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Editorial

The supplementary education sector has much to offer the mainstream education sector. A case in point relates to the issue of assessment and how best to determine the true performance of students across a realistic range of assessment tasks. This applies to primary and high schools as well to universities and private colleges.

Historically, the main form of assessment deemed valid by educators took the form of exams. This led to great stress and pressure and suited a narrow range of learning styles. Over time, educational developments and a growing awareness of a need to develop and assess a wide range of skills have led to the expansion of the range of assessment types used. Thus, in a typical course, students will be expected to any or all of the following types of assessment tasks:

- Assignments – presented in written, electronic or verbal form. Assignments may be done in-class or through research done outside of school hours.
- Individual research tasks
- Group research
- Class presentation tasks with or without the use of palm cards and/or other prompts
- Creation of a multimedia presentation
- Quiz – this can be verbal or written and can be self-marked, marked by a peer or by the teacher
- Tests and exams
- Case studies
- Written reports (information reports) in specified formats
- Essays and other extended tasks that require a cohesive, well-structured response to a question, issue or problem
- Surveys with tabulated and graphical data sets
- Completion of worksheets and cloze passage exercises
- Completion of crosswords and other alternative or creative means of assessing understanding
- Scenario-based problem solving
- Interviews
- Recordings of observations
- Design of a poster, brochure, website, booklet or other form of visual information

Viva presentation (where a student is asked question without notice about their research, methods and the like as a justification of the work they have undertaken)

This range of tasks is by no means complete. It is sufficient to note that there is a multiplicity of approaches to assessment. Increasingly, the need to develop in students a range of skills and abilities that are not assessable through test-taking alone has led to creative and interesting means of allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. However, the wide range of forms of assessment has also weakened the capacity to ensure that students do all their own work when completing academic tasks.

The capacity for a student to use others to complete academic work is evident through the multiplicity of websites offering to assist students to complete their academic work. Some of these sites will 'tailor' the work they do so that the entire work can be created. This is a worrying trend. The capacity to outsource learning and to engage others to plagiarise has increased as a negative consequence of developments in technology.

Whilst educational authorities seek to address the issue through the use of Turnitin – a program that 'reads' written work and assess that work against online published content – the issue has only grown over time. This is, in part, due to the phenomenon of 'ghost writing'. This occurs when a student and tutor sit together to create a piece that is novel, and thus will not be picked up by Turnitin. In any case, the work created through ghost writing is not wholly the work of the student and thus it is not a fair and accurate reflection of their efforts or abilities. It is time for mainstream educators to work with the supplementary education sector, peak parent bodies, professional educators, Vice Chancellors and other peak bodies to formulate an approach to assessment that is robust. The kinds of questions that should be asked are the following:

- What role does assessment done at home or outside of the educational institution have in a balanced program of assessment?
- How can any external work be assessed and is there a set of criteria that can be used to minimise the influence of those who might take commercial advantage of a student who is vulnerable, lazy or otherwise likely to engage a ghost writer?
- How can technology be harnessed so that 'answers' can be found and also correctly acknowledged and referenced?
- What forms of assessment can capture the veracity of work done by a student?
- Do exams need to be re-shaped around a need to apply problem solving skills, even if the exams are 'open book' in nature?

A feature of the educational sector in Australia is that universities and schools compete for the best students. There is a pressure to measure performance rather than processes and students seek to maximise their marks on assessable tasks. This places the emphasis on the product rather than the learning that occurs in the course of undertaking activities that are subject to assessment. Moreover, with limited university places the competitive strains can lead students and their families to make poor choices in terms of the supplementary support they seek.

Judicious educational management requires that the various parties and bodies within the sector collaborate to articulate the issues. This alone would lead to an improved understanding of the factors that help 'create' flaws and issues in the system. A collaborative approach would also mean that insightful solutions could be found. A broad sense of inclusion will lead to more meaningful engagement as well as a more consistent upholding of the standards likely to eliminate the practice of plagiarism and ghost writing.



PRESS RELEASE:

TUTORS CALL ON TEACHERS AND AUTHORITIES TO HELP ELIMINATE PLAGIARISM

7th June 2015

“The peak teaching bodies and the authorities such as BOSTES need to work closely with tutors in order to effectively manage the issue of plagiarism on HSC Assessment Tasks” said ATA CEO, Mohan Dhall. Speaking following a Fairfax investigation that Mr Dhall welcomed, he said that working with the tuition sector would help all parties understand the nature of tutoring and the reasons why parents seek tutors to assist their children. He said that assessors need to understand what tutors do: *“by ignoring the tuition sector, dominated as it is by teachers working after hours, the authorities are not ensuring that robust systems are in place. It is appropriate for all mainstream educational authorities to work closely with the tuition sector. In this way the best interests of students can be placed first, issues articulated and addressed. However, by ignoring the growth of the supplementary education sector there are real risks - as can be seen.”*

A need for an assessment of the “All My Own Work”

The NSW Board of Studies defined plagiarism as:

“Plagiarism is when you pretend that you have written or created a piece of work that someone else originated. It is cheating, it is dishonest, and it could jeopardise your HSC exam results.”

From a tutoring perspective plagiarism occurs when tutors create dependencies by doing the work of the student. Whilst the NSW Board of Studies does make explicit reference to tutors doing the work of students as an example of plagiarism it does not address the issue of rote learning and how this can overlap with plagiarism.

How teachers and authorities and tutors can work together

There are strategies that can help ensure Year 11 and 12 assessments are more robust and less likely to be subject to plagiarism. Such strategies include:

- Ensuring that all externally done assessments are subject to a level of internal review by schools. Thus assignments written outside of the school could be subject to an in-school task that would moderate the effects of outside help
- Asking students to declare whether or not they have a tutor or tutorial assistance with a subject
- Specifically educating students about the appropriate role of tutors
- Creating less predictable assessments and examinations, thus better balancing the amount of rote learned and content specific elements of assessment and increasing the thinking and cognition aspects of assessment
- Re-assess the range of assessments including whether there should be a small aspect of assessment in Year 11 that can draw from acknowledged outside sources. This type of task would mirror research in the real world outside of school.

“Clearly the tuition sector has much to offer in assisting the mainstream educational sector”, ATA CEO Mohan Dhall said. “As parents continue to seek tuition for their children at an increasing rate then these issues will only get bigger over time. We think it is time for tutors, mainstream educators and parents groups to get together and properly address these issues for the benefit of students and also educators. Perhaps even a licensing scheme could be created such that only ATA accredited tutors are allowed to tutor.”

Updates to Code of Conduct

The ATA Code of Conduct is being amended in line with the need to reflect a need to clarify aspects of the Code. Annually, an assessment is made about the completeness of the ATA Code of Conduct and whether any amendments need to be made, such that the standards become clearer and more robust.

Accessibility and consumer protection

Apart from minor amendments ratified by the ATA Board and detailed below, the ATA Code of Conduct will be written in a larger number of languages so that more consumers are protected by the standards. One of the features of a strong consumer protection framework is accessibility to information that helps protect consumers and assists them to understand their rights when exercising choice in the market. This is particularly important in the area of the provision of private supplementary education, as many parents may be driven to seek a tutor on account of a feeling of anxiety or vulnerability. This can lead them into making hasty or poor choices.

The ATA position is that parents need to make informed choices and in so doing should be careful to choose only an ATA member that is appropriately accredited.

ATA Code of Conduct is now available in the following languages

- English
- Arabic
- French
- German
- Greek
- Hindi
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese
- Vietnamese
- Telugu (and Telugu supplement for online learning)

In addition, for tutors engaging in Online tutoring, there is the ATA Supplementary Online Code of Conduct in English.

ATA Code of Conduct amendments

THIS GOES on the first page of every Code as a disclaimer

1. NOTE

***The ATA Code of Conduct may be changed from time to time without notice. Changes and amendments will be notified to members via email, newsletter updates and/or social media. It is the member's duty to ensure that they are aware of the latest version of this Code.**

2. This goes under Clause 3 "interpretation"

"Child safe" means that the child is safe from inappropriate conduct of an implicitly or explicitly sexual nature;

3. This goes under Clause 7

Additional Obligations

7A. Tutors who tutor within a child's home or their own home has an obligation under this Code to ensure that the tutoring takes place when there is a responsible adult present and in an open and accessible part of the home. Tutoring is NOT allowed to take place in a bedroom.

7B. For each session where tutoring takes place in a child's home, a responsible adult has to sign off each session to say that they were present and that the tutoring was conducted in a way that was child safe.

4. This is to be placed BEFORE Clause 43 and under the NEW heading Conflicts and Complaints Resolution Procedure

In the first instance when a complaint comes to the ATA Office the protocol is to ask the complainant to complete an ATA Complaints Form so that the complaint is put in writing. In the process specific reference to which sections of the ATA Code are in question is detailed. After this step we then approach the business or tutor involved and ask them for their version of events. The CAC does not convene until after the business has been given a chance to put a case.

5. This goes after Clause 50 BUT before "Promotion of the Code" and 51.

The CAC Process

The CAC will look at the complaint and any evidence provided by the complainant. It will then look at the member's evidence, including any evidence of how it followed the ATA Code of Conduct in the way the conflict was handled. The CAC looks for clear evidence of how/whether the complaints procedures detailed in the ATA Code of Conduct were followed. Each member should familiarise themselves with the Complaints Procedures as each member is bound it.

If a member opts to dismiss the authority of the ATA then the member forfeits its right to membership, as the ATA Code of Conduct is what gives the public confidence in ATA membership.

Tutoring in the news

“Editor’s Summary”

This story is about how easy and prevalent it has become for students to buy pre-written essays or to get a private company and/or individual tutor to do their work for them at a fee. This comes as a result of the amount of pressure placed on them, especially during the HSC.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/teachers-demand-change-to-combat-endemic-cheating-20150607-ghiqik>

By: Eryk Bagshaw

Teachers have called for an end to take-home assignments and urgent change to HSC testing to combat a “corrupt and unscrupulous cheating industry” that has flourished throughout the state’s high schools.

The Board of Studies has announced it will launch an investigation into the operators after the *Herald* revealed on Monday that under-pressure NSW students were paying hundreds of dollars to have assignments written for them by private companies and individual tutors.

The announcement comes as students at one selective school are being threatened with being kicked out for failing to score grades above 60.

The pressure has led them to purchase essays from unscrupulous providers, say teachers at the Sydney Technical High School.

NSW Teachers Federation president Maurie Mulheron has called for all assignments to be done in class to kill off the industry immediately.

“These latest revelations have shown that we can’t trust what students are bringing in,” he said. “A corrupt industry has grown up around it that encourages people to cheat; we can kill it off by making students only do assignments in class.”

“Parents have got to take some responsibility as well, there must be some parental knowledge when students are paying hundreds of dollars to take home assignments”.

A Board of Studies spokesman said the authority was in consultation with teachers and principals after the *Herald’s* report

“It is important to note that this is not an issue that affects the HSC more than any other academic assessment,” he said.

“This is a function of new technologies and high-stakes assessments wherever they occur. The Board of Studies will be investigating the suppliers of such services and taking whatever appropriate action we can”.

Teachers and students at some of the state’s top selective schools embroiled in the scandal have echoed the calls for reform.

On Monday it was revealed that students from the state's No.1 high school James Ruse, which has achieved the highest HSC results for the past two decades, as well as the prestigious North Sydney and Normanhurst Boys, were among those benefiting from the practice.

Since the report, teachers from other selective schools have come forward. One teacher at Sydney Technical High in Hurstville said students were at breaking point after being told those not achieving above band three were being threatened with being kicked out.

"The students are being forced to buy essays from tutors in order to stay in," the teacher said, adding that some staff were resigning this year partly as a result of the situation.

A spokesman for the Department of Education said no Sydney Technical High School student had been asked to complete their HSC at another school.

"The school is currently working with Year 12 students on a program of personalised support to ensure they meet their academic potential in the HSC," he said.

Another teacher at one of the schools said part of the problem was students who rote learnt essays they had purchased from tutors and then regurgitated them in an exam.

"You get university-level essays from students who could never complete them," she said. "The marking rubrics have to be changed so that it is not so predictable. Students are rewarded for technique dumps and not actually answering the question".

Former North Sydney Girls pupil Vaishnavi Calisa said that it was not uncommon for students to rote learn their whole HSC English essay.

"It shouldn't be like that, you shouldn't be rewarded for memorising an entire essay," said the student who topped the state in Mathematics Extension One last year.

The Australian Tutoring Association has called for the Board of Studies to introduce a licensing scheme to regulate the entire industry in a bid to eliminate rogue operators.

"As can be seen from these reports, by ignoring the growth of the supplementary education sector there are real risks," said association chief executive Mohan Dhall, who also teaches legal studies at PLC in Croydon.

"The peak teaching bodies need to work closely with tutors in order to effectively manage the issue of plagiarism on HSC Assessment Tasks. As parents continue to seek tuition for their children at an increasing rate, then these issues will only get bigger over time," he said.

“Editor’s Summary”

Most students prepare beforehand

for their NAPLAN exams by revising through past papers and questions. However, it has been argued that the purpose of NAPLAN is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the child.

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/naplan-students-want-harder-exams-20150505-gguexg>

By: Eryk Bagshaw

As students flooded out of classrooms and into playgrounds across the country on Tuesday after completing the written component of the NAPLAN exams, two words seemed to sum the exams up from Newcastle to Strathfield: “easy-peasy”.

It is a complete turnaround from the withering criticism that NAPLAN suffered last year when hundreds of students did not attempt a persuasive writing question that was criticised by many for being too hard, forcing the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority to adopt separate questions for the year 3 and 5, and 7 and 9 cohorts.

While students at schools from the Kimberley to Killara gossip about what they did and didn’t do, those outside the canteen queue waiting to find out what the writing question was this year will have to wait until next Friday, when the grace period for the national test finishes.

However, media embargos do little to dent the spirits of playground critics.

“They should have made it way more challenging”, said year 5 Strathfield South student Joycelyn Soo as she and six friends burst out of the classroom and onto the hopscotch court.

All the preparation served them well said their teacher Richie Kim.

Despite repeated warnings from educators that private tutoring was not necessary for NAPLAN, he said some students were taking five sessions a

week with private tutoring colleges.

Ashwin Rajeswaran sat his first exam on Tuesday. “That was super easy, it was basically like a revision of year 2 work; it’s all basic skills,” he said.

Moments after putting the pencil down on his paper the eight-year-old already had one eye on the future, to a set of exams three years away that suddenly seem just around the corner.

“The environment helps you get used to test conditions and the atmosphere that we will have for the scholarship and selective tests, which I’m still a bit scared about,” he said.

Geram Dunlop, a year 9 student at the Bishop Tyrrell Anglican School in Newcastle is at the other end of the scale. This year is the last time he will sit a NAPLAN exam.

“The language conventions were a bit tough, but the rest was fine,” he said.

His fellow Novocastrian, year 7 student Georgia Stewardson found the opposite. She said the writing topic was a lot broader than she expected but the test was pretty easy overall.

Geram and Georgia might be almost out of NAPLAN’s grasp, but testing continues on Wednesday and Thursday.

“We are really looking forward to reading and to maths,” said Georgia.

While students at Strathfield South and Bishop Tyrrell appear to have come away from the tests stress-free, ACARA chief executive officer Robert Randall said parents and teachers should put NAPLAN into context for their children.

“NAPLAN’s purpose is to identify, as early as possible, a child’s strengths and areas for development, to make sure they are progressing in literacy and numeracy,” Mr Randall said. “NAPLAN isn’t high-stakes testing; it amounts to less than four hours, four times in a student’s life over seven years of schooling.”

“Editor’s Summary”

This article is about how children in Australia have the fifth highest amount of homework in the world. It is discussed that some parents and academics want to decrease the amount of homework given to children, whereas some believe that if the child enjoys it then they should be allowed to have that choice.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/children-increasingly-expected-to-do-homework-in-the-school-holidays-20150703-gi4lyl.html>

By: Kieran Gair

Australian children have the fifth highest amount of homework in the world, research from an OECD report into the performance of students has revealed, leading to a backlash from parents and academics about homework destroying school holidays.

University of Sydney Associate Professor in Educational Psychology Richard Walker has slammed the proliferation of homework across term breaks.

“Aren’t we losing the plot when people don’t have holidays and, if they do, they’re expected to work through them? Society needs to get real. Adults and children alike need to have a break,” he said.

“We need time to ourselves, away from the pressures and demands of study and work, that is the purpose of holidays.”

Mother of three boys Kathy Whealing, a year 5 teacher at St Mary’s school in Manly, is a staunch anti-homework supporter.

“I am a big believer in ‘brain breaks’. Kids have so much going on with sporting and other extracurricular activities they shouldn’t be forced to squeeze in homework after school, and especially not in the holidays,” Ms Whealing said.

“Children need space to develop their creativity and have some downtime and that is what holidays are for. However, it is important to encourage children into the habit of reading for pleasure. Reading is by far the most valuable form of ‘homework’.”

But some students can’t seem to get enough.

While Presbyterian Ladies College in Croydon has opted not to give homework during the holidays for year 1 students, Brett Stephenson said it hasn’t stopped his six-year-old daughter Ruby’s desire to learn.

“Ruby attends the PLC extension centre during the holidays and she loves the personalised, one-on-one style learning at the centre,” Mr Stephenson said.

“Ruby is just one of those kids who loves learning. While homework can be really difficult for some children and completely at odds with how they learn, for Ruby that isn’t the case at all. She asked if she could keep attending PLC learning centre during the holidays.”

Mr Stephenson believes Ruby's homework isn't robbing her of needed downtime or playtime.

"If Ruby ever told us she wasn't enjoying it or it was getting too much and we noticed it was tiring her out, we would pull the reins in straight away."

Australian 15-year-olds now receive about six hours of homework a week compared with the OECD average of 4.9 hours.

By contrast, Finland, widely recognised as having the world's best education system, rarely allows teachers to assign homework before students reach their late teens.

However, Australian Tutoring Association chief executive Mohan Dhall said homework can be meaningful and engaging while reinforcing lessons learnt in the classroom.

"I think some structured time for homework is appropriate as part of a balanced approach to the holidays. That is, children should get some time off to recuperate. It is not too much to expect a child to spend some time reading (30-40 minutes) per day and a bit of time on maths," he said.

"The purpose of homework should be to reinforce and, where relevant, extend and supplement mainstream schooling. Two lots of 30 to 40 minutes spent on homework would not detract from outdoor activities, movies and playing with friends."

While an international backlash against homework has persuaded many primary schools to ban homework altogether, the NSW Department of Education maintains that homework is a "valuable part of schooling".

The Department of Education's homework policy states homework "allows for practising, extending and consolidating work done in class. Additionally, it establishes habits of study, concentration and self-discipline."

However, most parents do not realise they have options when it comes to when and if their children do homework. The NSW Education Department leaves the way open for parents to "discuss alternative strategies" if they don't agree with the school's homework policy.

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