

# TEACH Bulletin

## Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 56

February 2002

### Phonics vs.

When the Parliamentary Science and Education Select Committee released its report last August saying phonics needed to be re-emphasised if New Zealand's falling literacy levels were to be raised, Massey University's College of Education claimed it as a victory for the decades of research done by its professors James Chapman and Bill Tunmer....and, one might note, a victory of logic over ideology.

The myth still persists that New Zealand has one of the highest literacy rates in the world. One could confidently say that back in 1970, over thirty years ago. A lot of kiwi kids have passed through the New Zealand school system since then, representing most of those aged 35 and below. And it was in the 1970s that NZ schools adopted a "whole language" approach to learning to read. The worry comes from figures such as those from the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey. It found that 45% of employed NZ adults "had literacy levels that were inadequate for full functioning in a developed economy."<sup>1</sup>

"The whole language approach on its own just doesn't work", say Tunmer and Chapman.<sup>1</sup> There are two main reasons. First, the approach relies on children recognising whole words as symbols, similar to learning Chinese characters. "Given that it takes 10 to 12 years of study to learn 2000 Chinese words, this is obviously an inefficient learning method."<sup>1</sup>

Second, children are encouraged to "guess" at unfamiliar words, using clues from the context such as pictures or possible words that

one might predict from the unfolding meaning of the text. A moment's reflection shows that this is very ineffective, especially for children who have had less experience in reading or being read to and seeing ideas develop. While context is useful to help confirm as being correct a word a student is sounding out using phonics, context on its own is a virtually useless guide to determining an unknown word, a word which could also describe an unfamiliar concept. Take the sentence, "Fortunately Jim had his Thesaurus with him, and fed excellent synonyms to the team all

day." If the whole language reader did not know the words "Thesaurus" or "synonyms", he might conclude Jim was a cook from the context clue "fed" while the wider context may not support, or render invalid, that assumption in any way. Children can predict high-frequency words to some extent, but it is the infrequent words which carry the most meaning and are less likely to have been memorised by the student taught by the whole language approach. "This leaves the child trying to predict the meaning of the least predictable and least frequently occurring words", Professor Tunmer says.<sup>2</sup>

There are indications that the whole language approach is infected with ivory tower

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### Ineffective Computer Classrooms

Classroom teacher Sally McLaren paints the following scenario from her real-life experiences. It raises a number of issues surrounding the present Education Minister's commitment to spending millions of dollars in providing ICT (Information and Communications Technology) to every student in every school in New Zealand.

An enthusiastic and reasonably computer-literate teacher tells her class of 30 students that they have one hour to research and find information on the Internet about Global Warming. As the students begin, some have trouble logging on to the system, others find their computer keeps crashing. Quite a few don't know how to use a search engine properly. The teacher doesn't really know how to fix the students' computers.

The class starts to get noisy. Some students get bored and start surfing the net for fun or emailing. Soon, there is only 10 minutes of class time left. Not a lot of information has been gathered. The teacher is frustrated and so are the students.

If computers are supposed to be the ultimate learning tool, and if students are so much more motivated by the Internet as a learning method, then what went wrong?

How proficient is the teacher in all those aspects of the use of the computer? Has she had enough training? Has she had the time to become experienced enough in its use even with the training? In the above scenario, the objectives of the exercise were not clear

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idealism...or maybe just brute ideology. It “relies on assumptions about a child’s pre-school literacy preparation. It’s a comfortable, middle-class model that assumes basic language skills are in place before the child starts school.”<sup>1</sup> Maori, Pacific and poorer children are disadvantaged by such an approach because they often do not have the same familiarity with books, reading or being read to.<sup>3</sup>

The professors say a major flaw of the whole language approach is the claim that reading skills are acquired naturally, in the same way we learn to speak and listen. If this were so, why then do as many as 25% of all six-year-olds in NZ “require expensive, intensive, one-to-one Reading Recovery tutoring?”<sup>1</sup> Reading is a skill which must be taught and practised, like typing with all fingers, rather than an instinct that one can generally pick up from being immersed in the right environment.

One disturbing aspect of the widespread acceptance of whole language ideology is that the

highly regarded Reading Recovery programme merely gives pupils more of the same kind of reading instruction which has already failed them. Even more disturbing is that the research of Professors Chapman and Tunmer showed that children who successfully completed Reading Recovery did not significantly improve in their literacy development.<sup>1</sup>

The professors say phonics instruction is best done in a systematic fashion separate from actually trying to read.<sup>1</sup> Many home educators have used this approach for years as a simple and very effective way of having children master a wide range of reading materials, not just graded texts. It means drilling on letter recognition, sound recognition of the individual letters, consonant sound blends such as “th”, “sh” & “ph” and “br”, “cr” & “tr”.....this drill is very repetitive and boring for adults but generally not so for children. They seem to enjoy mastering the drill and seeing the letter symbols becoming old familiar friends. Maybe this was one factor in favour of the introduction of whole language philosophy and methodology: it was a less tedious procedure and a bit more interesting for the adult teachers.

#### Notes:

1. “Sounding Better”, *Massey* Issue 11, Dec 2001, p. 31-32.
2. “Recognition for Phonics Advocate”, *Massey News*, Issue 16, 10 September 2001, p. 6.
3. “Victory for Phonics -- and College of Education”, *Massey News*, Issue 15, 27 August 2001, p. 1.

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

enough. Global Warming is an enormous topic. If the teacher had time to research Internet resources she could have recommended some sites to the class, thus giving them a starting point for their search. Computers do not do away with teacher prep time: it may actually increase prep time.

Technical support was needed. If those students with computer skills and experience (the “haves”) were left to themselves, they would probably do well, consolidating their advantaged position, while the others (the “have nots”) would possibly experience a loss of confidence and perhaps hesitate to use ICT in the future. If the “haves” were paired up with the more computer illiterate students, they may become bored and resentful at being slowed down, and the “have nots” might experience undue harm to their self-image at having to be tutored by their peers. This equity issue simply does not appear to have a solution: it is known as “the digital divide”. Lack of a solution should raise other questions: is it reasonable or even rational to expect all school students to be equally computer literate? Why put students into such situations at all when the potential for harm or wasted time is increased by the increased number of factors outside the teacher’s control?

At this point home educators will be enumerating to themselves again the many advantages of one-to-one tutoring or mentoring. Unlike the teacher in the classroom, home educating parents generally know exactly how much and what kind of computer skills their youngsters have and can also more accurately assess whether they need any more or not. Prep time for a project can be incorporated into the project, as the student probably does it, reviewing for him or herself the various aspects of Global Warming before deciding on one aspect of the topic that is of particular interest. This of course pays large dividends later on, for the student

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## 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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hedf@xtra.co.nz

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Australia

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## Contact:

Chrissy Miller  
ph. (09) 428-0668

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chose the topic out of interest, rather than being assigned it like everyone else.

One should also consider carefully the value of using ICT. Is doing a web search always necessary? Ms McLaren declares that some middle school students "don't know how to use an encyclopedia

in book form. They think encyclopedias are only CD Roms!" She also sees problems in being able to evaluate the quality of the vast amounts of material available on the Internet. With a book one can quickly take in the author, the publisher, the table of contents, the nature and extent of the indices and appendices if any and who comments about what in the Forward and on the dust cover.

Are the schools and the Minister of Education asking "Where are we heading with this aggressive ICT expansion into schools anyway? Is computer instruction more effective than traditional methods, or is the real concern simply that students learn a few keyboard skills?" If they are not asking them, they should be, for a lot of extra tax dollars are being tossed in this direction.

(Parts extracted from "The Digital Divide in the Classroom" by Sally McLaren, Jan. 25, 2002

<http://www.childresearch.net/cgi-bin/topics/column.pl?no=00139&page=1>)

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## Tertiary Education: Weigh the Costs Carefully

Studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree will cost \$3000 to \$3600 this year, depending on the university. Medical and dental students are looking at fees of more than \$9000.<sup>1</sup> So let's do the figures: A three-year BA will cost a minimum of \$9,000 in fees alone. Add to that textbooks and other peripherals of \$200 per semester or \$400 per year (a very low figure). So that is another \$1,200, or a total of \$10,200 so far for the BA degree.

Of course places like Massey have dropped the normal undergraduate class credit value recently from 15 points to 12.5, so unless you take a heavy schedule each semester, you won't do the BA in three years. Add to that the fact that at least 40% of students change their major part way through their

studies, and you almost guarantee a four-year stint of study to secure the BA. So that could mean the \$10,200 goes up by another \$3,000 in annual fees plus another \$400 for books, making a grand total of \$13,600.

Tim Gray, Registrar of Otago University who just retired after a 40-year career at the university, said the semester system and the contraction of papers to six-month blocks did not seem a good way to aid the absorption of knowledge. "But I think the main aim of students is to pass exams, not get an education," he said. Mr Gray was also critical of moves in recent years to increase the number of people attending universities for it simply spread precious resources more thinly.<sup>2</sup>

Something even more disturbing is the fact that BAs just aren't worth what they used to be. There are now so many people out there with BAs that their value has been lessened. To get a really good job, we are told, one needs an MA, or another two years of study. So let's add another \$3,000 twice and \$400 twice and we get a total of between a low of \$17,000 for one who only took three years to do the BA, and a high of \$20,400.

Now these figures are for those who live at home. They do not include transport costs and the cost of forgoing whatever income the student could have been earning if he or she had gone into the workforce instead of the university. Even a lowly supermarket worker at \$5.50/hour could pull in over \$10,000 gross in a year. In three years, the length of time for a BA, that is \$30,000; \$50,000 for the five years of an MA.

If you are living on campus, the Auckland halls of residence (meals included) costs \$197 a week for a single study bedroom, or \$167 for a twin; at Otago, it is \$206 a week.<sup>1</sup> So a stay of 39 weeks would cost at least \$6,513, or \$19,539 during the course of a three-year BA, making that BA look rather expensive at a

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minimum of \$29,739. An MA would be a minimum of \$49,565 plus transport, clothing, entertainment and the \$50,000 you could have earned at the supermarket. (So if you're committed to going to university, doing study extra-murally, that is, by correspondence at home, is the way to go.)

Many first-year students do not anticipate extra costs for materials, such as art supplies or computer equipment. Ainsley Sanderson, Waikato University's student financial adviser, says younger students are sometimes caught out by the cost of flatting, including a bond of two to four weeks rent as well as set-up costs for power, gas, hiring whiteware and insurance.<sup>1</sup>

A University Students' Association survey last month reported an 18 per cent increase in the *average* student debt (meaning some owed a lot more than this), from \$11,695 in 1998 to \$13,743 last year. Only 9 per cent of students surveyed were debt-free last year, compared with 21 per cent in 1998.<sup>1</sup>

If it was available as a lump sum up front, that \$49,565 mentioned earlier may be enough to get a good little business going, which could be earning well at the end of five years. Or if you started work even at the low paying supermarket as a 16 year old, five years later you may not have an MA, but there would be several things in your favour: you will have earned \$50,000, you would be a lot more focused about your career path, you will have learned a lot about life in the real world, and you would be 21 years old which means you have a virtual automatic right of enrolment for almost any course at any NZ university. Five years later you could have your MA and still be only 26, that \$50,000 you earned keeping you largely out of student debt.

Once a university student, it is possible to earn a nice extra income as a tutor of high school students. Bryan Smith, a Student Job Search manager in Hamilton,

says students can make \$18 to \$20 an hour in this way.<sup>1</sup>

### Notes:

1. "Budgeting to Survive as a Tertiary Student" by Rebecca Walsh, *NZ Herald* 13/2/02, [www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=938914](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=938914)
2. "Retiring Registrar Notes Change" by Blair Mayston, *Otago Daily Times*, 5/2/02, [www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1103,1091095a3845,FF](http://www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1103,1091095a3845,FF)

## Czech

### Home Educators

According to Chris Klicka of the HSLDA (Home School Legal Defence Association in Virginia), Czech home educators are having an uphill battle to maintain their present freedoms. Michal Semin, president of the Czech home school association, estimates there are 500 families involved in home education in the Czech Republic.

Home education there is presently only temporarily legal and limited to the first five years of elementary schooling, approximately ages 6-10, following a governmental order begun in 1999 allowing for a five-year experiment. Even so, every home schooling family must enrol in one of three government-recognised schools which issue a certificate of permission twice a year and also test the children. However the Czech Ministry of Education issued a new bill recently that would give to a local education supervisory agency the power to decide if there are serious enough reasons for the child to be home schooled!

The HSLDA organised an email call to action early this month (February 2002) which resulted in over 150,000 e-mails being sent within 24 hours to the 200 members of the Czech Parliament in support of the Czech home schooling movement. A local Prague newspaper reported that the parliament e-mail server had been shut down by the volume of messages coming in on the home

school issue! HSLDA has since asked its members to turn their e-mail attentions to the Czech Embassy in Washington, D.C. Such tactics had mixed results in Brazil last year, and Singapore home educators specifically asked US home educators not do such things to their government officers. How effective the move will be in the Czech Republic remains to be seen.

## Telecom Science Roadshow

Travelling throughout New Zealand and setting up in schools and other centres such as MOTAT in Auckland, the Telecom Roadshow presents hands-on science activities and dynamic demonstration experiments.

Information and bookings at: [www.roadshow.org](http://www.roadshow.org) or email : [director@roadshow.org](mailto:director@roadshow.org) or ph (04) 499 7865. The cost is \$4 per student and resource kits are available.

## Bursary and NCEA Assessment

For Bursary -- home educators ~~must link with a local secondary school or an approved tertiary provider and register with NZQA by completing a special application form and returning it to NZQA before March 1 of the year of entry. This form is available from the Secondary Education Group of the NZQA.~~

For NCEA -- home educators must link with a local secondary school or an approved tertiary provider for assessment in NCEA level 1.

A copy of the regulations is available from long-time home educator Penny Bilton at:

[pennybilton@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pennybilton@xtra.co.nz)

## Governor General Meets Home Educators

Officers and Cadets of the New Zealand Air Training Corps Cadet Force met in Wellington last 27-28 September for a Vice-Regal parade marking their 60th Anniversary of service. Seventy cadets from eight lower North Island Squadrons marched through Wellington to the grounds of Parliament where they were inspected and addressed by the Governor General, Her Excellency Dame Sylvia Cartwright.

At the afternoon tea served in the Beehive, Her Excellency turned to a group of Cadets and asked each in turn how they enjoyed being members of ATC, where they went to school, etc. It was a moment of mirth and surprise for Her Excellency as the first three she spoke to (Richard Kleinjan of Masterton, Alanson and Charmagne Smith both of Palmerston North) were all home

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## Unjustified Discouragement

Recently a New Zealand home educating mum posted a message to an email group saying how she was a bit down because she was feeling somewhat guilty about "the off days" her son has when he isn't receptive to doing any "work". She then described what they did on this "off day".

"We went out into the garden at 10am. I continued to read to him during the day. We looked on the Internet about things of interest to him for a while, and he played Reading Blaster on the computer."

Now we don't know all the details, but a wee trip into the garden could include a vast array of educational experiences in the fields of agriculture and horticulture, botany and entomology, not to mention a bit of good old sweat and productive labour, redeeming the time, investing in tomorrow's supply of food for the table, etc. Note that this mum read to her

son! This has to be the single most productive activity parents can ever do with their children. It increases their vocabulary. It can whet their appetite for good quality literature as opposed to the other kinds out there. It presents their minds with vast opportunities to imagine things: rather than simply look at the picture on the picture-book page, their minds are being stimulated to creatively paint their own pictures of what the words are telling.

Reading together gives parents and children unlimited opportunities to springboard off a single word (Do you know what "restitution" means?) or a concept (Mum, what do they mean by "inner beauty"? ) and discuss it -- and related concepts -- for ages. What an opportunity to introduce your own values and standards, the ones you want your children to adopt.

Of course parents can also simply stop in the middle of a story and say, "You know, that reminds me of something that happened back in 1972...", which is part of ancient history to your children. And when you can say, "I was there," in that period of ancient history, they'll listen because there is nothing quite as intimate as an eye-witness account, especially if it was your mum or dad! And of course reading is simply helping the old bonding process to be positively reinforced. Keep it up!

This mum also searched the Internet *with her son!* Internet safety groups are repeatedly saying they wished more parents did exactly that: were with their children when they surfed the net, because of the many dangers out there in cyberspace. This is also teaching research skills, and gives you the opportunity to learn to quickly assess a website: is this a commercial site mainly interested in selling something, is this site academically rigorous or just light and breezy, does this site present a balanced view or is it unabashedly trying to push a barrow?

And he then played an educational

game on the computer. I replied to the mum that I thought she'd put in a fairly full day of it.... considering it was an "off day"!

This highlights a couple of things. Mums and dads are used to living in the real world with real demands imposed on them by all sorts of others and real time constraints. They have learned how to juggle several responsibilities at once and are usually pretty good at multi-tasking and filling in as much as they can in a day. So when it comes to home education, especially in the situation of one mum and only one or two children, they often peg their expectations fairly high, being used to getting the most out of each day. This is great, but one must be wary of unreasonably high expectations, for these are a recipe for burn out in both parents and children.

Then, too, parents often do not consider that their child's curriculum starts when they awake and finishes when they fall asleep seven days a week, 365 days a year. If parents are not cognisant of the incidental learning taking place as they do family chores, pursue their hobbies, participate in clubs and church activities or help Uncle Ted in his machine shop on the weekend, they can be unnecessarily setting themselves up for discouragement over what they perceive to be a ho-hum curriculum when it is in fact a fairly rich and varied one. This discouragement due to incomplete perception is also a factor in burn out.

You may see or imagine the hive of activity in the local state school, compare your efforts to that and again move toward guilt, discouragement and burn out. Activity doesn't always equal learning and development. Comparisons between your tutoring/mentoring situation and a crowded classroom are not at all fair:...battling with major logistical disadvantages, it is the schools which can often look bad. Perhaps it is they who should feel guilty, not you!!

# Coming Events

## Sth Auckland Home Education Information Workshop

Saturday 2nd March 2002  
9.00am to 4.00pm

Papakura Baptist Church,  
44 Clevedon Rd, Papakura  
\$20 per person/family if received  
by Wednesday 27 February, or  
\$25 per person/family for late  
registrations

9:00am

Registration and view resources.

9:30 Morning tea.

10.00 Welcome, followed by  
introductory talk.

10:45 -- Five Electives

A) Homeschooling and the  
ERO—Kate Jaunay

B) Helping Children with  
Learning Disabilities—Mary  
Anne Abplanalp

C) Teaching History from a  
Christian Perspective—Christine  
Whetton

D) Classical Studies: Getting  
Started—Barbara Smith

E) Preschoolers and Home  
Schooling: Do they mix?—  
Sharon Drinnan and  
Rosalind Peterson

12:00 noon — Lunch

1.00pm — Five Electives

A) Beginning Homeschooling:  
The First Year—Kay Christensen

B) Home Education: Getting  
Things into Perspective—Craig  
Smith

C) Art for the Artistically  
Challenged—Lyn Strong

D) The Charlotte Mason  
Approach—Uwe and Vivienne  
Balzatt

E) Classical Studies: Keeping  
Going—Barbara Smith

2.15 pm Afternoon Tea

2.45 — Five Electives

A) Preparing for Tertiary—Mary-  
Anne Abplanalp and Craig Smith

B) Unit Studies—Sharon Drinnan

C) Homeschooling: A Family  
Affair—Murray Drinnan

D) Becoming a Reader for Life—

## Christian Home Schoolers of NZ Worldview Conference

Sunday to Friday  
7-12 April 2002

Willow Park Convention Centre  
Eastern Beach  
Auckland

### Speakers:

**Dr David Noebel**, author of  
*Understanding the Times* a  
detailed analysis/comparison of  
Marxism/Leninism, secular  
humanism and Biblical  
Christianity;

**Chuck Edwards** of Summit  
Ministries, Colorado Springs,  
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Jill Meyer

E) Maths and Science—Rosalind  
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### Resources:

· A wide range of books,  
resources or second hand  
materials will be for sale.

· Bring and Buy Table—to sell  
unwanted resources phone  
Michelle, 292-5868. All items  
should be marked clearly with the  
price.

### Contact:

Clevedon Country Home  
Educators, 38 North Rd,  
Clevedon,

RD 2, Papakura

Christine: [The\\_Whettons@xtra.](mailto:The_Whettons@xtra.co.nz)

[co.nz](mailto:co.nz)

ph 292-8454

Mary: [mmickne@paradise.net.nz](mailto:mmickne@paradise.net.nz)

ph 267-2382

## Wellington Area Workshop

Venue: Porirua

Dates: 22 & 23 February

Friday evening 22 February  
7:30 pm

“A Vision For The Future”

This will have a Christian flavour  
to it -- Craig Smith

Saturday 23 February

9:30 - 10:30

“Avoiding Burnout” -- Craig and  
Barbara Smith

10.30 - 11:00 Morning tea

11:00 - 12:30

Two electives:

“Getting Started”

-- Craig Smith

“Classical Home Education”

-- Barbara Smith

12:30 - 14:00

Lunch time — quite long so  
people can talk to others who  
will be organised to talk  
informally on what they use to  
teach maths and reading. They  
will have resource samples with  
them. This time also gives people  
opportunity to change over  
parents to attend the afternoon  
session.

14:00 - 15:30

Three electives:

“Home Educating Through  
Secondary and Preparing For  
Tertiary Education and The  
Workforce”

— C. & B. Smith

“Use of Internet & Computers”

-- Phil Astley and

Julie Ward

“Five in a Row”

-- Leanne Morris

15:30 - 16:30

Panel of ex home educators now  
out in the world/workforce/  
tertiary study etc

16:30

afternoon tea, tidy up and home

For more information and  
registration:

**Jocelyn Young**

ph. (04) 237-7590

fax. (04) 237-7044

[pyoung@clear.net.nz](mailto:pyoung@clear.net.nz)

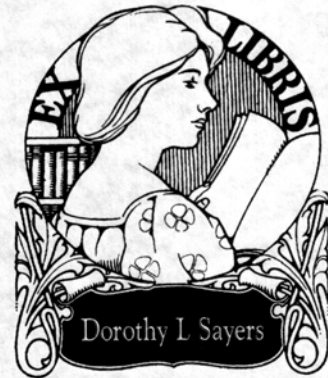
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