

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

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Discrimination Against Home Educators

Birkenhead College basketball team lost a chance at winning the premier girls' team competition, lost their best player, Eva Skelton, 14, and lost their coach (Eva's dad) all because Eva is home educated.

The Auckland Secondary School Heads Association (ASSHA), which has a monopoly on this sport on the North Shore, disqualified the team by ruling that home-schooled children or home-schooled sports teams are not allowed to enter their competitions.

The heads' association executive unanimously voted that they could not, under the current rules, allow home-schoolers to enter the competitions. This is understandable in relation to an entire team of home schoolers, of which there are two seeking to compete. But it is something of a grey area as to how or why it would apply to individual home educated youngsters competing in regular school teams. It is the fact that the ASSHA appear to have made no effort themselves nor tried to canvass their membership about a possible rule change to allow teams of home educators to join the competition, teams which are administered, coached and refereed by home-schoolers, which is difficult to understand. This is the key issue.

Patrick Walsh, deputy principal at De La Salle College and legal consul to the ASSHA, said it was within its rights. "In my opinion they are not discriminating against them on gender, race or sexual orientation. The only

discrimination is that they are not a member of an organisation," he said.

Home educating mums Helen Lacey and Margaret Skelton said they tried to keep the matter out of the press and resolve the whole thing themselves. But the *NZ Herald* published a story about the discrimination on August 18, wherein the opinion was expressed that "home-school people want to have their cake and eat it too. They made the choice not to be part of the school system."

"Many parents are upset about the *Herald's* 'have their cake and eat it too' line," said Lacey. "We would like readers to know a little more about the situation."

The ASSHA has a monopoly on certain sports, so surely they have an obligation to let all children participate. The four sports we home educators are presently unable to participate in, that are run solely by ASSHA (i.e. no club sport available), are Basketball, Hockey, Rugby and Netball. These four sports have organised themselves and their competitions for 20 years or so. In was only in 1989 that ASSHA decided they should administer all college sport, so formed the monopoly at that time. They now levy all schools who are members, and

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MoE Tightens Exemption Policies

(Kate Jaunay of the Home Educators Network of Aotearoa wrote the following in the HENA Magazine of July 2001):

Recently Penny Bilton and I went to visit Lylian Robb at the MOE in our roles as Ministry Liaison for Auckland Home Educators, Inc.

There is some restructuring going on in the Auckland MOE, and they have a new manager, Carla White.

I mentioned that there have been some difficulties recently with some people having trouble in getting second or subsequent exemptions for their children after having had no problem with the first one.

Ms Robb explained that there has

been a general tightening up of the policy on homeschooling; that approval is no longer guaranteed on a historical basis as it once was.

A programme from two or three years ago is no longer acceptable, unless it is a purchased programme such as that provided by ACE or the Hillsborough Education Trust or Alpha Omega. Even then, the applicant must demonstrate comprehension and an ability to convey the programme to the child.

An applicant must be able to explain the programme clearly for each subsequent exemption, not only because each child is different, but because there is not so much referring to prior exemption

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although the sports continue to organise the competitions as they always have, ASSHA rules apply.

Consider the following points made by the home educators:

- a) We pay taxes towards the salaries of all these teachers.
- b) The competitions are run at local community facilities which we as local residents pay for in our rates.
- c) These competitions we played in as children ourselves, and only want our children to have the same experience.
- d) In our application to join the association, membership in which would allow our children to play, we advised ASSHA that we would pay the fee, help with the administration of the sports we enter, have our own coaches and referees and practice at our own venues.
- e) There are home school parents who are currently coaching in schools, acting as referees and fulfilling various administration tasks for school sports.

It would therefore seem that schools are currently getting a lot

more from home-schoolers than we are receiving in return.

Local home educators have formed the "Homeschool Auckland Sport and Cultural Association" (HASCA) to make representation to ASSHA and other bodies. They will represent those Auckland home schooling parents who wish to join and have their children participate in college sport.

The Hillary Commission is behind the home educators as they feel all children should be able to play sport. However, because they believe resources are so finely stretched, North Harbour Sport and the Hillary Commission are currently trying to get all sport played through schools and have no club sport of any kind in any sporting code. With such a possibility on the cards, it is all the more important to see this matter resolved in favour of home educators.

Members of HASCA have contacted local MP's along with the ministers for sport, education and youth affairs. No reply has been forthcoming as yet. Mr Ken

White of the MoE in Auckland said his personnel opinion is that children should be allowed to play and that he hoped dialogue would end the current situation.

Unfortunately there is no dialogue with ASSHA. They still have not replied to a letter written to them on the 18th of July or to phone calls left at the office for Mr Boston. Mr Boston and Mr Oglivie, also of ASSHA, have both stated to Mrs Lacey and to Mrs Skelton that there are members of ASSHA who are anti-home schooling, making it unlikely at this stage that their rules will be changed. It would

appear that the matter is now being dealt with by their legal adviser, which could explain why they are not replying to HASCA. The HASCA is now submitting a complaint to the Human Rights Commission.

The current members of HASCA would like as many people as possible nation wide to write letters to the *NZ Herald* editor putting forward home schoolers' opinion on this particular subject. They want people to stick to the issue, however. HASCA is very conscious that they are not speaking for all home educators, and do not want to see any damage done to homeschooling in general. Therefore by sticking to the issue of just letting the children play peer sport should see them getting the message across. "We do not want to 'bag' schools," said Lacey, "and we do not want to get into the reasons of why we home school, as we feel this would detract from the main issue at this stage. Perhaps the volume of letters will make the *Herald* think this issue plus home schooling in general deserves some follow up."

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Forget Holidays

Three out of four children forget what they learn in school over the summer holiday, a survey by University of Exeter Professor Michael Howe has shown. The average British child spends most of the summer watching television and playing video games. A life-style of learning, as in Home Education, overcomes the problem. (Xtranews, 13 July 2001.)

TEACH Bulletin

is a monthly publication of the Home Education Foundation, and is concerned with those things which may impact on home educators. Articles will deal with political developments, statist and professional trends, correspondence with educationalists, and other items of general interest to home educators. Information herein is not to be construed as legal advice. Opinions expressed in TEACH Bulletin are those of the writer and should not be assumed to reflect those of the Home Education Foundation Trustees or Board of Reference Members.

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instruction, and reject not your

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Lower Hook Rd.
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Debbie
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(and I'll ring back)

Wanted:

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Contact:

Lynette Thomas
ph. (09) 444-2300
Auckland

(Continued from page 1: **Tighten**)

applications in the processing nowadays. There are so many people applying that they simply do not have the space to hold files of prior exemptions.

She said the Education Act is being followed to the letter. There has been a steady increase in the number of homeschoolers, including more Pacific Island and Maori families choosing this option.

Ms Robb is a former teacher herself and is quite intent on being able to be certain that the parent applying has a good understanding of the curriculum that they will be using, and is not just parroting back the list that is sent with the application form. For that reason she is pleased that parents must send a copy of their child's exemption to Learning Media to get a copy of the NZ Curriculum, as she feels many (including herself) would be tempted to quote portions verbatim in order to impress the MOE.

As for the "Plan" portion of the exemption (which seems to be a sticking point for many applicants) she says she sees it as a snapshot, a single picture of a structural plan of how a particular topic will be delivered -- this need not be as complex and dense as some parents are making it. It should be merely one example of one portion of a topic.

We mentioned that many parents are intimidated by the format of the exemption application, not being used to the language of the education business, and told her that AHE has a Starter Pack which takes the applicant step-by-step through the form. She was interested to hear about this and said that as far as she was aware, the form has not changed significantly for many years, since there were only a tiny number of people attempting to homeschool their children. When told that the AHE committee had discussed rewriting the application form she said, "Great! We'd appreciate some input!"

She reminded us that parents should send in an application about a month prior to the child turning 6, and that it is still meant to be processed within 15 working days. She added that people need to remember that the exemption is dated from when they receive the application, *not* from the child's birthday. She also added that they realise that people choose the option to homeschool for many reasons, and that the Ministry does not need (or indeed even want) to know these reasons, that they are approving the application on the education aspect only.

We also spoke about children with Special Needs and the desire of many parents to home educate them. I mentioned that we had heard that there might be funding available for teacher's aides, etc., through the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), but she said this was not so, that the ORS funds could only be used to pay for special therapy such as physiotherapy or Speech/Language therapy.

She added that this was only for very high needs children, not for moderate or high needs, nor could this funding be used as "respite care".

We did discuss the benefits of home educating special needs children and the need for parents to have some respite or teaching assistance for these children, but at present there is no provision for this kind of assistance.

She pointed out that homeschooling is a parent's choice, and that these factors need to be taken into consideration when withdrawing a child from school.

Homeschooling policy will be looked at in the near future, so there could be changes to come.

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“Let’s All Read” = “Let’s Use Phonics”

The Report of the Education and Science Select Committee on the 17-month-long inquiry into the teaching of reading in New Zealand, “Me Panui Tatou Katoa — Let’s All Read”, which was presented to Parliament this month, was very straightforward: “A re-emphasis must be made on the importance of the development of phonetic, word-level decoding skills in a balanced teaching of reading programme.”

A snippet from Richard Prebble’s “Letter from Wellington” this month reads, “The Parliamentary report into why reading standards have fallen is a devastating indictment of the education establishment. Government MPs only agreed to [ACT MP] Donna Awatere Huata’s request for an inquiry to shut her up, because they were sure it would prove Donna’s criticisms wrong. The MPs were staggered by what they found.”

Some findings:

* The largest study of our literacy levels, a 1997 survey of international adult literacy by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, found that one in five adult New Zealanders had poor literacy, with 200,000 at the bottom of the literacy scale.

* Last year, international surveys indicated that 18 per cent of 16-to-25-year-old New Zealanders were on the lowest level of a five-point literacy scale. Critics blame New Zealand’s falling literacy standards on the introduction of “whole language” teaching, where complete words are recognised through pictures or meanings, and sounding them out is discouraged.

* Submissions to the Select Committee claimed that at least one in five third-formers could not read properly when starting secondary school. In the poorest areas, more than half were “functionally illiterate”. The gap

between good and poor readers in New Zealand is the widest in the OECD.

* An international adult literacy survey in 1996 found 42 per cent of working New Zealanders scored below the minimum, meaning they could not cope in the workplace.

* A 1997 research paper found that using fun phonics “virtually eliminated the gap between Maori and Pakeha children by the middle of the first year of schooling” and closed the gap by the end of the second year. Don Buck Primary School, in the west Auckland suburb of Massey, uses a commercial phonics system and boasts that its rate of reading problems has dropped from 40 per cent to zero.

* The Government spent \$18 million on the national reading recovery scheme last year -- but mostly in the richest schools (classed as decile 10), whereas the bulk of the poor readers are in the poorest schools (deciles 1 and 2).

It is not the fiscal mismanagement of our tax dollars which spurs parents to home educate, but many do begin because they sense their children are not learning properly. As the Select Committee reported, “We heard from many parents that schools did not always work actively to overcome emerging literacy problems in students. Parents tend to feel powerless when their children begin to fall behind and, in some cases, they did not even find out for a very long time.”

The teachers’ union NZEI says the use of phonetics is better aimed at specific groups rather than changing the whole system. NZEI President Amanda Coulston says the emphasis should be on those most at risk, such as children from poorer families. (One has to ask why that should be. Do poor children learn differently from wealthy children, or is there a different set of expectations for the two groups?) Richard Ward from the School of Education at Waikato University

said concentrating solely on phonics could come at the expense of comprehension. Are these two experts saying, therefore, that comprehension may not be so important as the technical skill of reading when it comes to poorer kids?

Well, this is all daft speculation. But so is the idea that learning to read by phonics compromises comprehension. Teachers of reading by the “whole language” approach say comprehension should come from context and pictures and other clues on the page. **Right, you tell me how a child could read this line from clues on the page.** Come on, the entire sentence is composed of simple one-syllable words. Could there possibly be a picture that would even begin to convey what that sentence is meant to communicate? The context is full of more complicated words and ideas. If the child does not have those 16 words memorised as sight words as one would memorise the icons on a cell phone, digital diary or photocopier, the child could not read the sentence. For such a child to have a reading vocabulary of 1,500 words, he would have to have memorised 1,500 icons, that is, words, for he only sees them as unique shapes and lengths. Someone would have to teach this child every single icon/word to ensure he got them right, creating teacher dependency. The child taught by phonics needs only to learn the 42 sounds made by the 26 letters and a few letter combinations. That child then has an unlimited reading vocabulary, for he can read by sounding out, learning for himself, virtually every word encountered, creating independence in learning. It is obvious that the whole language child’s reading vocabulary is way behind the phonics child’s. Yet the report seemed to say that the whole language approach was the one to use to read for meaning. Again, this makes no sense. The phonics child’s reading vocabulary is much larger than his internal vocabulary, words whose meanings he knows, so he can easily read for meaning since he can read every word he already

knows plus a great deal more. Assuming the whole language child's reading vocabulary (of 1,500 for example) is much smaller than his internal vocabulary, we see he can only read for meaning among that finite number of words he has memorised, plus a few fortuitous guesses.

There are those of the constructivist school of thought, however, who may be behind this inverted idea of literacy. Since the whole language child has to guess at many words he sees on the page, the "guessing technique" as the Report called it, he learns to dialogue with the words on the page and impart his own meaning to them, thus constructing his own learning as he goes. The meaning he is getting out of his reading is the meaning he imparts to the text himself, not necessarily the meaning the author of the text intended to impart. Children are thus freed from the confines of the text, the author's intent or standard interpretations of the text and can exercise their own creativity in constructing a meaning for the text more in keeping with their own concepts, values and experiences. (Hey, I'm not making this up. Type "constructivism" into your search engine.)

The Select Committee's Report clearly reflects constructivist leanings. At one point it says, "New Zealand has gained an international reputation for the development of techniques that assist children in developing the skills required for gaining meaning from text." The implication is that simply reading the text and letting it transmit its own meaning to you is too simplistic. Instead children require skills to gain meaning from the text, as if the meaning of "Both Rangi and Suzie enjoyed staying at Uncle Joe's farm" was hard to grasp. (Actually, it is if "enjoyed" isn't one of the whole language child's sight words.) In spite of this international reputation, the Select Committee said, "Considerable concern has been expressed publicly that literacy standards in New Zealand have

fallen over time and that this phenomenon is associated with the teaching methods used in our schools." It also saw fit to recommend a re-emphasis on the importance of using phonics to teach children how to read.

The Select Committee's report said, "We received strong evidence that most children are able to learn to read at the first opportunity without requiring any second-wave intervention". So why do the NZEI and others cling to this whole language approach which generates such a need for second and third-wave intervention? Teacher dependency has been mentioned. We also read about the \$18m spent last year on reading recovery, trying to improve the reading of those being taught with this whole language approach. That represents quite a few jobs, 450 at \$40,000pa, in fact. And it appears there will be more for teachers and trainee teachers -- and those who teach the teachers. The Report said, "Our main conclusion is that the current system provides no guarantee that every graduating primary school teacher has the requisite skills to teach reading." Consequently the recommendations include that graduate teachers must reach minimum national standards in the teaching of literacy, and that all primary teacher-training institutions incorporate teaching phonetic skills.

It is hard to be optimistic. It will be several years before such a national standard is formulated and all teachers are trained to that standard and children in state schools start reflecting improved literacy skills.....assuming the downward trend can be arrested and as long as some other inhibiting factor doesn't crop up in the meantime. My recommendation: stick with Home Education.

There are two aspects of the report which could have direct implications for home educators. As a result of a single submission which said, "It should be every child's right in New Zealand to have pre-school education and

that there should be compulsory government-funded kindergartens for all four-year-old children," the Committee formulated the recommendation "That the Ministry of Education investigate whether compulsory early childhood education would improve beginning learning skills among at-risk groups, and thus close the reading gap." The other recommendation, "That a national campaign to counter non-attendance at school be initiated" may see more home educated children stopped by truancy officers.

The Select Committee's report may be read in full at: <http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/publications> or you may request a copy from your local MP or from the Clerk of the House, c/- Parliament Buildings, Wellington.

Importance of Learning Styles

Another disturbing quote from the "Let's All Read" Report said:

We found that some schools, principals and teachers, mainly in low-decile schools, had developed a tolerance, and perhaps a powerlessness, over their children's poor learning performance. At one decile 1 school in Auckland, a principal explained to one of us that the reason for poor literacy outcomes was "the bell curve, you know". In other words, the principal had come to believe that the school's poor reading outcomes were the result of genetic deficiencies in her students. In the face of such beliefs, it may be difficult to develop effective interventions in all schools.

Similarly, we heard of many instances where the lack of progress of students was put down to a difficult or impoverished home life. We agree in this regard with the philosophy of Don Buck School, which argues that whatever the background of the student, it is the responsibility of the school to find ways to teach them to read effectively. In other words, background can never be

used as an excuse for lack of reading progress. If we, as a nation, do accept that some groups of children will never learn to read effectively, with the inevitable severe economic and social effects of such deprivation, we are condemning some of our citizens to a less than optimal future.

These oh-so-sensible words actually came from our MPs! Another refreshing voice of reason was seen in *TheSchoolDaily* e-letter of 21 August. Barbara Prashnig, Professor Emeritus and Director of the Creative Learning Centre in Auckland, categorically claimed that “it is **not** true that the learning potential of human beings is limited due to their social environment, their upbringing and their physical abilities, and it is **not** true that teachers should never be made accountable for the learning success of their pupils. Quite on the contrary: it is every teacher’s duty to create a learning environment and use methods of instruction which match their students’ individual learning needs and skills.”

It is so good to see principles we HEs have used for years openly and positively acknowledged by non-Home Educators. Logistically school classrooms almost always have to adopt the “one-size-fits-all” approach to curriculum delivery, but HEs can also slip into this way of thinking because of its convenience. (Actually this approach can easily suit smaller HE families.) Yet of all people, we HEs have the best opportunity to tailor-make a curriculum for each of our children. Barbara Prashnig stated three principles which remind us parents of the depth of our responsibilities in Home Educating our children:

- 1.If students cannot learn the way we teach them, we have to learn to teach them the way they **can** learn.
2. There are no learning disabilities -- only **teaching disabilities**.
3. Students are not failing because of the curriculum; they can learn almost any subject, when

the instructions are matched with their individual learning styles.

This idea of a typical teacher taking note of the learning style of each of the 30 children in her classroom and adjusting her teaching style to suit is generally beyond meaningful practical application. But it is eminently practical -- and probably **the** major advantage of the HE concept -- for us HE parents to do this with our own children.

A Month of Momentous Events

A Parliamentary Select Committee finds that state schools are too often failing to teach their students to read well. They initiate an inquiry into making pre-school attendance for four-year-olds compulsory to help rectify the problem.

Post Primary Teachers Association president Jen McCutcheon said teachers feared they wouldn’t be able to take on extracurricular activities on top of the extra work they faced with implementation of the NCEA next year. But the Hillary Commission says New Zealand can’t afford for its students to miss out on things like sports, cultural groups and drama, what it says are a fundamental part of school life. Newlands College principal Paul Richardson says, “The fundamental culture of New Zealand secondary schools will change for the worse, and we will all be the losers if that happens.” (He also shudders at the spectre of New Zealand students spending all of their spare time doing schoolwork.)

North Harbour Sport and the Hillary Commission are apparently trying to get all sport played through schools and have no club sport of any kind in any sporting code. A Government review into sport and recreation in January criticised schools’ attitude to physical activity and recommended extending the primary school day by half an hour to make more time for sport.

Finlayson Park School in Manurewa runs a health clinic for students and their families. The school also employs 17 teacher aides to provide extra support for students who do not have much help at home with reading and writing. Last year, Kamo High School in Whangarei opened a building which houses counsellors, careers advisers and a public health nurse who is available to students and the community. At Penrose High School in Auckland, students are offered a “full service” education, which means their health and social needs are also catered for. As well as an on-site youth worker and social worker, a nurse, guidance counsellor and resource teacher of learning and behaviour, the school offers dental and medical care.

Australasian educators explained at a seminar in Wellington this month why they want a carefully crafted curriculum in the schools that would introduce children to all the world’s religions and philosophies. Of course, these studies will have to be PC: that is, monotheistic religions which claim to be “the only way” (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) will be presented merely as options just as equally valid as polytheistic religions (Hinduism, animism) or atheistic religions and philosophies (Buddhism, Atheism, Secular Humanism).

Does anyone get the idea that the state, via the schools, is trying to provide a fairly complete alternative to the family?

The provisions of New Zealand’s Integration Act are inexorably drawing all the private schools in this country back into the state fold. Home Educators — almost alone — remain independent. We need to appreciate our position in New Zealand’s current social history as something of a barometer of civil, political and religious liberties. If we get reined in, it means everyone else already is.