

System Sees Self in Sad State

Professor James Chapman, who has been with Massey University since 1980, has recently been appointed as head of its College of Education. His mission: to improve the literacy standards of the teachers Massey produces. "Research figures show that from children right through to adults, New Zealanders should be doing much better in literacy, maths and science," he said.¹ Who would question that assessment when the nation's colleges of education – we're talking tertiary institutions here – have to teach aspiring teachers reading, writing and study skills?²

Dr Elody Rathgen, head of Canterbury University's Education Department, says many teacher trainees are entering education institutions lacking the basic literacy skills to cope with academic study.² Many have a limited general knowledge and vocabulary and cannot write adequate sentences.³ This is a ground-floor literacy problem, not something complex or exotic. Yet these are proposing themselves as teachers who can teach others. "Teach them what?", one wonders.

"We have found in general, that first-year [college of education trainee] failures are due either to a lack of understanding of course content or more often, that students' work is unintelligible," Dr Rathgen said.³

Dr Rathgen believes the current three-year teacher education programme isn't long enough. She maintains four years would be better, "because at the moment, a number of students are entering

the course with literacy skills which are below what is needed for academic study,"² The question arises: exactly what, then, has been going on academically over the previous eleven or more years that these students have been attending compulsory schooling? Has this not been long enough already to teach the three Rs?

One must wonder about the overall quality of teachers if so many start out with less than sterling academic track records. *The*

School Daily columnist Alan Cooper says once they've landed a teaching job, it is common for teachers to stagnate. He goes on to say that "teaching is perhaps the only profession that does not require any formal professional development beyond certification.... despite the huge explosion of knowledge about how humans learn."⁴

Three years is definitely not seen as long enough now that much of that time is used in simply getting applicants' basic literacy skills up to speed. It wasn't any respected and researched educational understanding that reduced Canterbury's normally four year course to three back in 1999 anyway: it was competition with Auckland

(Continued on page 2: System)

Private Education in Africa and India

Schoolboy Worlanyo makes his way down filthy streets in Accra, Ghana, walking past the run-down exterior of the government school, where a few children forlornly wait for the doors to be unlocked. The government school teachers won't be there for a few hours, some not at all today, or any day.

Worlanyo instead enters the crowded playground of De Youngster's International School. The elderly Mr A.K. De Youngster started from scratch in 1980 with 36 children in a downstairs room in his house. Now, 22 years later, his chain of private schools has four branches, with 3,400 pupils. The fees are £30 per term — affordable for many of the poor — and to the many who can't afford that he offers free scholarships.

"The Americans wouldn't help

me," he smiles, "so I learnt to help myself." And now 45% of Ghanaian children go to private school in Accra, "helping themselves".

Borama, a city of 100,000 souls in Somaliland, has no water supply (donkey carts deliver water in leaking jerricans), no paved roads, no street lights and plenty of burnt-out tanks, remnants of its recent civil war. But it has two private schools for every government school. Ubaya-binu-Kalab school, with 1,057 students, charges monthly fees of 12,000 Somali shillings for primary and 20,000 for secondary — that's about £3 to £6 per month. Again, 165 of the students attend for free, the poor subsidising the poorest.

In the slums of Hyderabad, India, Zarina and her sisters pack their books away at lunchtime, leave

(Continued on page 2: Private)

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

University who'd just done it!² And if they think three years is a tight schedule, it is perhaps because they haven't yet caught up with Massey University's one year quick fix, which gives a person holding any undergraduate degree a certificate for both primary and secondary teaching.

Karen Johansen, Principal of Gisborne Girls High School, has a sociological explanation for these shorter training times: "Too many of this scratch-and-win, spot-prize generation expect instant rewards for very little investment."⁵

Secretary for Education Howard Fancy spoke to the NZ Principals' Federation on 28 February 2003. He reviewed the depressing statistics that show the unacceptably high number of students who do not succeed in the system; the higher-than-international-averages truancy and absenteeism levels; and the incidents of peer intimidation, bullying, physical assault and violence which are among the highest in the OECD. He also described how virtually all teachers and principals "held unreasonably low expectations of their stu-

dents", believing that failing students were failing because of their background and home. Mr Fancy suggested that perhaps the problem could instead be "a mismatch between the children's skills and instructional practice."⁶

He then mentioned an interesting bit of recent research by Russell Bishop and others which asked a number of Maori students what made the biggest difference to whether they learned or not. Quite contrary to the teachers' set attitude that certain students were pretty hopeless because of who they were and where they came from, nearly four out of five students said it was the quality of the face-to-face relationships and in-class interactions with their teachers that made the difference.⁶

Here is just another disconcerting fact about what the system does to both teachers and students. Teachers have the power and the daily opportunity to raise the game of many students by working on relationships with them and improving the interaction in class....and yet the tendency is to expect little from most and write off others completely, a very strong dem-

motivating factor. Let home educators read this well: the research said that almost 80% of even the most statistically disadvantaged students know instinctively that their academic success is tied to the positive relationship and interaction they have from significant adults. And who is more significant or has more time and opportunity to interact positively with children than their own parents?

It is good that the schooling system is seeing its own faults and hoping to do something about them. They are not the only ones who've noticed. Kip McGrath Merivale director Stuart Atkinson said

the number of children attending their after school tutoring services was increasing all the time.³ The Christchurch *Press* quotes parent Sharon Grainger, who has been taking her children to remedial mathematics classes for two years, as saying she didn't have "any faith in the education system," and, "I don't think it's meeting the standard...even basic skills aren't there any more."³ Nevertheless, she continues to send them to school. Must be for the socialisation.

Notes:

- 1.NZPA, "NZ Should Be Doing Better in Literacy - Education College Head", 27 March 2003, <http://stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,2361359a7694,00.html>
- 2.NZPA, "Teacher Trainees Struggling with Literacy Requirements", 20 March 2003, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,2344327a11,00.html>
- 3.*The Press*, "Teacher Training 'Inadequate' - Report", 21 March 2003, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,2345353a11,00.html>
- 4."How Complicated School and Teaching Is" (sic), 7 October 2002, <http://www.theschooldaily.com/articleView.asp?articlePK=16070>, Alan Cooper, acooper@clear.net.nz
- 5.NZ Herald, "Principals Reflect on Testing Times", 9 December 2002, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3008410>
- 6.NZ Principals' Federation Moot, <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=8133&data=1>

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

Peace High School and walk home practising their English together, the eldest coaching the youngest, who in turn teaches their mother. The journey takes them past St John's High School on one corner, Modern High School on another; past New Convent School newly opened in the home of the proprietor, and past St Angel's School in a converted chicken farm — all private schools in the slums.

There is a government school nearby, where the children can get free rice at lunchtime, free books, and, of course, free tuition. But parents who care would not dream

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

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. TEACH Bulletin is available for a subscription of \$16 per year for 11 issues (none in December) or two years for \$30.

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Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and reject not your mother's teaching.
— Proverbs 1:8

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Contact:

Chrissy Miller
Ph. (09) 428-0668
Auckland

(Continued from page 2: Private)

of sending their children there. "We want teachers who teach, not who get our children to do domestic chores," one veiled mother tells me. So parents pay their £1.50 per month, scrimping and saving to find the rupees.

Such parents now make up the majority in Hyderabad. Official figures show that 61% of all students are enrolled in the private unaided sector, and these figures are likely to overestimate the numbers in government schools (because of corrupt over-reporting) and underestimate the numbers in the private sector (because many such schools are unrecognized, therefore not noticed).

In Africa and Asia the poor know that government schools won't serve their needs. But they do not sit idly by, dispossessed and disfranchised — adjectives used by the liberal elite to describe the poor — acquiescent in their government's failure. Instead they vote with their feet, desert the state schools and move their children to private schools set up by educational entrepreneurs to cater for their needs.

The startling thing is that these schools are commercially driven and not dependent on handouts from state or philanthropy. Even charging very low fees, the schools can make a healthy profit, which, as in any good business, is ploughed back into the school. Part of the reason they can afford to do this is that they pay teachers perhaps a quarter of what they could get in the government schools, but the jobs are not available because the teaching unions have pushed up wages beyond any reasonable level.

What is the problem in state schools? The Probe Report, sponsored by the Indian government, put it succinctly: accountability. Private schools, the report said, were successful because they were more accountable. "The teachers are accountable to the manager (who can fire them) and, through him or her, to the parents (who can withdraw their children)." There is no such accountability in government schools, and "this contrast is perceived with crystal clarity by the vast majority of parents".

If the evidence from India and Africa reveals that the poorest worldwide are achieving better educational outcomes without the state, then this should inspire and buttress appeals for increased school choice in rich countries. It also raises anew the question: what on earth is government doing in education at all?

(Condensed from *The Spectator* (UK), "A Lesson from the Third World" by James Tooley, 25 January 2003, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/article.php3?table=old§ion=current&issue=2003-01-25&id=2690&searchText>)

The Social Disaster Called Public School

The historian Gary North made some interesting comments about the US public schools in his Institute of Christian Economics email newsletter of October 23, 2002:

“Government schools are the primary cause of mind-altering drug addiction in America. They are also the primary initial distribution centers. The public schools have created the present-oriented defeatist mindset that characterizes the drug addict. This mindset involves loss of faith in binding moral law, loss of faith in God, loss of faith in the possibility of redemption, loss of faith in the day of final judgment, and loss of faith in personal responsibility. Lose these, and you also lose faith in life’s meaning. Drugs are an easy sell to people who have abandoned faith in life’s meaning. To win the war on drugs we must win the war on tax-funded education.”

John Taylor Gatto comes at the problem of our meretricious and hyper-engorged government school system in a different way. As an ex-teacher himself, he emphasizes the aspect of sheer academic failure. A study of his website (www.johntaylorgatto.com) will, I think, open almost anyone’s eyes, anyone, that is, who hasn’t fiercely willed them to stay shut.

I fear that condition is, however, where most parents find themselves: in a self-willed blindness. Because to know that you are consigning your children to a hell hole seven or so hours a day is a bit unsettling if your self-esteem, your precious amour proper, requires that you see yourselves as Great Parents with Great Kids.

I regret to say I am related to a number of such people. They have my sympathy. I really do not enjoy disturbing their illusions. My gentle suggestions have been brushed aside often enough. And I can’t go past the level of gentle suggestions or ironic comments or subtle hints, etc. I long ago adopted as a guiding maxim this jingle: “Whoever is convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

To do anything meaningful about the school situation in those cases where there is not enough money for a good private school, or no such school within range, means home schooling. That means mama has to stay home, papa has to add some more duties to the already full load he will be carrying as sole breadwinner. A *drag* big-time. So look away and turn up the volume on the TV.

(Condensed from LewRockwell.com, “The Really Big Social Disaster Called ‘School’”, by Tom White, 18 January 2003, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/white/white25.html>. Contact Tom at tom.w@usa.net)

NZ public schools may not all be as bad yet, but history has shown that we generally are not far behind. Continue to work on your friends and relations with young children.

Volunteering Worthwhile

One of the most frustrating things that can happen to a new graduate when it comes to employment is a lack of experience. But how do you get this experience if no one is willing to give you a chance?

Many organisations in Palmerston North (as in other centres — Ed.) need volunteers. The only thing they really ask for is enthusiasm, an open mind and a willingness to learn.

Training is given either on the job or through internal training programmes. References are made available to students in the same way paying employers provide them.

Youthline is a referral and information phone service. The main issues a volunteer can expect to encounter include relationship troubles and drug and alcohol problems.

The IHC offers support services for the intellectually disabled. Volunteers may choose areas they want to work in and how much they want to do.

The RSPCA is an ideal introduction for students wanting to gain animal-handling experience. Volunteers are needed to perform duties such as cleaning, feeding and grooming animals. Students can give as much or little time as they choose. A commitment to the hours once they have been agreed on is important, though.

Adult Literacy Palmerston North provides one-on-one tuition, computer clinics for novices, and Work and Income programmes for literacy. Prospective volunteers, who must complete the NZQA tutor training, can choose to tutor clients in spelling, reading, writing, numeracy and computers. Volunteers can work on committees and in public relations and gain policy and governance experience.

Students considering Foodbank for work experience can expect to become multi-skilled. Volunteers can choose from a range of services, including administration duties through to collecting and packing donations. Students interested in research are able to work with experienced staff on the Poverty Indicator Reports.

The Brain Injury Association is looking for volunteers with patience, empathy and good people skills. Volunteers from all disciplines are welcome and anyone with a flair for web design would be gratefully received.

The personal gain from working with community groups comes in many forms. Students volunteering can expect to grow personally and professionally. Students who volunteer will develop skills in time management, strategic planning, group participation and facilitation, interpersonal communication and resource management; knowledge of employment laws; and confidence, to name a few.

A comprehensive list of local organisations seeking volunteers can be found at your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

(Condensed from *Manawatu Evening Standard* flier, “Volunteering Can Be Worthwhile”, February 2003, p.5.)

The System Grinds Them Down

The following was written by an unnamed Year 12 student in 2002 who subsequently dropped out of school entirely.

“It is a well known and accepted fact that a majority of students do not enjoy school, and would choose not to go if the decision was up to them.

“But everyone knows that they are there to learn and achieve qualifications that will earn them a place in the workforce and an income. We rely on the school system to educate children to this level, and without questioning the system, we trust it to do just that.

“School is not a good environment to learn in and does not cater for all learning styles. It only caters for those that are good at memorisation and those with linguistic and logical-mathematical or analytical intelligence. Others struggle and are forced to try and learn the same way. It’s like telling everyone they must wear a size ten shoe regardless of the fact it does not fit most.

“Schools have been working the same way for over 35 years, and for this reason, nobody stops to think that they may be teaching badly.

“Alistair Mant describes in his book *Intelligent Leadership* the characteristics of ten highly successful business leaders in Australia. None of them was successful at school.

“Subject choices are a major part of a student’s life. Five to six subjects must be chosen in order to fill the timetable, regardless of whether the student requires or is interested in the subject. If this subject was for a one hour period, five days a week and 35 weeks in a year, then 175 hours are put into a subject that is useless to the student. This is just for one subject. Perhaps these hours could be better spent with a subject of more relevance to the student’s future career choice, if one has been made.

“The major problem is tradition and the slow movement of changing it.

As technology advances and new jobs appear, schools will remain the same, frozen in time, becoming irrelevant and useless for educating a workforce of the future.”¹

New research from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed 35% of New Zealand 15-year-olds say school is a place they don’t want to go. The figure matches the results of 15-year-olds from the US, Belgium, Canada, France and Hungary.

The survey also showed about 60% of New Zealand 15-year-olds feel bored at school. A lack of interest at school is one of the reasons for poorer student performances.²

So what do bored students do? Make their own action. A school property manager spoke of students arriving at school with screwdrivers and socket sets ready to cause havoc. Doors being unscrewed from their hinges, desk tops removed, locks picked, and shoe “burn marks” made in floor coverings were standard fare. Aorangi Mobile Locksmith’s Malcolm Munro said he was even being called into primary schools to deal with what he described as “mindless vandalism” involving locks, not to mention the really cheeky attitude some quite young students had towards him when he was working at schools.

“Kids think they have all the rights, and no one else does,” the school property manager said of the change in student’s attitudes he has noticed in recent years. He spoke of high school students who would argue they had not caused property damage even when he had caught them in the act. He also reckoned peers pulled some students into such activities.³

With motivation at rock-bottom property is not the only casualty. A research project by Louise Taylor, Kelly de Lambert and Nicky Ellen, senior lecturers at the Christchurch College of Education School of Business, found cheating was rampant. Of 381 students surveyed from Canterbury and Lincoln universities, and the

Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, 80% admitted cheating. 63% admitted at least one serious incident of cheating such as copying from another student during a test, falsifying research, paying someone to do their assignments or impersonating another student in an exam.

“We knew it was happening anecdotally, and we’d had experience of it with our own teaching, but when I first pulled the statistics out, we were shocked,” Ms de Lambert said.

This is even more shocking: students commonly believed their behaviour was OK. When asked why they had cheated, most said they did not think it was wrong or had no reason.

Yet despite rampant cheating by tertiary students, institutions reported only low levels of dishonesty. Fourteen universities and polytechnics reported a total of 342 allegations of academic dishonesty in the 2001 academic year – accounting for only 0.2% of their student population. Some institutions with large numbers of students reported no cheating at all. Perhaps it is not the university’s job to police what are supposedly adult students. But then one would think the credibility of the degrees they award is really on the line when this amount of cheating is going on. It appears their credibility is as good – or just as bad – as the next guy. This same research paper said the high level of cheating uncovered is in line with overseas studies that have found as many as 86% of students cheat.⁴

Notes:

1. *The School Daily*, “Education - A Link To The Past”, 3 October 2002, <http://www.theschooldaily.com/articleView.asp?articlePK=16049>
2. *Waikato Times*, “School’s Boring: Teens”, 23 November 2002, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,2119650a11,00.html>
3. *Timaru Herald*, “Students Arriving at School Ready to Cause Havoc”, 29 August 2002, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/timaruherald/0,2106,2034787a6010,00.html>
4. *The Press*, “Cheats Thrive – Research”, 23 September 2002, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1478,2057624a6530,00.html>

Coming Events

4, 5 & 6 April 2003

The Mainland Home Education Conference

Venue: Middleton Grange School,
50 Acacia Avenue, Riccarton,
Christchurch.

Cost: \$45.00 pp or \$60.00 per couple for the weekend.

\$30.00 pp or \$40.00 per couple for
Fri/Saturday or Fri/Sunday

Saturday evening meal included

\$10.00 penalty incurred for registrations received after 1 March.

Billets available for the weekend.

Teenagers attending with their parents are free, if staying for Saturday evening dinner a surcharge of \$6.00 applies

Contact: CHEInc@free.net.nz,
Website www.che.org.nz (link from here) or ph. (03) 347-7371.

Programme

Friday 4 April

6.00pm Registration and resources open for sale

7.00pm Keynote speaker: Craig Smith - Home Education: Getting Things Into Perspective

Supper

Saturday 5 April

8.30am Registration and resources open for sale

9.30am Welcome and morning tea

10.00am Session One - 4 choices:

**Successful Creative Writing - Val Robb

**Learning from the Masters: Shakespeare, Art Appreciation, and Poetry - Denise Walmsley

**Work of Art - Maree Grant

**Research Skills - Kerry Lyford

12 noon Lunch - resources open for sale

1.00pm Session two - 4 choices:

**Helping Your Child Improve Their Writing - Val Robb

**Defining and Refining Your Vision - Denise Walmsley

**Looking After Yourself - Margie Hulse

**Montessori - Patricia Polderman-Charles

2.30pm Afternoon Tea

3.00pm Session Three - 4 choices:

**Secondary and Beyond - Craig Smith

**Musical Notes - Heather Parsonson

**Rudolph Steiner - Karen and Fraser Palmer-Hesketh

**Getting Started - Barbara Smith

4.30pm Resources open for sale

5.00pm Dinner

6.30pm Session Four - 3 choices:

**Been There Done That: Ask us How - Parents and Young Adult panel

**Optimising your child's brain potential - Christine Ward;

**Developing Your Own Curriculum - Craig Smith

8.30pm Conclude for the night

Sunday 6 April

8.30am Registrations and resources open for sale

9.30am Welcome and morning tea

10.00am Session Five - 4 choices:

**The Three Rs - Lennie Harrison

**Games - Di Brown

**Fathers and Home Education - Dean McLennan

**Happy Snappy Unit Studies - Jennifer Pope

12 noon Lunch - resources open for sale

1.00pm Session Six - 4 choices:

**Speaking with confidence - Tecorians

**Lap Packs - Jill Hanna

**Career Guidance - Career Services (Directed at parents)

**Classical Education - Barbara Smith

2.30pm Afternoon Tea

3.00pm Session Seven - 4 choices:

**Stepping Forward With Charlotte Mason

**Unschooling

**Learning Styles - Christine Ward

**Educating children with special needs - Deraulle Hope

4.30 p.m. Conference closes

11 April 2003

Radio Rhema

A talk with Craig Smith on Home Education, 11:05-11:30am.

15-18 April 2003

The Gift of Music Family Workshop

Venue: Arahina Training Centre
457 Wellington Rd., Marton

Cost: (See Registration Form)

Contact: Ph: (06) 327-8277

Fax: (06) 327-8376

Email: info@iblp.org.nz

25 April 2003

Radio Rhema

A talk with Craig Smith on Home Education, 11:05-11:30am.

25-27 July 2003

The Annual Heart Retreat for Homeschooling Mothers

Venue: Matamata Totara Springs

Cost: To be confirmed

Contact: Sue Abernethy, abernethy.clan@xtra.co.nz or Chris Bovil, Ph: (07) 883-2771.

Come and enjoy a weekend of refreshment, encouragement and nourishment for your body and soul.

23 August 2003

South Auckland Home Educators Workshop

Venue: Papakura Baptist Church

Contact: Christine:

whettons@clear.net.nz

Keynote speaker: Don Capill

Theme: Focusing on Literature and the Arts

Why Focus on the Arts?

1. Whether we realize it or not, each of us makes daily choices in the arts: music to listen to, film to watch, new lounge décor, hairstyle to wear, garden and landscaping. Not one person is excluded, in practice, from the world of the Arts.
2. Images influence at least as much as ideas, and the Arts are about both. The Arts impact the head and the heart, consciously and unconsciously, stirring feelings, provoking thoughts and shaping behaviour.
3. Works of Art are launched for a purpose and have a moral capacity to move us upward or downward.
4. Works of Art are not neutral in the battles of good vs evil, truth vs falsehood, beauty vs ugliness. Discernment is vital.
5. Today's post-modernism emphasises style over content, feelings over reason, image over substance, personal preferences over principles, the present over the past.

Elective details to follow.

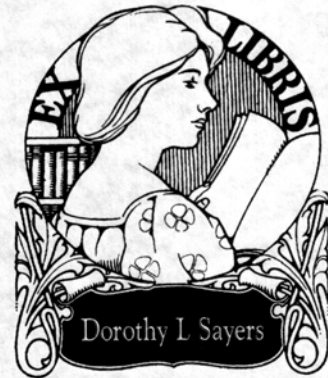
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