

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 14

March 1998

Home Educators Review the Review Officers!

(Last December all nine of the ERO officers, especially recruited to review home educators met in Hamilton for a period of specialised training. Part of that included meeting with three local Hamilton home educators: Carol Brown, a key figure in the Hamilton area home education scene for over 10 years; Tony Banks, current chairman of T.H.E.N., Inc., The Home Educators Network; and one other. Carol filed this report:)

We were each asked to talk for 10 - 15 minutes, followed by question time. Without any prior consultation, the three of us had chosen to talk about quite separate issues.

First, Tony spoke about how his family's personal journey had led them into homeschooling, and then he went on to talk about the wide range of philosophies held by homeschoolers. He pointed out the need for reviewers to be familiar with these philosophies, and asked them to indicate if they had read any Holt, Illich, Moore, etc. I have to say that the response was disappointing from our point of view, and many of the reviewers were obviously uncomfortable. One responded defensively to the effect that they didn't need to read about homeschooling philosophies as they had plenty of knowledge about a variety of general educational philosophies. Tony also talked about the need for honesty and integrity on both sides in our communication with review officers.

I spoke second, and talked about how I homeschool, about how our

informal style of homeschooling differs from schooling, and the consequent need for a reviewer to employ different ways of investigating our homeschooling than s/he would if reviewing someone using formal, packaged curriculum. I raised some of my concerns about the questioning of children. Firstly, that questioning will take place in the presence of "you or another person", leaving it open for that other person to be another review officer while you are out of the room. Secondly, that some homeschooled children may be intimidated, no matter how skilled the reviewer, because of their awareness that their whole family lifestyle my depend upon their answers.

The third homeschooler spoke very honestly about reviews she had had in the past, some of which had been handled with a lack of integrity and professionalism by the reviewer concerned.

A recent Massey College of Education symposium was told that many teachers fail to teach their students to think.

Associate Professor Rex Dalzell, Vice Principal of the College, spoke of the difficulties faced in teaching students to think in a world that doesn't welcome or encourage independent thought.

"Unpleasant as the fact may be, we, who claim to be teachers, tend to have a constraining rather than

(Although no mention was made of the person's name, one reviewer approached the homeschooler afterwards and said, "You were talking about X, weren't you?") This homeschooler raised many issues, clearly demonstrating the need for reviewers to develop reviewing skills and expectations of a different nature to those required when reviewing schools.

It was obvious that many of the reviewers were very uncomfortable about some of the issues we raised, and some felt quite challenged. A number had never heard of concepts such as "unschooling" or "deschooling" or other informal learning styles. Some seemed open to considering new ideas; some, despite appearing somewhat threatened by some suggestions, were happy to talk through their concerns; some said nothing the whole two hours!

Overall, the impression I got from those who spoke was that they are interested in the idea of homeschooling, and that they are more

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Teachers Tend to Operate on the Superficial Level

a liberating effect on the thinking activities of our students," Professor Dalzell said.

"By and large we do not teach our students to think in a truly deep and meaningful manner at all. We tend to operate very much at the superficial level."

(From *Off Campus*, Massey University Extramural Students' Society Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 2, October, 1997, pg. 14.)

Desk copy

TEACH Bulletin

is a monthly publication of TEACH Publications, 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. There is also a regular opinion poll regarding educational issues of the day that may impact home schoolers.

TEACH Bulletin is available for a subscription of \$16 per year for 11 issues (none in December), or by becoming a member of TEACH for a donation of \$30 or more. Some of the benefits of membership are:

- Discounts on Christian Home Schoolers of NZ National Family Conference fees.
- Discounts on TEACH National Leadership Forum fees.
- Coaching on how to participate in the Parliamentary process via letter writing, making submissions, lobbying MPs, etc.
- An annual free gift.
- Discounts on resources, books, T-Shirts, etc.
- Discounts on Sunshine Educational coach tours.
- An official TEACH tax-deductible receipt for your donation.

Your donation toward membership also helps to develop further services exclusively for home schoolers such as scholarships, summer schools, national tours by overseas experts, curriculum and home school resource fairs, national and international field trips.

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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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concerned about the parents' degree of commitment to homeschooling, and about their educational philosophy or vision, than about detail of content and method.

This impression has been confirmed with respect to one review officer. Two homeschoolers, while doing a degree of formal work with their children, provide their children with extremely rich, hands-on learning environments as a deliberate result of their educational beliefs. Their reviews were quite informal in the sense of being more like conversations than inspections. A third review, presumably by the same reviewer, about which I have only read, appeared from the description to be more formal. Why? The third family's homeschooling and approach to their review seem to be more formal. They had organised written responses to the questions sent with the notification of review. Although they did not say which packaged curriculum they used, it seemed from the article that they do use one and this appeared to be the focus of the review: they were asked "about individual subjects one at a time...I was able to show him my daily plans..." When the review officer asked to see the child, they sat the child at his desk in their schoolroom, with folders containing all his work.

It seems that this review officer's approach is, at least in part, determined by the parents' attitude to the review and by the style of homeschooling.

However it is important to realise that each reviewer will have their own style, and their own particular areas of interest. Another reviewer has been reported to be largely interested in planning. One wanted to know about each subject area, as listed as suggested subjects in the information statement.

Homeschoolers' use of community resources, contact with home-

schooling networks, and children's social contacts appear to be important to them.

Reviewers are, however, supposed to operate in accordance with their "Manual of Standard Procedures". Reports from one area (not Hamilton) claim that one reviewer has been ringing and asking to visit with little notice. Arrangements for a review are supposed to be made in writing, and although there is nothing in their manual stating how much notice should be given, you do have every right to refuse any particular appointment time, and ask for an alternative. You should not have to explain the reason for your refusal other than it is not convenient for your family.

Assume the best: that your review will be an enjoyable and affirming experience. However, do take the precaution of having another adult present — if your partner is not available, ask a friend or a homeschooling acquaintance to sit in. You don't wear a seat belt because you assume you are going to have an accident — you wear it just on the off chance!

The New Zealand Home Education Trade & Exchange

<http://www.voyager.co.nz/~asmith/homeedu.htm>

Andrew and Christine Smith have set up an Internet web site to help home educators buy, sell and exchange resources, advertise for resources wanted, and submit resources available for others to have for free.

They do seek some payment, "but it's really low key and totally voluntary, and applies only to those selling resources".

For submitting resources, including books and equipment, for sale, wanted, free:

Email: asmith@voyager.co.nz
Post: 139A Spinella Dr., Glenfield, North Shore 1310
ph. (09) 444-3818

Dear Mr Smith

HOME SCHOOLING

Craig S Smith
National Director
Christian Home Schoolers of Australasia
4 Tawa Street
PALMERSTON NORTH 5301

Thank you for your letter dated 12 February 1998 where you query the legality of a proposed review of home schooling to be conducted by the Education Review Office ("the ERO").

The policy and practices of the ERO obviously fall outside my portfolio, but I am happy to consider the wider legal issues you have raised.

I understand from your letter that the ERO is undertaking the proposed review of home schooling at the request of the Secretary of Education who is acting under s 21 of the Education Act 1989. I note your comments about ss 21(6) and (7) but I do not think that those comments are entirely correct. While s 21 provides that the Secretary must consider an ERO report on any exemption from enrolment before revoking that exemption, the Secretary does not have to have formed the intention of revocation before calling for the report. Indeed, if the Secretary had formed such an intention at that point, his ability to implement the decision would be compromised.

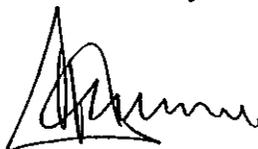
I would add that it appears from your letter that the ERO are not undertaking any "general review" but are concentrating on exemptions issued at least six months ago. I cannot agree with your suggestion that it is a nonsense for the Secretary to investigate exemptions six months after having granted those exemptions. While s 21 is indeed headed "Long Term Exemptions from Enrolment" s 21(6) makes it plain that the Secretary may revoke a certificate "at any time".

As you correctly point out, specific authority to undertake reviews of educational services provided to persons who have enrolment exemptions is proposed under clauses 59 and 60 of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill. This does not mean, however, that such reviews are presently unlawful; it is relatively common practice to clarify and confirm statutory powers, particularly when the extent of those powers is being questioned.

I agree with your further comment that the ERO has no statutory power to enter private dwelling houses. However, the fact that the ERO does not have such a power does not prevent that Office from undertaking a review. Nor does it prevent a Review Officer from asking an occupier's permission to enter a particular dwelling. I suggest to you, in fact, that it may well be in the best interests of any person offering home schooling to allow an ERO Review Officer access to the dwelling where that schooling occurs. If such access is refused then the ERO's ability to conduct an effective review of the home schooling may be compromised. Ultimately, such a refusal may mean that the Secretary is obliged to make a decision on revocation with only a partial report from the ERO. I do not think that such an outcome is desirable from any point of view.

It follows from the above comments that I do not share your concern that the proposed ERO reviews are either illegal or an abuse of power. Nevertheless I thank you for writing to me and acquainting me with your views.

Yours sincerely

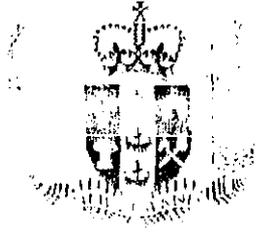


Douglas Graham
Attorney-General



ATTORNEY-GENERAL
Parliament Buildings Wellington

11 MAR 1998



Office of
The Minister responsible for the Education Review Office
Associate Minister of Education
Wellington, New Zealand

18 September 1997

Dear D

I refer to your further letter of 26 August 1997 about homeschooling issues.

You have asked "what is meant by a safe environment" and "where does the Government get its responsibility to ensure all children are receiving education in an environment in which they feel secure".

A safe environment is one which provides the student with an environment which is physically safe and emotionally safe.

Whether a student receives education at school or at home, the physical state of the environment in which they are being educated is an important aspect of the creation of good conditions for learning. The safety and comfort of the physical environment contributes to the provision of an emotional environment that is conducive to learning. The establishment of a safe emotional environment is arguably the most important aspect of the creation of good conditions for learning.

Under the Education Act 1989 every child in New Zealand has the right to a free education at a state school. The Act requires all children between the age of six and sixteen to be enrolled at and attend a registered school. An exemption from enrolment at school may be granted in respect of those children who are home schooled.

However whether a child is educated at school or at home, their right to an education is the same. Where the environment in which a child receives education is not safe their right to education is fettered. It is therefore an obligation of the Government to ensure that every child receives an education in a safe environment.

Yours sincerely

Hon Brian Donnelly
Minister responsible for the Education Review Office

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