirds of each day was spent preparing for NAPLAN. Evidence of this was observed on entering the room to witness the teacher calling out students’ names and students responding with their practice test results. As each result was supplied the teacher repeated it loudly to the whole class. During the observation period no direct or indirect reference to NAPLAN was made in MC4 or in MC1. However, during the 45 minute observation conducted in MC3 the word ‘test’ was recorded 17 times. Other references to NAPLAN testing were also made such as:

MT3: This is your last chance.

MT3 was referring to NAPLAN testing period approaching. Classroom MC2 evidenced no direct reference to NAPLAN testing, however, MT2 included NAPLAN testing with student learning. MT2 referred to NAPLAN examiners using the collective ‘They’:

MT2: This is what they want.

4.4.1.3. Atmosphere
Fieldwork observations at Maryvale recorded evidence of student encouragement in all four study classrooms. MC1 students were praised repeatedly for displaying appropriate classroom behaviour, trying hard, sharing, helping others, and work related achievements. Although no rewards were given to students during the observation period there was evidence of two reward systems in MC2. In MC3 verbal praise was forthcoming for students answering NAPLAN practice test questions correctly, however, those students who answered the teacher’s questions incorrectly were subjected to sarcasm and ‘put-downs’. Students in MC4 were observed receiving verbal praise for answering questions correctly in relation to endangered animals, their habitats, their predators, and issues related to causes of their endangerment. No other praise or encouragement was witnessed.

Student collaboration was observed in MC4 where students engaged in group conversations related to the unit topic, Endangered Animals, but was not evident in MC1, MC2 or MC3. The only evidence of humour was in MC4, a Year 7 class, where the teacher joked with students several times. Student movement in these classrooms was limited as children in all Year levels were observed learning from a seated position at their tables. One student in MC2 stood at the front of the room pointing to items on the computer generated lesson on the electronic whiteboard. The only other obvious
student movement was observed in MC3 where during the lesson several children left the room to visit the bathroom, a group of four students stood at the rubbish bin talking and sharpening their pencils and two students were witnessed crawling around on the floor under tables to avoid lesson participation.

Students were supplied with resources required to complete classroom tasks such as test booklets, exercise books and writing utensils, but few other resources were observed in these classrooms. Reading books placed in boxes sat on shelves in the Year 3 classroom, clusters of four or five classroom computers were available to students, and electronic white boards appeared to be the only other resource available to students. This is not to say that there were no other resources available to students attending Maryvale, but these were the only resources observed in classroom settings.

4.4.1.4. Students
Five students observed in MC1 demonstrated engagement in the task of dissecting a NAPLAN practice test for the purpose of identifying clues to correct answers, others displayed negative behaviour such as talking, calling out, fidgeting and yawning. After 45 minutes the number of students engaged reduced to three. MC2 students also demonstrated disengagement through talking and daydreaming, only three students produced any work. MT2 used threats in an attempt to re-engage students:

MT2: If we don’t do the activity on the electronic whiteboard we will go straight to the worksheet.

Children in MC3 displayed negative responses towards the teacher and task. Five students engaged in the learning experience. As mentioned previously, those students who answered questions incorrectly were subjected to sarcastic remarks and ‘put-downs’ from the teacher. Observed were students exiting the room, students standing around the rubbish bin, students crawling on the floor, and students fidgeting, calling out, tapping and swinging on chairs. The lesson continued regardless of varying levels of student engagement. In the final classroom, MC4 students were observed working collaboratively. MT4 continually prompted students to extend their thinking. Four of the five groups worked diligently throughout the lesson. One group appeared to devote little effort to the task and produced little work as a result. This classroom was unique in that it was the only classroom where students were observed working collaboratively with other students and their teacher.
4.4.2. Silverstone’s Classrooms
Observations were conducted at Silverstone in two Year 3 classrooms, SC1 and SC4, one Year 5 classroom, SC3 and one Year 7 classroom, SC2, in May 2011. SC1 and SC3 visits occurred during the middle session of the school day and SC2 and SC4 were observed during the afternoon session (Table 3.4). Classrooms at Silverstone included double teaching spaces which allowed room for furniture arrangement while providing floor space for individuals, small groups or whole class floor activities.

4.4.2.1. Physical
Classroom furniture at Silverstone was of timber construction. All classrooms contained student desks and shelving. Observed desk arrangements included rows in SC2 and SC3 and group format in SC1 and SC4. Students who required a desk to undertake an activity selected any desk, students were not allocated specific places to sit nor was there designated ownership of desks. Students in Silverstone’s classrooms were recorded moving freely around rooms addressing tasks through their selected mode of learning. A definite front of room only existed in one classroom visited, SC3; the desks positioned in rows faced the blackboard at the designated front of the room.

Demonstrations of student work constituted the majority of items displayed on walls of all classrooms observed at Silverstone. Space was also provided for affirmations, positive words such as peace, care and love, and labels including wet area and reading corner, students groups such as Chipmunks, Hedgehogs, Squirrels, Badgers, Raccoons, Rabbits and Otters, and paintings of tranquil settings, for example, a water colour of a cottage garden, a painting of a whale breaching from the water, and a sailing boat drifting along the ocean. Although present, Mathematics and English charts were allocated minimal wall space (Appendices P, Q, R and S).

4.4.2.2. Teachers
Silverstone had adopted a constructivist approach to learning and teaching. On entry to classrooms it was difficult to locate teachers as they constantly engaged with students and tasks. Students in classrooms SC2 and SC4 were observed negotiating tasks and learning environments confidently with each other and their teachers.

Children in SC1 engaged in reading while relaxing music played in the background. Two students involved themselves in an in-depth discussion about their book without
interrupting other students. ST1 provided individual consultation with students. Lesson content in SC2, a Year 7 classroom, involved research, design and problem solving as students investigated famous inventors and inventions through history. ST2 consulted with one student after another and appeared to offer encouragement and ideas, and prompted their research.

Students belonging to SC4, positioned in a circle on the floor, revisited their social skills. ST4, also a member of the circle, introduced discussion around the purpose of social skills and consequences of not displaying them. Students performed role plays of exhibitions of social skills and consequences related to a lack of social skills.

The format of mathematics observed in SC3 resembled that included in NAPLAN, as they were presented in multiple choice format. Mathematical problems were presented and strategies for solving problems were discussed. Students were asked to select and justify their preferred responses from a selection of four multiple choice answers. Manipulative materials were available for those students who functioned at the concrete operational stage. Students were also given the opportunity to consolidate concepts introduced in each mathematical problem before moving on to a new concept.

Noted during observations conducted at Silverstone, just prior to NAPLAN testing, was an absence of direct or indirect reference to NAPLAN.

4.4.2.3. Atmosphere

Consistent in all classrooms observed at Silverstone was encouragement and verbal praise directed towards students. ST1 used the ‘ripple effect’ successfully by rewarding individuals and small groups of children with praise such as ‘well done’, ‘good work’, ‘beautiful reading’, ‘well done children who have packed up’ and ‘thank-you for doing the right thing’; other students over-hearing this praise followed the example and they too were rewarded by ST1.

SC4 students worked collegially with other students and with their teacher developing role-plays to model social skills. SC3 students worked individually, in pairs or in groups to solve mathematical problems, some chose to use the concrete manipulative material resources provided. Obvious in SC2, the Year 7 classroom and SC3, the Year 5 classroom, was a child centered decision making process. Students were offered opportunities to decide whether or not they would team up with other students to
complete tasks, whether they would use manipulative materials to complete tasks, and how they would solve the problems involved in the tasks; they were witnessed negotiating with their teachers and with their peers.

Available resources in all classrooms observed at Silverstone included books, games and concrete manipulative materials positioned in labeled boxes on shelves situated around the perimeter of each classroom. Noted was the absence of computers in classroom settings. This is not to say that computers were not available or valued at Silverstone, however, students were instructed to relocate to the library if they required the use of information technology.

4.4.2.4. Students

Students in SC1 were observed during the middle session of the school day, from 11.30 am until 12.15pm. During this time they were observed sharing books, working and sitting together. They participated with each other and the teacher throughout the 45 minute lesson. SC4’s visit took place in the final hour of the school day, from 2.00 pm to 3.00 pm. Students read silently or shared discussions with peers about stories they had read. During this 60 minute observation students were witnessed asking peers for assistance with their work, few students approached the teacher for help. One student could not locate the reading box which contained books for his reading group level; he approached a fellow student who guided him to the correct location. A further example involved a student experiencing difficulty spelling a word. He did not raise his hand to ask the teacher, he instead called to a student near-by and asked him for assistance.

45 to 60 minute observations are a snapshot of the classroom environment and do not offer an holistic view overall. During these observations all students appeared to be engaged and motivated in the teaching and learning environment at Silverstone. Children in SC3 moved around the room setting up their working area, whether it would be as part of a group, individually or in pairs; they were offered the opportunity to decide how they were going to achieve the required outcome. The teacher ST3 provided assistance when requested to do so. The Year 7 classroom, SC2, was busy with students taking charge of their own learning. Students at Silverstone were witnessed engaging in all learning experiences. A working noise was evident as students participated in pairs, groups and independently to address student and teacher led tasks. Witnessed were students assisting and respecting each other and their teachers.
4.5. Parents’ perceptions

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, parents were included in the study to obtain further understanding of the research environment within each school community. Attempts were made to organise an appropriate time and venue to conduct interviews with parents of students at Maryvale. Unfortunately these attempts failed and no parent interviews were conducted. The following sections report combined findings from Silverstone’s parent focus group interviews which were both conducted in October 2011.

4.5.1. Silverstone’s Parents’ Perceptions

Both groups of parents from Silverstone, many of them teachers or working in the field of education, were fairly uniform in their perceptions of NAPLAN. They reported that as NAPLAN was afforded little importance at Silverstone it impacted students minimally:

SPGA1: We don’t make a big deal of it here. It’s a non-event. I don’t place a lot of emphasis on the results…

4.5.1.1. NAPLAN and student anxiety

Parents spoke negatively about schools affording NAPLAN elevated priority and, furthermore, provided explanations of their prior experiences where children had demonstrated high levels of anxiety as a result of NAPLAN testing. They explained:

SPGB1: At her last school she had the living daylights scared out of her by her class teacher. The teacher even sort of said to me, “It’s too hard, they can’t do it, there’s no way we can prepare them in time” and that general feeling was given to the children as well, so they were all petrified before they even took the test.

SPGB4: Their daughters came home from school in tears after they received their sheets back so obviously there was more of a competitive thing, nature there.

SPGB2: My child has a friend who is in year 6 at another school and he was saying they had a ‘Band 9 Club’ that they are all pushed to make it in to. He said the pressure has started now. It’s the year before and they have already started talking about it and you have to get into this ‘Band 9 Club’ and he said, “Even if you are like one mark into ‘Band 8’ you don’t get in”. I was like, “You can’t be taking that seriously”? and he goes “Nah, it’s stupid”. So he can see it, but what about those poor kids who are taking it seriously, gotta get into the ‘Band 9 Club’. It’s horrifying.
SBGP1: I don’t think she slept the night before as she was so anxious about the test and how long it was going to take and the fact that it was over a few days. She doesn’t normally stress out about stuff.

SPGA3: Depends on how it is presented to the children. So if it is low-key and just one part of teaching in schooling it’s fine, but if it’s promoted as the be-all and end-all then I think that can cause problems for kids.

SPGA1: I do think different schools have a different ethos, like here it is down-played, so we are all pretty low-key about it but some schools I imagine ramp everyone up and practise. I’ve got friends who are teachers and they coach, they gear teaching towards the NAPLAN results and I think that that goal of NAPLAN is absolutely misguided and is causing problems I imagine.

Further concerns raised included issues of NAPLAN test validity and equity.

4.5.1.2. Validity and equity
As noted many parent participants were teachers or worked in the field of education therefore they understood structural differences between education systems in southern states, particularly Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, to that of Queensland’s education system. Parents raised concerns regarding NAPLAN testing validity and equity because too many variables existed. They suggested that national assessment was pointless until all children in Australia commenced school at the same age, the purpose of the Preparatory Year was defined, Year 7 uniformly became the initial year of secondary school and school students experienced a unified curriculum. SPB1 discussed inconsistency between students’ NAPLAN test results and evidence of student achievement in classroom assessments and suggested that misleading information resulted in parent and student confusion:

SPGB1: Her results were nothing like her actual ability. Some were up here and some were down here (parent uses hands to describe extremes). None of it actually reflected her real ability so I was quite disillusioned by what it was that they were actually testing for because it didn’t reflect what her teacher knew about her ability or what I knew about her ability in certain areas.

SPGB6 and SPGB7 raised the issue of inequity in relation to the level of preparation students are subjected to prior to NAPLAN testing. They suggested that some students were situated in an advantageous position having been coached by their teachers in skills related to ‘test-taking’. They added that children were introduced to strategies for
identifying correct answers from a selection of multiple choices and ‘how’ and ‘what’ NAPLAN examiners were looking for:

SPGB6: I know that we can all get the children to perform well in the test, but it’s a matter of wasting time preparing them for those questions but it’s not an actual proper reflection of what they are capable.

SPGB7: My biggest issue is the credibility of the testing and the credibility links I think to teaching to the test. If it were just a cold test with no preparation and everyone was given the same parameters then that was managed. I think it’s just all the preparation that just makes how you measure the results near impossible it depends on how much time people have given to teaching to the test. It’s hard to compare the data because some of the schools have been doing lots of practice which of course is going to make you improve to some degree…it just doesn’t seem equitable and I think I have lost respect for it in that way. If it was truly equitable and accessible with everybody on the same playing field with really strict parameters I might be interested in it a little more in terms of its gathering data, but it has been used as a tool to perhaps manipulate, government bodies, schools and I feel teachers and schools feel very manipulated and pressured.

However, other parents viewed NAPLAN preparation from a different perspective and suggested that NAPLAN preparation which focused solely on curriculum content included in NAPLAN tests failed to provide students with an holistic education.

4.5.1.3. Representing an holistic view
SPGA2 and SPGB3 considered the narrow selection of concepts assessed in NAPLAN limited judgments of students’ capabilities as it represented minimal components of a child’s holistic education:

SPGA2: It’s too narrow; the focus on what they’re testing is too narrow. It’s a bit simplistic.

SPGB3: It’s like using a metre rule to mark out an oval, a huge playing field. They are not using the right tools to measure performance and if they were using the right tools I would be 100 percent behind it. Then, I would get useful information out of it.

Parents summarised NAPLAN testing and preparation to be anything but holistic and suggested that constant practice testing produced a narrow view of a child’s educational capabilities and furthermore failed to address the learning needs of all students.
4.5.1.4. **Low achieving students**

SPGB1 was not alone in identifying the issue of alienation of low achieving students. She emphasised that the length of the testing period was unrealistic for slow working or under-achieving students:

SPGB1: I don’t think it allows for children with learning difficulties given how long they have to sit tests for and all that sort of thing.

SPGB3: He has taken short tests and quizzes and those sorts of things before and there is not a problem with that but this was such a long process and there were so many questions he struggled with he walked out of it absolutely shattered with his own performance. He knew that he hadn’t done well when he was there. He was so stressed about the fact that he couldn’t answer many of the questions.

4.5.1.5. **NAPLAN questioning**

Topics selected by NAPLAN writers for the purpose of assessing the ability of students aged seven years to fourteen years of age to present a persuasive argument, were deemed inappropriate by Silverstone’s parents. They reported that young students were set up for failure in NAPLAN 2011 because of topic selection, ‘Should children have toys’. They illustrated their frustration:

SPGB1: How can I ask an 8 or 9 year old to write about should children have toys? Kids think it’s a foregone conclusion. Kids have toys; it’s just how it is. Why should I argue for this point? So, yes, they may have put forward an idea of writing persuasively but the actual question was like a ‘no-brainer’ for them. So why would they even have to argue the point? It just doesn’t sit right with me.

SPGB4: Yes, I agree. I think that if children are situated in a group and they are having a discussion I think that they would have very persuasive arguments, but it’s the writing down of that argument that is quite a lot harder.

NAPLAN test structure sparked conversation between parents who believed that the question format involving multiple choice questions, magazine style reading, and a lengthy period of assessment were incompatible with the real world of school experienced by students. This, they believed impacted on students’ results:

SPGB5: He wasn’t used to the format so the results. I wasn’t too happy but I don’t think it… I think it was more the format thing that he has never maybe used it. So I wasn’t really sure what happened. I am not really sure.
4.5.1.6. The purpose and usefulness of NAPLAN data

The duration between test completion and delivery of results significantly impacted parents’ perceptions of the value of NAPLAN feedback. They questioned the usefulness of such long awaited information in relation to overall purpose of NAPLAN testing. Parents suggested that by the time feedback arrived students had progressed to a higher level of learning therefore rendering the results useless. For NAPLAN results to be of any useful benefit they suggested immediate feedback to ensure existing gaps in student learning could be addressed. SPGB2 described the time lapse between testing and feedback as:

SPGB2: Ridiculous! Far too long a gap between the testing and the reporting. For any type of data to be useful it needs to be addressed straight away and not have 6 months in-between drinks is far too long...In 6 months they are at a different learning point. They have really moved on from there, it’s not so relevant anymore. It loses its purpose. Most schools would be getting a new teacher within a month...most schools would be moving on. So, it’s got a use-by-date.

It was suggested by Silverstone’s parents that maybe addressing students’ learning needs was not the intended purpose of NAPLAN.

4.5.1.7. The hidden agenda

Parents interviewed collectively attributed the introduction of NAPLAN testing to serving political demands. They contended that government bodies manipulated results to address a multitude of political agenda. The discussion included such comments as:

SPGA2: It is a political tool.

SPGA3: It depends on their particular agenda. I think it is a vehicle that could be used for many things depending on whatever point you want to push so I think it’s rather an adaptable document and the statistics as in any statistics can be presented in such a way that they promote or fail to promote certain aspects. It depends on how you want to use the data.

SPGA1: The government are probably using it push whatever type of schooling they want to promote (laughs), whether they’ve got the money to fund the state system or whether they need people to go to the private system.

SPGA2: I think it’s a political tool. It’s so they can say, “look our results were here and now they’re here”. And it’s for funding for school, which I think it’s a sad way of assessing funding because it leads the school to really have to focus heavily on one thing.
SPGB3: They are a political scorecard.

SPGB7: A way of ranking schools and differentiate between states in terms of educational standards.

SPGB3: It’s for political and economic purposes. If teachers had their choice they wouldn’t be putting on the NAPLAN tests as the benchmark and they wouldn’t be using the results in the way that they are being used.

Along with being politically focused parents suggested other stakeholders had a vested interest in NAPLAN results. They disputed assumptions that schools evidencing high levels of student achievement in NAPLAN tests, as displayed on the ‘One School’ website–designed and developed since 2003 as a component of the Smart Classrooms initiative as an information management system by Queensland’s Department of Education and Training (http://education.qld.gov.au/smartclassrooms/working-digitally/oneschool.html)–were superior educational institutions. Furthermore, they objected to schools using students’ NAPLAN results for the purpose of securing increased enrolments and explained:

SPGA1: Some schools would use it to promote their academic achievement and I imagine that some parents would use it as a screening tool to know where to send their children to get an advantage academically.

SPGB4: They are a parents’ one-up scorecard, “My school’s better than yours”.

SPGB1: Like a scorecard for schools and if your school has got this great score then it is probably a better place to send your kids. But, it creates this elitist culture of trying to get into this school because their NAPLAN scores were the best or stay away from that one because if their NAPLAN score are not that great which means the teaching is crap, which means it’s bound to be a horrible social environment for children, you know, all those sort of things that you just infer from the ‘One School’ site which isn’t really a true reflection of ability.

They added that a true reflection of student ability required a more holistic view of overall assessment than that associated with NAPLAN.

4.5.1.8. Assessment at Silverstone

Parents interviewed at Silverstone jointly suggested that the best types of student assessments involved obvious links between the learning taking place in the classroom and the assessment. They added that the assessment should be authentic in nature, and offer opportunities for all students to demonstrate their learning achievements at their
functional level. They suggested that superior methods of assessing student achievement include:

- **SPGB3:** Project-based, experiential activities where they can demonstrate their understanding of concepts through ACTIVE, PHYSICAL, VERBAL, (capitalisation emphasises a raised voice) demonstrated in various forms, completed in a time that they’re comfortable with.

- **SPGB7:** Things like self-assessment, peer-assessment and teacher assessment so they are pretty collaborative. Children are generally pretty honest I think. Children are often harder on themselves.

- **SPGB2:** Definitely not NAPLAN style. Definitely individual, specific, related to the learning intention and it’s very child-centered so it’s got to be in a modality that the child identifies with and it’s got to bring out what they are truly capable of doing.

- **SPGA1:** An individual learning program because some kids work quicker and some are slower and if they can go off and do the learning and then demonstrate that they sufficiently have that knowledge and then they can get ticked off that so they are not held up by others and they are not pressured by others.

Assessment practices at Silverstone were reported by parents as student centred and non-threatening with teachers using a multitude of assessment tools to obtain an holistic representation of students’ achievements. According to parents the underlying purpose of assessment at Silverstone was to identify areas where students required further support:

- **SPGB4:** I am not aware of any formal testing in our class. I know that they play a lot of games; like spelling quizzes in a game form or it could be times tables or Numeracy or something like that and it’s all in a game form. Obviously that would be a way for the teacher to see who is at what level.

- **SPGB3:** Project-based activities…checklist…With their projects they are given a criteria sheet before-hand.

- **SPGA3:** They are certainly monitored at their level and there’s certainly I think a greater, genuine attempt to cater for the different groups within a classroom in giving them different activities still with the same topic but geared more at different levels within that so the child can still achieve.

- **SPGA2:** It’s something that the teacher does for a child without the child knowing, it’s not testing, it’s observation.
The overall view

The overall consensus of ten Silverstone parents with regard to their perceptions of the value and purpose of NAPLAN testing as an appropriate assessment tool could be gauged by the following parent statements:

SPGB3: I just think it’s a vast waste of teacher and student time.

SPGB2: This is all RUBBISH.

SPGB1: NAPLAN doesn’t cover those aspects that would give a more rounded, holistic approach towards all the abilities a child would have.

The following statement by SPGA3 with reference to the importance she placed on NAPLAN results and SPGA1 when she explained her child’s reaction to NAPLAN testing perhaps demonstrated the minimal impact of NAPLAN on students attending Silverstone:

SPGA3: I don’t look at the results as an indication of whether my child is successful or a failure, in terms of black or white.

SPGA1: Actually, there was just a ‘whinge’ about it being real boring.

A comparison of two schools

Field work conducted at both school sites involving managers, teachers, parents and classroom observations provided a rich sample of data and presented an opportunity to gain insight into the research sites. Qualitative research methods employed in this study provided a particularly useful way of obtaining knowledge about the research sites and individuals associated with the research sites. Although participant perceptions were values laden, validity assured through the process of triangulation defined the extent to which participants’ accounts represented the social context of the sites. Participants’ perceptions of experiences are reported in the following sections. A summarised version of findings is provided in Table 4.1.

Categories for comparison

Field work conducted at Maryvale and Silverstone evidenced considerable differences between learning and teaching at the two research sites. Participants at Silverstone painted a very different picture of NAPLAN’s impact on learning and teaching than
those at Maryvale. Observations, although only 45 to 60 minute moment-in-time opportunities, captured first hand evidence which supported participants’ reports of two opposing approaches to learning and teaching. The following discussion explains evidence from both schools through themes identified during analysis. These are:

- hidden agendas
- top-down pressure
- perceived reactions to NAPLAN
- NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool
- NAPLAN as an holistic assessment tool
- curriculum, assessment and pedagogical shift to a NAPLAN focus
- NAPLAN practices a positive or negative
- NAPLAN and equity
- NAPLAN and validity
- NAPLAN results

4.6.1.1. **Hidden agendas**

Existence of a covert agenda disguised by the overt rhetoric that NAPLAN had been implemented for the purpose of increasing student achievement was initially suggested by MM1. Supporting this perception, Maryvale’s teachers believed NAPLAN was a tool for judging teachers and schools. SM1 also described NAPLAN as not being about children, but about ‘political point-scoring’ and money. Teachers at Silverstone identified performance based pay for teachers and management in government schools as the hidden political agenda. They suggested that parents rated schools according to NAPLAN results and governments would use similar methods to determine salaries for government employees. The issue of a hidden political agenda was raised in discussion amongst Silverstone’s parents, who suggested NAPLAN testing had little to do with student achievement, and described it as a political tool for the purpose of fulfilling government demands.

Teachers at Maryvale extended their perception of a hidden agenda beyond politicians and suggested that MM1 judged his teachers successful or incompetent according to their students’ NAPLAN results. Furthermore, they indicated failure to demonstrate
student improvement led to punishment by being moved to a non-NAPLAN year level the following year. This perception was confirmed by MM1 who explained that only teachers deemed to be successful in achieving improved student NAPLAN results were placed on Years 3, 5 and 7, which reflected his own agenda.

A further agenda was implied by MT4 who reported that she had implemented programs around NAPLAN in her classroom to increase her opportunities for promotion. Maryvale’s teachers also reported contract teachers ‘fudging’ their practice test results in order to impress MM1 and possibly increase their chances of securing a permanent teaching placement.

Data indicated a commonality between the two research sites in that study participants perceived the existence of hidden agendas in relation to the development and implementation of NAPLAN and how the data it produced might be used.

4.6.1.2. Top-down pressure

MM1 objected to the perceived assumption of those in the political arena that students’ NAPLAN results were reflective of school effectiveness as an educational institution, and the consequential pressure. The pressure to which MM1 referred flowed down the line according to Maryvale’s teachers. They recognised that MM1 was pressured by his seniors but suggested that he (MM1) passed his pressure on to teachers, who in turn passed it on to students.

During the classroom observations at Maryvale, MT3 was witnessed using sarcasm and ‘put downs’ when her students demonstrated an inability to correctly answer NAPLAN practice questions. MC3 stated to her students that they did not have much time to learn the skills as NAPLAN’s testing period was rapidly approaching. In this situation MT3’s reaction was interpreted as panic. The observer perceived MT3 as reacting to top-down pressure through the demonstration of stress in relation to her perception of her students’ inability to achieve improved NAPLAN results. MT3’s behaviour towards her students was interpreted as a resulting consequence. Existence of top-down pressure was discussed and confirmed by data collected at Maryvale.

SM1 suggested that NAPLAN allowed the government an opportunity to check-up on government schools and government school teachers and, furthermore, was using the pressure of school funding to ensure conformity. She added that a major factor which
increased her levels of anxiety was the expectation of government education bodies that she conform to their requirements. Teachers at Silverstone did not report experiencing top down pressure in regards to NAPLAN, as did their Maryvale counterparts, as NAPLAN was not prioritised at Silverstone. Silverstone staff emphasised to parents at the time of enrolment that Silverstone did not focus on NAPLAN but focused on holistic student development. Therefore, the teachers explained, parental expectations did not include improvement of students’ NAPLAN results. Evidence of top-down pressure was not observed at Silverstone which supported management and teachers’ accounts of occurrences at Silverstone.

4.6.1.3. Perceived reactions to NAPLAN

MM1 perceived that his students’ negatively reacted to NAPLAN preparation and testing. He surmised that his teachers would agree with him and would not recognise NAPLAN style learning and teaching as best practice and would consider constant practice testing as valueless in terms of producing valid data in relation to holistic student achievement. Two teachers interviewed at Maryvale perceived NAPLAN testing and preparation as having impacted on students negatively. The remaining teacher, MT4, suggested that NAPLAN affected Year 3 and Year 5 students negatively, but considered that Year 7 students benefited from NAPLAN. However, MT4’s comments at the commencement of the focus group interview were not consistent with her later view. The interview and observations indicated that MM1 may have underestimated his teachers’ negative perceptions of NAPLAN testing and the stringent NAPLAN learning and teaching practices implemented at Maryvale.

SM1 perceived NAPLAN as valueless and believed this to be the opinion of Silverstone’s students and teachers. She added that students at Silverstone considered NAPLAN ‘a waste of time’ as did their teachers. However, SM1 believed Silverstone’s parents may be more accepting of NAPLAN because of experiences from their own education. Although accurate in her assessment of her teachers’ perceptions of NAPLAN, as they indicated that they saw NAPLAN as ‘valueless’ and just consumed valuable teaching and learning time, data collected from parents indicated that SM1 underestimated parents’ negativity towards NAPLAN. Unfortunately there was no comparison data from the parents at Maryvale.
4.6.1.4. NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool

Benefits of NAPLAN preparation were reported by MM1 to include identification of gaps in education of students and teachers. He suggested that NAPLAN testing and pre-testing had proven to be useful as a diagnostic tool. However, only one teacher suggested that constant exposure to problem solving strategies involved in NAPLAN practice tests had evidenced increased levels of student achievement, while the remaining two teachers perceived the only benefit students gained from constant testing and re-testing was related to familiarity of test format, processes and procedures. Observed was NAPLAN being used as a diagnostic/formative assessment tool but teachers reported that unfortunately the process was restricted to concepts included in NAPLAN tests and the rush to cover all concepts left no time for explicit teaching of identified weaknesses.

Management and teachers at Silverstone did not value NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool and did not choose to implement a constant test and re-test NAPLAN preparation focus as a tool for diagnostic assessment of student learning needs. They believed that teachers’ judgments were a more reliable gauge of student achievement. There was no evidence of NAPLAN being used as a diagnostic tool. Silverstone’s teachers and parents added that the time period between testing and results delivery made NAPLAN useless as a diagnostic tool.

4.6.1.5. NAPLAN as an holistic assessment tool

MM1, principal of Maryvale State School, did not see NAPLAN as a valuable assessment tool for overall evaluation of student progress. He asserted that literacy and numeracy, although important components of curriculum, did not alone provide all skills and knowledge required for a complete education. Teachers at Maryvale described the practice tests as diagnostic tools, but rejected NAPLAN testing as a tool which produced an holistic view of student achievement. MM1 suggested that student’s results for achievement in the wealth of programs which ran in his classrooms were equally as important and were indicative of the value of education at Maryvale. However, teachers at Maryvale reported that the wealth of programs referred to by MM1 did not exist until NAPLAN testing was completed in May.

As previously discussed management and teachers at Silverstone did not value NAPLAN as an assessment tool. Instead they preferred overall assessment practices
conducted by classroom teachers to gauge distance travelled by their students. Parents of students attending Silverstone who participated in interviews consistently demonstrated low opinions of NAPLAN testing including negative descriptions as ‘It’s a waste of time’ and ‘It’s too narrow to offer an holistic assessment of student achievement’. They claimed that curriculum contained more than just literacy and numeracy.

4.6.1.6. Curriculum, assessment and pedagogical shift to a NAPLAN focus

In order to address the perceived accountability agenda MM1 endorsed drastically altered curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices at Maryvale in Years 3, 5 and 7 for four months leading up to NAPLAN testing and to a lesser degree of intensity, Years 2, 4 and 6 for six months in preparation for NAPLAN the following year. Teachers of Years 3, 5 and 7 at Maryvale were instructed to replace their traditional curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices with a ‘rigorous program’ of constant testing and retesting. NAPLAN tests from previous years were used to identify student weaknesses, teachers then taught to the weaknesses before implementing further testing to evaluate student progress and to identify need for further development. MM1 reported that he expected compliance from his teachers as the NAPLAN teaching focus and prescribed NAPLAN tasks were not negotiable at Maryvale. This was confirmed by teachers as they reported that NAPLAN commenced in week one or two of each school year and curriculum and pedagogy focused on NAPLAN which left no time for ‘getting to know you’ activities or for developing social skills, and classroom rules and expectations. Teachers reported that two-thirds of each day was devoted to completing NAPLAN practice tests, marking the tests and analysing results which involved only concepts covered in NAPLAN. They explained NAPLAN designed tasks and NAPLAN teaching focus as not representative of effective teaching and suggested that it narrowed curriculum which reduced opportunity for pedagogical flexibility and furthermore, stifled student creativity. Teachers reported introducing numerous concepts each day with no opportunity to teach them via appropriate scaffolding or to any real depth and no opportunity for concept consolidation. There was no entry point pertinent to students’ cognitive level, ‘if students fell behind, so be it’. These concepts were taught in isolation with no links to other concepts or connection to the real world. They
reported that the focus on NAPLAN preparation had been at the expense of other key learning areas.

Consistent with curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices described by teachers from Maryvale and recognising the limitations of 45 to 60 minute moment-in-time observations as not offering an holistic representation of events, focused on NAPLAN was observed in three classrooms visited at Maryvale. This was further confirmed by classroom wall displays, resources and lesson content which revolved around preparation for NAPLAN testing. Lessons involved students sitting in chairs at tables, in rows or groups, listening to teachers ‘teaching to the test’. Although not observed in MC4, students provided evidence which confirmed that this had taken place in the two sessions earlier in the day. MT4 was observed requesting students call out test results in front of their peers; she also displayed records of students’ test results on the classroom wall. Pedagogy involving opportunity for higher order thinking, collegiality, student negotiation and movement during learning experiences was only observed during the 45-60 minute observations in MC4. Focus on practice testing for NAPLAN was observed in the form of direct and indirect reference to NAPLAN testing. In one classroom the word ‘test’ was mentioned 17 times in one lesson. Teacher pedagogy demonstrated at Maryvale during moment-in-time observations was predominantly teacher directed and whole class, involving lesson instruction by teachers standing alongside whiteboards positioned at the front of rooms. Furthermore, low levels of student engagement, low levels of teacher engagement, and curriculum and pedagogy non-conducive to best teacher practice as described by the Queensland College of Teachers Ten Professional Standards for Teachers was also witnessed in classrooms at Maryvale.

The implementation of NAPLAN testing according to SM1 had minimally impacted curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices at Silverstone. She identified no positive effects in relation to NAPLAN implementation. According to SM1, Silverstone focused on student centered pedagogy and did not introduce any form of alteration to curriculum, pedagogy or assessment practices until two weeks prior to NAPLAN testing. During this time students were introduced to the NAPLAN test format. Overall SM1 described Silverstone’s NAPLAN results as above state average and attributed this success to an educational philosophy that involved the whole child and refuted that any
further focus on NAPLAN testing would see an improvement in students’ NAPLAN results. She attributed successful student outcomes to formative assessment and reported the use of summative assessment for reporting and planning purposes only.

Teachers at Silverstone reported no changes to their curriculum, assessment or pedagogy due to NAPLAN implementation other than that which was unavoidable. Limited NAPLAN practice which did occur was camouflaged within existing curriculum so that children did not feel threatened by it. Their teaching included a variety of pedagogy such as, individual seat work, whole group instruction and the use of hands-on manipulative materials. They added that basic skills and critical thinking skills were taught and encouraged in their classrooms.

Observations in classrooms at Silverstone supported the account of learning and teaching practices given by the manager and the teachers. Wall displays of numeracy and literacy concepts were shadowed by displays of student achievement, positive words and tranquil pictures. Learning in this environment involved sharing, discovering, problem solving and student negotiation of lesson content and pedagogy. Lesson content did not involve searching NAPLAN type questions for clues to the best choice of answer. Teachers facilitated while students freely moved from floor to desks when appropriate in rooms where generally there were no whiteboards, blackboards, computers or designated front. There existed an abundance of hands-on manipulative resources and books, both fiction and non-fiction.

4.6.1.7. NAPLAN practices a positive or negative?

MM1 believed that changes which have taken place in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy at Maryvale to include a ‘rigorous’ preparation period of testing and re-testing improved student results. Students’ exposure to constant rehearsal of strategies for answering questions included in NAPLAN tests was claimed to result in student improvement and therefore, justified the pedagogical shift within classrooms at Maryvale. Student improvement in practice tests reassured teachers that constant testing was indicative of student success and therefore, demonstrated positive consequences. However, they reported that NAPLAN focus involved ‘teaching to the test’ and teaching ‘test wiseness’ which resulted in a narrowed curriculum and limited holistic student improvement which left gaps in their students’ education. They suggested that
NAPLAN created unnecessary stress short-term and consumed a wealth of valuable teaching time which resulted in long-term side-effects.

Another benefit of constantly practising for NAPLAN identified by Maryvale’s teachers was that it reduced student stress as students became more familiar with test structure and testing process. Furthermore one teacher claimed that intense NAPLAN preparation involving constant testing built positive student/teacher relationships based on trust as students were assured that their teacher would not ‘let them down’.

Observed were disengaged students and teachers ‘teaching to the test’ in an attempt to improve their NAPLAN results. ‘Teaching to the test’ and teaching ‘test wisdom’ made up the lesson content in three of the four lessons observed. Discussions with students belonging to the fourth classroom confirmed that the same had occurred in the two prior sessions of the school day as discussed previously.

Management and teachers at Silverstone reported that NAPLAN impacted on learning and teaching only during the two weeks prior to NAPLAN testing where practice tests were introduced as a way of familiarising students with test structure in order to reduce test anxiety. They did not see the purpose of further time being allocated to NAPLAN practice and believed that constant practices only improves ‘test wisdom’ and therefore affected validity of results. Teachers report spending less than two hours a year rehearsing for NAPLAN and believed that constant practice testing did not improve results but eased anxiety.

Only in one classroom observed at Silverstone did there appear to be engagement in NAPLAN preparation. However, this included providing students with appropriate problem solving skills for answering the questions and not teaching ‘test wisdom’.

Parents believed that implementing constant NAPLAN practice in a school just led to validity issues as ‘test wisdom’ could mask a student’s true level of achievement.

4.6.1.8. **NAPLAN and equity**

MM1 surmised that Maryvale’s high achieving students might approve of NAPLAN. In contrast, those who displayed diminished performance in testing situations would detest NAPLAN and some, according to MM1, would actively resist participating by failing to attend school or by ‘running away’. Maryvale’s teachers identified the pitfalls of
teaching a NAPLAN focused curriculum and identified consequential deficits to students’ education. They were concerned about long-term effects of ‘teaching to the test’ and identified huge gaps in their students’ education. They also raised issues related to Year 3 students’ participation in NAPLAN testing and believed that Year 3 students were too young to be included and NAPLAN testing caused them unnecessary stress. They also raised concerns regarding the inequity of Queensland students being compared with their southern counterparts as Queensland students were younger and the curriculum was not aligned.

The length of NAPLAN tests was raised by Maryvale’s teachers as a further issue. They reported that expecting students to sit in a test situation for lengthy periods caused them stress and the extensive amount of reading required to complete the NAPLAN tests increased stress for low achieving students when they failed to finish. They added that students still functioning at the concrete operational stage were further disadvantaged due to the absence of time for explicit teaching of concepts using hands-on manipulative materials.

Although conducted over a limited time span, classroom observations confirmed that the practice of preparation for NAPLAN was inequitable. Witnessed were unattended lower achieving students, and teachers focusing attention on those few students deemed able to succeed. Maryvale’s teachers reported engaging in practices where teaching focused on students below, but extremely close to ‘the line’ indicating the national average, state average or like schools’ average. They reported disadvantages involved in this practice and related negative consequences to high and low achieving students who also had the right to teacher attention and educational development. There was no evident use of, or availability of manipulative materials for student use during these lessons.

Management, teachers and parents interviewed at Silverstone suggested securing equity with regard to NAPLAN testing by ‘levelling the playing field’. They reported that some schools spent an enormous amount of time preparing for NAPLAN and others like Silverstone did not. They questioned who was advantaged or penalised by this practice. Evident during classroom observations was the whole child approach referred to by adults interviewed at Silverstone; all children were able to work at their own level, in their preferred learning styles and use manipulative resources if required.
Silverstone’s parent population raised similar issues to those identified by other study participants. Issues of inequality were raised regarding comparison of students, schools, districts and states when no national uniformity of curriculum existed. Personal experiences with schools other than Silverstone enabled them to suggest a direct link between a school’s level of focus and presentation of NAPLAN, and students’ levels of test anxiety. Furthermore, they added that test time limits were inequitable and lengthy testing periods and current testing structures were responsible for increased levels of stress for low achieving students. Topic selection for the persuasive text task was also raised as an issue. Parents questioned selection of a topic suitable for an age range spanning seven years to fourteen years and suggested more suitable methods for obtaining intended data from younger children.

4.6.1.9. **NAPLAN and validity**

Although not specifically referring to validity issues related to NAPLAN, MM1 suggested that Maryvale’s students would find NAPLAN testing structure foreign, as opposed to assessment practices usually conducted which may negatively affect students’ performance. Teachers were more forthcoming when discussing NAPLAN test validity and suggested that the opportunity for students to guess successfully or the impact of outer influences such as sickness and test anxiety may skew results, rendering them invalid. Observations, although brief, indicated questionable validity when students engaged in practices involving ‘test wiseness’ and not strategies for solving problems included in NAPLAN tests. If the intended purpose of NAPLAN assessment was to gauge students’ ability to pass tests then this practice was successful. However, if NAPLAN assessment was to gauge students’ academic achievement, results may be invalid as they did not truly reflect data which was directly related to test purpose.

NAPLAN in the eyes of teachers and management at Silverstone did not constitute the best way of collecting valid student data. Teachers suggested that NAPLAN was probably the worst way. Regardless of their attempts to ease student stress they reported that students experienced negative effects such as test anxiety. Teachers further suggested that in order to achieve valid NAPLAN data, rigid restrictions related to student preparation, for example teaching to the test and test wiseness, must be implemented. To achieve valid results they suggested development of consistency in
delivery of curriculum and rigid test guidelines to ensure a level playing field was provided for all students involved.

Consistent with other participants involved in the research study, parents discussed their concerns regarding levels of student stress related to test format and its uncomfortable fit with assessment practices conducted at Silverstone. Parents suggested the best methods of collecting valuable data to determine student achievement included numerous demonstrations of skills and knowledge in a variety of formats. They recommended a wealth of assessment strategies perceived as superior types of evaluation suitable for collecting valid student data, without increasing student anxiety. Although Silverstone adopted a low key approach to NAPLAN preparation and testing, parents reported that their children still demonstrated signs of test anxiety in relation to NAPLAN.

4.6.1.10. NAPLAN results
MM1 described NAPLAN testing as an inequitable and inferior method of gathering student data and that the time span between testing and delivery of invalid results rendered results useless in terms of addressing student weaknesses. Teachers at Maryvale reported using data collected from constant testing to show parents the distance travelled by their children and described this data as more valuable than moment-in-time test data produced by NAPLAN testing. SM1 reported that she did not value NAPLAN results and in fact ‘gave them very little time’. Valued more by SM1 was assessment conducted by teachers in classrooms at Silverstone.

4.6.2. Degree of consistency of findings from sites
It would appear that a political hidden agenda whereby NAPLAN is used for purposes other than achieving improved student outcomes was perceived by managers, teachers and parents from Maryvale and Silverstone. All adult participants from both research sites uniformly suggested that NAPLAN processes and practices were inequitable and produced invalid data which had passed its ‘use-by-date’ by the time of release. All were forthcoming with suggestions for alternative assessment practices deemed more valuable in producing an holistic overview of student achievement.

At Maryvale curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices had been replaced with a rigorous NAPLAN agenda. MM1 perceived that students disliked the constant testing
routine adopted at Maryvale. Not representative of effective teaching, according to the 10 Professional Standards for Teachers, MM1 continued with and expected teachers to comply with teaching to the test and a NAPLAN curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms at Maryvale. In contrast curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices had not altered at Silverstone to accommodate NAPLAN implementation. Data indicated that differing approaches adopted at each research site revealed different participant reactions with regard to NAPLAN as a useful diagnostic tool, the worth of constant preparation for NAPLAN, and finally the top-down pressure created by NAPLAN. Silverstone’s participants did not report any significant benefits of NAPLAN testing and preparation, whereas Maryvale’s participants were able to identify positive effects as well as negative effects of NAPLAN. Table 4.1 below provides a tabular representation of the overall trends including commonalities and differences between data sets.

**Table 4.1 Degree of consistency of findings from sites**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Maryvale</th>
<th>Silverstone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified existence of a hidden agenda</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down pressure is evident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive perceptions of NAPLAN</td>
<td>Yes/no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN is a useful tool for diagnostic assessment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN is a useful tool for holistic assessment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has NAPLAN changed curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN practice is positive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN is equitable</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN testing produces valid data</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is validity affected by timespan between testing and results delivery</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.7. Summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed data derived from structured interviews with managers, semi-structured focus group interviews with teachers and parents, and classroom observations conducted at the two research sites. Findings which were representative of common viewpoints expressed by participants have been supported by quotes from a variety of sources, and notes and jottings from classroom observations.
conducted during fieldwork. Similarities and differences in outcomes have been discussed. While some commonality between the two research sites existed, the degree of divergence of learning and teaching practices in Years 3, 5 and 7 around NAPLAN at the two study schools was substantial. Most notable is the consistency of the NAPLAN environments within the two school sites confirmed through triangulation of data. As such, the data, therefore, describes two differing contexts for student experiences of NAPLAN.

As discussed previously the purpose of this research study was to privilege ‘student voice’ in matters related to their education. Chapter 5 presents the results and analysis from Maryvale’s student data collected during semi-structured focus group interviews and students’ words and drawings. Emerging themes and patterns in data, existing relationships between data sets and resulting findings will be addressed.
Chapter 5. Findings and analysis: Maryvale—The student voice

5.1. Introduction

Data and analysis from interviews with adult participants and classroom observations were reported and discussed in Chapter 4. The purpose of including adult participants and classroom observations was to develop an understanding of each school context and its community, and the insignificance or valuing of NAPLAN. Involving the adult school community also provided a lens through which to view the school experience of the students. The review of literature evidenced that the missing voice in conversations in relation to the implementation of NAPLAN testing in Queensland schools was that of the students. The purpose of this study was to privilege the ‘voice’ of middle years students in relation to their perceptions and reactions to, NAPLAN preparation and testing. The discussion will now turn to the most significant participants involved in the study, the students.

As discussed in Chapter 3, semi-structured focus group interviews, and sessions involving students writing words and drawing pictures in response to prompts, were conducted with middle years students in Years 5 and 7, and students in Year 3 attending each research site, Maryvale State School and Silverstone Independent School. This chapter discusses data and analysis from Maryvale’s students’ focus group interviews, and words and drawings sessions. Section 5.2 revisits the student focus group data collection process. Section 5.3 discusses findings from Maryvale’s students’ semi-structured focus group interviews. Section 5.4 presents findings from Maryvale’s students’ words and drawings sessions. Section 5.5 concludes the chapter with a brief summary.

5.2. Maryvale’s students

Maryvale’s student focus group interviews were conducted in May 2011, one week before NAPLAN testing. Four groups of students participated in focus groups interviews; seventeen students in total (Table 5.1). Year 5 students were drawn from two classes and were labelled groups A and B so as to avoid confusion when
transcribing and analysing data. They were not divided due to any other criteria. Maryvale’s focus group interviews were conducted in the foyer of the school hall which allowed privacy for students to speak freely about their school and their teachers without fear of being overheard.

Table 5.1 Student participants Maryvale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Maryvale students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>MS31, MS32, MS33, MS34, MS35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>MSA51, MSA52, MSA53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>MSB51, MSB52, MSB53, MSB54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>MS71, MS72, MS73, MS74, MS75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Appendix D provides further explanation of Maryvale’s data population and relationships between the participants).

Each focus group commenced with questions directed to students in relation to their hobbies, and likes, and dislikes. Although this data was not used in the analysis stage it did serve the important purpose of making the students comfortable in the interview situation and assisted with the development of collegial conversation.

With the exception of the initial session, which took place directly following the focus group interviews, the writing words and drawing pictures sessions were conducted in the school staffroom. Although the staffroom provided enough space to position students so they were unable to view others illustrations it did not allow the same privacy from outsider intrusion. However, the nature of the activity was such that no threat existed of outsiders becoming aware of the task content. The following section discusses the data and findings from the student interviews conducted at Maryvale.

5.3. Maryvale’s students’ focus group: Findings

Student focus group questions and prompts were divided into three categories, ‘general’, ‘assessment’ and ‘NAPLAN’. As mentioned previously students were invited to introduce themselves at the commencement of the focus group interviews. Conversations regarding students’ interests outside and inside the school environment were included in the ‘general’ category alongside their perceptions of themselves as students. Conversations were then guided to involve students’ preferred types of assessment and assessment practices they experience in their classrooms. These topics
were included in the ‘assessment’ category. Finally ‘NAPLAN’ was introduced as a means of gauging students’ knowledge and understanding as well as their perceptions and reactions to the national assessment program.

5.3.1. **Maryvale’s Year 3 students**

The interview schedule commenced with five Year 3 students, drawn from a cross section of abilities. Guided by prompting, students discussed their involvement in activities outside the school environment such as, sporting teams, dance classes, their musical achievements, hobbies and likes and dislikes. Following this the conversation shifted to their likes and dislikes associated with school, which were often, expressed by this group of Year 3 students, in relation to change.

5.3.1.1. **Change**

While all five Year 3 students reported a variety of positive experiences at school such as socialising with friends, participating in art activities, and attending physical education and music classes, they also expressed their dissatisfaction with the learning and teaching experienced in Year 3 in contrast to that which was experienced in Year 2. Students highlighted changes in teacher pedagogy as well as curriculum content. They explained that their school day involved ‘lots of tests’ which had replaced the fun activities historically experienced at school. This was captured by the following students’ comments:

MS35: Y2 was easy and Year 3 is hard because we have lots of tests and we didn’t in Year 2.

MS32: Year 3 is harder than Year 2. In Year 2 we never usually got tests and we never usually got writing tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and less art.

MS31: I don’t think the principal or deputy principal or whoever is controlling the school would tell her to do tests and not tell the Year 2 teacher to do it, so she’s just a mean teacher…

The students expressed dissatisfaction with and angst towards their teacher. Early in the interview it became apparent that the Year 3 students’ dislike of their teacher centered around two issues. The first issue related to perceived changes to classroom curriculum, assessment and teacher pedagogy which was heightened by their perception that their teacher was responsible for the changes. MS31 explained:

MS31: She (the teacher) makes us get away from fun and do tests.
The second issue reported by the students as impacting their student/teacher relationship was related to the teacher’s displays of aggressive behaviour. One student accused the teacher of aggressive behaviour towards her for failing to achieve good results on a NAPLAN practice test. The other students supported this accusation and added that they too ‘get in trouble for getting answers wrong’.

MS32: The main thing I don’t like is being with my teacher because she always yells at us…

MS33: Because she’s (the teacher) just one of those teachers (Child mimics teacher yelling) all day long …. 

MS31: What I hate about school is working with my teacher cause she’s mean (child mimics teacher yelling). The principal didn’t give orders to our teacher to be angry with us. I don’t see other teachers being angry. Perhaps our teacher is being picked on.

As the interview progressed further the students were provided opportunity to voice their perceptions of NAPLAN. They discussed the NAPLAN testing processes and procedures, including content, time limits and structure.

5.3.1.2. **Perceptions of NAPLAN**

The assumption that these Year 3 students would have limited knowledge of NAPLAN due to their lack of experience proved to be far from accurate in relation to NAPLAN test structure. The same could not be said regarding their holistic knowledge of NAPLAN procedures and processes. Further into the interview students discussed NAPLAN preparation and testing as ‘boring’ and suggested that NAPLAN tests included ‘too much reading, writing and colouring in little circles/bubbles’ (referring to the multiple choice questions where students are required to colour the circle corresponding to the correct answer). MS33 explained:

MS33: It's a really big test and goes on and on and on and you keep on having to do reading and writing and circling bubbles all the time.

They also suggested that the questions required a higher level of cognitive ability than was commensurate with their chronological age as they were expected to be able to answer questions involving mastery of concepts which they had ‘not yet learnt’:

MS33: The tests are hard. They give us the things that we haven’t even learnt yet, like they give us measuring stuff and we don’t know really how long it is. They asked us in the test we did
(child referring to practice test) how long the tree is to measure and that’s one that haven’t actually learnt about yet.

Test format and content issues were raised in relation to the strict test time limits. This is summed up by MS33’s comment:

MS33: The hard thing about NAPLAN is some (questions) we just don’t get to.

MA34 suggested that NAPLAN tests involved a large amount of writing and hard questions, MA31 reported:

MS31: It’s boring because every time you just have to colour in the circles, colour in the circles, colour in the circles.

In response to the events taking place in their classrooms particularly in relation to the approaching NAPLAN testing period, the students discussed their feelings.

5.3.1.3. Reactions to NAPLAN

Issues were again raised regarding the size of the tests, test content and associated time limits; however, of most concern was the fear demonstrated by words used by students to describe their feelings; ‘nervous’, ‘scared’ and ‘uncomfortable’:

MS31: I'm nervous.

MS32: Scared...It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous.

MS34: I’m a little bit nervous...I'm feeling a little bit uncomfortable about it cause it’s really, really, big.

MS33: I'm very uncomfortable and nervous because there are too many tests and too many bubbles.

Fear of perceived retribution from teachers and parents in relation to failure to achieve acceptable results was evident in the following comments:

MS33: I always get in trouble from my mum if I don’t get over 17 that's when I get grounded because mum doesn't like it when I get under 17, so when I don't get good marks I get grounded.

MS34: You have to be fast to get them correct. If we don't we get in really bad trouble and then we get an extra 10 minutes and it's not really fun cause we have to go over and over it and over it about five times.
MS35: We have to do it, but if we can't do it we get in trouble.

MS31: We get in trouble from our teacher.

More importantly it would appear that a student’s self-esteem is affected by NAPLAN testing. Two students spoke of their academic achievements in relation to their perceived self-worth using such terms as, ‘I’m not good at Maths’, ‘I’m not good at tests’ and ‘I don’t do well at tests’:

MS32: I haven't been getting really good marks in mine. I usually get mostly red (referring to the red biro used by the teacher to correct the practice tests) because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn’t do any tests.

MS35: I don't want to do them (tests) because I’m not very good at it. I always get wrong tests and I get nearly all of them wrong and I don't like reading and there's a lot to read and I'm pretty sad if I don't do well.

The students reported disliking the length of the NAPLAN testing period and the time limit set to complete each test. They indicated their frustration at the lack of opportunity to attempt all questions. Students explained that they may be able to answer some of the later questions, but because of time constraints they failed to attempt them:

MS34: You have to be really fast and get them right. I'm not really that fast at tests. Some questions I could probably get right but I don’t even get to them, so I get them wrong. You just have to be really fast.

One student directed attention to a ‘writers’ lump’ she has developed on her finger and further discussed how her hand gets sore from too much writing. She explained:

MS35: That's what happens to me sometimes cause I always get that (child points to writers’ lump) and they are really sore. There’s too much writing and too many bubbles, too many bubbles, too many bubbles.

In addition to feelings of low self-worth and fear of retribution in relation to their level of achievement on the approaching NAPLAN tests, students also indicated feelings of powerlessness regarding procedures taking place around them. They believed that they had no choice in relation to completing both the practice tests and the actual NAPLAN tests. One child went so far as to report classroom surveillance being used to monitor their participation:
MS31: We have to do the tests because the principal says we have to and there are cameras, look there's a camera over there (MS31 pointed to security alarm sensor in the corner of room indicating that it was a surveillance camera). They are watching us to make sure we are doing it. We have to do it.

Year 3 students also discussed their physical reactions to NAPLAN testing. MS32 explained how her body reacts and how their teacher responded to the reaction:

MS32: I get stressed, I get a big headache, my eyes start to close up, my eyelids just shut because there is too much work and I just feel like sleeping. The teacher says go to bed earlier, but it's just the tests, looking at too much paper, it is too light.

When asked about their preferred methods of student evaluation Year 3 students suggested assessment practices involving demonstrations of their learning.

5.3.1.4. Preferred assessment practices
The Year 3 students attending Maryvale described preferred methods of student assessment including demonstrations of their learning through presentations requiring computer technology such as Powerpoint or in dramatic format as role plays. They also reported enjoying demonstrating their understanding and knowledge of content and skills using physical construction including models and dioramas, and projects.

5.3.2. Maryvale’s Year 5 students
As discussed previously two Year 5 classes from Maryvale participated in the study and are labelled ‘A’ and ‘B’ for identification purposes. 5A and 5B are not streamed academically. Participating students cover a cross-section of ability groups and are only divided by class. Student semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted early May 2011. Three students participated in Group A’s interview, MSA51, MSA52 and MSA53, and Group B’s interview included four student participants, MSB51, MSB52, MSB53 and MSB54. The data from these interviews was combined on completion of the analysis process.

Consistent with Year 3’s focus group interview, the Year 5 sessions commenced with students introducing themselves through discussions about their hobbies and interests outside of the school environment. On completion of the introductions the discussion turned to school activities most enjoyed by the students. All Year 5 students reported their most enjoyable school experiences occurred during specialist classes such as
physical education, including sport, and music, including instrumental music. They also suggested that play times and lunch times were most enjoyable:

MSA51: I usually like coming to school, only on Fridays because sometimes we have sports. I don’t like the other days because class time is too long between the break times. I come to school for play times.

MSA52: I only like Fridays because of sport, Wednesdays because I have got dancing and violin and Thursdays because we’ve have got PE and music.

MSA53: I like Thursdays because we have music and I love Fridays because we’ve got music, playing music.

Two 5B students promptly directed the conversation to involve discussions about their teachers. MSB51 described some teachers at Maryvale as ‘scary’, while MSB52 suggested that she ‘could do without a few of the teachers’. In contrast to comments made by Year 3 students, whereby their teacher was held responsible for perceived changes to their school experience, there was no evident link between Year 5 students’ dislike of teachers at Maryvale and perceived changes occurring in their classroom. Although students were not prompted to discuss negative issues regarding their school experiences, consistent with those reported by Year 3 students, they volunteered comments regarding their dislike of teachers yelling. This was captured by MSA51:

MSA51: What I don’t like about the school is there is so much yelling in the classrooms from the teachers; I don’t like it.

Prompts were used to guide students’ conversations to include their classroom experiences. Students were encouraged to discuss activities and learning taking place within the classrooms. Both groups of Year 5 students discussed enthusiastically their work on thematic units, however, conversation soon turned to focus on major changes which had taken place as a result of NAPLAN implementation.

5.3.2.1. Change

For these children it appeared that the amount of time spent on activities involving NAPLAN preparation affected adversely their enjoyment of school. Data indicated that these students perceived changes occurring in their classroom since the implementation of NAPLAN as negatively impacting their school experience. They explained:

MSA52: We are doing persuasive text for NAPLAN.
MSA53: We pretty much do NAPLAN, NAPLAN, NAPLAN.

Consistent with the teachers’ explanation of time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation and pedagogical practices implemented when practising for NAPLAN, MSA51 and MSA52 reported:

MSA51: For about two sessions a day; up until big lunch we do NAPLAN. The first class time is NAPLAN maths and next is NAPLAN English and we do NAPLAN. We usually do maths in the first session.

MSA52: We do it as a whole class.

Unlike the Year 3 students, these students did not direct angst against their teacher in relation to changes occurring in their classrooms, however, they directed their displeasure towards NAPLAN. The most commonly cited reason was that NAPLAN had ‘taken over’ the majority of their school day, specifically NAPLAN mathematics in the 5B classroom. Students identified the relationship between the focus on numeracy and preparation for NAPLAN testing as ‘now it was all about maths.’ They explained:

MSB54: We do Maths, a hundred things on maths. We do NAPLAN practice. We just do that, maths, maths, maths; all we do is maths in our class now.

MSB52: Yes, NAPLAN practice tests. The whole morning is spent on NAPLAN maths.

MSB54: Even the middle session is sometimes maths.

MSB51: NAPLAN tests. Most of the time maths.

MSB52: The whole time is devoted to maths.

MSB53 reported that the little time left, after two-thirds of the day had been committed to mathematics, was dedicated to writing persuasive arguments in readiness for NAPLAN testing. Variety was reported as missing in the Year 5 classrooms. It appeared that some children attributed absence of outdoor games to the increased workload resulting from NAPLAN preparation. They reported that NAPLAN literacy was now practised in the afternoon session in place of unit work:

MSB52: In the afternoon we do NAPLAN literacy. We do reading activities, dictionary work, spot the difference where you have to spot the difference (a task included in NAPLAN tests.) You have to find the difference, write it on the sheet and then you have to colour it in.
MSB53: We don’t do anything else, just NAPLAN literacy and NAPLAN maths.

MSB54: Before NAPLAN there was less work that you had to do and you could just do reading, spelling, not maths, maths, maths. Do this, maths, do that, maths, maths, maths, everywhere. We used to play games outside sometimes. We don’t really get out during class time now. Now we always do maths.

Year 5 students claimed that apart from attending specialist lessons they spend their whole day preparing for NAPLAN. Although all students reported NAPLAN focus in their classroom they did not all necessarily report the same opinions of NAPLAN practices and processes.

5.3.2.2. Perceptions of NAPLAN
The students’ narratives revealed that NAPLAN impacts students differently. MSA51 described his perception of NAPLAN as an assessment tool:

MSA51: I think it is just a waste of time, because we only get a short time and it’s only one type of text (persuasive text) and it makes students stress out.

MSB53, a high achieving student, reported NAPLAN preparation work as, ‘easy’ and spoke with confidence about the approaching NAPLAN tests:

MSB53: I find it too easy. Sometimes too easy, sometimes I just want to stay in bed. I don’t like the easy work, like number facts, every single day we have to do them. At the first term, I had about two weeks of school because I was suspended most of the time, so I didn’t really come very often. I got all the practice tests done even though I was away and the whole class didn’t even get them done. I wish she (the teacher) would go faster; we waste a lot of time. It’s so boring the amount of time we have to spend going over and over the same thing. So every year they have to do a different type of test? It’s just simple and boring.

Other students commented in response to MSB53’s statement:

MSB51: He finds it easy because he’s very smart. He finds it easy and when he’s done he finds it really boring that he has to sit through this.

MSB54: Yes, because normally our teacher tells him to just go through it again and that and that’s really boring.

MSB51: He is one of the smartest people in our class and so once he’s finished, he’s bored, he just gets bored.
MSB53 demonstrated resentment towards students belonging to other Year levels not participating in NAPLAN testing and argued that if he was forced to participate then ‘everyone should have to’. He added that NAPLAN testing was ‘unfair’, because Year levels who do not participate in NAPLAN testing are offered opportunities ‘to do other stuff’. He explained:

MSB53: I don’t like it, it’s boring and if the whole of Year 3 and 5 and 7 in Queensland has to do it, then why doesn’t every single grade have to do it then and not just certain grades? Because I find that really silly and it’s not fair. If you’re going to do it why not just do it all grades? Because it’s really boring, so if other grades don’t have to do it then they get to do other stuff.

MSB54, a low achieving student, who does not identify herself as a successful mathematician and consequently has reported developing a dislike of mathematics, appeared to view NAPLAN through a different lens. It appeared that constant NAPLAN preparation, reported to be mathematics focused, had further added to MSB54’s dislike of mathematics:

MSB54: It’s hard. I like it when we do easy work. Too much thinking. There’s all these numbers and like everything and I go, “What’s all this?” I am really bad at maths so I don’t like doing it. I like rounding, that’s easy, I don’t like times tables, I don’t like, I don’t like maths, I don’t like what we were doing this morning (long division).

A further issue, identified during 5B’s focus group interview and raised by MSB52, was the lack of opportunity to learn new concepts introduced during student absence. She complained that the extensive amount of classroom time consumed by NAPLAN practising disallowed students an opportunity to ‘catch up’. MSB52 explained that this had resulted in her copying work from fellow students:

MSB52: When we did short division I was away so I don’t know how to do it. I just copy off someone’s book because that’s what I have to do, because I don’t know how to do it. I also don’t really know how to do multiplication and so I find all that really, really hard to me, so that’s why I don’t like maths or NAPLAN or any maths. I just think it’s frightening because there are all these words and most of the words and numbers are too big, like takeaways and everything, it’s so overwhelming and frightening.

The reported level of stress related to perceived changes occurring in Year 5 classrooms was to a lesser degree than that reported by Year 3 students. However, a different antecedent to stress was explained by 5A’s students in relation to the external
preparation and marking of NAPLAN tests. They suggested that the absence of any link to their educative experience in the classroom resulted in a fear of unknown expectations:

MSA51: I think because there’s multi things you’ve got to do you are sort of messed up and you’re not really sure. Like, I could do this argument for this one; you don’t know what they want for a persuasive text.

MSA53: You don’t know what kind of topic it’s going to be and you haven’t done that topic on that before and you don’t know what questions are going to be in there.

Student data collected from Year 5 students suggested that a relationship existed between a student’s perception of NAPLAN and their consequent reaction to NAPLAN. Stress attributed to the high-stakes attached to their NAPLAN test results by external bodies was also of concern to the Year 5A students.

5.3.2.3. Reactions to NAPLAN

Group 5A students demonstrated a perceived sense of powerlessness as they reported pressure experienced in relation to high-stakes attached to their NAPLAN achievement. This is captured by MSA51 and MSA52:

MSA51: If I got a bad mark it will affect me very badly because I wouldn’t be able to go to (child mentions name of school). If I get one ‘D’ it’s all gone. NAPLAN is pretty much important to them.

MSA52: It will affect me because if I don’t get a good mark I can’t go to the high school where I want to go to. I think they look at your NAPLAN results. It really scares me because I’ve got to think is it this one or is this one better (referring to multiple choice answer selection)? I’m just trying to get ‘As’ because I’m trying to get into this catchment school it’s at (child mentions name of school) and it’s a really good school and I think I should try my best to get into there.

In relation to feelings experienced by Year 5 students, they reported similar reactions and used similar words to those reported by Year 3, ‘nervous’, ‘scared’ and ‘worried’. MSA52 was quick to point out that the time constraints associated with NAPLAN tests were responsible for creating additional stress. She stated, “I’m scared. It’s scary because you get a limited amount of time to do it”. MSA51 reported classroom activities designed to increase speed when planning an argument for a NAPLAN persuasive text:
MSA51: We get out English books and start speed planning for NAPLAN.

While earlier in the discussion MSB53 described constant preparation for NAPLAN as ‘boring’, he also revealed his strategy for regaining the teacher’s attention. He reported being aware of his actions and of the purpose of his actions:

MSB53: It’s worse when I get a bit bored and I ‘muck up’ and do something else to get attention. The teacher tries to tell me to stop and I just go on. And then I go off, I am really naughty, cause I’m bored.

Other students identified the antecedent leading to MSB53’s reaction to NAPLAN preparation and demonstrated empathy with his plight:

MSB51: Yes and he is a really hard worker and the teacher just doesn’t really recognise what he has actually done it and he’s finished. So, like I’ve done my diary work once and the teacher says, “You haven’t done your diary work, start doing your diary work”, so I had to go and show her. She (the teacher) just sometimes just doesn’t really know what you’ve done, what you’ve actually done until you show her sometimes that happens to MSB53. The teacher just sits at her desk and doesn’t check-up to see what we’ve done.

Another point cited by 5B students involved recrimination by fellow peers directed towards both high-achieving and low-achieving students in relation to their NAPLAN practice test results. They reported students engaging in bullying behaviour, which they identified as frightening. 5B’s students added that the bullying had been exaggerated further by the teacher directing students to ‘call out’ their results in front of the class. They explained:

MSB54: Sometimes you get bullied by other kids if they find out that your mark. You don’t want to be bullied, you don’t want to be teased, and you want to get as high a mark as you can but if you are not doing well on NAPLAN lots of people will know your percentages and what you got and so you don’t really want that happening.

MSB53: Sometimes people find out. Sometimes if they find out your mark and it’s a really good mark they come along and bully you.

MSB51: Yes because you’re really good at it and they are really jealous or you do really bad and they say, “Ha, ha, I’m better than you, you didn’t get a good mark”. It’s actually quite mean.

MSB54: Some people do that.
MSB51: I hate it when the teacher reads out the marks. Sometimes kids just blurt out their mark to their friends and if they find out your mark they spread the word. If a child got 5 out of 70 marks and they just say, “Oh, I just got 5 really quietly and other people hear and if the person next to you if they are not a true friend or a nice person they could go spread the word and they would tell everyone and everyone would know and tease you. If they are not a nice person they get fun about that mark”.

MSB54 went on to say that her parents’ reaction to her NAPLAN results further exaggerated her fear of failure:

MSB54: I am frightened that I will get bad marks because sometimes I get yelled at by my parents.

On the other hand MSB51 emphasised:

MSB51: My parents don’t mind, but I am more worried about other kids.

MSB51 demonstrated little concern for her own well-being she was concerned for other students in her class.

NAPLAN was described by the Year 5 students as having positive as well as negative effects. MSB53 reported being excited, not about sitting the tests but identified that once the tests were completed he envisaged school reverting back to the experience he was familiar with. MSB52 reported negative effects in relation to sleep and her emotional well-being:

MSB54: I am not wanting to do it. I am not sleeping just thinking about it. I am scared that I am not going to get good marks, I’m so nervous.

MSB52: I didn’t even know they were next week. I feel like staying home. Now I know I’ve kind of got butterflies in my tummy from knowing that, because it is kind of frightening.

MSB53: I’m excited. Once it’s over we don’t have to do one more thing for NAPLAN.

Consistent with the Year 3 students, Year 5 students described preferred assessment practices which did not include NAPLAN style testing. They suggested methods of student evaluation practices and procedures which would create less student anxiety.

5.3.2.4. Preferred assessment practices
Middle years of schooling experts such as Bahr (2005) and Pendergast (2005) suggest that middle years students prefer to demonstrate their level of achievement rather than
participating in traditional methods of student assessment, which include pencil and paper type testing practices. Consistent with best practice assessment for middle years students, Year 5 students from Maryvale indicated that they preferred assessment through demonstrations of achievement, self-assessment, consultation, observation and construction. Students offered examples of how they might demonstrate their learning:

MSA51: By building something.

MSA52: I would like to do a power point.

MSA53: By doing a group presentation.

Noting the enthusiasm displayed for their project about ‘Space’, they further revealed that assessment which is related to their world and has obvious links to learning and teaching taking place in the classroom, is accepted by these students as preferred assessment practice to that externally designed, created and marked, such as NAPLAN. MSB51 explained:

MSB51: We have to do a project this term on ‘Space’. We have to build a rocket. We have to see how high it goes up in the air. It’s made out of paper and we get to test it out. We are going to get a mark for it. That’s the assessment I like.

MSB51 added that she would enjoy conversing with her teacher about concepts she had mastered. Furthermore she stated, ‘They (the teachers) can find out just by asking’. MSB54 agreed and added that, ‘the teacher could just listen and write down the things you say’. Self-assessment, whereby the teacher would supply her with the correct answers and allow her to mark her own test, was MSB52’s suggested method of assessment. She explained:

MSB52: Ticks and crosses don’t explain anything but if you can figure it out yourself while you’re marking it then you can learn from the mistake yourself.

She added:

MSB52: When she (the teacher) marks it it’s too much stress for me. You get confused and then when you go back you are confused and you don’t know what you are doing because it’s just too stressful.

Further preferred assessment tasks suggested by Year 5 students included presentations developed using computer programs, projects, graphs and models.
Maryvale’s semi-structured student focus group interviews culminated with the Year 7 student group.

5.3.3. Maryvale’s Year 7 students

The Year 7 group consisted of five students MS71, MS72, MS73, MS74 and MS75. The interviews followed the same format and were conducted the same day as those involving Year 3 and Year 5 students. Discussion commenced with students identifying their hobbies, likes and dislikes. They reported enjoying specialist lessons such as Physical Education and Music, and social aspects of school, however, these students also reported enjoyment from participating in activities within school. In contrast to students previously interviewed, Year 7 students appeared to identify benefits in working hard at school. This is captured by MS72 in her comment:

MS72: I like doing work because it helps you when you grow up. It helps you with your jobs and families and what you want to do in your life. To me school is not just like boring and you can also learn from it. That’s what they build them for.

Issues of teachers ‘yelling’, raised by Years 3 and 5 students, were not raised during the Year 7 interview, however, fear of the teacher was discussed. MS72 reported that she often experienced difficulty with mathematics, but was ‘too scared’ to approach her teacher for assistance. She explained that her fear of her teacher had led her to approach her peers for support during mathematics. This strategy had resulted in her being reprimanded by the teacher for distracting other class members.

Students explained that in their classroom they were presently engaged in developing a brochure about an animal identified as ‘at risk of endangerment’. The brochure would be used as an assessment task for their unit theme ‘Endangered Animals’. They also reported spending time in class preparing for NAPLAN. MS74 described the NAPLAN preparation occurring in the Year 7 classroom:

MS74: We are going through the questions that we don’t get. We’ve been doing that since the start of the term.

MS72 was quick to correct MS74 and added that this process of testing and retesting had commenced, ‘from the start of last term, not the start of this term’. In contrast to Years 3 and 5 students interviewed, Year 7 students did not demonstrate resentment
with regard to the perceived changes occurring in their classroom to accommodate NAPLAN.

5.3.3.1. Change
In the Year 7 classroom, students reported engaging in ‘heaps of testing’, but they explained that they were constantly practising their NAPLAN skills so as to improve their NAPLAN results. They described the NAPLAN practice work:

MS74: Now we just do boards of work on it, fractions, multiplication.

MS72: Kilometres, we just say what we don’t understand and then the teacher explains it to us.

MS74: Then she writes it on the board.

MS71: We do a test. We write in the book what we don’t understand and then she tells us what to do. Then it’s supposed to sink in and then we do a test and then if it doesn’t sink in we do another one.

The Year 7 students indicated that for two-thirds of every day curriculum in their classroom was focused on NAPLAN and although their perceptions of NAPLAN testing were not dissimilar to those of their more junior counterparts, they reported seeing benefit from constant NAPLAN preparation. They explained that engaging in constant NAPLAN preparation would allow them to become more confident, which would in turn increase opportunities for improved results.

5.3.3.2. Perceptions of NAPLAN
The distinction between this group of students and those interviewed previously was that these children had experienced NAPLAN preparation and testing twice before. MS73, drawing upon previous experience of NAPLAN testing stated:

MS73: I have the confidence to think back and say “Oh, this is alright because our teacher has taught us what to do and I know there are things that our teacher taught will sink in hopefully”. That’s what I was thinking.

Issues which loomed large for some students related to NAPLAN question format and lack of opportunity to ask their teacher for help. They suggested that at times during testing they were unable to comprehend a question and could not request assistance due to the perceived rigid test structure:
MS72: Sometimes it’s not about knowing the answer you don’t even understand the question so you can’t really answer it.

MS75: You can’t even ask the teacher to help.

MS71: So if you haven’t learnt it you just stop work.

Consistent with their junior counterparts and with the exception of MS71 who described NAPLAN as ‘exciting’, these students reported NAPLAN as ‘horrible’, ‘really horrible’. MS72 surmised that NAPLAN tests were gauged at a higher level than was commensurate with what they were being taught. MS72 explained:

MS72: You have to understand bigger equations in maths, bigger than normal ones. The questions are too hard for us. We haven’t been taught that stuff yet.

Despite MS71 describing NAPLAN as ‘exciting’, he later articulated that the time constraints created increased stress:

MS71: I don’t really mind doing tests slowly. You know doing it over a period of time until you finish it. NAPLAN you feel like it’s rushed. You feel so stressed out you just have to do it part by part. You rush it cause you need to finish it in the time.

Data indicated a definite link between students’ perceptions of NAPLAN and their consequential reactions to NAPLAN.

5.3.3.3. Reactions to NAPLAN

The Year 7 students’ narratives revealed that they experience both physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN testing. For example, MS74 explained her body’s reaction as ‘panic’:

MS74: It is it’s like everything goes blank to me, my head goes blank once NAPLAN starts and I (child pants) and so I talk and I get in trouble sometimes because I panic. Well the thing is, once the test is in front of me and the teacher says ‘go’ my eyes start to go all watery. I’m tired. I am thinking ‘Oh my God, what’s going to happen’? What are my parents going to do? I know it is alright but you still hesitate. It makes me feel very stressed.

MS72 added that her perceived sense of isolation during NAPLAN testing resulted in her becoming ‘extremely nervous’:

MS72: I guess you’re all on your own. That’s why you have to take your time. It’s like little me going, ‘what am I getting, what am I getting’? Small me is going ‘I don’t really care’.
Another point cited by Year 7 students during discussions about NAPLAN processes involved external test preparation and external marking:

MS73: Kind of stressed cause you don’t really know what you gotta learn. A little bit nervous.

MS75: It will make me feel bad because I will think that I have done really badly and I would have to practice even more. When the tests are being marked everything goes so slow. But when someone else is marking your work you say ‘Oh I hope I get a good mark’.

MS72: I would rather they tell us what they are looking for first so we can do it and we know what’s happening.

MS73: I don’t really know, I think I like it when they tell you what they are looking for when they are marking your work.

MS74: It’s like ‘Oh my gosh! What am I going to get’?

One aspect mentioned previously in relation to parents’ reactions to students’ NAPLAN results was again emphasised. This was captured by MS73:

MS73: It affects my parents because all my other grades from the past few years are good and if the results come out and my parents aren’t happy I will be in a bit of trouble. Usually when I get a good mark Mum and Dad buy me a present and if I get a bad mark I don’t get anything so I kind of have something to look forward to if I get a good mark.

The perception that NAPLAN results are determined by the amount of effort dedicated by a student was highlighted by the following statements:

MS71: I would think I am not trying hard enough.

MS73: I will be a bit upset because maybe I wasn’t trying hard enough and then I will get all sad because I am not happy with my results.

This group of Year 7 students from Maryvale felt that they had no control over assessment practices undertaken for the purpose of gauging their progress.

5.3.3.4. Preferred assessment practices

When the Year 7 students were privileged a voice with respect to their preferred assessment practices they elected assessment processes which included teacher observations and consultations, and demonstrations of their learning. They explained:
MS71: I would like the teacher to just watch me and talk to me to see if I am confident in what I am doing, if you get it, if you are struggling.

MS75: I could do a model and we could talk about it. The teacher could see what I am good at and what I am bad at. I wouldn’t choose a test because I don’t like tests.

Conversations with the students from Maryvale about their NAPLAN experiences were critical to this study because they highlighted the importance of allowing student voice in the decision making process in relation to their education. Further insight into the students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing was obtained from data collection and the analysis of students’ words and drawings.

5.4. Maryvale’s words and drawings: Findings

In order to answer the research question – ‘How do students in the middle years of schooling perceive and react to NAPLAN preparation and testing’? – students participated in a further data procedure involving students’ words and drawings. The words and drawings data and findings are divided into four main sections. Section 5.4.1 addresses Year 3 students’ responses to four prompts. Responses to the four prompts by Year 5 students are presented in Section 5.4.2 and finally Section 5.4.3 discusses Year 7 students’ responses to the four prompts. The following section provides a clear picture of the words and drawings sessions conducted at Maryvale.

Each group member was provided with a piece of A4 paper and pencils. As discussed previously words and drawings sessions took place at four distinct stages of the NAPLAN process:

- NAPLAN preparation
- Participation in NAPLAN testing
- Upon completion of NAPLAN testing
- NAPLAN results.

During each session students were instructed to draw a picture of how they were feeling in relation to a distinct stage of the NAPLAN process. Students were instructed to provide three words which support and explain each picture. An explanation of the analysis is provided in Section 3.7.2 and an example in Appendices I, J and K.
The first words and drawings session was conducted upon completion of each focus group interview and occurred during the ‘preparation stage’. Immediately following NAPLAN testing the second session, the ‘testing stage’, was conducted. The third session involved students responding to ‘completion of NAPLAN testing’ and the final session occurred when ‘NAPLAN results’ had just been released; some students had seen their results and others had not.

5.4.1. Maryvale’s Year 3 students’ responses: Words and Drawings

5.4.1.1. Maryvale Year 3 NAPLAN preparation
When responding to the first prompt, students’ feelings during NAPLAN preparation, four of the five Year 3 students, MS31, MS32, MS33 and MS34, drew pictures containing three faces; no bodies were included. Each face displayed human characteristics such as eyes, nose, mouth and sometimes hair, and were small and either oval or circular. All four illustrations included faces with down-turned mouths, interpreted as representing sadness, and an expressionless face which was interpreted as representative of a lack of prior experience and knowledge of NAPLAN testing, thus inhibiting their perception of how to feel. Expectation of the unknown is also demonstrated by MS31 and MS34 when drawing faces with surprised expressions represented by a widely opened mouth. Words used by these students to support their drawings included: sweating, scared, worried, sad, weird and nervous.

![Figure 5.1: MS31 Prompt 1](image1)

![Figure 5.2: MS32 Prompt 1](image2)
The fifth child, MS35 drew a face of an animal. Following extensive analysis and discussion the data analysis team interpreted this student’s drawing as depicting her disengagement with NAPLAN, as if she was not involved. This interpretation was supported by her choice of words ‘fine’, ‘yeh’ and ‘whatever’.

5.4.1.2. Maryvale Year 3 NAPLAN testing

When asked to illustrate how students felt while participating in NAPLAN testing the same four students, MS31, MS32, MS33 and MS34, drew bodiless figures, however, detail had increased to include tears and the line used to depict a down-turned mouth had increased in length, indicating increased sadness. Words chosen to explain and support their illustrations had intensified by inclusion of the adverb ‘very’, in front of each chosen word, for example, ‘very nervous, very scared’ and ‘very worried’. Furthermore, descriptive verbs, such as ‘shaking’, were added, and were considered by the analysis team as indicative of increased fear.

Unlike MS35’s initial drawing where her illustration indicated that she had disengaged from NAPLAN her second drawing included extensive detail. Considered to include a number of significant features; this illustration underwent intensive analysis several
times. The analysis team concluded that the down-turned mouth and two circles for eyes encasing dark dots for eye-balls reflected sadness and provided an expression of fear, contrary to the absence of expression in the initial drawing. MS35’s increased pressure on the writing instrument when drawing several items included in the picture was considered significant. Increased darkness of objects attracted the viewer’s attention to items considered important to the illustrator.

Firstly the dark line representing a pencil in the figure’s right hand was disproportionate to the size of the body. MS35 complained during the focus group interview that NAPLAN tests involve ‘too much writing’. Following this complaint, she introduced members of the focus group to a writers’ lump, which had developed on her second finger of her right hand. Representation of a pencil in the illustration signifies its importance to MS35. Pencil pressure may be causing her discomfort on her writers’ lump. Secondly a large, thick circle situated between the two figures was interpreted as representing multiple choice answer circles, referred to during focus group interviews as ‘bubbles’. MS35 repeated several times during interview that NAPLAN tests contained ‘too many bubbles’. Repetition indicated that colouring in ‘bubbles’ was an issue for MS35. The answer ‘bubble’ drawn in the picture contains a large, dark cross. During the multiple choice component of NAPLAN tests students are instructed to colour in the answer ‘bubbles’ which corresponds to the statement, word or sentence which best answers the question. At no time are students instructed to draw a tick or a cross in answer ‘bubbles’, therefore the analysis team interpreted the cross as reflecting MS35’s anticipation of answering incorrectly. Highlighting their significance and also drawn using increased pressure are large patches of scribble on each table representing test booklets. The stick figure drawn sitting next to MS35, although significant because of its inclusion, lacks any detail, thus rendering the character unidentifiable. Identification is not important as it represents a child who is sitting very close, but is unreachable to MS35 during NAPLAN testing. Worth noting is the positioning of the answer ‘bubble’ as it signifies MS35’s feelings of isolation. Positioning and size of the bubble inhibit any interaction between the two figures. The analysis team concluded that the narrative told by this illustration indicated that MS35 was fearful of participating in NAPLAN testing as her involvement would require a large amount of writing and a large amount of ‘bubbles’ to colour in, to answer questions which she would not answer correctly. Although others are also participating in the tests the rigid testing situation prevents any
interaction with other students and therefore, they may as well not be there. MS35 considers herself as all alone; totally isolated.

Figure 5.6 MS35 Prompt 2

5.4.1.3. Maryvale Year 3 NAPLAN completion

There appeared to be a marked difference in students’ illustrations once NAPLAN testing was completed. MS33 continued to draw more than one figure when asked to illustrate feelings related to the completion of NAPLAN testing. Figures had slightly increased in size and detail. MS31 and MS32 included one face in their illustrations, which had also increased in size. Other changes included more rounded eyes and smiles had replaced down-turned mouths, indicating happiness had replaced sadness.

One child who had previously drawn groups of children failed to supply an illustration to this particular prompt and instead expressed his feelings literally by writing, ‘HAPPY, Love you God and Happy as’ to illustrate his extreme happiness. Words included in artefacts collected from others had also become more positive, including words such as ‘happy, excited, delighted, proud’ and ‘glad’. MS35 again supplied an extremely detailed picture, this time she was dancing. The smile on her face, the boom box, the musical notes and the highlighted word ‘dance’ were all interpreted as indicative of MS35’s happiness that the testing period was over; the child was dancing with joy.
5.4.1.4. Maryvale Year 3 NAPLAN results

The fourth and final prompt asked students how they were feeling about the return of their NAPLAN results. At this stage some students had seen their results and other had not. Of the four students who had originally drawn more than one figure all except MS34 drew a lone smiling face. The large up-turned mouths of two faces represented happiness. The other showed a mouth full of teeth representing a huge exaggerated smile.

The fourth student again failed to draw a picture and elected to write the words ‘I’m dead’. His extreme happiness upon completion of NAPLAN testing had been replaced by his fear of failure and is represented by his choice of words.

MS35 drew a detailed picture of herself happily reading her test results.
5.4.2. Maryvale Year 5 students’ responses: Words and drawings

5.4.2.1. Maryvale Year 5 NAPLAN preparation
In response to the first prompt three students in 5A included a whole body to represent themselves. MSA51 who only provided two words to support his picture, ‘shocked and nervous’, included little detail to his stick figure, however, the face was illustrated with a down-turned mouth and the head appeared disproportionate to body size. The arms were stretched up as if to support the enlarged head. Although MSA53’s picture was more detailed than the one drawn by MSA52 the remaining two students represented themselves as stick figures. MSA53’s words, ‘nervous, scared and afraid’, were represented by a straight mouth and although MSA52 drew a squiggly line to represent her mouth the visual representation of the words was consistent with the one submitted by MSA53.

MSB53 and MSB51 each drew a large face; one face represented sadness with a down-turned mouth and the other emotionless with a straight mouth.
MSB52 drew three separate figures; with a word above each to explain the figure. The first a stick figure with a detached head including two dots for eyes and a mouth scribbled out was supported by the word, ‘scare’. The second head had no face and was supported by the word, ‘nervous’, while the third expressionless face was supported by the word ‘worried’. Absence of mouths and faces was interpreted as depicting ‘silenced’, the students’ perception of having no voice regarding events occurring in relation to NAPLAN preparation.

MSB54’s drawing described NAPLAN preparation using a sad student sitting on a chair at a table where a test paper was placed. ‘Ah! Upset and sad’, were written above the illustration. This picture represented MSB54’s feelings during the preparation stage.
5.4.2.2. Maryvale Year 5 NAPLAN testing

When responding to the second prompt, the testing period, MSA51 again drew a stick figure, however, more detail had been added to draw the viewer’s attention to the face in the illustration. It appeared that MSA51 had increased pencil pressure when drawing this picture. Eyes represented in his first drawing as slits were replaced by dark dots, squares had been drawn around the eyes and angular lines were used to represent eyebrows. The analysis team concluded that MSA51’s second illustration in response to the NAPLAN testing period portrayed severe changes to facial expression which appeared to represent anger. Words used by MSA51 also increased in severity from the preparation stage to the testing stage; from ‘scared, shocked and nervous’ to ‘stunned and teary’ and MSA51’s expression of anger was confirmed by the inclusion of the final word, ‘steamed’.

In response to the second prompt, during the testing period MSA53 and MSA52 again drew themselves as stick figures, however, they now sat alone at tables. Furniture size in each illustration appeared proportionate to figure size. Detailed representation of the test booklet in Fig 5.19 was interpreted as representative of its significance in the illustration, it appeared to draw the viewer’s attention. Figures drawn by these two students although in a sitting position were generally unchanged; however, facial
expressions were interpreted as representing increased unhappiness and words used to
describe their pictures included, ‘nervous and worried’, and ‘failure, scared’ and
‘worried’.

Figure 5.22 MSA52 Prompt 2

Figure 5.23 MSA53 Prompt 2

The illustration provided by MSB52 to the second prompt only included one face. The
other two items had been removed from MSB52’s previous illustration (Fig 5.18). The
remaining item, a face, had been enlarged and included more detail. A squiggly
horizontal line representing the mouth indicated indifference. This illustration was not
unlike those provided by MSB51, who showed little variance in illustrations submitted
for each of the four prompts.

Figure 5.24 MSB52 Prompt 2

Figure 5.25 MSB51 Prompt 1

Figure 5.26 MSB51 Prompt 2
MSB53’s response to the second prompt sparked interest amongst the analysis team. He had commenced drawing a similar picture to his first but then scribbled it out. Although the paper provided room for a drawing of equal size, MSB53 elected to draw a smaller face. This was interpreted as representing MSB53’s perception of himself as insignificant and a decrease in self-confidence during the testing period.

MSB54’s second illustration included all that had been in her first with the only difference being the direction of the figure. Figure placement allowed the viewer to participate in the anguish experienced by the child represented in the picture. Although not obvious from the black and white exemplar provided, the student successfully drew the viewer’s attention to the down-turned mouth by increasing pencil pressure to draw a dark, thick line.
5.4.2.3. Maryvale Year 5 NAPLAN completion

Illustrations drawn by Year 5 students in response to test completion were considered indicative of happy students. MSA52 and MSA53 had again unchanged their figure, but the distinct difference was evidenced by the facial expressions, each included a large up-turned mouth which was interpreted as representative of happiness. The same could also be said for the changes to the illustration completed by MSA51; the stick body had been removed and mouth direction was up-turned representing a large smile. Words used by all these students in response to feelings experienced upon test completion supported their illustrations and told the same story; ‘glad, excited, great and paralysed’, ‘happy, relaxed, okay and awesome’ and ‘relieved, good, glad, happy and great’.

Figure 5.30  MSB54 Prompt 2

Figure 5.31  MSA51 Prompt 3  Figure 5.32  MSA52 Prompt 3  Figure 5.33  MSA53 Prompt 3

Figure 5.34  MSB51 Prompt 3  Figure 5.35  MSB52 Prompt 3  Figure 5.36  MSB54 Prompt 3
The remaining 5B student MSB53 failed to provide illustrations representing his feelings in relation to test completion. MSB53 wrote the words, ‘glad’ and ‘happy’.

5.4.2.4. Maryvale Year 5 NAPLAN results

At the time of the final meeting with the students some students had received their results and others had not. MSA51 and MSA52 demonstrated little response to the delivery or anticipated delivery of NAPLAN results. Their illustrations appeared unchanged to those illustrated in response to the completion of NAPLAN testing.

‘Maths, Reading and Language’ were three words MSA53 used to describe her fourth illustration; each word was numbered 1, 2, 3 (Fig. 5.25). This was perceived to indicate that MSA53 had compartmentalised NAPLAN tests into three sections. Her drawing in response to the arrival of NAPLAN results included three numbered faces; one displayed an up-turned mouth representing a smile, the second displayed a down-turned mouth indicative of sadness and the third an expressionless face with the mouth represented by a straight line. The analysis team concluded that each face represented MSA53’s level of confidence in her ability to achieve a successful outcome in each academic area; Maths, Reading and Language.
Three students in 5B provided illustrations representing happiness in response to the final prompt, the delivery of NAPLAN results.

5.4.3. Maryvale’s Year 7 students’ responses: Words and drawings

5.4.3.1. Maryvale Year 7 NAPLAN preparation

When responding to feelings experienced during NAPLAN preparation two Year 7 boys, MS71 and MS75, submitted illustrations interpreted as representing boredom. Both confident in their ability to achieve a successful NAPLAN outcome, they drew themselves sleeping during NAPLAN preparation. Speech bubbles provided a picture of a test paper displaying ‘A+’ results. Both students supported their illustration with the word ‘confident’, while MS71 added adjectives, ‘bored’ and ‘tired’, to describe his picture. Although the illustrations provided by MS71 and MS75 include many similar features it is worthy to note that they were not sitting next to each other; at no time were students able to see responses provided by other students.
Year 7 female participants also provided detailed illustrations, although their added detail focused on human characteristics instead of furniture. In response to NAPLAN preparation each drew expressionless faces. MS72 and MS74 included beads of sweat raining down from their foreheads. Words used to accompany their illustrations included, ‘nervous, scared’ and ‘overwhelmed’. MS73 drew a whole-bodied picture of herself. A closed-body position with her knees turned in suggested her lack of self-confidence.

MS72 continued to draw the same face regardless of the prompt, however, an obvious changing characteristic, which raised contention amongst the analysis team, was the student’s hair. Two members of the analysis team conferred that MS72 represented normality by drawing straight hair, whereas the third member interpreted the straight hair as the student’s representation of normality. The third member of the team interpreted the straight hair as representative of lifelessness, indicative of the student’s perception of the NAPLAN preparation routine; ‘testing, marking, retesting’, as discussed during the focus group interview.

5.4.3.2. Maryvale Year 7 NAPLAN testing
MS71 and MS75 both had a changed attitude in response to the prompt related to NAPLAN testing. MS75, who appeared to have lost confidence, portrayed himself as ‘scared, shocked’ and ‘sad’ in his illustration. Furniture and the pencil placed on the table were disproportionate to figure size. A further over-sized item included was the
down-turned mouth, attracting the viewer’s attention to the sadness expressed on the student’s face. In contrast MS71’s confidence was replaced with a portrayal of anger. Using upper-case letters the adjective provided by the student to explain his illustration was ‘UPSET’. MS71’s illustration included a large head perceived as indicating the amount of information stored within and emphasising the extent of his anger.

Figure 5.48 MS75 Prompt 2

Figure 5.49 MS71 Prompt 2

The analysis team collectively interpreted the tight curls illustrated in MS72’s second response to NAPLAN testing as portraying an up-tight and frazzled student. It is worth noting that MS72 does not have curly hair nor did she have her hair curled on this particular day.

Figure 5.50 MS72 Prompt 2

Figures drawn by MS73 show her illustrations to be recognisable as the same person, however, each told a different story. To the second prompt MS73 included a table, a test booklet and in the left hand a pencil. Drawn standing behind a table, only the top half of the figure was visible to the viewer. MS73’s facial expression, including a down-turned mouth, indicated a sad child.
Illustrations provided by MS74 included the same representation of self throughout; however, changes were apparent in each illustration. As discussed previously MS74 included sweat beads raining down from her forehead to describe her feelings during NAPLAN preparation. These sweat beads also appeared in the second illustration but were removed from the third and fourth illustrations. ‘OMG Naplan (Oh My God NAPLAN)’ encased in a speech bubble was included in her second drawing, submitted in response to feelings experienced during NAPLAN testing and upon initial analysis was perceived as indicative of some level of stress. However, on closer examination MS74 had drawn a small smile and supported her illustration with adjectives, ‘nervous and curious’, which indicated to the analysis team that although she may be anxious about NAPLAN testing her level of stress did not represent extreme fear.

In response to the two final prompts each of the boys illustrated smiling faces which were supported by adjectives including, ‘happy, glad, great, good’ and ‘surprised’.

In the third instance in response to feelings immediately following testing MS72 again illustrated herself with tightly curled hair. Consistent with the previous interpretation her tightly curled hair was interpreted as representative of feelings of tension. However, the team was unable to concur with regard to the loose curls in the final illustration.
Two team members interpreted MS72’s loosely curled hair in the final illustration as signifying the gradual return to normality, or the returning of the straight hair, however, the third member of the analysis team provided a different, but equally logical explanation for the changing hair. Given the opportunity to observe MS72 and her extremely straight hair the third analyst might have changed her interpretation, but as this opportunity was not possible it was decided to accept both interpretations of why the student changed her hair from one illustration to the next. It was deemed a significant variable.

In contrast to her previous drawing MS73’s large smile represented her feelings upon completion of NAPLAN testing. Further to this MS73 drew her arms raised in a wide, open-bodied position, as opposed to the close-to-body position of the previous two pictures. Her illustration in response to the final prompt is comparable to that which she drew in her initial picture, however, the closed body position indicated by the turned-in knees, has been replaced with a straight-legged body pose, indicative of normality. In response to the results the arms have returned to a close-to-body position, also an indication that the elation experienced upon completion of the tests had ceased, signifying a return to normality.

MS74’s response to the completion of NAPLAN testing was demonstrated by a large, more obvious smile, arms were raised in celebration, and the words, ‘Yes it’s over’, encased in a speech bubble, represent sheer elation. Although MS74 displayed more nervous excitement than extreme fear, the picture told the story of a student who was extremely pleased that NAPLAN was finished. MS74 was perceived as being unsure
about the return of her NAPLAN results as her representation demonstrated surprise at her improvement.

Figure 5.55  MS74 Prompt 3  Figure 5.56  MS74 Prompt 4

5.5. Summary

Chapter 5 presented the results, analysis and discussion of Maryvale’s students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing. Findings indicate that Years 3, 5 and 7 Maryvale students have experienced negatively perceived change to their teaching and learning since the implementation of NAPLAN. Although differences exist based on their years of school experience, all year levels involved perceived that NAPLAN had ‘taken over’ their classrooms. Also uniform across Year levels was the students’ perception of powerlessness in decisions affecting them regarding NAPLAN and the perceived consequential changes occurring in their classrooms. All Year levels described stress related to NAPLAN preparation and testing citing various causes such as NAPLAN related time constraints; fear of retribution from parents, teachers and peers; test size; test construction and marking; the cognitive level of NAPLAN tests; and fear of being bullied. All participating students identified preferred assessment practices, such as demonstrations of their learning, to those associated with NAPLAN. Although to a lesser extent in Years 5 and 7, all students spoke of NAPLAN affecting student/teacher relationships, particularly the Year 3 students.

The middle years of schooling does not include students in Year 3, but as explained in Chapter 3 it was decided to include all year levels involved in NAPLAN testing in the primary school setting for the purpose of obtaining comparative data. Although the data indicated a definite link between student age, maturity, prior NAPLAN experience and student dissatisfaction with their school experience, the most significant difference was the impact NAPLAN implementation was reported as having on student/teacher
relationships in the Year 3 classroom. Years 5 and 7 students reported varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the NAPLAN focussed learning and teaching at Maryvale but in the majority directed their angst towards NAPLAN. Maryvale’s Year 3 students directed their displeasure towards their teacher as they constantly compared their Year 2 experience with their Year 3 experience. Fun learning experienced in Year 2 was absent in their Year 3 classroom. Their Year 3 teacher, unlike their Year 2 teacher, ‘yelled a lot’. Tests in Year 3 were ‘much bigger’ and ‘much harder’ in Year 3 than they were in Year 2. For all of this the Year 3 students directed the blame at their teacher. The Year 3 students were unfamiliar with the NAPLAN focussed curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices adopted by Maryvale to accommodate NAPLAN implementation and their reactions to these practices indicated a lack of understanding of the purpose of such change.

Findings from the study indicate definite links between Maryvale’s NAPLAN focus and the level of student satisfaction with their school experience; student/teacher relationships; emotional and physical reactions; student self-esteem; and bullying. Other links identified include student cognitive ability, age, maturity and prior NAPLAN experience; and student perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing.

As discussed previously, Maryvale State School and Silverstone Independent School have adopted vastly different approaches to the implementation of NAPLAN. Maryvale’s Year 3, 5 and 7 students engage in NAPLAN focused curriculum and pedagogy up to and including the NAPLAN testing period, whereas Silverstone has adopted a low-key approach to NAPLAN preparation and testing. Chapter 6 will discuss the results and analysis involving Year 3, 5 and 7 student participants from Silverstone. Chapter 7 will provide a discussion of the results for both schools.
Chapter 6. Findings and analysis: Silverstone—The student voice

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 presented data and analysis from Maryvale’s student focus group interviews and student words and drawings sessions. As discussed in Chapter 3 semi-structured focus group interviews and sessions involving students writing words and drawing pictures in response to prompts, were conducted with middle years students in Years 5 and 7 and Year 3 students attending each research site, Maryvale State School and Silverstone Independent School. The purpose of this study was to privilege ‘voice’ of middle years’ students in relation to their perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing. Discussion will now turn to perceptions and reactions of the second group of significant participants involved in this study; the students from Silverstone.

This chapter discusses the data and findings from Silverstone’s student focus group interviews and words and drawings sessions. Section 6.2 revisits the student focus group data collection process. Section 6.3 discusses findings from Silverstone’s student semi-structured focus group interviews. Section 6.4 presents findings from Silverstone’s student words and drawings sessions. Chapter 6 will conclude with Section 6.5, a brief summary.

6.2. Silverstone’s students

Student focus group interviews were conducted at Silverstone one week prior to commencement of NAPLAN testing, May 2011. Four groups of students participated in focus group interviews; 18 students in total (Table 6.1). Year 3 participants were drawn from two classes and labelled Groups A and Group B. No other criteria was used to divide the Year 3 students. The students were not streamed academically and the two groups covered a cross section of abilities. For further explanation of the data population and relationships between participants see Appendices D and E.
Silverstone’s student semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted in the school library. Although this venue, selected by SM1, was not as private as that which had been provided by MM1 at Maryvale there were few interruptions enabling the data collection to proceed as planned.

Table 6.1  Student participants Silverstone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Silverstone students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SSA31, SSA32, SSA33, SSA34, SSA35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SSB31, SSB32, SSB33, SSB34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SS51, SS52, SS53, SS54, SS55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SS71, SS72, SS73, SS74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously discussed focus group meetings were semi-structured and included prompting to ensure the flow of conversation. Each focus group commenced with questions directed to students in relation to their hobbies, and likes and dislikes. Although this data was not used during analysis it served the important purpose of establishing a comfortable interview environment and assisted with development of collegial conversation. Consistent with the structure of data collection at Maryvale, the initial words and drawings session was conducted immediately following each focus group interview. The venue provided for the three remaining words and drawings sessions was the Year 7 classroom and, although fellow students entered on occasion, participants continued with the task and were not interrupted by the intrusion.

During the four words and drawings sessions students were invited to draw pictures and include three words to explain and support their pictures in response to a different prompt each session (Table 3.11). The prompts were in relation to students’ feelings at four distinct stages of the NAPLAN process:

- NAPLAN preparation
- Participation in NAPLAN testing
- Upon completion of NAPLAN testing
- NAPLAN results.
6.3. Silverstone’s students’ focus group: Findings

As discussed in Chapter 5 student focus group questions/prompts were divided into three categories, ‘general’, ‘assessment’ and ‘NAPLAN’. Interviews commenced with the ‘general’ category where students introduced themselves and explained their perceptions of themselves as students. Conversations were then guided to include discussions of preferred assessment practices and assessment practices experienced in their classrooms; the ‘assessment’ category. The ‘NAPLAN’ questions/prompts were finally introduced as a means of developing insight into students’ understanding and knowledge of NAPLAN as well as their perceptions and reactions to the national assessment program.

6.3.1. Silverstone’s Year 3 students

As previously mentioned two Year 3 classes from Silverstone participated in the study. Five students participated in Group ‘A’ - SSA31, SSA32, SSA33, SSA34 and SSA35, and Group ‘B’ included four student participants - SSB31, SSB32, SSB33 and SSB34. Data from 3A and 3B was combined upon completion of analysis.

Consistent with student focus group interviews conducted at Maryvale, Silverstone’s Year 3 students commenced their group interview discussing their personal interests. These ranged from SSA31’s love of Green Tree Frogs to SSA34’s fascination of the night view of the city from his house on the hill. Conversation was then guided towards their school experiences. Silverstone’s Year 3 students reported enjoying school activities such as social skills, music, art, indoor and outdoor games, as well as key learning areas including Mathematics and English. Their only forthcoming complaints regarding their school experience included ‘getting up early’ on school days, the short periods allocated to breaks which they felt should be extended, SSA35 reported not being particularly keen on Spelling, and SSA31 reported that her mother, a Guidance Counsellor, kept her well versed in her social skills and therefore she disliked re-learning them at school. At no time did students indicate any changes to their school experience due to NAPLAN implementation.

SSB33 explained a current classroom learning experience she particularly enjoyed:
SSB33: We're learning to be gardeners and we are making our own little gardens and on Friday we are doing a, we are doing a show for, next Friday we are doing it. A show for the gardens, you know the gardens.

SSB33 had explained construction of her emotional garden during the classroom observation and when justifying the inclusion of a cactus plant reasoned that on that particular morning she was feeling a ‘little prickly’. Other students explained their classroom learning experiences and although activities described included some which could be identified as NAPLAN preparation tasks, the students appeared unaware of any change to their classroom curriculum in relation to NAPLAN.

6.3.1.1. Change
As the Year 3 interviews progressed it became evident that these students enjoyed spending time with the teachers. This was evidenced in dialogue chosen to describe their teachers:

SSA34: I like all the teachers here.

SSA31: They’re always smiling and caring.

Absent in their narratives was any reference to changes to their school experience in relation to NAPLAN. They reported no inclusion of NAPLAN preparation in their classroom and perceived NAPLAN as impacting their time at school minimally. Although many classroom tasks the students described could be identified as NAPLAN preparation tasks, the students had not identified any link and portrayed a positive attitude towards their classroom activities. They discussed their school experiences:

SSA34: We are getting better at our maths. We are playing Around the World for maths. We are learning how to read bigger words. Ah, that’s it.

SSA32: We are learning about the seven habits and we’re learning about reading and math.

SSA33: We are learning how to write a Persuasive text. We have been learning that for a couple of days and we are also learning how to get our times tables right and we are doing lots and lots of fun games to learn them.

SSA34: Times tables because we do Around the World. It’s this game where everyone sits in a big circle and somebody stands up behind another person and our teacher says a sum like 5x5. Whoever says 25 first gets to go to the next person and if you make it around the circle and get back to your spot you’ve won.
SSB34: In maths we’re learning our times tables, in English we’re learning how to read things and then to solve what the answer is. In English we’re learning to be detectives. Like we read book and then we’ve gotta solve what happened.

Silverstone’s teachers explained methods of including NAPLAN preparation in everyday lessons. Their students appeared unaware of any changes to their educative experience and had their own perceptions of NAPLAN and the impact NAPLAN had on their time at school.

6.3.1.2. Perceptions of NAPLAN
As mentioned previously in Chapter 5, the expectation was that Year 3 students, having not participated in NAPLAN testing previously, would have limited knowledge and understanding of NAPLAN purposes or procedures. Unlike their Maryvale counterparts who presented as well-informed on matters related to NAPLAN, this group of Year 3 students, as anticipated, demonstrated little understanding. Year 3’s brief introduction to NAPLAN may explain why students appeared less familiar with the tests than their Maryvale counterparts. SSA31 described NAPLAN tests as including ‘some maths stuff’ and ‘some sentences you’ve gotta fill in’, while SSA35 added, ‘It includes maths and English and it’s like a little book that has all the stuff in it, but there is a book of English and a book of maths’. Other explanations include:

SSB35: We get a sheet and someone asks us questions, I don’t know who, but someone asks us questions and we look at our sheet and we do the questions.

SSB34: I know it’s a big test that happens in classrooms that the school has to do but you can choose to do it and I think it’s something to do with the GOVERNMENT (capitalisation indicates raised voice to accentuate word).

SSB33: I know that we do it Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and then I think our teacher puts it on our report card.

SSB31: I think it’s a test about all our things we’ve been doing in the two terms.

SSB32: I think it’s a test so that we can catch up to other people.

Year 3 students reported being introduced to an example of a NAPLAN numeracy test, but explained that they had not devoted more than ‘a few minutes’ to it. SSA33 described the extent to which they had perused a sample test:
SSA33: We had a look at some things that were going to be in there and there was maths sums and there were adding up and stuff, but we only looked at it for like a few minutes.

Students discussed NAPLAN tests in terms of test complexity:

SSA34: It’s very interesting and I think that some people will find it a bit too easy and some a bit too hard.

SSA33: It’s not too hard for me either because I like doing sums and English and stuff.

The extent to which these students felt pressured in relation to NAPLAN testing was captured by SSA33:

SSA33: I know that you have to try your best and not cheat and if you don’t know an answer then come back to it later, it’s okay.

Silverstone’s 3B student group displayed no negativity towards NAPLAN testing nor did they report any consequential effects experienced, except a little ‘extra work’. They explained:

SSB34: It doesn’t make us lose time at school because we don’t like practise for it.

SSB32: We just have to do extra work.

SSB33: Yeah we don’t have to prepare for it.

Although students reported no related pressure to the implementation of NAPLAN and no evidence with respect to NAPLAN preparation taking place in their classroom, their reactions to NAPLAN remained significant to this study.

At this stage of the interview it was perceived that these students attached no real importance to NAPLAN, however, their reactions were more forthcoming when discussion turned towards their feelings.

6.3.1.3. Reactions to NAPLAN

Silverstone’s Year 3 students appeared to trivialize NAPLAN testing at times, however, they indicated a variety of reactions to NAPLAN ranging from, ‘nervous’ to ‘excited’. SSA32 and SSA35 selected adjectives such as ‘nervous’, ‘frustrated’ and ‘weird’ to explain how they felt with regard to the approaching testing period. It would appear that some students’ limited familiarity, and knowledge and understanding of the tests
resulted in their not knowing what to expect. This was captured in the following statements:

SSA33: I’m not that worried because it’s not like a test where you can get an A+ or anything. I think it’s not that bad because if you don’t get the answers right it doesn’t really matter, it’s not like you’ll die if you get them all wrong.

SSA35: All weird because I’ve never done it before and I don’t know anything about it.

SSA32: I think I feel frustrated, because I don’t know.

In contrast SSA34 reported ‘feeling good’ because he was learning and SSA31 added that she was ‘excited about it’, however, they indicated concern in relation to expectations of others with regard to their level of achievement in NAPLAN tests:

SSA32: I think that people could be disappointed in you that you didn’t do good in it.

SSA35: If my parents don’t like it I will be very, very sad. I would be upset. I would be very upset.

3B’s current gardening activity allowed students an opportunity to represent their feelings through their selection of articles chosen for inclusion in their gardens. It was perceived that this learning experience assisted students in expressing their emotions with respect to the approaching NAPLAN testing period. When students were asked directly about their reactions to NAPLAN these students appeared comfortable reporting their feelings. This is evident in statements:

SSB31: It doesn’t really make me worried; I just try to forget about it. Sometimes it gets hard to forget about it, you’re trying to forget about it and then we have a poster on the wall and I look there all the time to get a look at the gardens and then I see this thing on the wall and I look at it and it’s to do with the NAPLAN tests and I get like sweaty and everything. A bit nervous, a bit worried, but after maybe two days or one I might feel comfortable.

SSB33: On the first two days I am probably going to be worried but on the third day I will probably be okay.

SSB32: It shivers me and I feel scared and awful and ___.

A low achieving student, described her body’s physical reaction to tests as:

SSB33: My heart starts to beat fast when we do tests, that’s why I don’t really like to do tests cause sometimes, I am not so sure and if I run out of time and...if I run out of time and I’ve forgot one or I make a mistake my heart starts to beat fast.
It appeared that in order to deal with her consequential reaction to NAPLAN, SSB33 had developed the strategy of removing ownership of responsibility for failure to achieve a successful NAPLAN result by reasoning:

SSB33: We’ve never done the test so it’s not our fault.

She explains being exasperated by time limits enforced during the testing period. Alternately a totally different response was reported by SSB34, a high achieving child:

SSB34: I’m excited and shivery, I can’t wait to do it cause I love school work, I love tests.

Once again validity of NAPLAN results was highlighted when Silverstone’s Year 3 students explained their strategies for dealing with test questions they found difficult to answer. They reported that following many unsuccessful attempts to locate correct answers from the selection offered in the multiple choice section of NAPLAN they would ‘pick a random answer’ and reasoned that they may be ‘lucky’ and select the correct answer.

Discussion shifted to include how students might feel on completion of the testing period. Students reported a direct relationship between their NAPLAN achievement and their emotional well-being. They described their proposed reaction to a successful NAPLAN test result as ‘good’ and ‘happy’. Furthermore, ‘sadness, anger, scared’ and ‘worried’ were adjectives chosen to describe their proposed feelings of failure in response to an unsuccessful NAPLAN result. One student, SSB32 linked successful achievement with life and death by inferring that failure to achieve success in NAPLAN would cause her heart to ‘stop beating’. SSB33 reported feeling uneasy in relation to others judging her on her NAPLAN results, but reassured herself by again discarding responsibility for a poor NAPLAN result and reiterated:

SSB33: I hope they won’t be angry cause we’ve never done it before. Right now I feel like if I get ‘Z’ all the way through I am going to shred my paper and throw it in the bin. I’m scared that if someone sees it and if I get a bad result that they’re going to be cranky but if I get a good result they’ll be happy.

Consistent with previous student interviews conducted at both research sites Silverstone’s Year 3 students suggested preferred assessment practices.
6.3.1.4. Preferred assessment practices

Although these students demonstrated limited levels of stress related to NAPLAN testing, in comparison to their Maryvale counterparts, they did indicate that they preferred to demonstrate their learning rather than participating in pencil and paper testing. They suggested such assessment practices as presentations, role-plays, projects, and teacher observation and consultation. It would appear from the following discussion that construction of the emotional gardens in 3B had influenced some students:

SSB31: I feel I would like to make a garden to show how I feel and to express my personality.

SSB33: I would like to do a garden like her, but if I feel okay I would like to do a nice garden but if I get angry at myself or something then I am just going to do an angry garden to show my feelings.

SSB34: Something to create, like with stuff.

SSB32: I’ll do a model and if it’s good I’ll do something that I like and if it’s bad I’ll do like ghosts and scary stuff.

Year 3 students elaborated further and reported preferring group work where the teacher participates as a group member and listens to their conversations, and playing mathematics games where the teacher is provided with an opportunity to observe them playing, as preferred methods of gauging their progress. They suggested that when teachers observe and listen to students’ conversations they are able to identify students who are achieving and those requiring further assistance:

SSB31: She does games, like if we say we wanted to do a number game and count in fives and stuff and...or mainly twos, twos are easier and when you get to 2, 4, 6...

SSB32: Oh, do you mean BUZZ?

SSB31: Yeah and she just watches us and she knows who’s got it and who hasn’t.

Both Year 3 groups from Silverstone had reported little change to their school experience to accommodate NAPLAN preparation and testing, however, the same could not be said for the Year 5 students.

6.3.2. Silverstone’s Year 5 students

Year 5’s focus group interview consisted of five students, SS51, SS52, SS53, SS54 and SS55. Discussion initially focused around students’ hobbies and likes and dislikes
outside school. These included sports such as, soccer, table tennis, horse riding and riding scooters, artistic pursuits involving dancing, singing and instrumental music, and engaging in non-violent video games. Shortly into the interview conversation moved to enjoyment of academic pursuits such as English, reading and mathematics. SS53 added that she particularly enjoyed story writing and anticipated that one day she would be successful enough to submit a story for publication.

Students discussed their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of attending school. SS51 attributed her enjoyment of school to her ‘nice teacher’, whereas the remaining four students reported the social aspect of school as most pleasurable. A common complaint raised by three students interviewed was their perceived lack of power over their own education. They explained:

SS53: I just don’t like the idea of learning certain things that the teacher tells you to learn and stuff.

SS54: You are in a classroom and like you’re not just allowed to leave and walk home when you want. Like you have to be stuck doing all the stuff that the teacher says, not stuff that you’re interested in and it’s kind of like boring.

SS55: I just absolutely don’t like it because there is no freedom of what you do or what you want to learn about.

Further to this, two students expressed dissatisfaction in relation to the level of cognitive ability required in order to achieve some tasks:

SS54: Sometimes like if it’s hard you just want to get up and go home. Like maths, extremely maths, I just want to get up and leave the classroom.

SS52: I don’t like when we do maths I just get so frustrated I just want to start crying.

Contrary to previous students interviewed at Silverstone, these students reported a recent change in their usual classroom curriculum.

6.3.2.1. Change

At the time of the interview ‘Egyptian Mythology’ was described as the main topic of study in the Year 5 classroom, however, students reported dissatisfaction with the changes to learning and teaching during the previous two weeks. They complained that one third of each day had been consumed by NAPLAN preparation:
SS55: At the moment we are doing practising for the NAPLAN tests and it’s really annoying cause I just hate doing tests altogether.

SS51: Yeah, since the start of this term and we have done one nearly every day and that’s what’s really annoying cause we’re doing all these tests that are not really necessary.

SS53: Like everyone said, you just do so many of these tests that are really so unnecessary.

SS52: We are doing the NAPLAN tests, the NAPLAN tests and when we do the practices it’s just a waste of our learning time.

SS54: All the practising is really boring like we could be learning something different that will help us improve instead of practising something that we’re not ever going to use.

They indicated that they preferred to be learning something that was ‘more useful’. This was captured by SS55:

SS55: It’s affected my life quite a bit because over the holidays I have fallen behind in maths a bit because I haven’t been practising and now with the NAPLAN tests are over-swamping our lessons in maths and English I am falling behind the rest, the rest of the class.

6.3.2.2. Perceptions of NAPLAN

Three students referred to NAPLAN preparation and testing as ‘a stupid waste of time’, ‘really stupid’, ‘a waste of time’ and ‘useless’. They indicated that for them NAPLAN had no meaning and inferred that they had little understanding of its purpose. They emphasised their eagerness to return to ‘the real stuff’ and ‘not tests’ in the following discussion:

SS55: It’s just a stupid waste of time. When it’s over I am going to feel so good and I am going to be like the happiest man on earth. I then get to actually learn real stuff and not tests.

SS54: I think it’s really stupid and a waste of your time and useless.

SS52: I think the NAPLAN test is something we shouldn’t be doing because basically it has no meaning, I don’t think. I don’t really understand why we do it and I don’t know much about it.

Silverstone’s Year 5 students did not always display negativity towards NAPLAN. SS53 and SS51 described their perceptions of the purpose of the national assessment program:

SS53: I think it will help us if the government knows what we are really learning.
SS51: I think it’s to try and help us with our learning while we are at school and to make us better when we are adults.

Further into the interview discussion turned to government funding as the purpose of NAPLAN as students explained information they had obtained from their parents.

SS55: I’ve actually been told by my mum, that we do the NAPLAN tests so the government knows that they’re giving their money to the school and that the money that they are giving to the school is going to good purposes.

SS53: I know that it’s for the money to go to the right people.

Explanations offered by Year 5 students with regard to the purpose of NAPLAN testing extended to:

SS53: I don’t think anyone cares. Personally what I think is the teachers don’t have enough lessons to teach the whole year so they use the NAPLAN practice tests and NAPLAN tests as four weeks of fill in subjects and stuff.

SS54: Like SS53 said, it’s kind of like they want to fill in, it’s kind of like the teachers don’t really care, they just want to fill it in and get it over and done with. It’s like they don’t get their planning right for the time.

6.3.2.3. Reactions to NAPLAN

In contrast to SS53’s positive comment, discussed earlier in relation to the government trying to help students by ‘knowing what they are really learning’, her fear of the government was also portrayed as the interview progressed:

SS53: It’s actually the government that’s seeing your work. The government is really big and we are really small. I actually get physically sick when I am worried about the NAPLAN and the government.

Furthermore she explained how her fear of the government had affected her physically and reported feeling sick before participating in NAPLAN testing:

SS53: I don’t like actually doing the tests because you get all worried and stuff and like the night before I always feel sick before NAPLAN because I am really worried. If I can’t do a question I get really angry and I say stuff in my head “like pooh the government” cause I get really angry that they’ve sent out this stuff. Then I get distracted and I start doodling on the test with my lead pencil and then when I end up finishing I have to go back and rub it
all out. I get really angry if I can’t do the questions cause I feel that I’m not good enough and the government will know.

SS53’s comments regarding the government did not stand in isolation, when further into the interview SS54 reported:

SS54: I’ll feel like someone’s stalking me cause the government are like looking at your stuff and they know your name and like it feels like they are going to be watching you. So it’s kind of going to be creepy but when that feeling is all over I’m probably going to be really happy and we’ll be able to learn the real stuff. Even doing the practice it makes me feel like really weighed down because I know the government is going to look at it and assess you on it and all that.

Although students appeared to perceive the government as something to be feared, their fear of government did not alone constitute the full gamut of their reactions to NAPLAN. SS51 reported experiencing fear when positioned in a situation where she was unable to answer a NAPLAN question:

SS51: If I can’t do the questions in the test I will feel a bit worried cause if I don’t get the NAPLAN test done I will feel really scared.

Recognising the same feeling SS52 reported:

SS52: I get frustrated when I can’t get a question right and I start worrying and then I get upset and I start crying cause I don’t like doing tests and I just wanted to run away and go home.

However, SS55 justified his carefree approach to NAPLAN by reasoning that he valued assessment conducted by his classroom teacher and did not value that which was assessed by NAPLAN. He explained:

SS55: If I can’t do it I really couldn’t care because I’ve already been told by my teacher and my parents that I am one of the top people in reading and stuff in the class. So if I can’t do NAPLAN it doesn’t matter to me I really couldn’t care less.

When this group of Year 5 students were asked how they would feel upon completion of NAPLAN testing they uniformly responded that they would be relieved. SS52 indicated that she would be relieved because the end of NAPLAN testing signalled the end of NAPLAN preparation in their classroom. SS51 supported this statement and added that it also signalled the end of her mother’s ‘annoying’ questions about NAPLAN. SS54 reported experiencing pressure from home also and would be relieved
when the NAPLAN testing period ended as the pressure of continually practising for NAPLAN would cease:

SS51: My mum always goes, “I hope you’re doing well in your English and maths NAPLAN tests” and that gets really annoying.

SS54: My mum, like every time I say we are doing a test or something she goes, “Do you need to practise? I think you do” and then she forces me to practise sometimes and I don’t like that. I think it’s a waste doing it.

Further to this two students displayed their angst towards any further NAPLAN testing:

SS54: I hope that there’s never going to be a NAPLAN test again and if there is I am pretty much going to have to fake sick cause it pretty much makes me feel sick anyway, so I probably will be sick.

SS53: I’m going to get really angry when it comes around in Year 7 again.

While many comments were made by these students in relation to their reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing they explained that they were not strangers to tests. They reported participating in tests administered by their teacher in their classroom as one of many types of assessment tools employed to measure their level of achievement.

6.3.2.4. Preferred assessment practices

The Year 5 students discussed the variety of assessment practices used by their teacher and although they reported engaging in the occasional test they also experienced assessment through observation, consultation and checklists. This is evident in the following statements:

SS55: Sometimes we do tests.

SS51: Sometimes there’s a desk next to the teacher’s desk and he just calls us over and asks questions or it’s a test.

SS54: Normally we do like if it’s not a test then it’s a talk and if it’s not a talk then it’s a sit down with your teacher talking and a check list and then they talk to you if you have got something wrong.

Silverstone’s Year 5 students indicated that they understood the need for student assessment, but questioned the need for NAPLAN type testing when more relaxed methods were available:
I’d like to have, not an interrogation chamber, but like a talking place, like a chair, a desk and a lamp. You would just sit there and go, “I think I rate myself about 5/10 in English”. Self-assessment, that’s cool. I like that. Not NAPLAN tests.

I’d like to make a model because I love doing craft. I prefer doing that than doing NAPLAN tests. I’d like to make something.

I would like it if I could go on a trail ride with my teacher and he could just talk to me while I was on my horse. I would rather explain what I had learnt to my teacher while I was relaxed on the back of my horse.

I would prefer it if I went home and my mum asked me the questions and then got to show how she thought I was doing. She would ask the same questions that the teacher actually asks. So my mum asks me and then she writes them down and then sends them in to show the teacher.

I prefer to do a model or a project because whenever there’s a project on I’m usually the first person to hand it in and I enjoy doing them and I think of myself as a creative person. I don’t get it. Why do we do NAPLAN when they (the teachers) could find out other ways?

**6.3.3. Silverstone’s Year 7 students**

The final semi-structured focus group interview involved Year 7 students attending Silverstone. The interview format remained consistent and therefore commenced with students introducing themselves and discussing their interests. These students reported reaping much pleasure from reading, writing, music and art activities along with investigating interesting ‘things and people’ through history. For example SS74 explained that he enjoyed investigating machines, ‘how they work to help us’, and those who invented them.

When students were questioned about their school experiences they described their school as a place where opportunities to socialise with friends, make decisions, and experience new and exciting learning were provided. They their school experiences as:

- You get to learn a lot and you get to see your friends. You have the chance to make decisions about your learning. You are introduced to new and exciting learning and I get to write.

- You get to see your friends and you get to learn stuff.
SS74 reiterated his interest in learning about machines and indicated that school offered this opportunity. Further to this two students expressed their feelings regarding teachers at Silverstone:

SS73:  Here we can learn things and our teacher is cool.

SS72:  I like the teachers.

At this stage of the interview there was no evidence that this group of students were experiencing change to their educative experience due to NAPLAN.

6.3.3.1. Change
SS71 displayed enthusiasm as she explained their current unit, while SS73 added that she enjoyed learning further skills such as ‘working in groups’ and ‘negotiating’:

SS71:  We are learning about machines, what makes things work and the really smart people who have invented stuff in history that is really useful to us. We also learn lots of other stuff when we are not really aware that we are learning it. Skills and stuff.

SS73:  Yeah, like how to work well in a group, how to negotiate tasks and other stuff.

According to Year 7 students interviewed, very little had changed in their classroom to accommodate NAPLAN. SS74 reported being introduced to a NAPLAN test from a previous year but explained:

SS74:  We had a look at one, but it’s not really important so we don’t spend much time on it.

As the interview progressed students were questioned about their feelings with regard to NAPLAN.

6.3.3.2. Perceptions of NAPLAN
Consistent with comments made by students previously interviewed at Silverstone, Year 7 students referred to NAPLAN as ‘boring’ and indicated that they were looking forward to the completion of the testing period so that they could ‘return to normal’. They explained:

SS74:  It’s a bit boring test.
SS71: It’s a boring test that goes for a few days. I’m glad when it’s over because we can go back to learning the interesting stuff that we need to know and stop wasting time on stuff that’s not important.

SS74 indicated that she perceived NAPLAN as valueless and recognised it as a moment-in-time test which could not assess her progress as successfully as her classroom teacher could:

SS74: It doesn’t really matter. It’s not important. The teacher knows what we really understand not some stupid one off test.

It would appear from the students’ forthcoming comments that this group of students was well-informed in matters associated with NAPLAN:

SS71: We don’t have to do it if we don’t want to.
SS72: It’s set by the government and everyone in Year 3, 5 and 7 are supposed to do it.
SS74: Year 9 do it too.

Despite their articulating their perceptions of NAPLAN as ‘boring’, ‘a waste of time’ and ‘valueless’ as an assessment tool, two children expressed anxiety in relation to the approaching NAPLAN testing period:

SS72: I’m scared; I’m not looking forward to sitting in one place for so long.
SS71: Yeah, I’m a little bit scared.

However, the remaining children reported feeling ‘fairly confident’ about being tested, but could not wait for it ‘to be over’.

6.3.3.3. Reactions to NAPLAN

Conversations conducted with Year 7 students evidenced that they perceived NAPLAN as insignificant to their school experience. Other than being, ‘a little scared’ and greatly anticipating the completion of NAPLAN testing there was minimal reaction to NAPLAN portrayed. What they did portray, however, was a perceived sense of powerlessness in relation to decisions which are made about assessment practices which affect them. SS73 captured this when stating:
SS73: I think we should have a choice how we want to be assessed. I would like to write about things. It’s not fair to test everyone the same way, some people don’t do well on tests but that doesn’t mean they don’t understand something.

This comment also highlighted SS73’s feelings of inequality with regard to testing which sparked further discussion amongst Year 7 students in relation to their preferred methods of student assessment.

6.3.3.4. Preferred assessment practices

Silverstone’s Year 7 students indicated that they preferred assessment practices that were ‘useful’. Considered ‘useful’ methods of assessment were ‘projects’, ‘researching’, ‘making stuff’, ‘solving problems’ and ‘conversations’ with their teacher. They reported participating in these methods of assessment in their classroom:

SS71: I like what we are doing at the moment, projects and researching and making stuff and solving problems like we are now.

SS74: I like designing stuff. Like it’s useful and the teacher can just talk to us about what we are doing and she would know if we’ve got it or not.

SS72: Yeah, she could just watch us or talk to us and ask us a few questions and then look at what we have done.

SS73: I like projects and writing stories.

They also reported being aware of their teacher’s constant formative assessment practices including checklists, observations and anecdotal note taking:

SS74: She just knows most of the time. Sometimes we do sheets and that shows her, but when we finish something she checks it so she knows if we have got it or not.

SS72: Sometimes I think she is assessing us when we don’t even know she is doing it.

SS73: Yeah, she writes stuff down.

SS71 captured their teacher’s formative approach to assessment when explaining the teacher’s pedagogical practices:

SS71: Our teacher is involved in what we are doing so she helps us along the way so we can all achieve. That’s what her goal is. She doesn’t wait until the end to find out we need help, she asks us along the way.
The completion of student focus group interviews signalled commencement of student words and drawings sessions involving students from Silverstone.

6.4. Students’ words and drawings: Findings

For the purpose of addressing the research question, ‘How do students in the middle years of schooling perceive and react to NAPLAN preparation and testing? Silverstone’s students participated in two data collection processes, semi-structured focus group interviews, discussed earlier in the chapter, and student words and drawings sessions. As outlined previously words and drawings sessions were conducted at four distinct stages of the NAPLAN process:

- NAPLAN preparation
- Participation in NAPLAN testing
- Upon completion of NAPLAN testing
- NAPLAN results.

Consistent with session format conducted at Maryvale, each student was provided with a piece of A4 paper and pencils. Students were invited to draw a picture to explain how they perceived each stage of the NAPLAN process and include three words to support and explain their illustration (Table 3.1).

Data and analysis from students’ words and drawings is divided into four main sections. Section 6.4.1 addresses responses from students in Year 3. Year 5 students’ responses are discussed in Section 6.4.2 and, finally, Section 6.4.3 presents responses provided by Year 7 students.

Upon completion of each focus group interview the initial words and drawings session was conducted ensuring its position in the ‘preparation’ stage. The second session was conducted immediately following the conclusion of NAPLAN ‘testing’. Shortly following the second session, the third session involving students responding to the ‘completion’ of the NAPLAN testing period, was conducted. The fourth and final session was undertaken when NAPLAN ‘results’ had been released; some students were aware of their results and others were not.
6.4.1. Silverstone’s Year 3 students’ responses: Words and drawings

6.4.1.1. Silverstone’s Year 3 NAPLAN preparation

In response to the initial prompt regarding students’ perceptions of NAPLAN preparation all students belonging to Year 3 drew a picture containing one character. No further detail such as furniture or other students, was included in their illustrations. Two students represented themselves in their illustrations by drawing a head only.

SSA32 had used coloured pencils and had included characteristics such as hair, blue eyes and a red down-turned mouth. ‘Nervous, scared’ and ‘butterflies in my stomach’ were written above the illustration. The down-turned mouth and words selected to explain and support her illustration were interpreted by the data analysis team as representative of anxiety regarding the approaching NAPLAN testing period. SSA34 failed to include such detail. He had illustrated himself simply by drawing a circle for his head, two dots for eyes, a single dot for a nose, and a slightly up-turned line for a mouth. Unlike SSA32, whose words and picture indicated a level of stress, SSA34 included ‘scared’ and ‘excited’ which was considered more indicative of nervous anticipation rather than stress. Each student’s illustration represented their reactions to NAPLAN preparation.

SSB33 included only a face. A significant alteration to the face from one illustration to the next was the disproportionate mouth. In response to NAPLAN preparation the mouth was non-specific. ‘Okay’ appeared above the illustration which indicated that SSB33 was not really affected by the approaching testing period.
Four Year 3 students represented themselves in their illustrations using whole bodied characters. SSA31 had drawn a stick figure. The exaggerated length of the up-turned mouth and arms raised indicated happiness, as did the figure illustrated by SSA35. Consistent in both pictures were raised arms and a large smile, however, unlike SSA31, who had used a line for a smile to indicate happiness, SSA35 had attracted the viewers’ attention to the smile by adding two rows of teeth. The raised arms and smiling faces were supported by words ‘great’ and ‘happy’, however, also included were words ‘scared, nervous, frightened’ and ‘pressured’ which demonstrated a level of stress related to NAPLAN preparation and the approaching testing period.

SSB34, a high achieving student who reported loving school, indicated that she was looking forward to NAPLAN testing. Her illustrations in response to the four stages of the NAPLAN process told the same story. SSB34’s response to NAPLAN preparation included a whole bodied representation of herself, including detail such as clothing and movement. The bent knees tell the viewer that the figure illustrated is jumping. SSB34 also portrayed pleasure by illustrating raised arms. ‘Oh yeah! This is cool’ appearing in a speech bubble supported by ‘excited, happy’ and ‘impatient’ written above the illustration and a smiling face confirm the enjoyment portrayed by SSB34.
Figure 6.6   SSB34 Prompt 1

SSA33’s illustration included such detail as long curly hair, clothes and a slightly upturned curved line representing a smile, giving the impression of an uncomfortable but happy face. The words selected to explain and support her illustration ‘nervous, scared’ and ‘butterflies in her stomach’ explained why SSA33 might have drawn only a small smile.

Figure 6.7   SSA33 Prompt 1

SSB31 and SSB32 drew three figures in their initial illustrations. As discussed previously this may be a consequence of asking students to include three words. This was considered to be the case with the illustration provided by SSB31 as she consistently drew three images in her first three illustrations, however, it was not considered to be the case with SSB32. SSB32 included three images in response to the preparation stage only. In this illustration she had placed herself in the foreground with an upward curved mouth and the word ‘excited’ written above her head, indicating happiness. However, the same cannot be said for the other two students represented in her picture. Her fellow students are illustrated with untidy, flyaway hair, whereas her hair is drawn as neat and tidy. One figure has a squiggly line representing a mouth and the other a circle. The figure representing SSB32 appears calm in contrast to her peers. SSB32 has afforded herself importance in her initial drawing by positioning herself in
the foreground, but has demonstrated her understanding of the other students’ perceptions of NAPLAN.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 6.8 SSB32 Prompt 1**

In contrast SSB31 drew three representations of herself. Each figure was explained by a word written above. The first character displayed a smile, had two blue eyes and neat curly hair; the word ‘excited’ appeared above the character’s head. The second image, identifiable as the same person by similar facial characteristics, appeared under the word ‘nervous.’ Not particularly obvious by the exemplar provided, SSB31 increased pressure on the pencil to draw the second character. The red mouth no longer in the shape of a smile, and the larger circles used to represent the eyes, altered the facial expression from happy to nervous. The volume of curly hair also increased from the first image to the second image. The third image included in the first illustration, also identifiable as the same character, was described by the word ‘scared’. The mouth totally changed in shape and was represented by a circle, the circular eyes were unchanged, but the most obvious change was the increased volume of hair to the point where it almost surrounded the face. The alterations to the eyes and mouth for the purpose of changing the expression were justified by the data analysis team, however, the team were unable to reach a consensus regarding the increase in volume of curly hair. Therefore, this variable was discarded and thus eliminated from the analysis process.
Eight of the nine students belonging to Year 3 indicated varying levels of happiness, although the words often indicated nervous anxiety. There was obvious contrast between these illustrations and that supplied by the remaining student, SSA32.

6.4.1.2. Silverstone’s Year 3 NAPLAN testing

In response to the second prompt regarding the students’ perceptions of NAPLAN testing, SSA32 submitted her piece of A4 paper with the words ‘alright’ and ‘butterflies’, but failed to provide an illustration. SSA32 was encouraged to draw a picture, but responded by saying, “I can’t draw one cause I just didn’t want to be there”. SSA34 had again drawn a simple picture including a circular head with dots representing the eyes and nose. One noticeable difference was the up-turned mouth indicating the small smile in the initial drawing had become a straight line. This alteration changed the emotion represented on the face from happy to expressionless. ‘Alone’ was written above the picture.

Consistent with their first illustrations SSA31 and SSA35 drew whole bodied representations of themselves during the NAPLAN preparation period. However, in response to the second prompt regarding NAPLAN testing there were significant differences in their illustrations. Furniture had been included in the illustration submitted by SSA31 and the smiling face had been replaced by an expression initially
interpreted as fear. After considering the words selected to support and explain her picture ‘incredible, great’ and ‘happy’ the team re-analysed the illustration and further illustrations provided by the same student, and concluded that the large circular mouth was not drawn to represent fear, but to express a larger smile.

Figure 6.12 SSA31 Prompt 1

In contrast to SSA31 whose illustration had changed to demonstrate an increased level of excitement, SSA35’s second illustration indicated a decreased level of happiness. The head had increased in size and the body decreased, the arms once held high above the head had been replaced with a test booklet on the right hand side and a pencil on the left hand side. A further alteration was the mouth shape which has transformed from a large smile displaying two rows of teeth to a straight mouth with only one row of teeth visible. The word ‘bored’ was written above the picture.

Figure 6.13 SSA31 Prompt 2

Illustrations to prompt two by SSA33, although involving various levels of detail, indicated that initial stress experienced by the student had ceased to exist upon commencement of the testing period. Described by the student as ‘happy’ and ‘felt successful’, the smiling face represented in the second illustration was perceived as indicative of happiness.

Figure 6.14 SSA35 Prompt 2

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The second illustration submitted by SSB34 in response to NAPLAN testing although reduced to include only the upper body told the same narrative as her initial illustration. The bright eyes and smile were supported by a raised arm directing the viewers’ attention to the speech bubble. Contained in the speech bubble was the expression ‘This Rules’. Her inclusion of words, ‘tense, confident’ and ‘excited’ complete the picture.

SSB33’s facial expression in the second illustration was altered by the absence of teeth and the slightly downwards curve of the mouth representing sadness. This perception of sadness was confirmed by SSB33’s choice of adjectives ‘bored’ and ‘unhappy’.

In SSB32’s illustration in response to NAPLAN testing only one figure appears, unlike in her first illustration which included three figures, a lone figure with outstretched limbs, untidy hair and a circular mouth, from which is connected a speech bubble containing an exclamation mark and question mark. Her previously illustrated calm demeanour had disappeared as had her display of confidence. The words ‘strange, scared’ and ‘nervous’ explained the emotion experienced by SSB32 during NAPLAN testing. The analysis team considered interesting SSB32’s decision to place herself
alone in her second illustration. This was interpreted as indicating that once the testing period commenced SSB32 was aware of her feelings only and not those of others.

Figure 6.18 SSB32 Prompt 2

SSB31’s illustration in response to NAPLAN testing included three images. Consistent with the previous illustration each image represented SSB31’s self. ‘Excitement’ in the initial illustration was replaced by ‘happiness’ that NAPLAN testing has commenced. The ‘nervous’ image was replaced by a character feeling ‘great’ about NAPLAN testing and the ‘scared’ image has transposed to represent a child feeling ‘awesome’.

Figure 6.19 SSB31 Prompt 2

6.4.1.3. Silverstone’s Year 3 NAPLAN completion

In response to the third prompt, the completion of NAPLAN testing, SSA31’s circular mouth remained unchanged from that which appeared in the previous illustration, however, the arms reverted to a raised position representing happiness as they had appeared in the initial drawing. Adjectives selected by SSA31 ‘happy, great’ and ‘good’, indicated happiness experienced by the student.
The happy child existing in SSA35’s initial drawing re-appeared in her drawing in response to the third prompt. To this prompt SSA35 selected the words ‘lad (glad), happy’ and ‘awesome’, to further support a very large smile. The body had reduced in size and was insignificant to the focus point of the illustration, the smile.

The facial expression in SSA33’s third drawing represented the same emotion as depicted in response to the second prompt, however, the student added the word ‘relieved’ indicating that although happy to participate in the NAPLAN process she was pleased that it had concluded.

Consistent with the majority of Year 3 students, SSA32 drew a smiling face in celebration of the completion of NAPLAN testing and described her feeling as ‘happy’.
SSA32 elaborated further by adding ‘Happy that it’s over, finally’. SSB34’s third illustration at first glance could be mistaken for a child displaying unhappiness with her perceived achievement. This misunderstanding may be emphasised by the inclusion of words ‘sad, disappointed’ and ‘impatient’. However, the thinking bubbles explain that SSB34’s unhappiness is related to the two year wait until she is able to participate in NAPLAN again and the wait for the return of her results. The clever use of body language in the third illustration clearly indicates her sadness.

![SSB34 Prompt 3](image)

**Figure 6.23 SSB34 Prompt 3**

The mouth appearing on the face of the third drawing submitted by SSB33 in response to the completion of NAPLAN testing represented a happy child, now up-turned displayed two rows of teeth slightly spread to accentuate the smile. Adjectives such as ‘so happy’ and ‘glad’ further reinforced the transformation from sadness to happiness.

![SSB33 Prompt 3](image)

**Figure 6.24 SSB33 Prompt 3**

In SSB32’s third illustration she included only a black outline of herself. Although not obvious from the sample provided she coloured in her black outline with a white pencil. The words ‘glad, worried’ and ‘empty’ appeared above the illustration. Identified by the data analysis team as a significant drawing, her word selection sparked further interest. Following intense analysis the team concluded that although ‘glad’ that the testing period had concluded, SSB32 was worried about her level of achievement. Two members of the data analysis team suggested that the emptiness described by SSB32 indicated that the student felt the need to give the NAPLAN tests everything she had, until there was nothing left, leaving her still ‘worried’ that she may not have given
enough. Whereas the third member of the team viewed the ‘emptiness’ through a different lens and explained her perception of the illustration as ‘the deflated feeling a person experiences following the conclusion of an event considered exciting’. As the two explanations were considered acceptable it was decided to combine the two. The team concluded that the excitement experienced by SSB32 during the lead-up to NAPLAN displayed in her initial illustration, followed by the demonstration of stress experienced during NAPLAN testing had resulted in SSB32 experiencing a nothingness, a flatness, an ‘emptiness’ upon the conclusion of NAPLAN testing period.

Figure 6.25  SSB32 Prompt 3

Illustration three submitted by SSB31 although appearing in a different order contains the same configuration of images as those previously submitted, two faces and a whole bodied stick figure. The first image, the stick figure is drawn using squiggly lines and is supported by the word, ‘wonky’. This figure was perceived as indicative of a child who has given everything she has to NAPLAN and feels she has nothing left, not even enough to stand straight. The expression appearing on the face of the second image indicates happiness and is appropriately supported by the word ‘happy’, however, the final image is indicative of a student ‘worried’ about NAPLAN achievement.

Figure 6.26  SSB31 Prompt 3
6.4.1.4. Silverstone’s Year 3 NAPLAN results

Considered a point of interest was the absence of a final illustration from SSA32 and SSA34 in response to their NAPLAN test results. However, further analysis of Silverstone’s parent focus group interview transcripts evidenced that the parents of each of these students reported that they would not share NAPLAN results with their children. Irrespective of this SSA32 wrote, ‘sad, not happy’ and ‘bad’ at the top of the blank page in anticipation of her NAPLAN test results.

Happy smiling faces were not present in any of the final illustrations submitted by 3A’s students. SSA33 who had selected words, and provided illustrations which indicated happiness throughout the previous three stages of the NAPLAN process, in her final illustration drew a picture of a girl displaying a large down-turned mouth, supported by the words ‘bad, sad’ and ‘upset’.

![Image of SSA33 Prompt 4]

Although not represented by a sad face SSA31 replaced her smiles and her up-lifted arms with an expressionless face and arms as horizontal as the line representing her mouth. Words ‘okay, good’ and ‘bad’ explained the student’s decision to express neither happiness nor sadness. SSA31 had seen her results and perceived her achievement as neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’ and therefore was neither ‘happy’ nor ‘sad’.
SSA35 who had also been privileged to view his results elected to illustrate his level of achievement in each of the three NAPLAN areas, as depicted in NAPLAN reports, rather than illustrating himself. Written in uppercase font the word ‘BAD’ appeared twice. In contrast, the word ‘good’ written in lowercase font only appeared once.

In SSB34’s final illustration in response to her NAPLAN results she indicates the return of happiness. Only the head was included but a large smile and wild hair were interpreted as indicative of excitement. As emphasised by her word selection SSB34 is ‘joyful, proud’ and ‘on top of the world’.
SSB33 reported being extremely pleased with her NAPLAN results which she clearly displayed in her fourth illustration by an exaggerated smile supported by the words, ‘happy, so, happy, so, so, happy’.

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 6.31**  **SSB33 Prompt 4**

The final illustration submitted by SSB32 in response to delivery of NAPLAN results represents a child delighted with her achievement. The ‘WOW’ written in the text box indicates her surprise at her achievement, supported by words, ‘good’, Happy’ and ‘glad’.

![Image](image2.png)

**Figure 6.32**  **SSB32 Prompt 4**

SSB31 appears forlorn in her final illustration. She had not viewed her results and in the final image the words chosen to explain her picture were ‘questions’ and ‘weird’. Although no speech bubble was provided the image included three question marks as if the student was thinking about her unknown level of achievement.

![Image](image3.png)

**Figure 6.33**  **SSB31 Prompt 4**

In contrast to the Year 3 students no Year 5 students included more than one representation of self in their illustrations. Of the five Year 5 students involved, SS51, SS52, SS53, SS54 and SS55 only one student SS54 did not draw a whole bodied image of herself.
6.4.2. Silverstone’s Year 5 students’ responses: Words and drawings

6.4.2.1. Silverstone’s Year 5 NAPLAN preparation
Illustrations provided by Year 5 students in response to NAPLAN preparation evidenced a variety of student reactions. SS51 included extensive detail such as clothing, a head band, a test paper, and a speech bubble. She drew a whole bodied representation of what appeared to be a happy child unaffected by NAPLAN preparation. Her illustration was not only supported by words encased in the speech bubble, ‘fine, relaxed’, but also by the words written above the image ‘fine, relaxed’ and ‘cool’. The smiling face included in SS54’s illustration also indicated happiness. ‘Happy’ was written above the image, however, SS54 also indicated that she was experiencing anxiety regarding the approaching testing period by including the word ‘scared’.

![Figure 6.34 SS51 Prompt 1](image1)
![Figure 6.35 SS54 Prompt 1](image2)

SS52 also selected ‘scared’ along with ‘frightened’ and ‘nervous’ to explain her illustration. The tears streaming down the face and outstretched arms were perceived as indicating helplessness.

![Figure 6.36 SS52 Prompt 1](image3)

The final two Year 5 students demonstrated angst towards NAPLAN preparation in their initial illustrations. SS53 drew a stick figure vomiting, the speech bubble provided
sound effects ‘blah’. SS55 portrayed a clear message in his illustration which included a frown, a down-turned mouth, and thinking bubbles leading to the statement written using capitalisation, ‘I HATE NAPLAN!’ and a question, ‘What’s the point’?

![Figure 6.37 SS53 Prompt 1](image1)

![Figure 6.38 SS55 Prompt 1](image2)

### 6.4.2.2. Silverstone’s Year 5 NAPLAN testing

No Year 5 students demonstrated happiness during the testing period. Although two students SS51 and SS54 had indicated happiness in relation to NAPLAN preparation, the same could not be said for their images in response to NAPLAN testing. A down-turned mouth indicated unhappiness in SS51’s second illustration. Her representation of herself sitting at a table where a test paper was placed was surrounded by question marks. SS51’s ‘happy, fine’ and ‘relaxed’ representation of herself had been replaced. The words ‘kind of nervous, uptight’ and ‘sometimes bored’ explained the visual image. The ‘happy’ ‘but a little scared’ image provided by SS54 was replaced by an illustration indicating movement. Image direction and leg placement informed viewers that the figure was running, the image was supported by the words ‘running away’. The figure standing behind a table with arms outstretched and ‘What do I do’? written in the speech bubble indicated that SS52’s perception of helplessness remained during NAPLAN testing. To further explain the emotion experienced by SS52, ‘worried, frightened’ and ‘scared’ appeared above the image.
SS53 further elaborated on the boredom indicated previously by adding the words ‘annoyed, frustrated’ and ‘boredom’. Supporting her illustration of herself seated at a table holding a test paper was a trail of ‘Zs’ implying that SS53 suffered boredom to such an extent that she had fallen asleep.

It would appear that SS55’s attitude towards NAPLAN did not improve with the onset of NAPLAN testing. He failed to supply an illustration and instead chose to write his message, ‘www.I AM BORD.com.au’.

6.4.2.3. Silverstone’s Year 5 NAPLAN completion
Messages portrayed by Year 5 students in illustrations in response to NAPLAN completion emphasised happiness. SS51’s third illustration of herself had reverted to
the happy representation appearing in her initial drawing. Up-reaching arms and ‘Yah, Yah, Yippy’ appearing in the speech bubble assisted in clarification of her feelings. However, SS51 indicated through her choice of words that although ‘happy’ and ‘very excited’ she was still ‘worried about results’. SS52 elected to display her feelings in response to test completion by covering most of her page with a happy face. Two rows of teeth indicated a large smile and inclusion of words ‘happy, glad’ and ‘relieved’ supported the illustration. SS53 demonstrated her ‘joyed, excited’ and ‘fantastic’ self with ‘Sunshine, Lollipops’ and ‘Rainbows’ written and illustrated surrounding a figure with outstretched arms and legs and an exaggerated smile. SS54 also used a rainbow to illustrate her ‘Happy, Good, Excited’ self. SS55’s previous negative attitude changed upon completion of NAPLAN testing where he drew himself with spread legs, and outstretched arms jumping in celebration. The series of lines extending from his body were perceived as indicating excitement and ‘Halaloya’ (Hallelujah) written above the picture confirmed this perception.

Figure 6.44 SS51 Prompt 3 Figure 6.45 SS52 Prompt 3 Figure 6.46 SS53 Prompt 3

Figure 6.47 SS54 Prompt 3 Figure 6.48 SS55 Prompt 3

6.4.2.4. Silverstone’s Year 5 NAPLAN results
In response to the final prompt in relation to feelings experienced at the time of the NAPLAN results delivery, question marks reappeared in the illustration submitted by SS51. She had not had the opportunity to view her results and therefore was not able to assess her own achievement.
Having viewed her results SS52 indicated her feelings by illustrating her results as they appeared on the NAPLAN results sheet. The words ‘bad, bad’ and ‘okay’ were chosen to explain her perception of her achievement. SS54 also drew a picture of her results, but in contrast to SS52 they did not appear in NAPLAN results format. The large tick drawn alongside the results sheet was reflective of the words appearing above the image, ‘Good’ and ‘Happy’.

SS53 had indicated throughout her illustrations that she perceived NAPLAN as boring. She continued to emphasise her lack of interest in NAPLAN in her final illustration by including words ‘disinterested, bored’ and ‘Couldn’t care less’. Above the image ‘hmph’ was written in the speech bubble and at the end of an outstretched arm was a large hand in the ‘STOP’ position. The hand, disproportionate to other items included in the illustration had been cleverly drawn to capture the viewers’ attention.
SS55 was extremely pleased with her results and indicated this by drawing a trio of ‘A+s’ under which was written each component of the NAPLAN tests compartmentalised by the student as ‘English, Math, reading &c’.

Figure 6.53 SS55 Prompt 4

6.4.3. Silverstone’s Year 7 students’ responses: Words and drawings

6.4.3.1. Silverstone’s Year 7 NAPLAN preparation

In response to prompts associated with the stages of the NAPLAN process all Year 7 students displayed some level of uneasiness as well as some level of excitement. The only image present on each page submitted by SS73 was a speech bubble. In response to NAPLAN preparation a test booklet appeared in the speech bubble. Above the speech bubble ‘nervous, excited’ and ‘confused’ were written, suggesting that SS73 although experiencing an element of anxiety was still excited in relation to the approaching NAPLAN testing period.

Figure 6.54 SS73 Prompt 1

SS71 and SS72’s responses to NAPLAN preparation included adjectives such as ‘scared’ and ‘worried’ which indicated some level of anxiety, however, also included were ‘excited’ and ‘ready’ which was interpreted as nervous anticipation. Both students drew whole bodied figures to represent themselves. Punctuation marks located around
their heads offered a visual representation of students’ thought processes. A significant difference between the two illustrations was the facial expressions. SS72 had drawn a squiggly line to represent her mouth which made the face look anxious, whereas SS71 used a straight line to represent her mouth which made the expression appear less anxious.

Figure 6.55 SS71 Prompt 1          Figure 6.56 SS72 Prompt 1

SS74 included three images in his initial illustration. The first image described as ‘strange’ featured squinty eyes, a down-turned mouth and a hand positioned across the cheek which offered a ‘strange’ appearance. Described as ‘worried’, the second image included eyes wide open, raised eyebrows and hands positioned across the mouth giving the facial features a ‘worried’ appearance. ‘Freaky’ was the adjective used to describe his third image. The clever use of eyebrows closing in on the eyes and the hand in the mouth indicating nail biting gives the face a ‘freaky’ appearance.

Figure 6.57 SS74 Prompt 1

6.4.3.2. Silverstone’s Year 7 NAPLAN testing

In response to the NAPLAN testing period SS73 drew a cross and a tick in a speech bubble above which was written the word ‘confused’. Data analysis team discussion involved debate in relation to intended meaning. One analyst surmised that SS73 was referring to the multiple choice component of NAPLAN tests and did not know which answer was correct. A second analyst argued that SS73 was referring to NAPLAN questioning style and was unsure of the intended meaning of the question. The final analyst suggested that the cross and tick were indicative of SS73’s lack of confidence in her ability to answer questions correctly and she was questioning her own ability.
Although all explanations were justifiable upon further analysis of the student’s four illustrations it was concluded that the cross and tick were indicative of SS73 not knowing if she had answered correctly or incorrectly.

![Image of cross and tick]

**Figure 6.58   SS73 Prompt 2**

SS72 gave the appearance of a decreased level of anxiety in her second illustration. She drew herself seated at a table and although not smiling the facial expression portrays a more relaxed appearance than in her previous illustration. Words selected by SS72 to support and explain her illustration ‘relaxed’ and ‘confident’ confirm the emotion visually represented in the illustration. SS71 also drew herself sitting at a table with a test paper. She too selected ‘confident’ to describe her emotions but also included ‘scared’. The emotion displayed on the face appears anxious. Two speech bubbles, one containing a ‘tick’ representing ‘confident’ and the other a ‘question mark’ indicating ‘scared’, appear in the illustration.

![Images of SS72 and SS71 illustrations]

**Figure 6.59   SS71 Prompt 2**  **Figure 6.60   SS72 Prompt 2**

The three images included in SS74’s initial illustration did not appear in any further illustrations submitted by SS74. In response to the testing period the only feature considered by the analysis team as significant was the exaggerated appearance of the oversized head as it is disproportionate to other images included. The enlarged head also appeared in illustrations provided by SSA35 and a selection of students from Maryvale and was interpreted as indicative of the students’ perception of the amount of information stored in their heads so as to complete the NAPLAN tests.
6.4.3.3. Silverstone’s Year 7 NAPLAN completion

In the third artefact provided by SS73 written in the speech bubble was ‘naplan?! 100%’ above were the words ‘happy but worried’. This was perceived as meaning that SS73 was ‘happy’ that the testing period was completed but still experienced anxiety regarding her level of achievement.

Self-portraits submitted by SS71 and SS72 in response to NAPLAN completion portray happiness, however, there still appears a level of anxiety present in relation to their perceived success or failure. SS71 illustrated herself smiling and at first glance appears happy, but the selection of words ‘relieved, excited’ and ‘nervous’, and the two speech bubbles, one containing a smiley face and the other a question mark, told a different story. A smiling face present in SS72’s third illustration indicated happiness. Words ‘happy’ and ‘excited’ appeared above the illustration, however, the inclusion of the word ‘worried’ indicated that SS72, although happy is still experiencing anxiety with regard to her NAPLAN achievement. The mail-box appearing on the left-hand-side and the speech bubbles encasing the repetition of the word ‘waiting’ and ‘but happy’ indicated that SS72 is waiting for her NAPLAN results.
In response to the completion of the NAPLAN testing period SS74 drew a stick figure with a smile and included ‘happy’ above the image.

6.4.3.4. Silverstone’s Year 7 NAPLAN results

SS73 demonstrated extreme happiness with her success in the NAPLAN tests, however, she indicated through her selection of words that she was still a little ‘confused’ but ‘proud’ of her achievement.

SS71 and SS72 used exaggerated smiles to attract the viewers’ attention to the happy emotion portrayed in the pictures. Words such as ‘happy, proud’ and ‘glad’ selected by the students to describe their illustrations supported the messages displayed by the visual images.
In SS74’s final illustration regarding the delivery of NAPLAN results the stick figure re-appears. The inclusion of a thinking bubble encasing two further stick figures was perceived as a signal of the return of other students into SS74’s world. The appearance of the word ‘unknown’ explains that SS74 had not yet viewed his results.

6.5. Summary

Chapters 6 has presented results, analysis and discussion of Silverstone’s student perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing. Findings indicate that NAPLAN implementation has affected minimally the curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices in Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms at Silverstone. However, Silverstone’s students reported that NAPLAN testing had impacted them to varying degrees. Unlike Maryvale, where the student complaints were in the majority quite uniform, there were distinct differences in perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN reported by the three year levels at Silverstone.

Year 7 students displayed frustration with what they considered as an intrusion to their learning and teaching time. NAPLAN was considered a complete waste of time. The Year 7 students anticipated the completion of NAPLAN testing with enthusiasm as it signalled the return to their ‘normal’ school experience. Consistent with their Maryvale counterparts, Silverstone’s Year 5 student data confirmed the link between NAPLAN focussed learning and teaching and negative student perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing. Although the NAPLAN focus in the Year 5
classroom at Silverstone was to a lesser degree than in classrooms at Maryvale, it was significantly more than that which occurred in the Year 3 and 7 classrooms at Silverstone and had resulted in increased negativity towards NAPLAN. Silverstone's Year 3 students displayed fear of the unknown and were concerned that their level of NAPLAN achievement would be viewed by others, including the government. Unlike the Year 3 students at Maryvale, Silverstone’s Year 3 students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN were no more or less significant than the Years 5 and 7 students’. This may indicate that age, maturity and prior NAPLAN experience may impact students less than significant changes to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.

Chapter 7 will provide a discussion addressing commonalities and divergence between students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing from each research school. Chapter 7 also examines the evidence from this study in terms of the established literature on middle years of schooling, assessment and the impact of high-stakes testing.
Chapter 7. Discussion

7.1. Introduction

As is evident from the vast literature published in the field, information relating to middle years schooling and middle years students’ characteristics and consequential specific needs is abundant. There also exists a vast amount of research and literature in the area of educational assessment, assessment purposes and practices, including high-stakes testing. Contemporary literature indicates significant increases in the educational arena, as well as in electronic and paper-based media, in discussions relating to NAPLAN testing. Furthermore, privileging student voice in matters affecting their education has been a topic of research both past and present. However, there is a gap in research-based findings and discussions privileging middle years students’ voice in relation to the implementation of NAPLAN testing.

In order to address this shortfall, this study has provided an analysis of middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN in two Queensland schools. Contrasting with many studies that have explored NAPLAN implementation, the interpretive research approach was employed to view lived experiences through the student lens, resulting in expressions of student voice. Engaging with middle years students from the commencement of the NAPLAN preparation and concluding with the delivery of NAPAN results to these students, enabled analysis of the perceived change and the challenges students faced and their reactions to these. This study did not set out to provide data that would represent all middle years students experiences, but rather to feature the experiences of students in two school settings.

As explained, the two schools involved were a Queensland government school and a school from Queensland’s independent system. The selection of these two schools was purposive. Both schools were known to the researcher and was informed by the observation prior to this study that the approaches taken to participation in NAPLAN appeared to be contrasting. The schools were geographically close, in Australian terms, and drew from similar catchment populations. Maryvale is a Queensland government co-educational, public state school with a mixed socio-economic and cultural population of over 700 students. Silverstone is a co-educational, independent school with a mixed
socio-economic and cultural enrolment of under 300 students. A major contextual contrast for the two schools is their governance. Maryvale is a government school, and as the discussion in Chapter 4 revealed, pressure on NAPLAN performance were perceived to be externally-driven. However, many independent schools in Queensland, and Australia, recognise what is a growing significance of NAPLAN outcomes informing parental choice of school. Independent schools must be responsive to parental expectations. Silverston, however, had made the choice to focus on holistic education, downplaying at the official management level, a focus on NAPLAN.

This chapter provides: a comparison of findings from the two school approaches to the implementation of NAPLAN; discussion from the developing themes; insight into student voice in relation to the implementation of NAPLAN; and a summary of student attitudes, perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN.

7.2. **Methodology effectiveness**

The methodology employed in this study was designed to privilege student voice and in this regard has proven to be successful. Semi-structured focus group interviews enabled participants to interact with each other in discussions on and about NAPLAN. Students were able to discuss their learning and the types of assessment that assisted their learning that they liked. Offering students a voice through the invitation to draw is both innovative and in the tradition of other studies. This method of data collection provided students with the opportunity to express that which is not easily put into words and offered the researcher the opportunity to explore the students’ insights and perspectives about NAPLAN and these changed over time. The children’s images required interpretation and hence a team of researchers interpreting the visual data was necessary. Agreement on the meaning of images was high, and where it differed the diverse interpretations are provided so that the reader can form their own opinion. The integration of interviews, words and pictures revealed extensive and generally similar information, forming a kind of validation through triangulation. The overall effect is that the methodology was valid and productive, and its usefulness will be increasingly validated as other researchers are encouraged to use similar approaches.

7.3. **Different schools**
The participation of teachers, parents and school managers, and classroom observations aided in building an holistic overview of the students’ world inside and outside the school environment and allowed for triangulation of data about the school contexts. Considerable attention was given to ensuring that the adults’ perceptions of NAPLAN and perspectives of students’ needs were only used for comparison with the perceptions and perspectives of the students. The data obtained was supported by classroom observations, conducted to aid in the data validation process through methodological triangulation. The variety of data collection approaches used to gather information from a cross section of participants at varying levels of the school community assisted in establishing the context of the study and allowed comparison of perceptions between data sets (refer to Table 3.1). The purpose of including adult participants and observations was to observe the context in which students’ perceptions would be sought.

Findings from Maryvale’s teachers, parents and school managers participants indicated that for them top-down pressure resulted in a pedagogical shift which had impacted on curriculum, assessment and pedagogy in Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms and to a lesser extent in Years 2 and 4 classrooms. All teachers interviewed reported engaging in ‘teaching to the test’ and developing ‘test wiseness’. NAPLAN preparation commenced in weeks one and two of the school year at Maryvale involving two-thirds of each day in Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms, testing, marking and re-testing literacy and numeracy concepts pertinent to NAPLAN testing. Teachers focused their attention on students placed marginally below the average indicators so as to improve their classroom averages. However, they identified the inequity of such a practice in relation to high and low achieving students who are also entitled to teacher attention. During this period minimal time was allocated to explicit teaching and consolidation of concepts, and there was limited use of hands-on manipulative aides for those students requiring concrete materials. Other key learning areas such as: Science, Studies of Society and Environment, The Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Technology were afforded minimal attention. NAPLAN was not considered to be indicative of an holistic assessment tool for the purpose of gauging students’ overall educational achievement. The lengthy time between NAPLAN testing and result delivery was viewed by the teachers as a negative aspect of NAPLAN and they considered the results useless for purposes of diagnostic assessment. The NAPLAN testing format, which allows for
successful guessing, and external influences affecting students’ ability to perform, were identified as issues affecting the validity of NAPLAN results. Maryvale’s manager and teachers suggested the existence of a hidden agenda in relation to various stakeholders and their overall reaction to NAPLAN was, in the majority, negative. However, they viewed NAPLAN preparation as positive as it provided useful data for parent feedback on student achievement, and for behaviour management purposes.

In contrast, NAPLAN implementation at Silverstone had, reportedly, not resulted in a pedagogical shift and instead participants reported minimal impact on curriculum, assessment and pedagogy practices. Silverstone’s students were introduced to NAPLAN test format, and skills and knowledge pertinent to NAPLAN content, however, unlike pedagogical practices at Maryvale, this was embedded in the learning and teaching. The holistic classroom curriculum focus involving the whole child, body and soul, had altered little. NAPLAN preparation did not commence at Silverstone until two weeks prior to testing. Teachers reported not having engaged in practices involving ‘teaching to the test’, teaching ‘test wiseness’ or teaching to select groups of students. All concepts were taught explicitly and students were provided extra time, opportunity for consolidation, and hands-on manipulative materials when required. Silverstone’s adult participants did not report experiencing top-down pressure associated with NAPLAN, however, consistent with their Maryvale counterparts, they suggested the existence of a hidden agenda for political purposes. In matters associated with NAPLAN equity and validity of results, teachers suggested that the approach adopted by a school may influence students’ success in achieving improved NAPLAN outcomes. However, they were undecided regarding whether a NAPLAN focused curriculum advantaged or disadvantaged students. Silverstone’s teachers, parents and school managers overall reaction to NAPLAN was negative.

The response of Maryvale, overall, echoes research findings from the USA on the potential negative impact of tests on teaching, curriculum and assessment (Au, 2007). The response of Silverstone, in contrast to that of Maryvale, reflected international consensus (Barratt, 1998; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Lingard, 2005; NMSA, 2003) and Australian official directives that maintaining a rich and holistic approach to education is the appropriate preparation for students for tests such as NAPLAN. However, even at Silverstone, some students
expressed apprehension and teachers expressed concern for teachers in other jurisdictions, about the nature and consequence of NAPLAN.

It would appear that it is how schools manage NAPLAN in part that determines how it affects its teachers, curriculum and student population. The effect of external pressures may be such that schools approach the processes associated with NAPLAN in ways that may not achieve the best overall experience for students.

7.4. Developing themes

Conversations involving students’ lives outside of the school environment were initiated at the commencement of each student focus group interview prior to directing discussion in order to include their lived experiences within the school environment. Students’ conversations developed around their likes and their dislikes in relation to attending school.

While Maryvale’s children favoured the social aspect of school such as conversing and playing with their friends during break times, they also collectively indicated that most enjoyment was experienced during specialist lessons such as Physical Education, including sport, and Music, including instrumental music. In addition to spending time with friends and specialist lessons Maryvale’s students reported receiving pleasure from tasks associated with theme work such as ‘Space’, ‘Endangered Animals’, and ‘The First Fleet’.

Consistent with Maryvale students, Silverstone’s students favoured the social aspect of school and discussed enthusiastically their enjoyment of specialist lessons. They demonstrated enthusiasm for their theme-based learning environments such as the Year 3’s work developing their emotional gardens and the Year 7 unit theme on ‘Machines through History’, covering such areas as ‘Who invented machines?’ and ‘How have these machines changed our lives?’

During focus group interviews conducted at Maryvale, six themes in relation to NAPLAN testing emerged:

1. students’ perceptions of their teachers.

2. students’ perceptions of NAPLAN tests.
3. students’ reaction to time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation.

4. students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN.

5. students’ fear of recrimination.

6. students’ right to speak and be heard.

Maryvale’s students’ narratives, and words and drawings revealed evidence to suggest that government bodies, education authorities, and the principal and teachers involved in the implementation of NAPLAN testing at Maryvale State School had not offered students an opportunity to express their ideas and concerns about NAPLAN; no-one had listened to the students’ voice. Prompted by the themes which emerged during analysis of Maryvale’s student data Silverstone’s student data was viewed through the same lens. Each of these themes are now discussed in this chapter, enabling the continuities and discontinuities of student experiences to be revealed.

7.5. **From the mouths of babes**

The data from students provides a window into their experience of NAPLAN that has not been widely available previously. Until now, most reporting related to NAPLAN has focussed on school achievement comparisons rather than the personal experiences of students engaged in the testing regime. The data from this study indicate that some students have developed predominantly negative perceptions of, and reactions to NAPLAN testing and preparation where the curriculum and teaching and learning experiences have been driven by efforts to optimise NAPLAN scores. In contrast, at Silverstone, students experienced little change as an effect of NAPLAN. This is evidenced through the six themes. The differences in their responses highlights the range of ways schools respond to high-stakes testing regimes.

In this study, the decision to include Year 3 students in the study enabled the collection of valuable comparative data. Some data revealed little difference in the Year 3 students’ responses to NAPLAN preparation and testing to those of their Year 5 and Year 7 counterparts. However, the same cannot be said in relation to student-teacher relationships, understanding NAPLAN processes and procedures, and their physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN.
7.5.1. Students’ perceptions of their teachers

The first theme to emerge from the data related to the students’ perceptions of their teachers. The data indicated that Maryvale students regarded their teachers as responsible for major changes to curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices which have taken place since the introduction and implementation of NAPLAN testing. Complaints of teachers ‘yelling’ and being ‘scary’ were raised in all four focus groups. In contrast to Maryvale students, Silverstone students reported little to no change to curriculum, assessment or pedagogical practices to accommodate NAPLAN and explained that they were happy with their teachers.

Including the Year 3 students in order to obtain comparable data proved fruitful with regard to student/teacher relationships. The most alarming response came from the Year 3 group at Maryvale who directed their angst regarding NAPLAN towards their teacher. The students understood the expectation that they would complete the NAPLAN tests but unlike the Year 5 and Year 7 students, who had prior experience with NAPLAN preparation and testing, they had no understanding of why their school experience had changed. Maryvale’s Year 3 students expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of time available for non-NAPLAN activities and the transformation of their school experience in contrast to that experienced in Year 2. They emphasised that they ‘missed the Year 2 teacher’ and the ‘fun’ learning environment. In response to the initial prompt regarding their feelings during the NAPLAN preparation stage, the Year 3 students drew faces which were interpreted as indicating sadness. This is evident in Figs 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4. The Year 3 students explained that they were ‘not being tough’ on their teacher for displaying ‘aggressive’ behaviour and ‘yelling a lot’, and reasoned as an explanation for such behaviour that perhaps their teacher was ‘being bullied’. According to the teachers at Maryvale, Maryvale’s manager expected NAPLAN curriculum focus required pedagogical practices not identified as being ‘best practice’ nor were they practices that the teachers would choose to employ, which may account for the teacher’s behaviour described by the students. Contrastingly, at Silverstone where little was reported to have changed with regard to the transition from Year 2 to Year 3 the Year 3 students spoke positively about their school experience. Silverstone’s students belonging to 3B did not mention their teacher while 3A’s students reported being happy with the teaching staff at Silverstone.
Group 5B at Maryvale explained that their dissatisfaction with their teacher centered around two issues, the first regarded teacher ‘with-it-ness’. These students suggested that their teacher was not aware of work being completed by some students. They reported that high achieving students who finished the practice tests experienced boredom and resorted to attention seeking behaviour to regain the teacher’s attention. They added that when the teacher finally realised these students had completed the work she (the teacher) directed them (the students) to ‘go through it again’, resulting in further student boredom, frustration, and student misbehaviour. Re-teaching concepts already mastered is identified as an antecedent recognised as a trigger for poor behaviour in high achieving students resulting in students, including those in the middle years acting out behaviours (Colvin, 2004). In contrast to MM1’s perception that high achieving students might approve of NAPLAN, findings in this study indicate that the high achieving students interviewed are disadvantaged.

Although the classroom visits amounted to a-moment-in-time and therefore do not represent an holistic picture of the learning and teaching environment in the classrooms at Maryvale, lack of teacher attentiveness and student disengagement was observed in MC3 and MC1. Disengagement from their learning is identified in the literature as a characteristic of middle years students (Pendergast and Bahr, 2005), however, MT1 and MT3 reasoned that the students had disengaged because they were the ‘dumb group’. Several students were observed facing away from MT3 including a boy sitting alone at the end of MT3’s desk who received no teacher acknowledgement the entire lesson. Contemporary literature suggests that middle years students require sustained individual attention in a safe and healthy school environment, including strong teacher/student relationships (MYSA, 2008). Middle years students need to feel valued and engaged in their own learning (Pendergast, 2010). Positive student/teacher relationships are incredibly important to students in the middle years (Coil, 2003) and can be the catalyst that determine whether middle years students engage or disengage with school (Schurr & Forte, 2009). Research has shown that differences in the ways teachers interact with their students has an impact on student academic and social development (Plank & Condliffe, 2013).

MT1 and MT2 described low ability children in their classrooms as disadvantaged due to lack of available time to expose them to a variety of ‘ways to learn’ concepts not yet
mastered, and agreed with MT4 who considered spending time with low achieving students during NAPLAN preparation to be ‘a waste of time’. As noted by Black and Wiliam (1998), when teaching is diverted to developing test skills and sitting tests, the time allocated to teaching is reduced. Constantly measuring student performance reduces valuable teaching time (Black, 2010; Stobart, 2008) and leads to the practice of ‘teaching to the test’ instead of teachers focussing on areas needing development and even neglecting the child (Black & Stobart, 2008). The teachers reasoned that students positioned close to but just below state and/or national averages, when targeted with extra help could be elevated to a higher position. Observed in this classroom was ‘teaching to the test’ regardless of student disengagement.

Maryvale’s teachers explained that MM1 expects improved student NAPLAN results and the easiest way to improve classroom averages is to target students who do not require substantial improvement to move from below to above the line of average. This practice is referred to in the literature as ‘triaging’, where teachers concentrate their teaching on students near benchmarks to get them over the line, leaving behind students most at risk (Dulfer et al., 2013; Jennings & Dorn, 2008), the low achieving students and the high achieving students. Attentiveness to students’ individual needs is a requirement of the Professional Standards for Teachers (Professional Standards for Teachers Guidelines for Professional Practice, 2005). Standard Five states, ‘the requirements for designing and implementing learning experiences that are inclusive, acknowledge and value difference, and enable students to demonstrate personal, group and community responsibility’ (2005, p. 18). The findings indicate that high achieving students are equally as disadvantaged in these classrooms at Maryvale as their low achieving counterparts and are therefore less likely to show improvement as they too are being starved of teacher attention.

The second and significant issue raised by Maryvale’s 5B students involved the collection of students’ results. They reported that the routine of having to call out their practice test scores resulted in high achieving and low achieving students being bullied by their peers. Although this method of results collection was not witnessed during the classroom observation conducted in 5B, it was witnessed in the Year 7 classroom where MT4 called out students’ names and students responded with their practice test results. As each student provided their result MT4 announced the result to the whole class.
Further to this, students’ NAPLAN practice test results were displayed on the classroom wall in clear view of all students and classroom visitors. Peer acceptance is probably the single most important thing in their time of life for the young adolescent, success in life means success in friendship (Coil, 2003). Therefore, alienation from a peer group can impact how middle schoolers perceive themselves and result in disengagement from school. During the focus group interviews with Maryvale’s teachers there was no mention of the perceived student rivalry in response to the NAPLAN practice test results. Furthermore, there was no indication that teachers were aware of the incidents of bullying reported by the students as occurring as a consequence of their method of gathering student results. Providing students with the opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns in relation to matters affecting their school experience, such as NAPLAN, may have resulted in the development of teacher awareness of alleged bullying at Maryvale. Privileging student voice may have resulted in the development of strategies to eliminate bullying by simply altering their method of results collection.

Year 5 students at Silverstone did not report a lack of teacher ‘with-it-ness’ or incidences of bullying as a consequence of NAPLAN test result, however, they did complain that their learning experiences had become NAPLAN focused in the two weeks prior to interview. Although tasks observed in the Year 5 classroom reflected NAPLAN numeracy tests, where the tasks appeared in multiple choice format and students were instructed to select a response which they considered best answered the question, this is where similarity with NAPLAN concluded. Students were offered an opportunity to discuss and justify their selection, strategies for problem solving were introduced, manipulative materials were available for use by students functioning in the concrete operational stage of development, and students were allowed opportunities for consolidation of concepts prior to the introduction of further mathematical problems. Although dissatisfied with changes to their school experience to accommodate NAPLAN, the Year 5 group interviewed at Silverstone reported their satisfaction of their teachers with one student (SS51) attributing her enjoyment of school to her ‘nice’ teacher.

Drawing on past experiences involving NAPLAN testing, Maryvale’s Year 7 students reported they had faith in their teacher in that she would teach them everything they needed to know to achieve success. However, MT4 claimed that the development of
trust extended to the development of positive student-teacher relationships which proved to be untrue for one Year 7 student, MS72, who reported being too afraid to ask for help and as a consequence had resorted to asking peers for assistance, resulting in her being reprimanded for talking. In contrast, all of Silverstone’s Year 7 students expressed their satisfaction with their learning and teaching environment and their teachers. SS73 described the classroom teacher as ‘cool’ and SS72 explained that all the teachers at Silverstone were ‘likable’.

7.5.1.1. Summary

Findings from Maryvale State School indicate that curriculum and pedagogy have been significantly transformed since the implementation of NAPLAN and typically do not involve authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations, which are frequently cited as key essential components for successful middle schooling (Barratt, 1998; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Lingard, 2005; NMSA, 2003). MM1 explained that Years 3, 5 and 7 students at Maryvale are ‘[S]ituated in learning and teaching environments with little room for freedom, excursions, or further investigation’. There was no evidence of integrated curriculum, alignment of appropriate and relevant curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, positive and productive student/teacher relationships or classrooms where warm, enthusiastic, optimistic, flexible and spontaneous teachers negotiate with students and encourage them to take ownership of their own learning, all of which are recommended in the literature as optimal for educating young adolescents (Barratt, 1998; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Lingard, 2005; NMSA, 2003).

The Year 3 students assumed their classroom teacher was responsible for the testing culture adopted at Maryvale, which had consumed time historically spent ‘having fun’, because she was a ‘mean teacher’. MT2, the Year 3 teacher, supported practising for NAPLAN solely because ‘it would be inexcusable to sit students down ‘to do that test’ without having engaged in practising’. However, student resentment towards their teacher was misguided. Evidence from the interview with MM1 indicated that the decision to change the learning and teaching practices at Maryvale to accommodate the implementation of NAPLAN was made by school management and not by Maryvale’s teachers. MM1 explained that the introduction of NAPLAN testing had affected curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices at Maryvale State School which in
turn had changed the school experience of students in Years 3, 5 and 7. He reported the changes as ‘focused around NAPLAN tasks and a NAPLAN type approach to teaching and learning’. MM1 acknowledged that, ‘Kids want to come to school to learn, but they also want to have a bit of fun and NAPLAN preparation can take a lot of fun out of learning’.

Reducing student stress through familiarisation with the NAPLAN structure and testing format was also supported by MT4. Broadfoot and Black (2010) suggest that student stress or test anxiety can affect test performance and can be regarded as a source of invalidity which will distort test scores. MT4 perceived that the constant routine of practising for NAPLAN reassured students that their teachers would provide them with appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding in order to achieve success.

Students’ accounts of learning and teaching in Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms at Silverstone were supported by SM1 who claimed that the implementation of NAPLAN testing had marginally impacted curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices at Silverstone. Further confirmation was obtained during conversations with Silverstone’s parents who reported that NAPLAN was afforded little importance at the school and therefore had impacted students minimally. At Silverstone the teachers reported that they refused to allow NAPLAN to disrupt their learning and teaching or to compromise student/teacher relationships or to threaten student engagement. Engaging middle years students in their own learning is as critical as for older students (Pendergast, 2010).

Relationships based on trust and openness were evident between the students and the teachers at Silverstone. During classroom visits students were observed displaying examples of working collaboratively with fellow students and their teachers to the extent that on entry to classrooms it was often difficult to locate the teachers as they constantly engaged with students and tasks. This supports Cook-Sather’s (2006) claim that respected students who feel important in their classroom are more able to develop quality relationships and create a mutual learning environment with their teachers, and improved learning outcomes are more likely to be achieved.

Silverstone’s students demonstrated their ability to function independently, however, they requested teacher assistance when required and teachers were observed providing that assistance. Tasks witnessed were both student and teacher led with students not
only assisting each other but also demonstrating respect for each other and their teachers. Obvious in SC2, the Year 7 classroom, and SC3, the Year 5 classroom, was the child-centered decision making process. Students were provided opportunities to choose their learning environment and were witnessed negotiating with peers and teachers.

Silverstone’s Year 3A students appeared enthusiastic as they explained the learning occurring in their classroom. Neither of the Year 3 groups reported any change to their school experience since the introduction of NAPLAN. In contrast to Year 3 students’ account of learning and teaching at Silverstone, the Year 5 students complained that their learning experience had become more NAPLAN focused in the previous two weeks. The Year 7 students explained Silverstone as a school where opportunity to ‘experience new and exciting learning’ was provided.

Years 3A, 3B and Year 7 students interviewed at Silverstone did not report any changes to their school experience to accommodate NAPLAN implementation. This was supported by classroom observations and Silverstone’s teachers’ accounts of learning and teaching in their classrooms. Teachers reported spending less than one hour per year preparing their students for NAPLAN testing. SM1 confirmed the limited impact NAPLAN implementation had on Silverstone students and explained that moving forward at Silverstone did not include a NAPLAN focus. There was no evidence of a NAPLAN curriculum focus at Silverstone, however, during teachers’ focus group interviews the teachers explained that NAPLAN test material was integrated within existing curriculum and therefore camouflaged any alteration to lesson structure or content.

7.5.2. Students’ perceptions of NAPLAN tests

The second theme to emerge from student data related to the cognitive level required by students in order to achieve successful NAPLAN test outcomes. Maryvale’s students consistently complained about the academic level of NAPLAN tests. Most described the tests as beyond their ability. This perspective was supported by Maryvale’s teachers who explained that the Queensland curriculum does not align with that of the southern states which ignites issues in relation to equity. The teachers reported that their students were placed under duress when tested on concepts which had not yet been addressed in Queensland schools and were not due to be addressed until the following year.
Educational reform including the Queensland government’s decision to introduce Prep as the first year of schooling and to relocate Year 7 students to secondary school, combined with the implementation of the Australian National Curriculum, will see Queensland schooling more closely aligned with education structures in states such as Victoria and New South Wales by 2015. However, large-scale testing programs, especially national test programs are developed and interpreted externally and link minimally to the learning taking place in the classroom (Broadfoot & Black, 2010; Gronlund & Waugh, 2008).

Silverstone’s children demonstrated various levels of understanding of NAPLAN and its procedures and processes. Initially it was easy to assume that their knowledge and understanding of NAPLAN was extremely limited when NAPLAN was described as ‘a sheet with some questions’. As the interview progressed their familiarity with the structure and content of NAPLAN tests became evident. They reported that NAPLAN included literacy and numeracy and the tests were in booklet format, the testing period extended over three days and finally they suggested that NAPLAN had ‘something to do with the GOVERNMENT’ (capitalisation representing raised voice). Year 3A students reported having been introduced to a NAPLAN numeracy test booklet but explained that they had only looked at it for a short while ‘a few minutes’. Silverstone’s students made no such complaint regarding the difficulty of NAPLAN test content and explained that their strategy for dealing with questions they found difficult was to ‘pick a random answer’. Teachers also suggested that the students often correctly guess answers to multiple choice questions and suggested that this would affect the validity of NAPLAN results. A number of researchers agree that ‘test wiseness’ results in more informed and better guessing in multiple choice tests (Frey, Petersen, Edwards, Pedrotti & Peyton, 2003). Further to this, SPGB6 and SPGB7 raised the issue of inequity affecting result validity and suggested that some students are situated in an advantageous position having been coached in ‘test wiseness’ prior to participating in the NAPLAN tests. A further concern raised by SPB1, a Silverstone parent, was the inconsistency between students’ NAPLAN results and the evidence of students’ achievement in classroom assessments. She suggested that misleading information resulted in both parent and student confusion. Rather than directing negativity towards NAPLAN test content Silverstone’s students directed their negativity towards NAPLAN preparation.
As discussed previously Silverstone’s Year 5 students reported recent changes to their classroom curriculum and explained the changes as ‘really annoying’ and ‘not really necessary’. They complained that preparing for NAPLAN was ‘just a waste of learning time’. The teachers agreed with the students and referred to NAPLAN as a ‘waste of time’. Silverstone’s manager’s perception of her students’ and teachers’ reactions to NAPLAN testing: ‘they would consider NAPLAN testing and preparation a waste of time’, proved to be accurate.

Silverstone’s parents, viewing NAPLAN from a similar aspect, suggested that NAPLAN preparation which focused solely on curriculum content found in the NAPLAN tests failed to provide children with an holistic education. They described NAPLAN preparation and testing as anything but holistic and suggested NAPLAN testing was a narrow view of a child’s educational capabilities and furthermore failed to address the learning needs of all students. High achieving Year 7 students at Silverstone referred to NAPLAN as ‘boring’. Students suggested that NAPLAN consumed school time, time which could be spent more purposefully learning ‘important stuff’. NAPLAN was viewed by Silverstone’s parents as valueless. They recognised NAPLAN as a moment-in-time test which could not evaluate student progress as successfully as classroom teachers. The Year 7 group were the only students at Silverstone who appeared well-informed with regard to their right to choose whether or not to participate in NAPLAN testing.

Time constraints attached to NAPLAN testing was another important aspect identified by Maryvale’s students. They felt that speed was required to achieve successful results. Students reported spending class time practising ‘speed planning’ for writing persuasive text and completing timed number facts. Students added that they felt the time restrictions were unfair and limited their opportunities to demonstrate mastery of questions not attempted due to insufficient time. They feared that external assessors would assume the unanswered questions were indicative of insufficient skills and not due to time limitation. The students reported that the time allocated to complete the tests was ‘too short’ and added that the feeling of being ‘rushed’ increased their level of stress. They experienced ‘panic’, and a reduced opportunity to thoroughly evaluate each question to ensure it was answered correctly. They complained that the tests involved too much work to be completed in the available time period. Some students found the
sheer size of NAPLAN daunting and reported that the tests included too much ‘reading and writing, and too many bubbles to colour in’. Silverstone’s students’ only reference to ‘time’ in relation to the NAPLAN testing period was to express concern regarding, ‘having to sit in one place for so long’.

Reference was made by Silverstone’s teachers to the relationship between a student’s age and their ability to cope with perceived pressure related to NAPLAN testing, however, traditional testing was not common practice at Silverstone therefore the teachers claimed that students of all ages attending Silverstone would be uncomfortable in any formal testing situation.

7.5.2.1. Summary

Maryvale’s students emphasised that they were expected to demonstrate mastery of concepts not yet addressed and therefore, in their opinion, the tests were set at a standard beyond their level of capability. They reported that the questions included in NAPLAN tests were sometimes confusing and they were often unsure of the intended meaning. This was also recognised by MT4, the Year 7 teacher who suggested that trick questions were added to NAPLAN tests in an attempt to confuse students and questioned the integrity of such a practice. MT4 elaborated further suggesting some NAPLAN characteristics caused Year 7 students stress such as, restricting them to a limited duration to complete tests which are set above their cognitive level. In contrast Silverstone’s students appeared comfortable when discussing NAPLAN and spoke of minimal stress or pressure and consistently reported NAPLAN as consuming school time and as valueless. Their chosen method for addressing difficult questions was to guess the correct answer.

An important aspect causing stress amongst the students from Maryvale was the time constraints attached to the NAPLAN tests and their inability to complete the tests in the allotted time. Contrastingly, Silverstone’s students reported NAPLAN preparation time and having to sit for three days in a testing situation as their only concerns regarding NAPLAN time constraints. Regarding the NAPLAN testing period a perceived relationship between student age and ability to cope with NAPLAN testing, and student unfamiliarity with a formal testing environment were the only concerns reported by Silverstone’s participants. Explanations of student concerns regarding NAPLAN were
not confined to the actual testing period, students attending both study schools reported concerns regarding NAPLAN preparation time.

7.5.3. **Students’ perceptions of time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation**

A further theme to emerge related to the amount of learning and teaching time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation. The Year 3 students at Maryvale reported that NAPLAN preparation was taking time away from key learning areas involving what they described as ‘fun’. As opposed to their Year 5 and Year 7 counterparts, the Year 3 students blamed their teacher and referred to her as ‘mean’ and responsible for the changes which had eliminated ‘fun’ from their school experience. Supporting the Year 3 students, their teacher MT2, indicated that there was no time for ‘fun’ or ‘tender-love-and-care’, which she regarded as important for Year 3 students. The teachers interviewed from Maryvale reported that Year 3 students did not understand NAPLAN assessment processes or procedures. All teachers interviewed disputed the value of the inclusion of Year three students in NAPLAN on the grounds that they were too young to be included.

At Silverstone where little has changed to accommodate the implementation of NAPLAN the only reference to NAPLAN preparation was reported by Year 3A students who discussed having viewed a NAPLAN numeracy test from a previous year for ‘a few minutes’. They did not connect learning how to write a persuasive text (NAPLAN writing genre), with NAPLAN preparation. Nor had they made links between the ‘Around the World’ game, designed to improve times tables’ skills, and NAPLAN numeracy. Group 3B reported no change to their curriculum, but this is not to say that they were not involved in some form of NAPLAN preparation. Silverstone’s teachers reported including selected skills and knowledge in their everyday lessons, however, suggested that the students were unaware of the practice taking place within their classroom.

Consistent with the comments from Maryvale’s Year 3 students, the 5A students at Maryvale also reported spending two-thirds of each day since the beginning of the school year preparing for NAPLAN, however, in contrast they blamed NAPLAN for the changes, not their teacher. Students suggested NAPLAN preparation was a ‘waste of time’ and anticipated the completion of the testing period which would signal a return to
normality. Supporting the students’ perceptions of NAPLAN preparation, Maryvale’s teachers explained that NAPLAN preparation consumed valuable teaching time and involved pedagogical practices such as, ‘teaching to the test’ and teaching ‘test wiseness’; which had narrowed the curriculum. Narrowing the curriculum, where teachers merely drill test content to achieve improved test results, where the curriculum lacks depth (teaching-to-the-test), where teachers coach students how to become successful test-takers (test wiseness) and where teachers focus learning and teaching on select groups of students to achieve maximum improvement, is noted in the literature as amongst the many negative consequences of attaching high-stakes to assessment (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Harlen, 2005; Shepard, 2003). ‘Teaching to the test’ and teaching ‘test wiseness’ was witnessed in three of the four classrooms observed. MM1 Maryvale’s principal confirmed the considerable amount of time spent focusing on NAPLAN by adding that, “NAPLAN season encompasses February, March and April leading up to and including the testing period in May”.

Year 5B students at Maryvale objected to the reported increase in workload since the introduction of NAPLAN testing and supported the Year 3 students by claiming there was no time available to learn about curriculum included in other key learning areas. They reported that most of their school day focused on mathematics and believed mathematics had ‘taken over’. The findings indicated that students who were not strong in mathematics developed an even stronger dislike for the subject due to the perception that mathematics had ‘taken over’ their school day. One student in 5B complained about the absence of time available to learn mathematical concepts not yet mastered and in need of further development. She reported compensating for her lack of understanding by resorting to copying from her peers. The teachers also reported the lack of time available for explicit teaching of concepts not grasped by some students as being a consequence of the NAPLAN preparation focus in place at Maryvale. Contradicting this, MM1 explained that many programs focused around The Arts, Physical Education and the love of learning, occurred in classrooms at Maryvale. He stated that Maryvale was about the students’ holistic education and not solely academics. However, MM1’s stated belief contradicted students’ and the teachers’ accounts of learning and teaching practices occurring in Years 3, 5 and 7 classrooms at Maryvale. He also contradicted his previous account of the learning environment experienced by the Year 3, 5 and 7 students at Maryvale as dominated by a NAPLAN focus in the early months of the year.
NAPLAN preparation was raised by Silverstone’s Year 5 students who reported that during the two week period preceding interview one-third of each day was spent preparing for NAPLAN. They explained that they completed one NAPLAN practice test each day and complained that it was ‘really unnecessary’ and consistent with their Year 5 counterparts at Maryvale referred to NAPLAN preparation as ‘just a stupid waste of time’. SS55 objected to practising and indicated that time spent practising for NAPLAN had negatively impacted him academically. NAPLAN was not always seen in a negative light by this group of students. SS51 viewed NAPLAN through a more positive lens and explained NAPLAN as a tool for developing students into ‘better adults’. In contrast SS53 was quick to point out that he believed the purpose of NAPLAN was to assist teachers with their planning.

Year 7 students at Maryvale described their school days as including ‘heaps of tests’ and ‘heaps of board-work’. They explained that two-thirds of their day was consumed by the recurring pattern of ‘testing-marking-retesting’, however, they reasoned that this routine would assist them in building confidence before the NAPLAN testing period. Year 7 students, although not enjoying the testing, had attached a purpose to this routine and therefore did not view NAPLAN practice through the same lens as Maryvale’s Years 3 and 5 students. The teachers’ explanation of the extent of NAPLAN preparation occurring in their classrooms supported the students’ claims. Although the classroom visits were brief, findings from the observations also supported the students’ claims that the first two sessions of each day were dedicated to NAPLAN preparation.

In contrast to the Year 7 students at Maryvale, the Year 7 students at Silverstone described their learning environment as unchanged and explained that they, like the students in 3A, had been introduced to a NAPLAN test, but due to its perceived lack of importance had not afforded it a great amount of time. Consistent with students in 3B who enthusiastically discussed their learning theme, ‘Emotional Gardens’, the Year 7 students demonstrated enthusiasm for their themed learning environment. The students also explained other learning opportunities involving skills which assist them to work successfully in groups and to develop their powers of negotiation.

7.5.3.1. Summary
Middle years education at Maryvale prior to NAPLAN testing in May involves teacher pedagogy and learning experiences which mimic the assessment. The tasks require little
challenge as opposed to powerful knowledge, integrated curriculum, higher-order in critical thinking, problem solving, and authentic and reflective assessment with high expectations embedded in a real-world context, identified as important for successful middle years schooling (Barratt, 1998; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000, Lingard, 2005; NMSA, 2003). In response to their feelings during NAPLAN preparation, most Maryvale children drew faces to represent themselves. Detail was often minimal; however, what were consistent were the facial expressions representing varying degrees of sadness, fear and anxiety.

Unlike Maryvale, the learning and teaching witnessed in the classrooms at Silverstone involved authentic instruction with high expectations involving curriculum and pedagogy which excited the students and linked to their world, all important for successful schooling for young adolescents (Barratt, 1998; Crosswell, Bahr, Pendergast & Newhouse Maiden, 2010; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Lingard, 2003, 2005; NMSA, 2003). NAPLAN preparation is embedded in Silverstone’s existing curriculum two weeks prior to the testing period in May, therefore it involves little to no change to curriculum, assessment or pedagogical practices in the classrooms at Silverstone. Many students appeared to be unaware of any test preparation within their learning. Only Silverstone’s Year 5 group discussed the minor changes to their learning experience. They viewed NAPLAN preparation as more of an inconvenience than a stressor. Illustrations submitted during the words and drawings sessions represented Silverstone’s students smiling. Adjectives selected to support and explain their drawings indicated nervous anticipation in relation to the approaching NAPLAN testing to a greater extent than any fear or anxiety. Examples of this can be seen in Figures 6.4 and 6.6.

7.5.4. Students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN

The fourth theme to evolve from student data related to students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing. Contemporary literature indicates that students cannot perform to the best of their ability when they are upset or anxious and a student’s level of anxiety is dependent on the student’s perception of cognitive demands (Hohensinn et al., 2011). Broadfoot and Black (2010) suggest that students’ attitudes to learning and the strategies they use to further their own learning may be affected by the way assessment is conducted. Therefore, if ‘test anxiety’ does...
interfere with optimum performance, the anxiety might be reduced by making tests less ‘test-like’.

MS74, a Year 7 student attending Maryvale, complained of watery eyes and tiredness when completing the tests. Added to these physical reactions she also reported feeling panicked in relation to restrictive time limits; she explained that her mind goes completely blank in response to the panic. Time constraints were also reported as the cause of increased stress levels of students in Maryvale’s 5A. MSA52 explained, ‘It’s scary because you get a limited amount of time to do it’. MSA51 reported that their class engaged in ‘speed planning’ for NAPLAN. Maryvale’s Year 7 students described their reactions to NAPLAN using adjectives such as, stressed and nervous.

Maryvale’s Year 3 students used similar adjectives such as ‘nervous’, ‘scared’ and ‘uncomfortable’ to explain their feelings in relation to NAPLAN structure, content and size. They stated, ‘I’m no good at maths,’ ‘I’m no good at tests’ and ‘I don’t do well at tests’, reflecting the extent to which NAPLAN impacted their self-esteem. They too raised the issue of test time constraints in relation to their ability to ‘work fast’. Year 3 students reported sore hands, eye strain, headaches, feeling tired, and feeling sick, as physical reactions to NAPLAN practice and testing.

One student, MS72, explained feeling ‘alone’ and ‘small’. Proportion was an interesting aspect of drawings considered. Some illustrations included significant items associated with NAPLAN testing which were disproportionate to the figure of the child. This display of disproportion or exaggeration, was evident in Fig 5.43, 5.44 and 5.48 and points to feelings of insignificance experienced by the illustrator when compared to the NAPLAN tests. Also disproportionate in some student drawings was head size. The enlarged head present in Figs 5.13 and 5.49 was interpreted as representative of the amount of information the child considered was necessary to be stored in his head.

Although the Year 3 students from Silverstone demonstrated a limited knowledge of NAPLAN they did report physical and emotional reactions to the approaching testing period. In the first instance it appeared that their reactions were directly related to their lack of information. One student used the word ‘weird’ and another the word ‘frustrated’ and explained that they were experiencing these feelings because they had
never participated in NAPLAN testing before. Some students, developed an alternative approach to NAPLAN as evident in the following statement.

SSA33: I’m not that worried because it’s not like a test where you can get an A+ or anything. I think it’s not that bad because if you don’t get the answers right it doesn’t really matter, it’s not like you’ll die if you get them all wrong.

The Year 3 students directed little negativity towards NAPLAN during their conversations but reported that on the actual day NAPLAN testing commenced they might experience nervousness but felt assured that this feeling would pass by day three.

A perceived fear of ‘government’ became apparent in conversations with students at Silverstone. Their perceived powerlessness was evidenced through statements including ‘I am really worried because it’s actually the government that sees your work’, ‘the government is really big and we are really small’. ‘I say in my head, like pooh the government, cause I get really angry that they sent out this stuff’, and ‘I’ll feel like someone’s stalking me cause they’re looking at you stuff and they know your name and like it feel like they are going to be watching you, so it’s kind of creepy’. Although SS53 had displayed a carefree attitude towards NAPLAN early in the interview, later he spoke of feeling sick and worried in relation to the government’s role in NAPLAN. This is portrayed in his illustration in Fig 6.7.

Alternately, apart from feeling a ‘little scared’, it would appear that Year 7 students perceived NAPLAN as insignificant and therefore not worthy of a reaction from them and furthermore, they were looking forward to the completion of the testing period so ‘things could return to normal’. However, to support their illustrations they selected words including: ‘nervous, excited, confused, scared, worried, ready, strange’ and ‘freaky’ to describe their emotions in the lead-up to NAPLAN testing.

7.5.4.1. Summary

Again it was the Maryvale students who reported the greatest impact physically and emotionally in relation to NAPLAN preparation and testing. The reported student reactions to NAPLAN were in the majority related to NAPLAN test content and associated time constraints. Although some students interviewed did not elaborate on specific physical reactions to NAPLAN they explained their emotional reaction using adjectives such as ‘nervous’, ‘worried’, ‘stressed out’ and ‘scared’. Discussions with
students highlighted that students’ reactions to NAPLAN testing varied in relation to their cognitive ability. Boredom was reported as an issue in relation to constant NAPLAN preparation which resulted in one high achieving student adjusting his behaviour in order to regain teacher attention. Perceived lack of teacher attentiveness was reported by one child as affecting his desire to attend school. Another student did not wish to attend school because NAPLAN testing was ‘kind of frightening’. Furthermore, NAPLAN testing had affected her ability to sleep.

As discussed previously NAPLAN does not in any major way impact the learning and teaching in classrooms at Silverstone, however, NAPLAN testing was reported as impacting the students physically and emotionally. Unlike Maryvale students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN associated with NAPLAN content and time constraints the unfamiliar structure of NAPLAN tests and extensive testing period were identified as most affecting Silverstone’s students. Teachers and parents from Silverstone demonstrated concern that NAPLAN affects their students negatively. They suggested that test structure including multiple choice format, magazine style reading format, and lengthy periods of assessment, were incompatible with the real world of school experienced at Silverstone; which they believed would impact negatively on their children. SM1 Silverstone’s school manager and the teachers explained that the use of pencil and paper tests was not common at their school. It would appear that NAPLAN as a National Assessment Program was no more of an issue to these Year 3 students than any other approaching test would be. In discussions Silverstone’s students rarely used the term ‘NAPLAN’ but often referred to ‘tests’. In conversations with students from Silverstone, ‘the government’ often came up as a topic for discussion.

7.5.5. **Students’ fear of recrimination**

The fifth theme to emerge from the student data was fear of recrimination from parents, teachers, peers and external bodies in relation to their level of achievement in NAPLAN tests. Pressure related to parental expectations placed on students to achieve desirable NAPLAN outcomes was common amongst the Maryvale students. Students reported being ‘yelled at’, ‘grounded’, and ‘in a bit of trouble’ for not reaching parental expectations. Silverstone’s students reported being fearful of disappointing their parents but did not suggest any threat of recrimination for failing to reach parental expectations.
Maryvale’s Year 3 students reported that failing to complete sufficient questions in practice tests resulted in them getting in ‘really bad trouble’ and therefore, they feared retribution from their teacher. Some Year 3 students interviewed at Silverstone did not appear stressed in relation to the approaching NAPLAN testing period, however, concern was raised during their discussion in relation to the expectations placed on them by adults. In contrast to their Maryvale counterparts the Silverstone students reported that they would be disappointed in themselves if they were to fail to achieve a successful result in the NAPLAN tests rather than fearing any retribution from their teachers.

Alarmingly the students in Year 5 at Maryvale raised the issue of NAPLAN-related bullying and collectively complained of being bullied by their peers because of high or low levels of achievement in NAPLAN practice tests. They explained that other students became aware of their successes and failures resulting in incidents of bullying. They expressed their fear of being teased and reasoned that the bullying may be related to jealousy of high achieving students and reaping pleasure from ‘making fun’ of lower achieving students. Silverstone’s Year 5 students focused on the government’s position regarding NAPLAN. It would appear that this group of Year 5 students perceived the government as something to be feared.

Maryvale’s Year 7 students did not appear concerned about others’ perceptions of their achievements except for the external examiners’. They indicated that they would experience disappointment with themselves and embarrassment if they achieved a poor NAPLAN result because the tests were marked by external examiners. In contrast, the Year 7 students at Silverstone did not display or report any fear of recrimination, of self or from others, in relation to their NAPLAN outcome.

7.5.5.1. Summary
Amongst other recommendations the Middle School Reform Agenda suggests Queensland state schools ‘provide a safe and healthy environment as part of improving academic performance’ and ‘involving parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development (Barratt, 1998). Such recommendations were not perceived by the students at Maryvale as components of their school culture. Instead Maryvale students reported fear of recrimination from their parents, teachers and peers, and embarrassment with regard to the external examiners in relation to perceived failure
to produce a satisfactory NAPLAN outcome. In contrast the students at Silverstone were fearful of the government’s reaction to their NAPLAN results and were concerned that they may disappoint their parents and teachers.

7.5.6. Students’ right to speak

A further concern and the sixth theme to emerge from the student data was the perception of powerlessness. The Year 3 students from Maryvale stated that they would have appreciated a choice regarding their inclusion in NAPLAN. They explained their powerlessness in relation to decisions made about assessment practices which directly affected them. MS31 clearly stated, ‘We have to do it even if we don’t want to do it’ and explained how their participation was constantly monitored. Students in Maryvale’s Year 5 identified the external preparation and marking procedures of the NAPLAN tests resulted in feelings of powerlessness. They explained that the tests were developed externally, therefore, they were not sure of expectations or intended content. They explained that school-based assessment tasks set by their teacher were related to familiar topics that were discussed in class before the assessment. They feared that they would be unfamiliar with the selected persuasive text topic in the writing component of the NAPLAN tests and therefore would be unable to develop a strong argument. A further issue raised by Year 5 students at Maryvale was increasing levels of anxiety due to the fear of running out of time to complete the tests. They suggested that external markers would not understand that they had not attempted some questions because of time constraints not because of inability. Feelings of powerlessness were also reported by Year 5 students attending Maryvale; however, these feelings resulted from a different stimulus. The high-stakes external parties, such as certain secondary schools, attached to students’ NAPLAN results left the students experiencing feelings of powerlessness in relation to their futures. They reported that some secondary schools determined acceptance of enrolment based on the level of a student’s NAPLAN achievement.

Consistent across all three Year levels at Maryvale was a sense of powerlessness experienced by students in relation to their exclusion in decisions made about assessment practices which impact upon their educational experiences. They demonstrated dissatisfaction with NAPLAN processes and procedures adopted by
Maryvale and suggested a variety of preferred assessment practices which they believed would result in a less negative reaction to and more valid data from assessment.

Table 7.1  Maryvale’s students’ preferred assessment practices, as reported in Chapter 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Presentations Individual &amp; Group</th>
<th>Construction Diorama &amp; model</th>
<th>Written Project, drawing and graphs</th>
<th>Self and teacher assessment Checklist</th>
<th>Observation &amp; consultation</th>
<th>Anecdotal notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5B</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Silverstone’s parents jointly suggested the best forms of assessment are those which mirror the learning taking place in the classroom, are related to the students’ real world, and are designed to cater for all students’ level of cognitive ability. According to parents, superior methods of assessment include project-based experiential activities where students are able to demonstrate their understanding of concepts through active, physical and verbal demonstrations in various forms and are completed in a non-threatening time period. They suggested forms of assessment such as: self-assessment, peer-assessment and teacher-assessment, assessment designed to meet the needs of individual students; and child-centered assessment. These methods of assessment explained by the parents are referred to in the literature as ‘authentic assessment’. Authentic assessment is based upon the premise that assessment should primarily support the needs of learners and is conducive to the middle years philosophy (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005; Boyd, 2000; Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Nagel, 2010; Swain & Pendergast, 2013).

These mirrored assessment practices valued by the students—demonstrations of learning through presentations, role plays, projects, construction and working in group situations—were suggested by Year 3s as assessment practices they would elect if privileged a voice. They added that teachers would participate as part of the group and would ‘just watch’ them. When asked directly what methods of assessment the Year 5 students would choose, if invited into discussions regarding their education, they suggested demonstrations of their learning along with self-assessment and
teacher/student consultation. Year 7 students elaborated further to include, projects involving researching, construction, and problem solving. Furthermore, the Year 7 students reported preferring to ‘just talk to their teacher’ (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Silverstone's Students’ preferred assessment practices, as reported in Chapter 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Types of assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual &amp; Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.5.6.1. Summary

The Middle Years of Schooling Association (2008) suggests that making assessment meaningful and related to the students’ world inside and outside of the classroom, including students’ interests and cultural backgrounds enables assessment to be linked to the learning and teaching process (MYSA, 2008) and engages middle years students who are prone to disengagement, underachievement, and alienation from school (Carrington, 2006, MYSA, 2008). Jenkins and Pell (2006) suggest a link between student alienation from school and student voice. They assert that when teachers privilege student voice and respond to what students have to say students become more connected to school.

Maryvale students’ feelings of powerlessness related to choice regarding their inclusion in NAPLAN, external preparation and marking procedures, high-stakes attached to students’ NAPLAN results impacting enrolment opportunities in certain secondary schools, and exclusion in decisions made about assessment practices. Regardless of chronological age or current school year level, Maryvale students asserted that if invited into discussions regarding preferred assessment practices they would nominate demonstrations of their learning. They all concurred that assessment which is thoroughly explained with clear expectations was their preferred method of assessment, not assessment which is externally set and marked, such as NAPLAN. They explained that the expectations would be clearly defined before the assessment commenced.
Furthermore, they would not choose an assessment process ‘like NAPLAN’ because of the consequential impact on their school experience (Table 7.1).

The underlying purpose of assessment at Silverstone, according to the parents, is to identify areas where students require further support. According to the teachers, at Silverstone students are able to learn at their own pace, assessment practices are ongoing and in the main formative in nature, resulting in valid assessment of student achievement. This is supported by their manager who claims that student progress at Silverstone is measured formatively. She asserts that formative assessment is the most successful method of informing future learning and teaching. Silverstone’s students’ preferred assessment practices are in the main those assessment practices in place in classrooms at Silverstone. NAPLAN procedures and practices are foreign to Silverstone’s students as a testing culture is not common place at Silverstone.

7.6. Summary

This study has identified a substantial link between the approach adopted by a school for the purpose of preparing for and implementing NAPLAN and the students’ perceptions of and reactions to this.

7.6.1. Different attitudes, different outcomes

Scrutiny of the data indicates that top-down pressure had resulted in a pedagogical shift at Maryvale which had impacted, curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy to varying extents for students in Years 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, for teachers, and for management. The NAPLAN approach adopted such practices as ‘teaching to the test’, ‘teaching test wisdom’, ‘teaching select groups of students’, and a routine of ‘testing-marking-retesting’, two-thirds of each school day during the NAPLAN season, February, March, April and May. Maryvale’s approach to NAPLAN impacted student/teacher relationships in that the students held their teachers responsible for their change to the school experience. Students’ descriptions of their teachers included ‘yelling a lot’, ‘scary’, ‘aggressive’, ‘lacking teacher with-it-ness’, and responsible for associated bullying. They described their learning experience as lacking in key learning areas such as, Science, SOSE, HPE, The Arts, and Technology and complained about the absence of ‘fun’.
In contrast, Silverstone’s students’ accounts of their school experience indicated that typically learning and teaching had altered little with respect to NAPLAN. Some students indicated that NAPLAN had not impacted curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Others suggested that the impact was minimal. Students’ reported and displayed positive student/teacher relationships, they liked coming to school and they liked their teachers. Students’ descriptions of their teachers included ‘nice’ and ‘cool’. Their accounts of learning and teaching at Silverstone included activities such as working collaboratively; negotiating, and problem solving with their peers and their teachers, and activities included, constructing emotional gardens, researching machines through history, performing role-plays and practising social skills.

7.6.2. Students’ perceptions of NAPLAN

In this study qualitative data tracked students from the preparation for NAPLAN testing to the delivery of NAPLAN results and sought out to answer the research question, ‘How do middle years students’ perceive and react to NAPLAN’?

In the majority Maryvale’s students’ accounts described the NAPLAN tests as, in their view, set above their cognitive ability. Silverstone students agreed with their Maryvale counterparts in their perception that the time constraints attached to the NAPLAN tests were unrealistic, the questions were confusing at times, and the testing period was extensive. Maryvale students were alone in their perception that the NAPLAN test structure, colouring in a bubble to indicate the selected correct answer, was annoying.

As discussed previously, Maryvale accommodated NAPLAN by implementing a NAPLAN focussed curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. It was, therefore, not surprising that Maryvale students perceived NAPLAN as involving extensive test preparation, extensive test practice, and extensive board-work. Students complained about the restricted learning opportunities in their classrooms as a consequence of the NAPLAN focussed learning and teaching approach adopted at Maryvale. In contrast Silverstone had changed little to accommodate NAPLAN and therefore the students perceived NAPLAN as involving very little preparation.

The extent of student knowledge in relation to government policy was unclear, although a commonality between the two schools was students’ perceptions of the government’s role in NAPLAN. Students attending both schools spoke of government as something to
be feared. Maryvale students elaborated further explaining that the government was responsible for creating the NAPLAN tests and marking the tests. They indicated their concern about the government’s perception of their NAPLAN test outcomes. One particular issue raised was that the government markers would assume that students were unable to answer questions not attempted due to time constraints, and therefore the results would be invalid. Table 7.3 offers a tabular representation of the commonalities and differences between Maryvale’s and Silverstone’s student perceptions of NAPLAN.

Table 7.3 Students’ perceptions of NAPLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF NAPLAN</th>
<th>Maryvale</th>
<th>Silverstone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Test Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set above cognitive level</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealistic time constraints</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions confusing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive testing period</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test structure annoying</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning and Teaching Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive preparation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive test practice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive board-work</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal preparation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedural Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally created</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally marked</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.6.3. Students’ reactions to NAPLAN

Findings from this study indicate a link between a school’s approach to NAPLAN and students’ reaction to NAPLAN. Maryvale’s choice to adopt a NAPLAN focussed curriculum, assessment and pedagogy resulted in students experiencing ‘fear’, ‘sadness’, ‘anxiety’ and ‘panic’. For some this had altered their perception of school to such an extent that they did not wish to attend school anymore. Maryvale’s students expressed feelings of isolation and insignificance in their spoken and written words, and their illustrations. Only the high achieving students expressed feeling bored, with one
student expressing that his participation in NAPLAN was monitored by government surveillance cameras.

The emotional reactions experienced by Silverstone’s students, where NAPLAN does not play a significant role in curriculum, assessment or pedagogy, included feeling ‘excited’, ‘happy’ and ‘ready’ for the tests. However, a minority of students from Silverstone expressed feeling frightened, nervous and anxious, but in the majority they were a little ‘confused’ about the expectations and felt ‘strange’. One child, in particular, complained of feeling like she was being ‘stalked’ by the government.

Consistent with the students’ emotional reactions to NAPLAN, their physical reactions indicated a link between the importance NAPLAN is afforded in a school and the students’ reactions to NAPLAN. Maryvale’s students complained of sleepless nights and feeling sick preceding the NAPLAN testing period and feeling uncomfortable and tired during the testing period. Students complained of watery eyes and eye strain, sore hands and headaches. Silverstone’s students’ physical reactions to NAPLAN testing were on the whole limited to feeling sick as they approached the testing period. Table 7.4 provides a tabular representation of students’ emotional and physical reactions to NAPLAN testing, the summary being created from the adjectives used by the students to support and explain their drawings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS’ REACTIONS TO NAPLAN</th>
<th>Maryvale</th>
<th>Silverstone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Reactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panicked</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insignificant</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bored</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to attend school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strange</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being stalked</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chapter discussed commonalities and divergences between students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing from each research school. This chapter also examined and presented the evidence from this study in terms of the established literature on middle years of schooling, assessment and the impact of high-stakes testing. While some commonality between the two research sites existed, the degree of divergence of learning and teaching practices in Years 3, 5 and 7 around NAPLAN at the two study schools was substantial. Also discussed in Chapter 7 was the inclusion of the Year 3 students in the study and the degree to which NAPLAN affected their time at school in comparison to the Year 5 and Year 7 students’ school experiences. This comparison resulted in the identification of links between prior NAPLAN experience, commensurate with age and level of maturity, and students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN.

Adding to and filling the gap in the literature with research-based findings from this study which privileges middle years student voice in relation to the implementation of NAPLAN will be discussed in Chapter 8.
Chapter 8. Conclusion and recommendations

8.1. Introduction

This study is important because it contributes to filling a void in the literature with respect to research that privileges middle years students’ voices in relation to NAPLAN testing. Student voice data collected in this study in the form of interview text and student drawings to provide insight into their experiences, reveal that the processes and procedures associated with the implementation of NAPLAN impact on middle years students’ experiences of schooling. Interestingly, the effects are disparate in the two Queensland schools investigated in this case study approach, despite the testing regime being identical in all regards apart from the way the individual school contexts conduct their response to the processes and procedures. In addition to student voice, the approach to NAPLAN implementation adopted by these two schools and hence the nature and extent of its impact experienced by the students is further exemplified through interviews with school leaders, teachers and parents.

It was evident from the commencement of initial interviews with school managers that the two schools had adopted divergent approaches to NAPLAN implementation, although there were some similarities, such as the constant effect of the wider political agenda associated with NAPLAN. At case study school Maryvale, NAPLAN was the school focus. Curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices revolved around NAPLAN preparation. Maryvale’s teachers experienced top-down pressure and felt that their efficacy as teachers was judged by their students’ NAPLAN results. These stressors negatively affected their working environment. Conversely, case study school Silverstone provided a contrasting picture. There was minimal evidence of any effect on curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices emanating from NAPLAN considerations. At Silverstone, NAPLAN was considered to be ‘a moment-in-time test’ and therefore was afforded little attention and created minimal disruption to the running of the school or the teachers’ working environment.

This research opens a window that enables a view of two schools that are arguably at polar ends of the spectrum of the possible responses schools as institutions might make to the NAPLAN agendas, and while these case studies are unique and cannot be
used to generalise more widely, one can speculate that there are other schools engaging in similar responses, and schools ranging everywhere along the spectrum in between and perhaps beyond. Hence, it is a reasonable assertion that NAPLAN implementation is likely to be having a significant effect on the experiences of some students in our classrooms.

This chapter is divided into four sections: Section 8.2 presents implications emanating from this study, Section 8.3 reasserts the limitations of this study, Section 8.4 presents recommendations including a way forward, and finally, the chapter will conclude with a brief summary in Section 8.5.

8.2. Implications

The perception of systemic expectations in the form of top-down pressure on school Principals and teachers to improve students’ NAPLAN results can result in a curriculum, assessment and pedagogical shift in schools. This effect was as evident in one of the schools in this study. In this setting, teachers may engage in practices such as ‘teaching to the test’, developing ‘test wiseness’ and classroom routines involving ‘testing-marking-re-testing’ of NAPLAN related literacy and numeracy concepts. A further concern is ‘triaging’, where teachers concentrate their teaching on students near benchmarks to get them over the line (Dulfer et al., 2013; Jennings & Dorn, 2008) instead of teachers focussing on areas needing development (Black, 2010; Stobart, 2008) may also be evident. When the nature of the assessment is high-stakes the teacher pedagogy and learning experiences may be subverted to mimic more closely the assessment with the test results becoming more significant than those taking the test. At one research site all of these practices were evident, with two-thirds of each day, commencing at the beginning of the school year and continuing until the completion of the NAPLAN testing period in May, spent preparing for the NAPLAN tests. This NAPLAN associated shift in education impacted on middle years students’ perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN, both physically and emotionally.

The NAPLAN focussed curriculum, assessment and pedagogy involved in such practices does not involve authentic instruction, learning and teaching that excites students, learning tasks which link to the world of the students, high expectations, or the required support and quality learning enabling students to achieve (Crosswell, Bahr,
Pendergast & Newhouse Maiden, 2010; Horan, 2010; Lingard, 2003; NMSA, 2003), or align with research literature on best practice middle schooling. Elements necessary for middle schooling include engaging young adolescents in relevant, meaningful and challenging learning through the implementation of initiatives including, higher order thinking, negotiated, relevant and challenging curriculum (Barratt, 1998; Garrick & Keogh, 2010; Hilton & Hilton, 2010; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Lingard, 2005; NMSA, 2003), not constant test rehearsal. Middle years students develop a love of learning when immersed in appropriate curriculum which is grounded in rigour and relevant to the concerns of young adolescents (Horan, 2010). Successful middle schooling requires the alignment of curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices (Barratt, 1998), that relate to the middle years students’ real world.

In this study it is clear that learning and teaching at a NAPLAN focussed school results in minimal attention to key learning areas not associated with NAPLAN, such as Science, Studies of Society and Environment, Health, Physical Education and Recreation, The Arts, and Technology. Yet, the middle years can be viewed as a period of opportunity for sophisticated skill development where increased levels of abstract knowledge can be introduced (Roeser, van der Wolfe & Stobel, 2001). To meet the needs of middle years students powerful knowledge, integrated curriculum and authentic assessment are required (Barratt, 1998; Schurr & Forte, 2009). This study indicates that middle years students enjoy learning and teaching involving key learning areas of the curriculum not included in NAPLAN testing, such as, integrated theme work including assessment through presentation, construction and technology. Middle years students are best engaged with interesting curriculum where they can identify the links to their real world.

This study reveals that students attending a NAPLAN focussed school can develop negative perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN testing and preparation which can result in the breakdown of student/teacher relationships. Yet, middle years students require sustained individual attention in a safe and healthy school environment, including strong teacher/student relationships (Coil, 2003). Teachers are the catalyst that can make a difference, therefore middle years classroom should be staffed with teachers displaying characteristics including, warmth, enthusiasm, optimism, flexibility,
spontaneity and a wide repertoire of pedagogical practices (Schurr & Forte, 2009) not teachers who ‘yell a lot’ or are too ‘scary’ to approach for help.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the constant focus on NAPLAN associated learning and teaching can impact the educative experience of both high-achieving students and low-achieving students as an antecedent triggering poor behaviour. Focussing teaching on those students situated marginally below the line of average as a method of improving overall NAPLAN results, ‘triaging’, is not indicative of equity in education. This study has explored middle years students’ perceptions of and reactions to this pedagogical practice and has identified student disengagement from learning and associated behaviour problems as a consequence. Early adolescence signals for many students the onset of behaviour problems (Fuller, McGraw & Goodyear, 2002), as well as a reduction in learning and a marked increase in the gap between low and high achieving students (Lingard, Ladwig, Mills, Bahr, Chant & Warry, 2001). Middle years students need to feel valued and have some ownership of their education (Pendergast, 2010). Ensuring success for all students by providing an opportunity for them all to improve academic performance is more conducive to positive relations and a healthy learning environment (Carnegie Council, 1989).

Another associated issue related to a shift in school focus to include improving NAPLAN results is the importance this places on results. This ‘product focussed’ learning and teaching involving numerous practice tests, can create issues between students, resulting in bullying as identified by the students in this study. Providing a safe and healthy environment involving authentic, reflective and non-competitive assessment practices, as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens, is more likely to result in improving the school experience of middle years students and consequently create a love of learning (Pendergast, 2010). This apparent mismatch between the educational needs of young adolescent learners and practices in schools that respond to NAPLAN with intentional strategy such as highlighted in this project, highlights the quandary those loyal to effective middle years education face in a high-stakes assessment regime.

But not all schools respond to the NAPLAN agenda in the same way. In the second case study school, NAPLAN is considered to be a ‘moment-in-time test’; where there is no interruption to the running of the school or the learning and teaching any more than is
absolutely necessary. In this scenario students experience minimal disruption to their school life that is attributable to NAPLAN testing. This is not to say that these students do not display negative perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN testing and preparation, but this study indicates that those who do are fewer in number and their level of negativity is not to the same extent as those attending a school where the practices revolve around NAPLAN preparation.

NAPLAN testing can cause physical and emotional reactions from middle years students who attend NAPLAN focussed and non-NAPLAN focussed schools. Characteristics of the test structure and processes can cause stress on middle years students. One identified antecedent triggering stress in middle years students was the extensive testing period. Young people are physical and their bodies play a large part in who they are and who they become (Hunter & Macdonald, 2010). Therefore expecting middle years students to sit under test conditions for three consecutive days is very demanding. Research suggests that middle years students learn best by ‘participating’ in the learning. Learning by doing is fundamental to the quality of skill acquisition (Carrington, 2006). The sheer length of the NAPLAN tests is daunting for some middle years students, especially when time constraints are added.

Time constraints can cause further stress to middle years students as they rush to complete the tests. Slow readers experience difficulty completing the tests in the given time experiencing anxiety as a consequence. They consider NAPLAN time constraints unfair when the tests are not reading tests. Students complained that answering confusing questions when racing to meet a deadline does not allow them time to check and recheck their answer for accuracy. They worry that unanswered questions due to their failure to complete the tests will be marked as incorrect and have a deleterious effect on their overall results. Marked by people who have no relationship with the students, markers are unaware of a student’s reading ability and may presume that the unanswered questions remain so due to a lack of knowledge and not due to a reading or comprehension difficulty.

A further NAPLAN related issue creating anxiety among some middle years students is the method of answer selection in the multiple choice component of the tests, answer bubbles. Having to accurately colour the bubbles, associated with the best response to the questions, consumes valuable time. Middle years students already under pressure to
complete a test within a specific time can experience further stress due to the importance of colouring the bubbles accurately.

This study identifies ‘fear, stress’ and ‘anxiety’ as reactions to NAPLAN testing experienced by some middle years students’. This reaction is commonly associated with the persuasive text topic. Students fear that they may have no prior understanding of the previously unseen topic and suggest that writing an argument regarding an unfamiliar topic is difficult and does not demonstrate a student’s ability to write a persuasive text. Perhaps if teachers were offered the opportunity to immerse their students in the selected topic prior to the testing then maybe the resulting test data would display a more accurate indication of student ability and as a consequence reduce middle years students’ fear, stress’ and ‘anxiety’.

The final and alarming concern with respect to NAPLAN and students’ stress levels, involves the issue of the government’s relationship with NAPLAN testing. This study identified fear of government as an antecedent to negative reactions displayed by some middle years students. The adults responsible for developing this fear are unknown, however, government involvement was responsible for anxiety amongst some middle years students. Further explanation of the government’s role in mandating NAPLAN and the purposes for its use may reduce unnecessary related stresses.

8.3. Limitations of this study

This study was a case study design with data sources from several groups including: school managers, teachers, parents, and most significantly, groups of students in Years 3, 5 and 7. Studying groups from two research schools with vastly different approaches to NAPLAN provided a rare opportunity to collect a significant quantity of comparative data. However, because the data uniquely applies to two case study schools, the scope of the study and its generalisability is limited. The research design is commensurate with doctoral study, but highlights the need for more expansive studies, replicating the methods and theoretical framework in a diverse range of school contexts.

As explained throughout this thesis, the Year 3 students, while not the focus of the study, were included as a way of obtaining input into the students’ first experience of the NAPLAN processes. Including the Year 3 students, who had no prior direct
experience with NAPLAN, allowed analysis and comparison with the middle years students in Years 5 and 7 who had experienced NAPLAN testing previously. Tracking these students longitudinally would allow a more in-depth look at the relationship between prior NAPLAN experience and students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN over time.

Data collection and analysis became challenging for several reasons. Although the data population included a cross-section of student age, year level, and cognitive abilities, it was too difficult to focus on specific groups of students, for example, low achieving students or Year 7 students. Reducing the range of overall characters in the study and increasing the number of characters in a specific group would have enabled more in-depth analysis of a number varieties of great interest in educated research.²

Having conducted this research, the insight gained would be of assistance in modelling a state-wide or country-wide study investigating the links between NAPLAN implementation and middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. A study with a larger data population but a narrower field, for example, 500 Year 7 students attending ten different schools across the country would allow more focussed analysis of the link between Year level (maturity) and a variety of factors including prior NAPLAN experience, student satisfaction/dissatisfaction with school, student/teacher relationships, fear of adult recrimination, government involvement, bullying, and positive and negative physical reactions and student performance. These studies may have the opportunity to include variables not closely examined in this study, variables which may also impact students perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN, such as, students who speak English as a second language, children from various family structures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, children with diagnosed special needs, those students requiring learning support and/or behaviour adjustment, and those who are Gifted and Talented, just to name a few. Furthermore, this study has identified the need and recommends further research into the implementation of NAPLAN and its impact on middle years students.

² The inclusion of teachers, parents and school managers was to obtain an holistic overview of the students’ world inside and outside the school environment. Inviting the adult participants into the study was to establish the perceptions of the adult members of the school community and when added to other data collected aided in the data validation process through methodological triangulation.
8.4. Recommendations

This study points to the need to better understand the ways in which schools have responded to the NAPLAN agenda in terms of their daily practices, and how this impacts on the experiences of students. In this way the findings from this study might be confirmed or challenged. The recommendations for further research fall into three key areas: recommendations for policy makers regarding text processes and protocols; recommendations about research employing student voice; and the final recommendation relates to the need to privilege another marginalised voice in the NAPLAN equation – that of teachers. Each of these recommendations will now be considered.

8.4.1. Recommendation 1

With regard to recommendations for policy makers, assuming that NAPLAN is retained, much of the recommendation emanating from this investigation which privileges student voice is related to the impact on the preparation for and administration of the tests.

In relation to the extensive testing period, further study is needed to explore the consequences of gradual administration of NAPLAN testing and the effect on middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. For example, the three components of NAPLAN might be administered separately, one in March, one in April and one in May, rather than on consecutive days. A further study where NAPLAN time constraints are removed, allowing students to continue until they acknowledge that they have completed the test, may alter middle years students’ perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. Altering the test administration procedure to allow small groups of students access to adult assistance with reading, comprehension and question expectations would allow a more level playing field for slow readers with comprehension difficulties. A further study allowing students to become familiar with the text topic prior to the test may result in improved results. Involving students in the test construction may assist test developers with appropriate questioning and eliminate the current questioning issues. It is recommended that further research is conducted in relation to a definite link identified in this study between Year level/maturity and Year 3 students’ perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN preparation and testing.
8.4.2. Recommendation 2

With regard to the key recommendation related to student voice, it is noted that students did experience negative consequences as a result of the preparation for and administration of the NAPLAN testing, however the nature of these effects varied in the school sites. Gaining a deeper understanding of the impact on schooling practices in a wider, representative study is recommended.

Ideally middle years assessment practices would not involve national testing such as NAPLAN. This study identifies the significance of engaging students in educational dialogue in matters regarding their education. Meeting the educational needs of middle years students in this critical stage of their education involves listening to students’ dialogue, hearing what they are saying, and acting upon their recommendations. Privileging student voice has provided insight into the middle years students’ perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN and their preferred assessment practices. This study reveals that the middle years students involved in this study recommend that appropriate assessment for middle years students involves demonstrations of their learning including:

- Presentations both individual and group;
- Construction of dioramas and models;
- Written projects, illustrations and graphical representations;
- Self and teacher assessment involving checklists, observations, consultations and anecdotal notes.

A more expansive study in Queensland and Australia where a more holistic view of NAPLAN implementation models would confirm or disprove findings from this study and allow for more generalised conclusions. All schools across Queensland and Australia participate in NAPLAN testing. An increase in research sites would allow more interrelated factors and perhaps causal relationships established with greater certainty.

8.4.3. Recommendation 3

As suggested previously, privileging student voice in matters affecting their education may require privileging another associated but marginalised group, the teachers. A
further study privileging teacher voice, exploring their lived experiences, may build upon the emerging links within this study which privileges student voice.

8.5. Summary

This study can be viewed as supporting processes that seek to understand and describe educational practice as a social practice. Without considering education as a social practice we legitimise social and academic hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). Educational reform often fails to capture the voices of those who matter most. Those who seek insight into educational practices and issues need to reposition students in educational research and reform. In this study the students were active participants engaging in spoken, written and illustrative dialogue. Each lens provided a rich opportunity to study educational life in schools from the perspectives of the students, what goes on behind the classroom door in the minds of the students. The most valuable lens, when seeking how students think and feel, is their natural form of symbolic expression, their drawings. One of the hallmarks of the democratic philosophy underpinning middle years schooling is a capacity to negotiate elements of schooling such as pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and school structures and practices, with middle years students (Hunter & Forrest, 2010). The use of student drawings as a method of data collection provided a valuable vehicle to illuminate students’ perceptions of and reactions to NAPLAN.

This study adds to the existing research on middle years and high stakes assessment by privileging student voice. This case study focussed on two Queensland schools which are revealed to have implemented extremely disparate approaches to NAPLAN preparation and administration, one totally focussed on NAPLAN and the other displaying no NAPLAN focus. One of the declared intentions of NAPLAN testing is that it serves to increase student achievement by informing all stakeholders of the actual competencies and levels of performance of the silenced, the students. Given this rhetoric, which is challenged by this research, it would be both interesting and important to know what improvements are made by individual students over time.

The way forward is for adult stakeholders from all levels to converse with each other and more importantly with the students in matters which affect their educative experience, such as NAPLAN. The strength of this data and its accompanying analysis
lies in the fact that it allows the students’ perceptions and reactions to be heard, and highlights the quandary those loyal to effective middle years education face in a high-stakes assessment regime.
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Appendix A  Parent/Carer Consent form for minor

Griffith University Letterhead

Parent/Carer Consent form for minor

Chief Investigator: Professor Donna Pendergast

Research Team: Katharine Swain

School: School of Education and Professional Studies, Gold Coast

Contact Phone: 555 28402

Contact Email: k.swain@griffith.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that ______________ participation in this research will involve the researchers analysing the interview responses, observations and the conversations he/she has in focus groups;
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that the information that _____________ provides will be de-identified;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to ________________ from his/her participation in this research;
- I understand that ________________ participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw ______________ at any time, without comment or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 5585 (or
researchethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical
count of the project; and

- I agree to ______________ participating in this project.

Participant’s Name Printed_________________________________________________________

Parent/Carer’s Name Printed _______________________________________________________

Parent/Carer’s Signature____________________________________________________________

Date__________________________________________________________
Appendix B  Parent/Carer Information sheet

Griffith University Letterhead

Parent/Carer Information sheet

Chief Investigator: Professor Donna Pendergast

Research Team: Katharine Swain

School: School of Education and Professional Studies, Gold Coast

Contact Phone: 555 28402

Contact Email: k.swain@griffith.edu.au

Why is the research being conducted?

In Australia, the introduction of the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing signifies a focus on accountability in education. The aim of this research is to explore the impact of (NAPLAN) on Queensland’s middle years students from their perspective. We are interested in investigating the tension between NAPLAN testing and middle years’ approaches to what is taught, how it is taught and how it is assessed.

What you will be asked to do

If you are interested in being part of this project we will be asking you to participate in a 30 – 40 minute semi-structured interview about the above topic at a venue suitable to you and the researcher. No other action will be required of you. Each interview will involve one member of the research team and you as a member of a focus group discussion.

The interview will be audio taped. Segments of the interview will later be transcribed, and the original audio tape destroyed. All names and other identifying comments will be removed.

When we analyse the interviews, we will be looking for themes. We will not be able to identify which piece of data was provided by which person. It is likely that in
publication of results from this study, some responses and small extracts of the transcript might be printed. However, these extracts will not be personally attributed to you or any other person.

**The basis by which participants will be selected or screened**

The proposed research will evolve over seven distinct stages. Stage 1 will involve the informal interviews with the school managers. The second stage will entail the selection and detailed data collection, during student focus groups interviews. At the completion of the interviews students will be asked to illustrate a response to a given prompt. They will also write words to explain their illustration. These student groups comprise up to five students from each of the grade levels. Researchers will source guidance from the teachers in selection of these students. The third stage will relate to the development of and data collection from teacher focus groups. The teacher focus group will be derived from the teachers of the Years 3, 5 and 7 classes. Stage 4 will involve classroom observations of teachers and students. This population will include the teachers and students from middle years’ classes, Years 5 and 7, and the Year 3 students that participate in the NAPLAN testing. The Year 3 students will be included to identify if there is any difference in their perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN with those of the students who have previous experience with NAPLAN testing. At Stage 5 and 6 students will draw pictures and write words in response to prompts 2 and 3 and prompt 4 respectively. The final data collection will take place in Stage 7 which will involve the parent focus group interviews.

**The expected benefits of the research**

It is expected that the findings of this study will shed light on the perceived consequential effects of high stakes testing on middle years’ students. This study promises to contribute to and extend the current research and foster a greater understanding of the relationship between Middle Years Philosophy and student perceptions and reactions to NAPLAN. The findings from this study may suggest ways and means to influence and contribute to future policy and practice.

**Risks to you**
The risks associated with this research are negligible. You are not being asked to do anything other than participate and share your opinion with the researcher.

**Your confidentiality**

The data will be stored in a LOCKED FILING CABINET IN A LOCKED OFFICE and no-one other than the researchers will have access to the locked space. The analysis that results from this project will not be reported in a way that allows any individual to be identified.

**Your participation is voluntary**

You agreement to participate is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the researchers in any way. Only the researchers will know who has agreed to participate and this information will not be released to anyone else. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Questions / further information**

If you have any further questions or require further information about this research project at any time, please contact:

Professor Donna Pendergast, School of Education and Professional Studies (Gold Coast)

Email: d.pendergast@griffith.edu.au

Katharine Swain, School of Education and Professional Studies (Gold Coast)

Email: k.swain@griffith.edu.au

The ethical conduct of this research

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au

**Feedback to you**
The chief investigators will provide you with information about the progress of the research if you would like to have access to this.

**Privacy Statement**

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of these data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/ua/aa/vc/pp or telephone (07) 3735 5585.
Appendix C  Parent/Carer Consent form

Griffith University Letterhead

Parent/Carer Consent form

Chief Investigator: Professor Donna Pendergast

Research Team: Katharine Swain

School: School of Education and Professional Studies, Gold Coast

Contact Phone: 555 28402

Contact Email: k.swain@griffith.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my participation in this research will involve the researchers analysing the interview responses, observations and the conversations I have had in meetings or focus groups;
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that the information that I provide will be de-identified;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 5585 (or researchethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
• I agree to participate in this project.

Parent/Carer’s Name Printed __________________________________________

Parent/Carer’s Signature ____________________________________________

Date ____________________________________________________________
Appendix D  Participant coding Maryvale

Participant coding Maryvale

[Diagram showing the participant coding structure for Maryvale, with分支 for Maryvale Manager 1, Maryvale Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, Maryvale Classrooms 1, 2, 3, 4, Maryvale Students for Year 3 - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Year 5 - Groups A - 1, 2, 3, and Maryvale Parents (NIL).]
Appendix E  Participant coding Silverstone

Participant coding Silverstone

SM1

ST1
SC1
SSA3
SSA3
SSA3
SSA3
SSA3
SC2
SS71
SS72
SS73
SS74
ST2
ST3
ST4
SC3
SS52
SS52
SS53
SS54
SC4
SSB31
SSB32
SSB33
SSB34
SSB35
SPG

SPGA

SPGB

SPGB1
SPGB2
SPGB3
SPGB4
SPGB5
SPGB6
SPGB7

Silverstone Manager

Silverstone Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4

Silverstone Classrooms 1, 2, 3, 4

Silverstone Students

Year 3 – Groups A–1, 2, 3, 4, 5
B–1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Silverstone Parent Groups

Silverstone Parent Groups A–1, 2, 3
B–1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Appendix F  Transcript trawling

**EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPT TRAWLING FROM FOCUS GROUP (SEMI-STRUCTURED) INTERVIEWS.**

Bold text indicated that the researcher is asking a question.

___ The person speaking was interrupted and did not complete what they were saying.

... The person speaking did not finish what they were saying, but continued to speak.

With the exception of 'NAPLAN', capitalisation indicates emphasis in voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of speech</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>What do you know about NAPLAN and...? (Unable to complete question as students interrupted).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>That's boring because every time you just have to colour in the circles, colour in the circles, colour in the circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>And the tests are hard. Sometimes they are a bit easy but not usually. They give us the things that we haven't even learnt yet, like they give us measuring stuff and we don't know really how long it is because they asked us, in the test we did test how long is the tree to measure and that's one that we haven't actually learnt about yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>It is sometimes hard, sometimes easy and sometimes medium. The hard things about NAPLAN is some we just don't get there, is some we just don't get to. (Child is referring to running out of time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>I know that there's writing in it and a lot of hard questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>How does it make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>A little bit nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous because I haven't been getting really good marks in mine. I usually get mostly red because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn't do any tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>How is year 3 different from year 2?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>A lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td><strong>How?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Because we have lots of tests and we didn't in year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td><strong>What sort of stuff did you do in year 2 that you don't do in year 3?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>And there's less games in year 3 than in year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Year 2 was easy and year 3 is hard and I used to be really good at writing and now my hands get really sore because we do a lot of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>That's what happens to me sometimes cause I always get that (Child points to writers' lump).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>A writers' lump, I have one of those. (Researcher shows student her writers' lump).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>And they are really sore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>The difference about year 2 and year 3 is year 3 is harder than year 2. Mrs ---- (Child refers to year 2 teacher) is alright and Mrs----- (Child refers to year 3 teacher) is ok and they both look exactly the same. In year 2 we never usually got tests and we never usually got writing tests and maths tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and let art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>School has changed because I used to like my other teachers a lot better, they were much better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td><strong>What makes a better teacher?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>(Child mimics his teacher yelling) all day long. Because she's just one of those teachers. She makes us get away from the fun to do tests. I don't think the Principal or the Deputy Principal or whoever is controlling the school would tell her to do tests and not tell the year 2 teacher to do it, so she's just a mean teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83. Researcher</td>
<td>Do you know what year levels do the NAPLAN tests?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84. All</td>
<td>Yes, 3, 5 and 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85. Researcher</td>
<td>And nine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86. Student 3</td>
<td>How about the year 4s?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87. Researcher</td>
<td>No, they don't. In primary school it's only years 3, 5 and 7. Do you think that maybe your teacher is just doing the testing because you are going to be tested in year three and your year two teacher did not do the testing because you were not going to be tested in year two?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88. Student 3</td>
<td>And she is just doing her job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89. Researcher</td>
<td>You haven't actually sat the NAPLAN tests yet, they are next week, so how are you feeling about them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90. Student 3</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91. Student 5</td>
<td>Scared.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92. Student 2</td>
<td>I don't want to do them because I'm not very good at it. I always get wrong tests and I get nearly all of them wrong and I don't like reading and there's a lot to read and I'm pretty sad if I don't do well. I always get in trouble from my mum if I don't get over 17 that's when I don't get grounded because mum doesn't like it when I get under 17, so when I don't get good marks I get grounded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93. Student 3</td>
<td>I'm nervous as it seems like it's a really big test and goes on and on and on and you keep on having to do reading and writing and circling bubbles all the time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94. Student 5</td>
<td>I'm feeling a little bit uncomfortable about it cause it really, really, big and I'm not really that fast at tests. You have to be fast to get them correct. If we don't we get in really bad trouble and then we get an extra 10 minutes and it's not really fair cause we have to go over and over it and over it about five times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Cause we have to wait until the rest of the class has finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>No until the time is up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>I'm nervous because it's always got hard stuff. Every time there's easy stuff, sometimes there's easy stuff and after the easy stuff the rest of the test gets harder, so it starts off easy and then it gets hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>It doesn't matter if you can't do it, does it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Yes, because we have to do it. We have to do it even if we don't want to do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>But if we can't do it we get in trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>We get in trouble from our teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Get in trouble from our teacher and if there's a relief teacher we get in more trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>I'm very uncomfortable and nervous because there are too many tests and too many bubbles. I get stressed, I get a big headache, my eyes start to close up, my eyelids just shut because there is too much work and I just feel like sleeping. The teacher says go to bed earlier, but it's just the tests, looking at too much paper, it is too light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104.</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Teachers have to collect marks for you to write on your reports. What do you think would be a great way that the teacher could collect results from you? Your teacher has to know whether you can do the work or not. What ways do you think your teacher could find out if you can or cannot do the work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Well, we could tell her if it is too hard in year 2. We only got one test a term and they were usually hard, but she said to us, &quot;I will make them a little bit easy.&quot; Because I said to her, &quot;you're giving us too hard tests, like grade 3 ones, can you please put a little bit of easy in it?&quot; And she did she is that nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>My teacher in year 2 would never do that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 107. | Student 3 | We could tell her what we don't know and tell her what we know. You could write it down on a piece of paper, what you want to say, if you are a bit too
nervous. Or you could just show her. Like get a piece of paper and write something that is really hard, like on the test, cause it’s really hard and you just want to show her that it is really hard. She will feel sorry for me and she might do it a little bit easier, but probably not too much cause we’re in grade 3. We have to do the text because the principal says we have to and there are cameras, look there’s a camera over their (Child points to security sensor in corner of room thinking it’s a security camera). It’s the teacher’s job; it’s what they’ve been told to do. I understand that but it’s a bit too hard. I’m not trying to be tough on her (referring to the teacher).

108. Student 1  The principal didn’t give orders to our teacher to be angry at us. I don’t see the other teachers being angry. Perhaps our teacher is being picked on. Today she got a bit angry at us because she planned an activity and some kids screwed up bits of it. And we measured her and we painted it this morning we ripped off bits and said mean things about it, but we didn’t mean to. One kid ripped it up into pieces that wrecked a whole lot (referring to a measuring activity prepared by the teacher).
Appendix G  Text segmenting

EXAMPLE OF TEXT SEGMENTING FROM FOCUS GROUP
(SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Order of speech</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous because I haven't been getting really good marks in mine. I usually get mostly red because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn’t do any tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>A lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Because we have lots of tests and we didn't in year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>And there's less games in Year 3 than in Year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Year 2 was easy and Year 3 is hard and I used to be really good at writing and now my hands get really sore because we do a lot of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>The difference about Year 2 and Year 3 is Year 3 is harder than Year 2. Mrs ---- (Child refers to year 2 teacher) is alright and Mrs----- (Child refers to Year 3 teacher) is ok and they both look exactly the same. In Year 2 we never usually got tests and we never usually got writing tests and maths tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and let art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Well, we could tell her if it is too hard in Year 2. We only got one test a term and they were usually hard, but she said to us, “I will make them a little bit easy.” Because I said to her, “you're giving us too hard tests, like grade 3 ones, can you please put a little bit of easy in it”? And she did she is that nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>The difference about Year 2 and Year 3 is Year 3 is harder than Year 2. Mrs ---- (Child refers to year 2 teacher) is alright and Mrs----- (Child refers to Year 3 teacher) is ok and they both look exactly the same. In Year 2 we never usually got tests and we never usually got writing tests and maths tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and let art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>School has changed because I used to like my other teachers a lot better, they were much better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>(Child mimics his teacher yelling) all day long. Because she’s just one of those teachers. She makes us get away from the fun to do tests. I don't think the Principal or the Deputy Principal or whoever is controlling the school would tell her to do tests and not tell the year 2 teacher to do it, so she's just a mean teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>And she is just doing her job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Order of speech</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>I'm very uncomfortable and nervous because there are too many tests and too many bubbles. I get stressed, I get a big headache, my eyes start to close up, my eyelids just shut because there is too much work and I just feel like sleeping. The teacher says go to bed earlier, but it's just the tests, looking at too much paper, it is too light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Well, we could tell her if it is too hard in Year 2. We only got one test a term and they were usually hard, but she said to us, “I will make them a little bit easy.” Because I said to her, “you're giving us too hard tests, like grade 3 ones, can you please put a little bit of easy in it”? And she did she is that nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>My teacher in year 2 would never do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>61.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>That’s boring because every time you just have to colour in the circles, colour in the circles, colour in the circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>And the tests are hard. Sometimes they are a bit easy but not usually. They give us the things that we haven't even learnt yet, like they give us measuring stuff and we don't know really how long it is because they asked us, in the test we did test how long is the tree to measure and that's one that we haven't actually learnt about yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is sometimes hard, sometimes easy and sometimes medium. The hard things about NAPLAN is some we just don't get there, is some we just don't get to. (Child is referring to running out of time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>I know that there’s writing in it and a lot of hard questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 2 was easy and Year 3 is hard and I used to be really good at writing and now my hands get really sore because we do a lot of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>The difference about Year 2 and Year 3 is Year 3 is harder than year 2. Mrs ---- (Child refers to Year 2 teacher) is alright and Mrs----- (Child refers to Year 3 teacher) is ok and they both look exactly the same. In Year 2 we never usually got tests and we never usually got writing tests and maths tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and let art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Yes, 3, 5 and 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>How about the year 4s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>I don't want to do them because I’m not very good at it. I always get wrong tests and I get nearly all of them wrong and I don't like reading and there's a lot to read and I'm pretty sad if I don't do well. I always get in trouble from my mum if I don't get over 17 that's when I don't get grounded because mum doesn't like it when I get under 17, so when I don't get good marks I get grounded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>I'm nervous as it seems like it's a really big test and goes on and on and on and you keep on having to do reading and writing and circling bubbles all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Order of speech</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>I'm feeling a little bit uncomfortable about it cause it really, really, big and I'm not really that fast at tests. You have to be fast to get them correct. If we don't we get in really bad trouble and then we get an extra 10 minutes and it's not really fun cause we have to go over and over it and over it about five times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>I'm nervous because it's always got hard stuff. Every time there's easy stuff, sometimes there's easy stuff and after the easy stuff the rest of the test gets harder, so it starts off easy and then it gets hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>I'm very uncomfortable and nervous because there are too many tests and too many bubbles. I get stressed, I get a big headache, my eyes start to close up, my eyelids just shut because there is too much work and I just feel like sleeping. The teacher says go to bed earlier, but it's just the tests, looking at too much paper, it is too light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>That’s boring because every time you just have to colour in the circles, colour in the circles, colour in the circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>And there's less games in Year 3 than in Year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>The difference about Year 2 and Year 3 is Year 3 is harder than Year 2. Mrs ---- (Child refers to Year 2 teacher) is alright and Mrs----- (Child refers to Year 3 teacher) is ok and they both look exactly the same. In Year 2 we never usually got tests and we never usually got writing tests and maths tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and let art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Cause we have to wait until the rest of the class has finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>I'm very uncomfortable and nervous because there are too many tests and too many bubbles. I get stressed, I get a big headache, my eyes start to close up, my eyelids just shut because there is too much work and I just feel like sleeping. The teacher says go to bed earlier, but it's just the tests, looking at too much paper, it is too light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Well, we could tell her if it is too hard in Year 2. We only got one test a term and they were usually hard, but she said to us, “I will make them a little bit easy.” Because I said to her, “you're giving us too hard tests, like grade 3 ones, can you please put a little bit of easy in it”? And she did she is that nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical/emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>A little bit nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous because I haven't been getting really good marks in mine. I usually get mostly red because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn’t do any tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Order of speech</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Year 2 was easy and Year 3 is hard and I used to be really good at writing and now my hands get really sore because we do a lot of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>That's what happens to me sometimes cause I always get that (Child points to writers’ lump).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>And they are really sore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Scared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>I don't want to do them because I’m not very good at it. I always get wrong tests and I get nearly all of them wrong and I don't like reading and there's a lot to read and I'm pretty sad if I don't do well. I always get in trouble from my mum if I don’t get over 17 that's when I don't get grounded because mum doesn't like it when I get under 17, so when I don't get good marks I get grounded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>I'm nervous as it seems like it's a really big test and goes on and on and on and you keep on having to do reading and writing and circling bubbles all the time.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>I'm nervous because it’s always got hard stuff. Every time there's easy stuff, sometimes there's easy stuff and after the easy stuff the rest of the test gets harder, so it starts off easy and then it gets hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>I don't want to do them because I’m not very good at it. I always get wrong tests and I get nearly all of them wrong and I don't like reading and there's a lot to read and I'm pretty sad if I don't do well. I always get in trouble from my mum if I don’t get over 17 that's when I don't get grounded because mum doesn't like it when I get under 17, so when I don't get good marks I get grounded.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>I'm feeling a little bit uncomfortable about it cause it really, really, big and I'm not really that fast at tests. You have to be fast to get them correct. If we don't we get in really bad trouble and then we get an extra 10 minutes and it's not really fun cause we have to go over and over it and over it about five times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>But if we can't do it we get in trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>We get in trouble from our teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Get in trouble from our teacher and if there’s a relief teacher we get in more trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Order of speech</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred assessment</td>
<td>107.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>We could tell her what we don't know and tell her what we know. You could write it down on a piece of paper, what you want to say, if you are a bit too nervous. Or you could just show her. Like get a piece of paper and write something that is really hard, like on the test, cause it’s really hard and you just want to show her that it is really hard. She will feel sorry for me and she might do it a little bit easier, but probably not too much cause we’re in grade 3. We have to do the texts because the principal says we have to and there are cameras, look there’s a camera over their (Child points to security sensor in corner of room thinking it’s a security camera). It's the teacher's job; it's what they’ve been told to do. I understand that but it's a bit too hard. I'm not trying to be tough on her (referring to the teacher).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to speak</td>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous because I haven't been getting really good marks in mine. I usually get mostly red because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn't do any tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Yes, because we have to do it. We have to do it even if we don't want to do it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H  Theme reduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes combined</th>
<th>Order of speech</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time dedicated to NAPLAN</td>
<td>61.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>That’s boring because every time you just have to colour in the circles, colour in the circles, colour in the circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ physical and emotional</td>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous because I haven’t been getting really good marks in mine. I usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reacts to NAPLAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>get mostly red because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn’t do any tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>A lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Because we have lots of tests and we didn't in Year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>And there's less games in Year 3 than in Year 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Year 2 was easy and Year 3 is hard and I used to be really good at writing and now my hands get really sore because we do a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>The difference about Year 2 and Year 3 is Year 3 is harder than Year 2. Mrs ---- (Child refers to Year 2 teacher) is alright and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs----- (Child refers to Year 3 teacher) is ok and they both look exactly the same. In Year 2 we never usually got tests and we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>never usually got writing tests and maths tests. We usually just do fun stuff. There is less games now and let art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Cause we have to wait until the rest of the class has finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>103.</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>I'm very uncomfortable and nervous because there are too many tests and too many bubbles. I get stressed, I get a big headache,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>my eyes start to close up, my eyelids just shut because there is too much work and I just feel like sleeping. The teacher says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>go to bed earlier, but it's just the tests, looking at too much paper, it is too light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105.</td>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Well, we could tell her if it is too hard in year 2. We only got one test a term and they were usually hard, but she said to us,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I will make them a little bit easy.” Because I said to her, “you're giving us too hard tests, like grade 3 ones, can you please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>put a little bit of easy in it”? And she did she is that nice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Preferred assessment practices

**The right to speak**

107. **Student 3**

We could tell her what we don't know and tell her what we know. You could write it down on a piece of paper, what you want to say, if you are a bit too nervous. Or you could just show her. Like get a piece of paper and write something that is really hard, like on the test, cause it’s really hard and you just want to show her that it is really hard. She will feel sorry for me and she might do it a little bit easier, but probably not too much cause we’re in grade 3. We have to do the texts because the principal says we have to and there are cameras, look there’s a camera over their (Child points to security sensor in corner of room thinking it’s a security camera). It's the teacher's job; it's what they’ve been told to do. I understand that but it's a bit too hard. I'm not trying to be tough on her (referring to the teacher).

67. **Student 5**

It makes us feel nervous and it makes me feel really nervous because I haven't been getting really good marks in mine. I usually get mostly red because I am not very good at tests because when I was in grade 2 we didn’t do any tests.

99. **Student 1**

Yes, because we have to do it. We have to do it even if we don't want to do it.

### Themes

- Students’ perceptions of teachers
- Students’ perceptions of NAPLAN tests
- Time dedicated to NAPLAN preparation
- Students’ physical and emotional reactions to NAPLAN
- Fear of recrimination
- The right to speak
### Appendix I  Emergent Analytical Coding sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of human figures</td>
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<td>inside or outside classroom</td>
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<td>whole body</td>
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<td>part body</td>
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<tr>
<td>large figure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>small figure</td>
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<td>body language</td>
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<td>proportions</td>
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<td>Non-human figure</td>
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<td>Facial expression</td>
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<td>frightened</td>
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<td>Face size</td>
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<tr>
<td>medium</td>
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<td>large</td>
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<td>Face shape</td>
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<td>Detail</td>
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<td>moderate</td>
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<td>extremely detailed</td>
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<td>Other inclusions</td>
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<td>test booklet</td>
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<td>pencil</td>
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<tr>
<td>furniture</td>
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<td>speech bubble</td>
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<tr>
<td>other</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix J  Trait Coding

### EXAMPLE FACIAL EXPRESSIONS
**PROMPT 1 YEARS 3, 5, 7 COMBINED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Facial expression</th>
<th>Maryvale</th>
<th>Silverstone</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td></td>
<td>1111111111</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>16</td>
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## Appendix K  Holistic Coding and Holistic Review: Drawings

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Appendix L  Room design MC2–Maryvale Year 3 Classroom

*front of room*

- teacher’s desk
- whiteboard/blackboard
- entry door
- row of student desks
- row of student desks
- row of student desks
- row of student desks
- row of student desks

*back of room*
Appendix M Room design MC1–Maryvale Year 5A Classroom

front of room

entry
door

Whiteboard/blackboard

electronic
whiteboard

row of student
desks

row of student
desks

row of student
desks

row of student
desks

row of student
desks

row of student
desks

back of room

student
desk

teacher’s
desk
Appendix N  Room design MC3–Maryvale Year 5B Classroom

*front of room*

- whiteboard/blackboard
- electronic whiteboard
- row of student desks
- student group
- student group
- student group

*back of room*

- teacher’s desk
- student desk
- entry door
Appendix O Room design MC4–Maryvale Year 7 Classroom

Students do not necessarily sit at the same table all of the time.
Appendix P  Room design SC1–Silverstone Year 3A Classroom

teacher’s desk

bookselves

nest of desks

carpeted area

nest of desks

bookselves

entry door
Appendix Q  Room design SC4–Silverstone Year 3B Classroom

bookshelves  bookshelves

bookshelves

bookshelves

desk

desk

4 desks in each group

desk

desk

desk

teacher's desk

desk

desk

entry door
Appendix R  Room design SC3–Silverstone Year 5 Classroom

Diagram of classroom layout with sections labeled for shelves, student desks, entry door, blackboard, and teacher's desk.
Appendix S  Room design SC2–Silverstone Year 7 Classroom
Appendix T  A Glossary of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of terms will apply. It is acknowledged that most of these terms can be problematised.

Administrative Assessment is where the purpose of the assessment and reporting is within the administrative area and it addresses accountability and policy development at a school system level (Gronlund & Waugh, 2008).

Assessment encompassing all activities undertaken by students, teachers and educational authorities which provides information about student learning and in turn informs future learning, teaching and policy decisions (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carr et al., 2000; Crooks, 1988; Natriello, 1987; Sadler, 1989).

Assessment Instrument/Tool is any method or procedure for producing information about pupils (Harlen, 2007).

Authentic Assessment is reflective of actual learning in and beyond the classroom (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005).

Cohort Testing refers to assessment of a whole population of students from a particular district, year level or some other predetermined criteria (Brady & Kennedy, 2009).

Criterion referenced Assessment refers to proficiency, achievement and competence judged against associated standards or criteria for mastery within each domain to be tested (Stiggins, 2005).

External Assessment is implemented by a person or people not from within the teaching situation and the assessment task is set outside the school (Brady & Kennedy, 2009).

Formal Assessments employs structured situations in which specific behaviour is observed under standard conditions with variable preconditions (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009).

Formative Assessment is part of the instructional process. When incorporated into classroom practice, it provides the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. (Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009).
**High-stakes Assessment** is assessment that is set by an external body for the purpose of providing rich data about individual student performance and involves interest beyond those who sit the tests (MCEETYA, 2008).

**Informal Assessments** are not data driven but rather content and performance driven and are carried implemented as everyday teaching and learning activities (Harlen, 2005).

**Middle School** will refer to an area allocated to teach middle years students (Carrington, 2002).

**Middle Schooling** will be used to refer to the educational philosophy underpinning the impetus for educational change for young adolescents (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005).

**Middle Years and Young Adolescents** will encompass all students in the 10 - 15 age bracket or the school years 5 -10 (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005).

**Norm referenced Assessment** is where a score is compared with an expected level of performance: that is, the average score of other individuals or groups (Cumming, 2012).

**School-based Assessment** is teachers taking responsibility for course design, implementation and assessment (Brady & Kennedy, 2009).

**Summative Assessment** is cumulative in nature and is utilized to determine whether students have met the course goals or student learning outcomes at the end of a course or program (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009).