

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 58

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Multiplied Benefits of

A study released last month by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research reveals an incredibly easy way to lift significantly the lowest-decile school children's reading scores, to improve their reading habits and attitudes on a continuous basis over time and to see the benefits extend to the children's extended families.

What kind of programme could do such things? It must be very technologically-intensive, require a lot of set up costs and training as well as on-going professional development. And it probably costs a packet.

The programme's been going for seven years and has 78,000 students. The report says "The deep and lasting impact" of the programme on each of the students is "inestimable".

So what's the deal. Are you ready for it? You simply give a child a couple of books a year. We're not talking rocket science here; this is easy. It is the Duffy Books in Homes programme, started by author Alan Duff (a member of the private sector of society, as opposed to the public or civil servants crowd). Chalk another one up for private enterprise.

Twice a year, children get to choose a book of their own to take home from a list of about 50. According to principal Doreen O'Sullivan of St Anne's School in Newtown, Wellington, as soon as the books arrive at the school "there is this deathly hush that descends over the whole school when they rush back to their classes and start reading. It is quite magical really."¹

Let us note a couple of things: the scheme was started by a private individual motivated by a privately held concern for the welfare of children in what are generally perceived to be lower socio-economic situations. It is a scheme wherein the students choose their own books rather than having them chosen for them. It is a scheme wherein the students individually own the books, rather than dip into a communal collection such as a library.

Contrast the simple aspects of this

scheme with its now-proven track record of improvement with the thinking of John Dewey, the most influential educator of the 20th century, who has greatly shaped the schooling system we have today with its alarming track record of increasing failure rates. From his base at the University of Chicago and then Columbia University, Dewey fashioned his own social philosophy of education, which held that the mind is not really the property of the individual but of humanity, which means the collective or the state. He urged that the goal of education be to adapt the child to the group rather than to learn knowledge and skills. Dewey was blunt in identifying high literacy as a chief factor opposing his new philosophy. He called it a

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Computer Games Stunt Brain Growth

Children who play computer games for hours on end risk stunted brain growth and a loss of self-control. A study found thought processes required by computer games were too simple to stimulate crucial areas of the brain, leading to underdevelopment and consequent behavioural problems such as violence. Professor Ryuta Kawashima, of Japan's Tohoku University, said the greatest threat from computer games was not their tendency to arouse aggression, as previously thought, but the lack of mental stimulation they provided.

His team measured the brain activity of hundreds of teenagers while they played a computer game and compared it to another group doing arithmetic. They said results showed that, unlike the

maths exercise, the computer game did not stimulate the brain's frontal lobe, which plays an important role in the repression of antisocial impulses and is associated with memory, learning and emotion. A lack of stimulation in this area before age 20 prevented neurones from thickening and connecting, thus impairing the brain's ability to control impulses such as violence and aggression.

Dr Tonmoy Sharma, of the Institute of Psychiatry, said Professor Kawashima's theory was backed by other studies.

"If computer games are the sole or main source of stimulation over a prolonged period of time when the brain is developing, this could result in an under-developed

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

“perversion” to attach great importance to “the predominance of learning to read in early school life.” He brought a de-emphasizing of literacy skills in favour of his brand of social skills.²

Dewey’s success in selling his philosophy to the state schooling systems of the Western world explains why the centuries old proven method of teaching reading by phonics went out of fashion among state-trained teachers a generation or two ago. It is to the credit of some within the academic community who never abandoned phonics and who even recently managed to convince a Parliamentary Select Committee to recommend its re-introduction and re-emphasis.

While the success of the Duffy Books in Homes programme is encouraging, it is merely a pointer to vastly under-utilised family-based practice which has produced voracious, comprehending, demanding and discerning readers for centuries: parents reading to their own children 20 minutes every day.

Study after study from reading researchers confirms a litany of benefits: reading to children strengthens the parent-child bonds while building up a reservoir of pleasant, anchor-like identity-building family-based memories in the children’s hearts; it builds vocabulary and background knowledge and establishes the reading-writing connection; it exposes children to a wealth of experiences outside their own; it stimulates imagination, stretches attention spans, nourishes emotional development, encourages compassion, reshapes negative attitudes to positive ones; it provides many opportunities for parents and children to springboard into discussions about life’s many thorny and weighty issues; it can be used to whet and develop the children’s appetite for quality classical-type literature; and it introduces textures and nuances of the English language rarely heard on TV sitcoms. And reading aloud is, in essence, an advertisement for learning to read. Could it be that many have concentrated so hard on teaching children *how* to read they have forgotten to teach them to *want* to read?

So how can parents improve their children’s reading skills by simply reading to them? Try establishing a family routine, a tradition, of turning off the TV for 20 minutes before bedtime and reading a fun, exciting book. Parents must not think to themselves how boring it would be to read something at an eight-year-old reading level. Why? Because eight-year-olds generally have a *listening* level far above their own reading level. Stretch them (and maybe yourself as well) by reading Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* in the original

older-English version; or *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Heidi*, *Hound of the Baskervilles* or any of hundreds of similar books which have riveted children’s interest for generations.

Sitting comfortably with your children around you (they may be cuddled close or quietly drawing or playing with blocks or even doing the dishes) is a fantastic way for a frazzled-feeling home education mum to calm the nerves and collect her thoughts while still engaging the children in an effective teaching strategy.

Dads especially can capitalise on those most impressionable minutes before their children drop off to sleep. Sure, you think it is wimpish to read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or *Little House on the Prairie* when there is rugby on Sky. But men, listen, you can have it all! You can read a bit of *Uncle Tom* to the children at their bedtime, and then -- I know it sounds incredible -- on the very same night you can still watch the rugby as well!

Notes:

1. *The Dominion*, 26 March 2002, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1103,1144866a11,FF.html>
2. Schlafly, Phyllis, “The Real Book Banners: All books are banned for those who cannot read”, *The New American*, 4 October 1985, p. 38.

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

frontal lobe and the behavioural problems associated with this,” Sharma said. “Computer games do not lead to brain development because they simply require the repetition of simple actions and have more to do with developing quick reflexes than carrying out more mentally challenging activities such as forward planning or analysis. Teaching children to play more demanding games such as chess would be much better than buying them a computer game, although probably not quite as welcome.”

(Continued on page 3: **Brain**)

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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Contact:

Sandy Liddicoat
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email: liddfam@maxnet.co.nz

(Continued from page 2: **Brain**)

Stimulation of the frontal lobe was important in the production of the chemical serotonin, used by the brain to repress impulses. Sharma said when this area of the brain was not stimulated, serotonin levels fell, and a person's ability to control their behaviour was reduced.

Kawashima's study also found that reading aloud was effective at stimulating the frontal lobe.

(*Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 2001, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0108/26/national/national10>.)

Computers Don't Deliver

Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom is a 250-page book by Larry Cuban, published by Harvard University Press (ISBN 0-674-00602-X). The author takes a close look at how new technologies are being used in schools and considers whether the investment in hardware has paid off in improved classroom learning. He provides evidence from well equipped classrooms in the Silicon Valley that outfitting schools with networked computers does not work the kind of miracles school reformers and vendors claim.

What makes Cuban's findings especially noteworthy is the fact that the two high schools and the university being studied have taken special efforts to support the use of new technologies. There is also an historical perspective which lends strength to the argument, for this is not the first technology Cuban has studied that failed to deliver the goods promised by vendors and cheerleaders. He has traced the failures of earlier efforts such as instructional TV.

It would seem that the personal one-to-one tutoring or mentoring practices possible in the typical home education situation are still very hard to beat.

Less is More

What do you make of the fact that you can't go to school in Sweden until you are 7 years old? The reason the unsentimental Swedes have wiped out what would be first and second grades here [in the U.S.A.] is that they don't want to pay the large social bill that quickly comes due when boys and girls are ripped away from their best teachers at home too early.

It just isn't worth the price, say the Swedes, to provide jobs for teachers and therapists if the result is sick, incomplete kids who can't be put back together again very easily. The entire Swedish school sequence isn't 12 years, either -- it's nine. Less schooling, not more. The direct savings of such a step in the US would be \$75-100 billion, a lot of unrefinanced home mortgages, a lot of time freed up with which to seek an education.

Who was it that decided to force your attention onto Japan instead of Sweden? Japan with its long school year and state compulsion, instead of Sweden with its short school year, short school sequence, and free choice where your kid is schooled? Who decided you should know about Japan and not Hong Kong, an Asian neighbour with a short school year that outperforms Japan across the board in math and science? Whose interests are served by hiding that from you?

One of the principal reasons we got into the mess we're in is that we allowed schooling to become a very profitable monopoly [the Integration Act could well capture all schools eventually], guaranteed its customers by the police power of the state [compulsory attendance laws]. Systematic schooling attracts increased investment only when it does poorly [witness our never-ending line-up of new school

programmes to fix some problem or other], and since there are no penalties at all for such performance [who is held responsible for illiterate 16-year-olds who were compelled to attend schools for 10 years? — it's not the schools], the temptation not to do well is overwhelming.

(From *The Public School Nightmare: Why fix a system designed to destroy individual thought?* by John Taylor Gatto.)

Time with Teens Essential

A major study by Professor Robert Blum, professor of paediatrics and adolescent health at the University of Minnesota, reveals that parents who fail to find enough time for their children put their teenagers at risk of problems including drug use and teenage pregnancies. In addition, teenagers working more than 20 hours a week part-time were also more at risk of drug and alcohol use and early sex.

The study of 12,000 American high-school students has exploded the myth that single mothers struggling to control their offspring are to blame for juvenile delinquency and suggests that workaholic or distant parents with no time to listen to older children pose a greater threat.

Teenagers who felt emotionally "connected" to at least one parent were up to a third less likely to show some types of problem behaviour. Blum said that cramming teenagers' lives with joint family outings did not help. Instead parents should physically supervise free time -- a strategy effective in preventing drug and alcohol use more than other problems -- and make themselves available at the four key times of the day: early mornings, immediately after school, evening meal and bedtime. According to Blum, if there was any key time during the day, the evening meal was it.

"It's not about going to the football match or to the shopping

mall with them," said Blum. "Know the names of your kids' friends, know who their parents are and speak with them, know your children's teachers. Be available when they need to talk, don't hesitate to talk to them even when you think they're not listening -- and, when you are talking, turn off the television."

In the study, schoolchildren between 12 and 18 answered questions testing connection to parents. The students have been tracked over six years. Results so far showed family connection was "powerfully" linked to a lower risk of problem behaviour.

(From *Workaholic parents cause delinquency* by Gaby Hinsliff, Sunday Observer (UK), 14 April 2002, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,5500,684708,00.html>)

Gifted Going Down the Gurgler?

Gifted and talented children must be identified and given teaching and learning experiences appropriate to their needs, says Michael Townsend, associate professor in educational psychology, with research interests in gifted education, at the University of Auckland.

There are, on average, three to four gifted children in every classroom in the country. They face a bleak educational future, underachieving and unchallenged by a general curriculum and a lock-step school system.

The Working Party on Gifted Education, in its recent report to the Minister of Education, highlights the problem and suggests some answers. Put simply, exceptional children need exceptional treatment, with teaching and learning experiences appropriate to their needs. We already nurture the physically gifted, i.e., potential All Blacks. Surely we need to do the same for the intellectually exceptional.

As many as 15 per cent of preschoolers and school students have the capacity to perform at a level significantly beyond others of the same age. Such gifted children learn faster and better than their classmates and often think differently.

School is often boring and frustrating for them, leading to lower motivation to achieve. Some children even deliberately underachieve in order to gain acceptance from their less able schoolmates. Many eventually drop out of school.

So, what does the working party want the minister to do? The major recommendation is for legislation requiring schools to identify gifted and talented children in every ethnic, socio-economic, gender and disability group and to give them teaching and learning experiences appropriate to their needs. Such changes would require teachers to give these children more time and support. Let's see: they want gifted children to be identified as such, given more time and given revved up teaching and learning experiences. It would appear that home educators can do this -- actually, they routinely do this -- without the need for legislation being passed.

However there have already been more than 60 years of pleading and advice from educators in previous reports to Governments. Why the hesitation?

In a word: egalitarianism. Apparently the powers that be have determined that kiwis don't like to see one group favoured over another. Concern with success for all has resulted in an unwillingness to give educational experiences to one child that are not appropriate for all, even when this dumbing down threatens the academic rigour of schools and proves harmful to the motivations and aspirations of gifted children.

This hesitation evaporates when it comes to sport, however. Gifted and talented athletes are identified early and given experiences and opportunities (including special

school provisions, school holiday training camps, sports academy assistance) to help them develop their potential. But if little Rangi or Suzie is gifted in cultural, creative or intellectual pursuits, it would appear that private tutoring -- such as that available in the home-based educational environment -- is their best option for reaching maximum potential.¹

This has in fact been known for quite a few years now. Back in 1960 Harold G. McCurdy examined "The childhood pattern of genius" in a study supported by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D.C. In summary, McCurdy wrote, "The typical developmental pattern includes as important aspects: (a) a high degree of attention focused upon the child by parents and other adults, expressed in intensive educational measures and, usually, abundant love; (b) isolation from other children, especially outside the family; and (c) a rich efflorescence of fantasy as a reaction to the preceding conditions. It might be remarked that the mass education of our public school system is, in its way, a vast experiment on the effect of reducing all three factors to a minimum; accordingly, it should tend to suppress the occurrence of genius."²

Notes:

1. Facts in the foregoing extracted from "Dialogue: Clever kids need help to reach their full potential", *NZ Herald*, 4 March 2002, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=1090604>
2. Quoted in Doctoral thesis of Brian D. Ray, President, National Home Education Research Institute, Seattle, Washington, 29 July 1986.

Drugs for Pleasure

A survey of 15,000 children aged 14 and 15 was conducted by the UK Schools Health Education Unit. The commonly used drugs were cannabis, solvents and amphetamines. The Unit found that it was *low* self-esteem kids who were the experimental users and

high self-esteem kids who were the more committed users. Up to 27% of young people with high self-esteem had used illicit substances compared with 20% of their less self-confident peers.

This has implications for home educators as well as for all parents, for it contradicts the conventional wisdom that drug-taking is more prevalent among anxious or insecure youth looking for an escape. Heather Ashton, professor of pharmacology at Newcastle University, supported the above findings with her own studies and in addition found the pursuit of pleasure rather than coping with anxiety or stress to be the prevalent motivator among drug-taking young people. Either peer pressure or the hedonistic tendencies of society at large — or both — are enough for many of our youth to pursue activities which they know are both illegal and dangerous.

(Facts from "UK survey blows some myths about youth drug taking", 25 March 2002, <http://www.theschooldaily.com/articleView.asp?articlePK=11800>)

Abuse Beyond Belief

Six months before seven former senior Taradale High School students held a classmate down and sexually violated him, the victim spoke the following to about 100 fellow students at the school's senior speech contest:

"For years I have been stereotyped as a typical 'nerd': tall, skinny, wears glasses, reads a lot, has a quest for knowledge and is not very sports-oriented.

"I used to hate going to school on some days, as the teasing got worse and worse. I never really had close friends as I went to a town school and lived in the country . . . so I began to focus on other things and expand my mind and learn new and interesting things."

When he thought his "track of hurdles would never end", he started at a new school, but the bullying got worse. "Suicide was a frequent thought. The thought of ending it all was quite frequent after being badly bullied by my

peers, but I didn't carry it out for the thought of hurting my family.

"The feeling of being worthless and not fitting in, often for stupid reasons, like not playing rugby or my being tidy and well-dressed, was quite strong. The constant bullying and abuse got too much, and I left the college in June 87."

His school years have been a heart-wrenching nightmare for the boy and his family, apart from 3½ years when he was at home studying with the Correspondence School, gaining SC and other qualifications. "But all the qualifications in the world cannot compare to the feeling of being with others and of companionship with others your own age."

Said his father: "I don't know how many pairs of broken glasses we went through. He was being punched all the time, his head banged against the wall . . . they'd take his pie and spit on it."

In 2001 he wanted a fresh start and went to Taradale High School. He was nervous as the first term approached, but once he had settled in and met fellow seventh-formers, his life changed. "I began to develop something I have never really had, a social life with teens . . . I have been welcomed into Taradale as an individual and accepted for my personal qualities." So he said then. Little did he know what was coming. His father says he was targeted by the so-called elite male Taradale students for having the manners to open doors for girls and standing up to greet adults.

(From www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1103,1178749a1938,FF and www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1103,1178746a1938,FF)

School "socialisation" is overpowering: knowing how bad it was he actually came back for more. *Seven* of his school "friends", Taradale's finest, savagely betrayed him. It seems schools can be dangerous for decent people.

Coming Events

May 10/12:

Above Rubies camp, Woodend, Christchurch

Contact: Sue, Ph: (03) 319-2886
email:ianpage@actrix.co.nz. Lenore Williams is taking electives on Home Education

May 17/19:

Above Rubies camp, Waihola, Otago

Contact: Julie, Ph: (03) 417-7091
email: s.j.wiel@xtra.co.nz.
Katie Aldridge is taking electives on Home Education

May 24/26:

**H.E.A.R.T.
(Home Educators
Annual Retreat)
Matamata**

Contact: Chris, Ph: (07) 883-2771
email: abernethy.clan@xtra.co.nz

June 7/9:

Above Rubies camp, Marton

Contact: Toni, Ph: (06) 328-5757
email: toni_rentoul@hotmail.com.

Barbara Smith is taking electives on Home Education

June 15:

**Rotorua
Home Education
Workshop**

Venue: St Johns Presbyterian Church hall

Cost: \$10.00 for day or \$3.00 per session paid by 8 June

Contact: Ph: Heidi (07) 349-3355
email: mark.heidi@xtra.co.nz

Programme

9:30-10:30 "Avoiding Burnout"

10:30-11:00 Morning tea.

11:00-12:30 2 Electives:

** "Home Education: Getting things into perspective" -- What's it all about; Schooling verses education; Character training; Can I do this: parents qualifications; Tutoring/Mentoring; Where is this going: developing vision

** "Training Our Children's Minds" -- the first stage of a classical education, no matter what curriculum you are using or not using.

12:30-14:00 Lunch Time. Talking freely with people, displays etc.

14:00-15:30 "Home Educating Through Secondary and Preparing For Tertiary Education and the Workforce"

15:30-16:30 Question and answer session

Break.

7:30-9:00 Separate meeting for Christian Home Educators at 110 Springfield Road, Rotorua. "Fathers Role and a Vision for the Future"

July 20:

**Wanganui
Home Educators
Workshop**

Venue: Central Baptist Church
cnr Wicksteed & Dublin Streets

Cost: \$10.00 person/couple

Ctc: Marice, Ph: (06) 345-3660
email: jmmmhill@xtra.co.nz

Programme

9:30-10:30 "Avoiding Burnout"

10:30-11:00 Morning tea

11:00-12:30 2 Electives:

** "Getting Started" Looking at both starting at 5-6years and taking older children out of school

** "Training Our Children's Minds" -- the first stage of a classical education, no matter what curriculum you are using or not using.

12:30-14:00 Lunch Time. Talking freely with people, displays etc.

14:00-15:30 "Home Educating Through Secondary and Preparing For Tertiary Education and the Workforce"

15:30-16:30 Question and answer session including a section on the Fathers Role in Home Education

August 3:

**Palmerston North
Home Education
Workshop**

Contact: Ph: (06) 357-4399

email: hedf@xtra.co.nz

August 10:

**Shore
Home Educators
Workshop**

Venue: Rawene Centre, 31

Rawene Rd., Birkenhead, North Shore City (4 minutes north of the bridge.)

Cost: \$35 per couple, \$30 individual, teens accompanying parents free. Register EARLY to ensure your choice of sessions (some have limited numbers) and to receive a free catalogue (Elijah or Rainbow Resource) and free theme pen. Morning and afternoon tea provided.

Contact: Denise, (09) 479-1488 or Christine, (09) 483-6991

info@shenetwork.org or from end of May:

shorehomeeducators@hotmail.com
www.shenetwork.org

Programme

3 session times; 18 workshop topics to choose from. Speakers include Craig & Barbara Smith, Helen Pearson, Phil Astley, Rob Williamson. Large range of resources available to purchase.

September 7:

**THEN Home
Educators Conference
Hamilton**

Venue: Gateway Christian Centre

Contact: Vicky, Ph (07) 847-8016

or Peter, Ph (07) 847-2595

email: ixoye@paradise.net.nz

October 14-19:

**Home Education
Awareness Week**

Check out what is on in your area or create something for your area during this week)

October 19:

**Palmerston North
Home Education
Workshop**

Contact: Ph: (06) 357-4399

email: hedf@xtra.co.nz

Please Note: For ALL the above, dependent infants and youth are welcomed, but there are no facilities for children.

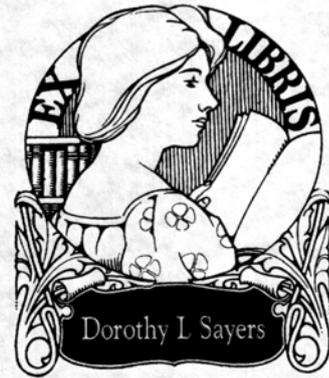
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