

13 May 2013

Submission on Assessments in Qld Schools:
OBSERVATIONS:

Here are some of my impressions as a result of teaching in a state school for many years with our prescribed internal assessment system:

Years 11 and 12 seem to me to be a two year long assessment because of the never ending tests and assignments which are given to students.

At the beginning of each year, the school gives students a list of the year's assessment pieces and it looks daunting.

A semester is considered to be 17 weeks, except for semester 4 which is, I think, 13 weeks. So the time allocated for the course of study is, say, 65 weeks.

In my experience, each authority subject has about 11 pieces of assessment over the two year course. So, in 65 weeks of study, the students do 66 pieces of assessment, given that they do 6 subjects (which is the normal load). In addition to that, they do Core Skills practice tests (usually two) and then the proper QCST is at the end of August of year 12.

Conscientious students (and there are a good number of them) find third term of year 12 (i.e. the first term of their final semester) very stressful, as that is the time when they have important assessment in each subject to finalise their achievement levels. They have a block exam and they have their QCST. As well as that they have some heavy assignment work. It is at the end of that term that the schools prepare submissions (i.e. samples of students' summative work) for the various subject panels to peruse. One of the principles used in determining a student's achievement level is "latest and fullest" (...fullest? I thought "full" was absolute, with no comparative or superlative ... but anyway, we're talking education here). Anyway, students certainly feel the full weight of responsibility as they are constantly reminded that they need to work hard and do well in this term (this is after being reminded of that for every assessment they have had for every subject by every teacher over the previous 18 months).

The whole process is onerous for teachers as well, as a result of the work load. I guess because we have done it for so long, a lot of people think that is the way you have to do it, but I beg to differ. We could achieve the same outcomes with a smarter approach and less assessment.

Students are expected to furnish a medical certificate if ever they are absent for a test or are late in submitting an assignment. That is impractical as it can be difficult to see a doctor, and it is expensive. We all have a cold or feel down at some time and need to take a day off, but there is not much chance to do this in a two year course of authority subjects, unless you do it during the holidays.

If a student develops a more long term illness such as glandular fever or flu, the students' workload and stress is compounded, as they not only have to catch up on new work, but also on the assessment they have missed. Each teacher tends to concentrate on their own subject, but multiply that by 6 for the student. The student is not feeling 100% when he/she returns to school but still has to cope with all these work pressures. (In spite of saying "attach the medical certificate to the student's profile and it will be taken into consideration when verification (the allocation of achievement levels) is done", I have found that having been ill does disadvantage a student,

especially when they are trying to achieve very highly).

I have dealt with and known of a substantial number of students who have become very stressed, stayed up late doing tasks, and had depression and other medical conditions as a result of the unreasonable demands placed on them. The expectations placed on the students is unreasonable and counterproductive. It does not have to be like this. People say it is society and modern day living in general, but the school demands certainly contribute to a student's lack of well-being.

Apart from the pressures students feel and the onerous work load for the teacher, I found that students who did subjects with a heavy assignment load would concentrate on assignments for those subjects and neglect their homework for exam based subjects. Their reasoning was that the assignments were for assessment whereas the homework was not and so the assignments were the immediate priority.

Students did not develop a comprehensive understanding of their subject as a whole, because each assessment was for recent work, and then on to another topic. So the arrangement of "learn and forget" happened, as often topics would not be revisited.

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