

The Education 'Crisis' in Australia, High Stakes Testing and Marginalised Pre-Service Teachers

Kirsten Lambert

Murdoch University, Australia

Alison L. Hilton

Murdoch University, Australia

Abstract

Decades of global neoliberal education policies that rely on high stakes testing as the sole measure of quality in education, have resulted in underperforming students and a mass exodus of teachers in Australia. Yet those same neoliberal policies govern the curriculum for university teacher education programs. This paper offers a glimpse into marginalised pre-service teachers' (PST) experiences of teacher testing in Australia's high-stakes Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students (LANTITE). Utilising Critical Disability Theory, we problematise teacher testing as a gatekeeping tool for students undertaking teacher education. The paper highlights how rigid policies governing high-stakes teacher testing in Australia have disempowered and turned away talented and empathetic future teachers. Through illuminating their embodied experiences of stress and anxiety, we interrogate neoliberal discourses of power and show how teacher testing is used as a blunt instrument to solve complex problems and funnel public funding to private corporations. As part of a larger longitudinal research project, we highlight how vulnerable PSTs who have become unwitting victims of the high-stakes test juggernaut. This article focuses on five emergent themes from the research: (a) the embodied impact of stress and anxiety on test-takers, (b) withholding of information regarding testing processes and support, (c) the lack of differentiation available to PSTs (d) impacts of edu-businesses and the business of education on vulnerable participants and (e) a passion for differentiation.

