I’d like to talk to you about my child’s NAPLAN results.” I suspect that this comment at a parent-teacher interview has replaced that previous horror “What are you doing about my child getting bullied.” The result of this shift in emphasis seems to be that today’s teachers sense a growing need for increased knowledge about how to handle data.

Let’s face it: teachers have always been great data collectors, but today the data collection exercises are far more sophisticated (though arguably, not much more effective) than the old grade books that were a teacher’s constant companion, recording everything from Bill’s success at tables to Mary’s absences from PE. The major change, however, is that today’s parents are far more sophisticated in their knowledge of what data seems to be important. To help teachers handle these queries it is hard to imagine a better resource than a new book by Emeritus Professor Tony Shaddock. Not only does he know his topic thoroughly, but he also expresses the issues so that busy teachers can share his knowledge.

In 11 bite-size chapters, augmented with two very practical appendices, the author explains the importance of effective data collection, the teamwork that enhances data gathering and usage, different types of data and how to extract information for each, and then reminds his readers that the findings need to be reported and that in itself is a multi-faceted process depending on whom you are reporting to. By the way, the author explains that data was traditionally viewed as a plural word but now is usually accepted as a singular one, so we can avoid awkward sentences that start off with “The data were shown to be...”.

As you make your way through the book you become acquainted with the staff of a fictional school, and you can compare your learnings with the green imperative: why we should rethink the way we teach. This book is produced as an e-book and the useful six-page index that arise in the life of many young people today. She admits that many of these problems are well-known to parents from their own teenage years, but she has also included issues that are just as new to parents as they are to their offspring: computers, mobile phones, texting and sexting, cyberbullying and cybersex, Facebook and other social networks. She deals with them all in a very thorough but very readable manner.

Her approach to each topic is identical, offering readers a straightforward and practical route that will enable them to identify the essence of each problem, learn why it is a problem, and then discover a solution. This three step process – here’s the problem, why it’s a problem, here’s the solution – all occurs within two or three pages. I found that the second step was particularly useful because it usually viewed the problem from both sides, that of the parent and that of the teenager. Not every solution will appeal to every reader, but there is more than enough sound common sense (which, sadly, is not so common in our dealings with young people) to warrant exploring the book.

The topics are grouped under 10 self-explanatory headings, such as ‘Keeping my teen motivated and engaged in school’, ‘Drinking and drugs’, ‘Understanding and dealing with my teen’s sex life’, and ‘My parenting style’. The title of each issue is clearly outlined and if you want further help to locate a topic, there is a very useful six-page index.

The book is produced as an e-book and the author has clearly understood that reading this type of text requires a particular presentation to prevent the reader becoming exhausted. I would say that this is a good example of just how to write an e-book.

Years ago I came across a similar style of book that listed 100 behavioural problems for primary students. I found it useful to photocopy the List of Contents from that book and give it to my teachers so that if they were faced with aberrant behaviour, they could consult the list and see if the issue was addressed. Parents might like to do the same here – if only to discover that their teenagers (thankfully) don’t seem to be as bad as some others!

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