

# PROBLEMS WITH ASSESSEMENT

## HOW SHOULD TEACHES BE SUPPORTED?

I am a Maths /Science teacher who has taught for over 30 years in public schools. I am at present a Maths B panel member, previously a Physics panel member for 6 years and have acted as a head of Department for around six months. I am committed to public education and have worked hard to increase its effectiveness.

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### **PROBLEM 1: EACH SCHOOL HAS TO RE-INVENT THE WHEEL**

What has been the procedure?

1. A new assessment system is introduced with very vague guidelines and teachers are responsible for working out the details.
2. Teachers in every school in the state spend hours (and hours and weeks) trying to come up with something.
3. Then teachers find out "that's not what we want ... we want this!"
4. So back to the drawing board ... each school in the state now spends more hours, days or weeks trying to fix up the problem.
5. Then they find out "that's not what we want ... we want this!"
6. Teachers are worn out and just when they think they have it 'right', a new syllabus is introduced and the cycle of stress continues again and again.

### **PROBLEM 2: THE NON-TRANSPARENCY OF ASSESSMENT**

This is much talk about transparency of assessment systems. Transparency in assessment is essential for fairness, repeatability and teachers being able to 'sleep at night' after awarding grades!

Talking in regards to the Maths and Science assessment procedures:

The teachers are generally foggy about how they come up with a final grade on an individual paper let alone combining it all together for a number between 200 and 400. It is very difficult for students to see where their grade came from. This is because marks cannot be seen by students and thus the ability of students to scrutinise the whole assessment process is greatly reduced.

And parents; well they have virtually no idea what is going on! If parents were allowed to see teachers go through the overall progress from the marking of their child's papers through to the assigning of an SAI which determines their child's future, many parents also would not be able to sleep at night!

Why the education system persists with assessment systems which are extremely non-transparent is beyond me!

## TYPICAL 'ARGUMENTS' PUT FORWARD

Over the years arguments put forward by presenters trying to introduce a bad educational idea include the following. (Yes, re-inventing the wheel and non-transparent assessment systems are not good things!)

Typically a presenter says something like:

1. *"Research backs up this idea."* This 'research' argument has been used for every educational idea that was later discarded because it was a very bad idea! The 'research' argument does mean only good educational ideas are introduced.
2. *"You just don't want to change!"* Well, yes ... this is a basic trait of human nature but it is presented at seminars as somehow an automatic argument against anyone who is at all critical of a new system. The 'you just don't want to change' statement ***is not an actual argument*** against anything! It is simply a statement on human nature. How it is continually used as a standard 'argument' at seminars amazes me!
3. *"The new system is straight forward and not really time consuming."* At an in-service on the introduction of one of the recent syllabus someone asked the presenter; "How many classes do you teach while you are introducing the new syllabus at your school?" The presenter said; "I only teach one class!" (End of discussion!)

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## SUPPORT TEACHERS WITH RESOURCES

There is an idea that we should not give teachers samples because they will just copy them or some such reasoning. But giving good quality samples will allow struggling or inexperienced teachers access to good quality assessment. It will allow experienced teachers a very good starting point to add some individual touches of their own. We model to our students so they know what is required. Teachers are no different and the more support of good quality material that can be given the better!

It is good for teachers to review their assessment items but it is very bad that every school in the state has to start from scratch to make them up. Teachers do not have the time nor is it necessary to keep re-inventing the wheel.

## THE 'MARKS TO LETTERS AND LETTERS BACK TO MARKS MERRY-GO ROUND'

The end product of the system is an OP number but in the past a teacher who has talked about using numbers (marks) has been treated as some sort of lunatic! This has changed (a little recently) with a word from above saying schools can use marks as long as they are not putting marks on assessment items.

Many schools use marks to award letters and transfer these back to marks again and round and round until they finally award an SAI number. All this juggling and 'hiding' of numbers (marks) adds to the non-transparency of the system, increases teacher frustration and takes time (and

energy) away from lesson preparation. If I wanted to sap the energy of teachers in a futile exercise, I could think of no better way than this.

### **THE ROLE OF A BODY LIKE THE QSA**

What should a body the QSA do to aid in the education of students?

1. **Support** teacher with quality assessment items and quality resources
2. **Supply** sample work programs
3. Supply teachers with a system of grading students that is **TRANSPARENT (TO TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS) AND WITH A SYSTEM THAT IS REPEATABLE.**