

NZ School Children Rank Below Bulgaria

New Zealand primary school pupils are ranked second worst at reading among English-speaking countries. Only Scotland came out worse. We fall behind the Czech Republic, Hungary and Lithuania in literacy, having slipped from first in the world in 1970 to 6th in 1991 to 13th in 2001 out of 35 countries studied as part of the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study. We now rank below such countries as Bulgaria and Latvia, even though our students had an extra year's schooling compared with most who took the test.¹

"This is disastrous," said Massey University's head of education, reading expert James Chapman. "We cannot accept that this is satisfactory at all."

Nevertheless, the scores were hailed *a success* by Education Minister Trevor Mallard.

The average reading score for New Zealand students of 529 was well above the international average of 500. About 17% of pupils were in the top 10% internationally. But that was offset by about 16% of pupils reading in the bottom 25% – one of the biggest differences in any country's scores.

Researchers also noted girls' literacy skills were much better than boys', again one of the widest variances seen.

"The gap between boys and girls is worst equal with Iran and Belize," said Professor Chapman.² The gap is surpassed only by Muslim countries, where girls score far worse than boys. Here in

New Zealand, however, it's the boys who are doing worse than the girls.¹

He blamed resistance at the Education Ministry and among teacher educators to teach a phonics-based method of reading instruction. "Not everyone is convinced by the research conducted in this area," he said.²

There are two studies in one being commented on here. About 2500 year five pupils from 156 school

took part in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001, carried out by the Massachusetts-based International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. A second group of about 1200 students from 73 schools took part in an associated 10-year Trends Study.

The 10-year Trend Study showed overall performance in reading literacy was virtually the same in 2001 as it was in 1990. Trevor Mallard said this was good because "there is a significantly higher proportion of students – 12% in 2001 – that sometimes or never speak English at home compared with 8% in 1990." The Minister also downplayed the differ-

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Top Scholars Profiled

The best year 13 students sat private New Zealand Education and Scholarship Trust (NZEST) exams in physics, chemistry, accounting, English, mathematics with statistics and mathematics with calculus. Competition was pretty tough, but top place was taken by Simon Marshall, of Onslow College in Wellington, who gained five A+ grades, including 100% in maths with calculus.

Clustered in second place were: Kelvin Peng and Yun Ho Choy, of Auckland Grammar; James McNamara, of Wellington College; and Ricky Kwok, who was dux of Hamilton's Hillcrest High School. He will study medicine next year and says he would still like time to fit in his other pursuits, which include St Johns first-aid and learning five musical instruments.

Another Hillcrest student, Te Oru Mikaere, gained the top mark in the country, 88%, in the NZEST Maori exam. The canoeing and soccer champion will put aside Maori studies next year to enter Massey University's Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree.

Akbar Ashrafi, 16, a Bangladesh-born Auckland Grammar student, puts his ranking of sixth in the scholarship exams down to lots of hard work and supportive teachers. Akbar, who was dux of Grammar, will attend Auckland Medical School next year after being accepted when he was just 15, and hopes to become a cardiac surgeon.

Peter Lau, this year's dux of Mt Roskill Grammar, scored ninth overall nationally. He was also awarded a medal for achieving

(Continued on page 2: Scholars)

(Continued from page 1: *Scholars*)

high marks in a mixture of science, maths and humanities subjects.¹

What can we home educators observe about these scholars? First, they seem to be involved in a range of things – St Johns, musical instruments, canoeing and soccer are mentioned – and not just academics. One mentioned hard work and supportive teachers. Ricky Kwok is quoted as saying, “I’d have to attribute some of my success to the excellent staff at Hillcrest as well as the environment for learning it provides. The staff there encourage you to set really high goals and that’s a great influence.” These students have high goals: careers in medicine, cardiac surgery, vet studies.

The *Herald* article mentioned some other factors: Auckland Grammar students make up 14 of the top 67 national NZEST scholars this year; almost half the scholars are of Asian or Indian decent. Peter Lau’s father, Steven, said Peter had been in the country only eight years, yet had become very proficient in English with the help of the internet and had an insatiable curiosity about things. Mr Lau said the Chinese way was not to gush over high-achieving offspring but was to afford children

“everything they need in their daily life and give them the very best education possible. Good results are good, but the more important thing is that students are committed to studying hard while they are in school and do the best they can.” This writer’s experience with Afghan refugees was to watch these young people arrive here unable to speak a word of English and within eight years go overseas representing New Zealand on trips sponsored by joint commercial and state concerns.

These young folks know all about hard work and an uncompromising focus on future goals rather than immediate pleasures. They also have total backup and encouragement – probably a fair bit of pushing as well – from their parents. It may even be permissible to point out that certain cultural groups, known for their focus on hard work and getting ahead, are consequently over-represented in the results.

The NZEST exams are administered by a charitable trust and held

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ence between the scores of boys and girls. But the difference in New Zealand was one of the largest observed and had not changed over the last 10 years.³

Professor Bill Tunmer from Massey University reckons the gap is easily explained – boys just don’t read as much as girls. They acquire basic language skills at a similar rate at first but start falling behind when, after a certain point, *vocabulary development is driven more by free reading than tuition.* (Emphasis added – Ed.)

Sandra Aikin, senior officer of teaching and learning with the Educational Institute,

says it reflects a long-standing situation, a combination of historic social factors, plain laziness, television and computer games. There was far greater acceptance of girls spending time in passive activities such as reading, said Ms Aikin. “No boy wants to be bullied or told he is a nerd, but if you aren’t reading regularly, of course you are going to be outperformed.”

Auckland University’s Professor Tom Nicholson said social attitudes would have to change to improve boys’ performance. “The old attitude of ‘boys will be boys’ isn’t on any more,” he said. If the gap continued to widen, there would be little chance of the country riding any “knowledge wave”. “If we have, say, 25% of the population struggling with literacy skills, then that is 25% less capability for this country to be one of the leaders in the world,” he said, noting that boys outnumbered girls three to one in remedial classes.⁴

Mr Mallard did point out the helpful information that both studies showed certain family factors were linked to pupils who do well. “These factors include *reading at an early age with parents or caregivers, having greater access to education resources, parents being positive about reading and students having a strong belief in their reading ability,*” Trevor Mallard said. (Emphasis added — Ed.)

A copy of the report of these studies can be found on the Ministry of Education website, www.minedu.govt.nz.⁵

Notes:

1. *Maxim Institute Real Issues No. 59*, Our kids’ reading - the best or the worst? Who’s right?, 17 April 2003, maxim@maxim.org.nz
2. *Dominion Post*, NZ kids plummet in reading survey, 10 April 2003, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/in1/print/0,1478,2392332a6000,00.html>
3. *NZ Herald*, NZ pupils score well in international reading study, 9 April 2003, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3351551>
4. *NZ Herald*, Boys’ reading skills decline further, 16 April 2003, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3401378>
5. Executive announcement, Strong international literacy results for kiwi kids, 10 April 2003, announce@ministers.govt.nz

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:

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(Continued from page 2: *Shame*)

before Bursary exams each year. This year 1530 students from 175 schools sat the exams. Home Educators can also sit these exams. About \$80,000 in grants is offered to the top scorers. Such privately run exams were established in 1989 when the State scrapped centrally run scholarship exams, but since the Ministry of Education and the NZ Qualifications Authority plan to re-introduce the national scholarship exam in 2004, the NZEST will hold its 12th and final set of exams next year. To find out more about NZEST, phone (09) 270-0480 or visit www.nzest.ac.nz.

Peter Lau went on to win the ESITO Award at the 2000 Genesis Energy National Science and Technology Fair. He was also announced as male Top Scholar in the 2002 University Bursaries examinations. Other top scholars were:

Lisa Jan McCarthy of Motueka High School in Agriculture & Horticulture; Kevin Chich-Yao Huang of Rangitoto College, Auckland in Biology; Richard FW Yu of King's College, Auckland in Chemistry; Jafar Ahmed of Mt Albert Grammar School in Economics; Victoria Mollard of Howick College, Auckland in Geography; Hazel Llewellyn Swainson of Gisborne Girls' High School in History; Yu-Chi Liu of Burnside High School, Christchurch in Maths with Calculus; Simon Grant Murphy of Palmerston North Boys' High in Maths with Statistics; Akbar N Ashrafi of Auckland Grammar School in Physics; and Deborah Lynette Simpson of Selwyn College, Auckland in Science.²

In these results we see not only that more than half are of Asian descent, acknowledging what may be cultural commitments to hard work and goal orientation, but also that four of the remaining five are girls, a probable testimony to the efforts of the feminist movement.

Notes:

1. *NZ Herald*, "Scholarship success rewards students' toil", 9 Decem-

ber 2002, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3008458>
2. *The School Daily*, "Bursary Top Scholars", 7 April 2003, <http://www.theschooldaily.com/articleView.asp?articlePK=18917>

Home Educated Welcomed to This College

Five years ago, Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi, began a concerted effort to bring home-schoolers to its campus, even though many state universities and even some private schools continue to make it difficult for home-schoolers to enrol. Now, 56% of Belhaven faculty with school-age children are home schoolers themselves, and 19% of this year's freshman class were home-schooled.

Belhaven president Dr. Roger Parrott, himself a home-schooling parent, says he understands the significance of home school education and that it is a great foundation for college-level work. He says the school offers special scholarships for home-schooled students. "We know that if they come, they're going to persist and graduate because parents are going to be involved in their education."

Located in Mississippi's capital, Belhaven was named among "America's Best Colleges for 2002" by *U.S. News and World Report* – and in *The Templeton Guide: Colleges That Encourage Character Development*, the school is recognized for leadership in the field of student character development for spiritual growth programs.

(From *Agape Press*, Christian college makes a niche for home schoolers, 19 March 2003, <http://headlines.agapepress.org/archive/3/192003e.asp>)

Home Educators in Iraq

Over the last few years, since the American Home School Legal Defence Association succeeded in passing a law in the US Congress to open up military enlistment to home educated students, many have actually joined the military service. The

HSLDA has created a list of "home school graduates" who are involved in the Iraqi conflict. There are presently 149 people listed with both men and women appearing on the list representing several branches of military service: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Check it out at: <http://www.hslda.org/HSIraq.asp>

Promise of Computer Learning not Delivering

Professor Trevor Kerry of the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside predicts that within 20 years classes will be delivered using computer technology. This would mean much of youngsters' experience would be gained second-hand, "through computer programs rather than through real life and social relationships", rendering teachers' present work conditions irrelevant. "E-mail manners will become more important than table manners," he said.

Social Issues

Distance learning and the use of video-conferencing would mean that one teacher could deliver a lesson to pupils in several schools. School buildings could be dispensed with as pupils log on at home and choose a registered teacher for whatever subject they are interested in.¹

Poorer children, however, without access to a computer at home, might be left behind in the rush into information and communication technology (ICT). The schools may not be the answer for these children, for teachers say they are worried about training, technical support and on-going funding in the government's drive to get more computers into schools. In addition educational software had to become more appealing in order that school lessons could compete with the sort of games children are used to.

Little Return on Investment

The issue of affordable technical support, according to Kate Griffin, head of Greenford High School, a large comprehensive in west London, was already acute. "The sort of people who have the skills we need are very difficult to come by. I had to advertise four times to get any

technical support at all. They can earn so much more elsewhere."²

According to Professor Joshua D. Angrist, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Victor Lavy, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, writing in the October 2002 issue of the *Economic Journal*, ("New Evidence on Classroom Computers and Pupil Learning") there is no evidence that computer-aided instruction improves pupil performance.

In 1994 the Israeli state lottery funded a large-scale computerisation effort in many elementary and middle schools - the Tomorrow-98 programme. By June 1996, about 10% of the country's elementary school pupils and about 45% of the country's middle schools pupils had received new computers and there was a substantial increase in classroom use especially in elementary schools. In particular, the likelihood that fourth-grade teachers used the computers to teach mathematics went up by about 20 percentage points as a consequence of the new machines.

Enough time had passed by the test date for the new computers to have had a large and statistically significant impact on instructional methods for fourth-graders.

But there is no evidence that increased educational use of computers actually raised pupil test scores. In fact, the best estimates show that the mathematics scores of pupils in schools that received new computers actually went down.³

Plagiarism

It is great to see so many computers in our schools. They adorn the libraries. They swarm together in computer labs. They are even intruding into classrooms. It is not so great to see how they are used. For far too many students they do little more than encourage plagiarism. They are used to download screeds of information, which is then uncritically and without understanding, fed into essays and assignments. To remedy this, much teaching needs to be done off the computer.

Three Research Skills

First is the skill of formulating questions to ensure an accurate focus. Asking the right questions is a basic thinking skill that needs to be taught.

Second is the need for search techniques. The Internet is such a large database that it is quite easy to get 5,000 or even 50,000 sites listed. However, that list can be reduced to ten or less by skilful and thoughtful use of key words. There is an important thinking skill included here: categorisation leading to precision and accuracy.

However, the Internet is not a font of accuracy. Therefore one needs techniques to check the reliability of the information collected. Moreover students need a certain degree of philosophical scepticism: an attitude of mind that does not trust without checking. Some checks are simple, like when was the last update done and where does the site initiate? The address will give some clue to this. Obviously some of these, such as the university sites, are more likely to be accurate and up to date than others, but they still need checking. It is a case of "do not assume it". Check it.

Other checks require much more. At least a second major site should be checked out, preferably more. Do not overlook reference books and the more up to date items one finds in periodicals.

Third is the need for note-taking skills. These should include the use of visual organisers, or even old methods of linear note taking (Main topic, sub topic, details), and the almost lost literacy skills of précis and paraphrase. Downloading chunks of text is neither a thinking skill nor an activity useful to any form of education.

The Internet is essential, it must be used, but it is used most effectively as only a small part of the total teaching and learning context.⁴

Expense Unjustified

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) in 2001. 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 studied evidence from the well-equipped classrooms of two high schools and a university in Silicon Valley which took special efforts to support the use of new technologies. He concludes that outfitting schools with networked computers does not work the kind of miracles school reformers and vendors claim. Along with other researchers from Stanford University, Cuban follows students through their schedules, interviews them along with their teachers and builds what amounts to a disappointing portrait of school use. Although he looks at three age segments (pre-school and kindergarten, high school and higher education), his findings are disappointing across all three levels despite impressive expenditures.⁵

The NZ Government will invest \$28 million in tertiary education electronic learning (e-learning) capital projects over the next four years, says Tertiary Education Minister Steve Maharey. This would ensure tertiary providers could take advantage of technology-assisted tools to enhance student learning. "We're talking about more than computers," Mr Maharey said. "We're talking about our students being equipped with the skills to participate in an innovative New Zealand."⁶

Notes:

1. *BBC News*, PCs "reinventing" teaching, 19 May 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/education/newsid_754000/754495.stm
2. *BBC News*, Teachers' computer concerns, 6 May 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/education/newsid_738000/738138.stm
3. *The Guardian*, UK, Computers don't improve pupils' performance, 25 October 2002, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4531740,00.html>
4. *TheSchoolDaily*, The Cooper Column, Alan Cooper, acooper@clear.net.nz, 4 November 2002, <http://www.theschooldaily.com/articleView.asp?articlePK=16644>
5. Review by Jamie McKenzie, 2001, <http://www.fno.org/feb02/oversoldreview1.html>
6. *NZ Herald*, \$28m for e-learning, 3 April 2003, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3350557>

A Radical Ideology for Home Education

The existing scholarship suggests that the home school movement emerged largely as an embodiment of both radical reform from the left and conservative Christianity. The following deals with the philosophical underpinnings of the home school movement from the tradition of the radical left by examining the works of John Holt, the man perhaps most influential in providing an intellectual base for the radical segment of the movement.

John Caldwell Holt (1923-1985), the oldest of three children in a wealthy New England family, was reared in New York City and Connecticut. Holt spent his elementary school years in private schools in New York City and Switzerland, followed by high school at the prestigious Phillips Exeter Academy, where he graduated the youngest in his class. Holt subsequently enrolled in Yale University's engineering school¹, and upon graduation in 1943, aspired to be a physicist, but first received a commission as an officer on the submarine *Barbero* during the latter years of World War II.^{2,3}

When the war ended in 1945, Holt became convinced by the dropping of the atom bomb that civilization was at risk, and he went to work for the New York State branch of the United World Federalists, an organization involved in the World Government movement. In 1952, bored and unchallenged in his duties, he left the organization for a year's travel in Europe.^{2,4}

When he returned to the U.S., Holt looked for meaningful work and considered taking up farming. His sister, who resided in Santa Fe, New Mexico, had noticed Holt's positive interaction with her own children and encouraged her brother to consider teaching. Holt resisted the idea until she suggested the Rocky Mountain School, an experimental boarding school in Carbondale, Colorado (near Aspen), whose faculty and students grew their own food and helped maintain the school. Even

if teaching proved distasteful, Holt reasoned, he could at least learn to farm. Because the school had no faculty openings, Holt worked and observed in exchange for room and board, eventually filling a fifth grade math, English and French teaching position and developing a fascination with the learning process. After four years, Holt, at the age of 34, left Carbondale for Boston where he continued his teaching experiences at a succession of schools – Shady Hill School, Lesley-Ellis School and eventually at Commonwealth School. He was fired from all three positions because, among other things, he insisted that testing had detrimental effects on learning.⁴ Holt explained, "Schools were always a means to an end for me. I had to work in schools in order to answer my questions on learning and children's intelligence. But I never identified myself as a schoolteacher."² Although fascinated with children, Holt never identified with parenthood either, remaining single throughout his life.² (To be continued in May issue.)

Notes:

1. In the early 1970s, Holt came to view educational credentialism as a major social problem and educational experience a private matter, and from then until his death in 1985, he refused to discuss his academic background – particularly his attendance at Yale. Even now, his successors at Holt Associates, Inc., are hesitant to release this information. It is offered here with the stipulation that Holt's distaste for public touting of educational standing be understood by the reader.
2. Allen, Mel (1981). The education of John Holt. [Reprint of article appearing in *Yankee* magazine, December, 1981]. (Available from Holt Associates, 2269 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140).
3. Farenga, Patrick (1994, October 20). Telephone interview with author (Unrecorded).
4. Sheffer, S. (Ed.) (1990). *A life worth living: Selected letters of John Holt*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Univ. Press.
(From: "A Radical Ideology for Home Education: The Journey of John Holt from School Critic to Home School Advocate: 1964-1985" by Casey Patrick Cochran, Ph. D., Division of Educational Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia 30322. As in *Home School Researcher*, Vol 13, No 3, 1999; Brian D. Ray, Ph.D., Editor, National Home Education Research Institute, PO Box 13939, Salem, Oregon 97309, www.nheri.org.)

Coming Events

9 & 23 May 2003

Radio Rhema

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

9 June 2003

8th Annual TEACH Leadership Forum

Venue: Christchurch, to be advised.

Contact: Craig and Barbara Smith
Phone (06)357-4399, email: hedf@xtra.co.nz

Time: 10 am to 4 pm

TEACH (Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home) Forums have been held annually since 1996 in various parts of New Zealand, by Craig & Barbara Smith of the Home Education Foundation. They are designed to be gatherings of equals to discuss, share and explore any topic the home educators attending wish to raise. The Forums are open to any home educators but are specifically intended for those carrying some responsibility within the local support group, such as coordinator, leaders, newsletter editors and other volunteers. It is also for those wanting to start up a support group or are involved in helping others in their home education endeavours.

9 June 2003

Evening Meeting on Home Education

Venue: Quinn's Road Chapel Christchurch. 7:30pm

Contact: Dot Brown, phone: (03) 312-8790, i.brown@ext.canterbury.ac.nz

Topic: Training Children and Youth in Emotional Purity—Craig and Barbara Smith. This is for everyone whether your child is a toddler or at the end of the teen years. The evening will end with a general Question and Answer session on home education. It would be helpful if Dot was given questions beforehand.

12 June 2003

Evening Meeting on Home Education

Venue: Dunedin, to be advised

Cost: To be advised

Contact: Yolanda, Phone: (03) 477-3039, email: roland.

storm@clear.net.nz

Evening Meeting, 7-10pm, will begin with a Devotional to encourage everyone in developing a vision for their Home Educating. Craig Smith will speak especially to encourage Fathers and will also spend some time updating us on the Political situation. The evening will end with a general Question and Answer session on home education.

14 June 2003

Southland Home

Educators Workshop

Venue: Invercargill Central Baptist Church

Cost: \$10 single, \$15 couple, or \$5 per session, Young adults free with parents

Contact: Bev (03) 207-2862 d.b.nicholson@e3.net.nz or Gay (03) 214-4493; bgibson@ezysurf.co.nz

Programme

8:45am Registration and view resources

9:15am (Welcome)

9:30am SESSION 1

**Home Education -- Getting things into Perspective and a Vision for the Future — Craig Smith

**Training our children to worship — Barbara Smith

10:30am Morning Tea

11:00am SESSION 2 (2 electives)

**Keeping Going when the Going gets Tough (Avoiding Burnout - Symptoms of burnout, Causes of home school burnout, Strategies for avoiding burnout) - Barbara Smith

**Home Schooling from a Christian Perspective — Craig Smith

12:30pm Lunch - Bring your own - hot drinks provided

1:30pm SESSION 3 (2 electives)

**Getting Started - Dealing with MOE/ERO, Pulling Children out of School, Filling in an Exemption Form, etc — Barbara Smith

**Home Education Through Secondary and Preparing for Tertiary Education and the Work Force - Craig Smith

3:00pm Afternoon tea

3:30pm SESSION 4 (2 electives)

**Training our Children's Minds,

Tools of Learning and Motivation - Barbara Smith

**Developing Your Own Curriculum and The Vital Nature of Reading Aloud — Craig Smith

7:30pm SESSION 5 (2 electives)

**Training our Children and Youth in Purity - Barbara Smith

**Dad's Essential role in Home Education — Craig Smith

9:00pm Supper

There will be tables available for you to bring your unwanted books to sell and look for second hand ones to buy.

17 June 2003

Home Education

Evening

Venue: Hokitika Church of Christ, Corner Stafford and Sale Street, Hokitika

Cost: no cost

Contact: Lloyd and Sonya, Phone: (03) 755-5300, email: mcgarveys@xtra.co.nz

Meeting with Craig and Barbara Smith. Start time: 7pm

19 June 2003

Nelson Home Education Workshop

Venue: Nelson, to be advised.

Cost: To be advised

Contact: Phillipa, Ph: (03) 522-4213 email: zarephath@xtra.co.nz

Programme

10.30-11.00am - Registration

11.00am - SESSION 1 (2 electives)

**Getting Things Into Perspective, - Craig

**Training our children's minds - Barbara

12.30-1.30 am - Lunch

1.30pm - SESSION 2 (2 electives)

**Home Educating Through Secondary - Craig

**Getting Started - Dealing with MOE - Barbara

3.00pm - Afternoon Tea - Provided

3.30-5.00 pm - SESSION 3

Keeping Going When the Going Gets Tough - Craig and Barbara

BREAK

7.30-9.30 pm - Craig - Where is this going? Developing a Vision. Fathers Role In Home Education
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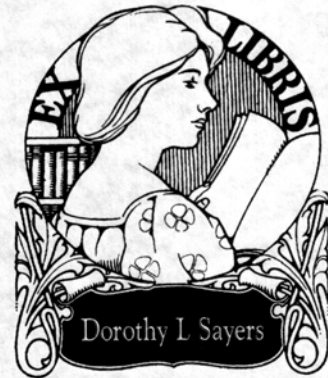
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