

6:59am Thursday 16th of August 2018
Location: Anna's Room, Anna's House

"Beep! Beep! Beep!"

My eyes flutter open and the sun streaming through my curtains hit my eyes. I close them again for just a few minutes.

"Anna! Time to get up or you're going to be late" yells Mum

I sigh and get up. I'm exhausted to say the least. I have an assignment due today about the Political Arrangement of Iraq for Level 2 Social Studies. The truth was I had little interest in the topic, I didn't really understand the content and I'd left it to last minute which meant I was up till 3:00am trying to finish it. It wasn't my best work and I have no idea whether I've put everything in it I need. But oh well, I'll just resub it later, I mean normally the amount of time we get for a resub is longer than the actual assessment.

8:42am Thursday 16th of August 2018
Location: N Block, New Plymouth Girls High School

I yawn as I enter my first spell; Level 2 English. Literal eye roll. I'm not trying to be rude or anything but I just don't get the point of English. I speak English, I can read English, I can write English why on earth do I need to learn to read between every letter, every line and every space.

"So, girls we can clearly see that the author is trying to imply....." preaches the teacher.

I look at Holly and roll my eyes. The poor author probably didn't even mean it imply that. I mean I get that sometimes an author will imply something between the lines but some of the ideas we're supposed to get are a bit far-fetched.

Holly leans into my shoulder and whispers

"When in the future do you ever plan to use the concepts from unfamiliar?"

And there was the crux of the matter when was this standard ever going to appear beyond the three-hour exam, I'd spent a whole year preparing for. I didn't want to do English for a career and I highly doubt someone in an English career seriously considers the standard 91100? Well, unless they become a teacher of NCEA. Glad that's not what I want to be, the system is far to confusing.

10:39am Thursday 16th of August 2018
Location: Corridors, New Plymouth Girls High School

'Ring! Ring! Ring!'

I exit the door from my Level 2 Biology Lab. Students litter the corridor, leaning against walls, talking in hushed voices. So many of them look exactly how I feel; tired, exhausted and over school. I've always been told that during our teenager years we are more fragile and prone to stress. NCEA definitely isn't cognizant of our mental wellbeing. Stress leaches from our skin giving students pimples and rashes to make them feel even more self-conscious. Many students binge eat to relieve the stress which in turn just creates more self-doubt. Students everywhere are just trying to cope, trying to look perfect, trying to be

strong while they are actually breaking inside. They don't want to draw attention but they just want a break. The only reason they actually come to school is for their friends and to achieve a qualification which they don't understand. To top it off its not just the students either. All the teachers are strung out. They are so stressed out, trying to complete all their work in time and look after their personal wellbeing. They don't have time to notice the students which are slowly falling apart and slowly walking towards the end. No one sees the suffering because everyone's so busy trying to keep themselves together. Often if I go to the bathroom during class there will be a student breaking down. You try your best to cheer them up, but just like you they are trapped in this system while their minds are spinning out of control.

1:37pm Thursday 16th of August 2018

Location: O Block, New Plymouth Girls High School

I waltz on into O3; the classroom where my friends and I sit at lunch

"Oi, Anna how was your job interview yesterday?" yells Holly

"OMG, it was embarrassing!"

"Oh, how so?"

"Well, I told him I had NCEA Level 2 endorsed with Excellence and he looked at me and asked what does that mean? I started trying to explain it to him, but he just didn't get it. He told that he'd google it and moved on from the conversation. I'm definitely not getting that job"

"You'll get the next one!"

I sigh, I hoped so. Ehhhh, NCEA is a system which I'm yet to fully understand and I've been doing it for two years now. Each year at school is just another Easter Egg Hunt, looking for credits except sometimes it feels like there aren't many easily hidden ones and the reward is pretty bitter sweet. Countless hours of work for barely anything in return. The credits are split into internal and external standards, but not everyone does the same amount. I mean how do you actually compare four external credits with four internal credits. I mean I spent a whole year studying to earn the four external credits but I stayed up till midnight to earn the four internal credits. They both present two different parts of my personality. One that I'm not organised and bad at self-management while the other shows I have good self-management over long periods of time? I'm completely lost with how to explain the system and what it represents I can do. No wonder my interviewer told me to be quiet. It's taken me two years to understand parts of the system and I've spent a lot of time trying to. Most students have no idea how their qualifications work. It makes it extremely hard to work out what to aim for when you don't know how the system is comprised.

3:47pm Thursday 16th of August 2018

Location: Central New Plymouth

School is finally over for the day! Yass!! I love learning but the system we are forced to learn in kind of puts a damper on my enthusiasm. I hop of the bus and like all the other students on the bus a little bit of school stress is lifted off, but not all of it, not even close I still have five assessments due tomorrow! But this afternoon I'm catching up with my friend, Mahala. Mahala attends another school across town and often the difference between our schools highlights the flaws of NCEA.

“Hey Girl!!” I squeal
“Hey yourself!” she yells
“How’s it been?”
“Great, if you love having three assessments all at once”
“I know right, it’s like the teacher plot to make our lives stressful”
“I’m working on the Level 3 Chemistry Scientific Experiment internal?”
“Oh really? Me too! How much more do you have to go?”
“Just the conclusion”
“What?? I haven’t even started the method, discussion or the analysis yet”
“The what?”
“The method, discussion and the analysis???”
“Oh, we don’t have to do that part its provided as part of the internals’ resource”
“Oh really?”
“Yeah our internal is open book and we get a month to complete it”
“What???” Our internal is closed book and we get 2 lessons to complete it”
“OMG! That’s so different”

And it really was but it wasn’t as well. Both of us would get awarded 4 credits if we passed the standard. However, the amount of work she did in comparison to me was very different. The assessments conditions were different and the marking would also be different. The work she does might get an Excellence at her school but at my school it would probably get you a Not Achieved. Sometimes it’s tempting to switch to a school with a lower academic standard on internals so that I can just get easy Excellences. However, at these schools their students often find externals really hard. It’s annoying how the same assessment can vary between two schools which are less than 5 kilometres away. I think it also gives some students a false idea of how they are doing comparatively. She gets straight Excellences but at my school she’d be lucky to pass. Students end up going to university thinking they are a lot better than they are comparatively to other students. If only the internal assessments were done in the same conditions and contain the same work at every school across the whole country. It might save students from struggling at University like a lot of them do these days.

5:31pm Thursday 16th of August 2018
Location: Dining Room at Anna’s House

“Anna! Dinners on the table!” echoes Mums voice done the corridor
“Coming” I yell as I exit my bedroom and walk down the hallway.
I take my seat around our four-person dinner table. Tonight, my brother is at a sports practice, so only three of the seats are occupied.
“So, Anna how’s school going?” asks Dad
“Just the usual confusing, stressful mess” I sigh
“So how are your grades doing?”
“Well, I got 6 credits in Biology at Excellence, I got my Chemistry test endorsed with Excellence, and I’m resubbing my Level 2 Physics internal tomorrow for 6 credits”
“So how many credits will you have after tomorrow?”
“32, with 15 at Merit and the rest at Excellence”
“But you had 24 last time how does that work?”

“Well, some of them are Internals, some of them are practices and I won’t get the resubbing mark tomorrow”

“Ehhh.. okay sounds great!” he sighs “But that sounds like gibberish to me”

“Sounds like gibberish too me too, Dad”

That was NCEA a confusing puddle of assessments, practice tests, internals, resubbed internals, resat internals, externals and whatever else the system decided to throw at us. It could take months to explain the system to an outsider. And to be honest trying to keep a track of how the system is put together is a nightmare. And after you think you understand everything about the system someone asks a question

“If I’m an accelerated and I did Level 1 a year ahead and I only got it endorsed with Merit in Year 10, when I get more Level 1 Excellence credits in Year 11 when do I get my endorsed at Excellence? Can I get my endorsement at Excellence?”

Anyone reading this piece know the answer to this? I’ve been asked it multiple times and it’s not particularly clear online or to the teachers at my school. And my school runs an accelerated student program!! How could we not understand it?? Or know the answer???

“So, Anna you still think of doing Engineering at University?”

“I guess, I mean a part of me really wants to do Law but because I decided to drop Social Studies in Year 10 I can’t”

“Can’t you just go back?” asks Mum

“Nah, I’ve talked to the school about it. They said that seen as I haven’t taken it since Year 10 I can’t pick it up.”

Another one of the ‘beautiful’ aspects of NCEA if you decide you don’t want to go through that door. It closes and you can’t get back to it. Even though most of the standards in a subject are completely irrelevant to the work you do in University. While we might not have to pick our career at the age of 13 like in some countries. The decisions we make in Year 9 and 10 can cut off options which we have never even considered. I thought I hated social studies, but I love Law. Not well connected at University courses but connected in terms of prerequisites. Careers we’d never had a chance to consider blocked. Door closed and the doors open to show the future I don’t want. And that’s stressing me out enough without having to consider the work I’ll have to do to achieve this undesirable but only future life I have.