

Just Because



Advocate **Mark Copland** explains how he would make the world a better place.

Project kindles lift in literacy

I AM going to lose some of the teachers here, but I am a fan of testing and a fan of NAPLAN.

Not as a tool to compare schools on a league table — nor as a narrow focus for curriculum — but as one way of measuring how well an individual student is going in literacy and numeracy and also how a particular school or school system is travelling.

For parents with students who have strong literacy and numeracy skills NAPLAN is probably not all that helpful. But for those students who are struggling it can be a crucial beginning tool. And this is an important point.

Identifying the problem does not solve the problem! It is the only place to start — but we must find strategies and resources which work — otherwise we will merely become experts in documenting disasters.

The reason I think the benefits of NAPLAN and testing outweigh the negatives can be clearly seen in the area of indigenous

education.

In 2008 I was part of a group of teachers establishing Tiwi College on Melville Island in the Northern Territory.

As part of our routine we sat down with parents in the community and discussed report cards and children's progress. In some cases parents were informed that their son or daughter was in Year 11, but struggled to read the equivalent of a Year 2-level student. That didn't address the issue, but it was certainly better than the post-modern nonsense that masqueraded as assessment previously (eg. student X is achieving at expected level).

But not all is doom and gloom in indigenous education. There are a number of flickering lights in the tunnel.

For many years Multi-Lit — a phonics-based program has been making great gains for Aboriginal students from inner-city Sydney to remote communities on Cape York. Another sign of hope is the



INCENTIVE: Student Katelyn Ferguson-Gardiner with her new Kindle. PHOTO: THE DAILY EXAMINER

Indigenous Reading Project (IRP)

IRP was established just last year. The idea is very simple. Students who are below the national minimum standard for reading are targeted as part of the project.

The hook is a free Kindle. Well almost. Students are given a free Kindle e-reader to upload and read books for three months. They are pre-tested and then post-tested. Those who have progressed, improved their test results and received positive feedback from parents and teachers then get to keep the

Kindle.

And the good news is ... it is working! The first group of students had improved the time they spent reading by 154%. Their fluency levels had improved by 51% and comprehension by 42%.

There will be 100 Kindles sent to Aboriginal students around the country this year.

We have had a student from the Toowoomba region take part in the project.

The small and passionate team who make IRP happen are putting out the challenge to Amazon — the company that sells the Kindle.

The Indigenous Reading Project represents a great opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students around the country improve their literacy.

It is also a way in which all of us can play a very real role in making a real difference in a young life.

To find out more about the Indigenous Reading Project go to irp.org.au