

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 45

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Home Educators Appear Well Informed

The TEACH Opinion Poll #6 was posted and emailed out to many home educators in September and October of last year. When the 286 responses received back were analysed this month, the most common attribute found among them was their many endeavours to stay well informed about issues related to home education, child development and parenting.

96% had read articles on home education (HE) as well as discussed HE issues with others. 92% had read at least one book on HE, 89% had read one on Parenting/Teaching and 87% one on Child Development. 80% had attended HE conferences or workshops, and 77% subscribed to a HE magazine or journal. Only 50% had searched the web for material on HE, and a mere 25% subscribed to a HE email discussion group, figures which may simply reflect how printed matter is still far more easily accessible than electronic information technology.

The two questions on the survey asking about possible lobbying initiatives produced one of the most united responses and also the one where HEs are most divided. 88% were in favour of some kind of initiative to see Government enshrine in law the concept that parents have the prior right to determine the type of education and training their children receive. When it came to whether HEs should lobby for the need to apply for only one exemption per family rather than one for each child as is the law at present, 27% said, "No", 22% said "Don't know/not sure", which means 49% at least had some reservations about it, while exactly the same proportion,

49%, were in favour of starting such a lobbying effort.

HEs who responded to the survey were least decisive on two issues: whether HEs should have access to schools' vocational guidance services, either for free or at a fee (31% answered "Don't know/not sure", and only half answered "Yes"); and whether they thought the MoE should offer alternatives to ERO Reviews (26% said "Don't know/not sure" while only 40% said "Yes").

One question asked how important HEs felt it was to have access to the new NCEA qualifications. Only 1/4 really

wanted it with 73% not really worrying about it. Did this indicate a low opinion of higher education among HEs? Another question was designed to shed light on this issue. It asked, "Do you foresee any of your children going on to tertiary education?" The answers were: "Yes, they definitely will" — 15%; "It is our hope that they will" — 31%; "We would leave that choice completely up to each child to decide" — 41%; "It is not a high priority with us" — 11%; and "Can't see it happening" — two individuals indicated this answer, which was less than 1% of the respondents. So it would appear that while as many as 12% do not see higher education as a desired option, the rest either desire it (46%) or at least want it to be a

(Continued on page 2)

Working Party Cancelled

The Ministerial Working Party on Home Schooling, which was called for by the Minister of Education back in July 2000, has been cancelled.

The letter from Senior Adviser Craig Workman dated 6 December 2000 was short and to the point:

I am writing to inform you that the Minister of Education has elected not to continue with the Homeschooling Working Party.

The reason for this is that he could not be assured of full, and broad sector participation in the Working Party at this time.

I wish to acknowledge your time in preparing your nomination and your patience in waiting for this matter to be resolved.

What Mr Workman is referring to here is the fact that of the four groups invited to participate, the Home Education Foundation, the Home Education Network of Aotearoa, the National Council of Home Educators of NZ and the Home Schooling Federation, this last group decided not to participate.

Those five months did see a lot of preparatory work done and a vast amount of discussion took place, both at the support group level and via various email groups. Such work is always a good exercise in helping more home educators become familiar with the wider issues surrounding home education and should stand us all in good stead when the next issue arises.

(Continued from page 1)

viable option for their children (41%), which would indicate they probably conduct their HE activities with this in mind.

Concerns were expressed regarding various provisions HE can and cannot access. 89% said they would probably accept an increase in the Supervisory Allowance subject to their studying whatever strings might be attached, 51% saying they would not accept any more strings than there are now. 83% said they would be concerned if access to the National Library should be cut. 91% said "No" when asked if HEs should be *required* to do some kind of Professional Development (PD) activity (7 individuals here answered "Yes"). A full 59% said they definitely didn't want or were not interested in gaining access to College of Education PD courses, while 24% did want such access.

In other areas, the vast majority (87%) could not see why being aged under 16 should be a barrier to attending night schools, polytechs or universities. Nearly half (47%) said there were no

areas of HE where they'd like more assistance, while 1/4 said there were. In the lone question regarding children with Special Education Needs (SEN), 71% of respondents not only said HE parents of SEN children should have exactly the same access to professional help and specialist resources as do SEN children in schools but also agreed that the state should be thrilled to subsidise any parents deciding to HE their SEN children because of the superior commitment and attention such parents would provide.

Two questions dealt with the performance of the MoE and three with the ERO. 13% of respondents rated the Exemption application procedure as "Excellent", 51% rated it as "Good", and 23% as under par. Sixty-six individuals made comments as to what they would change, and it is hoped to investigate these and other written comments by respondents in next month's *TEACH Bulletin*. Almost 73% said "No" when asked if the MoE should be able to specify particular educational outcomes that HEs need to achieve, but nearly 13% actually answered "Yes".

requires that parents demonstrate *that the child will be taught* "at least as regularly and well as in a registered school". Nearly 22% said they were happy about it, 39% said they were not, and almost 24% said they had reservations about it. All three groups made extensive comments explaining their positions, which should be interesting to read about in next month's *TEACH Bulletin*.

Only 14 individuals (4.9%) said they would not let the ERO officers into their homes for a review, fearing the precedent it sets and 19% said they resented state bureaucrats sitting in judgment on their lifestyles and family relationships. Over half of the respondents said they had nothing to hide, plenty to show and that it was convenient having the review on their own turf. Other responses are equally revealing: nearly 45% would value professional advice offered by ERO officers; almost 29% said they would look upon the ERO approval as a confidence booster; and exactly the same number thought it was essential for HEs to be regularly reviewed in order to maintain credibility with the rest of society. Just under 41% did say they were torn between playing the gracious hostess to a guest and dealing with a large and intimidating bureaucracy, both of which are represented in this one ERO review officer entering their home.

Summing up this particular group of HE respondents, there seems to be a generally recognisable majority opinion on the issues raised, with the definite exceptions of access to school vocational guidance services, whether they'd like more assistance, should they lobby to require only one exemption per family and whether there should be options to ERO reviews. The writer is surprised and a little worried about the substantial minorities, over 1 in 4, who look for approval of their HE efforts from the ERO and the society at large.

Regarding the ERO's review procedure, 39% of respondents had never had one or had one so long ago, they didn't feel they could comment. So of the 144 respondents who did feel they could rate the ERO, 22% said "Excellent", 55% said "Good" and 22% said the review method was under par.

There was a question about whether HEs were happy for an apparent trend among ERO reviewers to ask for *evidence of learning in the children*, while the Education Act only

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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instruction, and reject not your

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Technology Curbs Aggressive Behaviour

A “groundbreaking study” says technology can curb aggressive behaviour at school and improve academic performance in the process. Study authors Robin Stern, Ph.D., of Columbia University, and Ted Repa, Ph.D., from New York University, studied three groups of students from a New York City public school over a 12-week period. The study is said to have confirmed that an innovative Social Learning Software program from San Francisco-based Ripple Effects, Inc., dramatically reduces aggressive behaviour by 32%, increases positive behaviour by 77%, and improves educational outcomes.

“It’s both hopeful and a little frightening to think that software could teach kindness to kids,” says Ripple Effects CEO, Alice Ray, a nationally recognized expert in social learning and violence prevention who designed the software. “But technology is a powerful tool. It can work for or against us. This study suggests that the right computer technology can have a massive, positive impact on school climate and academic performance.” Full media kit: <http://www.rippleeffects.com/aboutus/mediakit.html>

Since this press release came from San Francisco, site of the software vendors, 3,000 miles from where the research took place, it appears to be more of a sales pitch than a serious research report. What is frightening is to think that such aggressive marketing could turn schools into vast technology laboratories with people’s children as the lab rats. Some would say that has already happened...John Taylor Gatto’s latest book *Underground History of American Education* seems to say it’s been going on for decades already. In light of all this, the benefits of home education are even more self evident.

(Parts excerpted from *The School Daily*, 26 Jan 2001, <http://www.theschooldaily.com/>)

Why Do Boys Fail in School?

Boys make up 70 per cent of special-needs programmes in schools, and are over-represented in suspension, bullying and expulsion figures. Two-thirds of those attending reading recovery programmes are boys. Why? Peter Simpson, Belfast School principal and Canterbury Primary Principals’ Association president, believes boys are more likely to be kinaesthetic, or movement-based, learners. They are frustrated by a school system that requires them to sit still and work at a desk.

Owen Kingston-Smith, a resource teacher who visits several Christchurch schools to work with children who have learning and behaviour difficulties, says boys have lots of ideas but they may have trouble writing them down. They like to be organised, know where things are going and what the rules are. They also like to be treated fairly. He believes they develop physiologically at a different rate to girls, and they would learn more, particularly reading and writing skills, if they started school at age six, instead of five.

“They live in a fairly 3-D world. To sit down and face a pen and pencil-type activity – they just don’t have the developmental skill to deal with that. Their brains develop differently to girls.”

Research by Christchurch College of Education lecturer Faye Parkhill shows boys are less likely than girls to be able to write their name when they start school because the development of fine motor skills is less advanced than in girls at the same age. She notes that the performance of boys is higher in countries where reading is taught from age seven.

These remarks confirm what home educators have known for years: children are unique and develop differently, meaning few are optimally served by the conventional school setting of one teacher to 25 students. The gender differences highlighted above may be helpful in an institutional setting,

but parents dealing with their own children note that such generalisations are not always helpful to them. And so home education parents seek to work with each child's unique learning styles, concentration spans, food allergies or intolerances, academic and recreational abilities and interests as well as those factors only parents know about, such as how well the child slept last night and how much the pet rabbit which just died meant to him or her.

The schools' response to such disparities among children ranges widely. First, in just trying to answer the question "why", one hears that single-parent families; lack of male teachers as role models for boys; the influences of video games, television and magazines; social conditioning; and disadvantaged backgrounds are all blamed in one way or another.

In University of Canterbury education lecturer Elody Rathgen's view, the "poor boys" focus is a backlash against the advances made by women over the last 30 years. "Girls are becoming genuine competitors for

serious academic awards."

The answer may be as simple as accepting that, particularly in their early years at school, boys learn, react, and behave differently to girls, and they may require different teaching strategies.

Belfast School in Christchurch has a behaviour modification

programme in place to deal with boys causing trouble in the classroom. The psychological and philosophical underpinnings of such programmes would be a cause of concern to many home educators, for such programmes clearly compete and are even contradictory in some areas to the original behaviour modification institution of the family. Belfast

TEACH Bulletin Opinion Poll #6

Posted to 1,400 home educators Sept/Oct 2000; results of 286 responses as of 23 Jan 2001

1. Would you generally be in favour of some kind of initiative to see Government enshrine in law the concept that parents have the prior right to determine the type of education and training their children receive?
87.8% a. (251) Yes **1.7% b.** (5) No **8.0% c.** (23) Don't know/not sure
2. What would be your reaction to a suggested rise in the Home Education Supervisory Allowance?
0.3% a. (1) I would welcome it with open arms, regardless of whatever extra requirements might come with it.
37.8% b. (108) I would probably accept it, but would need to study whatever strings were attached first.
51.0% c. (146) I would accept it as long as there were no more strings attached than there are now.
8.4% d. (24) I could take it or leave it.
2.4% e. (7) I don't receive it now, nor will I ever touch it.
3. What is your thinking in regards to families home educating (HE) their children with Special Education Needs (SEN)? (More than one answer is OK on this one.)
43.7% a. (125) They should go through the same exemption procedure as anyone else.
0.3% b. (1) They should go through a more rigorous exemption procedure.
71.0% c. (203) They should have exactly the same access to professional help and specialist resources as do SEN children in schools.
3.5% d. (10) If they seek an exemption from school enrolment and attendance, they should realise it means removal from the system and all its resources.
71.7% e. (205) Families choosing to HE their SEN children will have such an advantage due to the constant individualised attention by those who know and love and are most motivated toward the SEN child's welfare, that the state should be thrilled to subsidise their access to any state funded or privately funded resources, training and expertise available, for they above all others will gain maximum benefit from every dollar invested.
4. School Cert, 6th Form Cert and Bursary are all to be replaced within the next three years with the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). How important is it to you that home educators have access to this new qualification?
12.2% a. (35) It is absolutely essential: we MUST have access!
13.3% b. (38) It is very important, and we should try to get access
42.0% c. (120) We would like to have access, but it's not everything
30.8% d. (88) It really is a minor issue with us
5. Do you foresee any of your children going on to tertiary education? (University, Polytech, Wananga Whare, etc.)
15.0% a. (42) Yes, they definitely will.
30.8% b. (88) It is our hope that they will.
41.3% c. (118) We would leave that choice completely up to each child to decide.
11.2% d. (32) It is not a high priority with us.
0.7% e. (2) Can't see it happening.
6. HEs should at least have access to the schools' vocational guidance services, whether they be free or for a fee.
50.7% a. (145) Yes **13.3% b.** (38) No **31.1% c.** (89) Don't know/not sure
7. Should being aged under 16 be a barrier to HEs attending night schools, polytechs or universities as it is in many circumstances at present?
3.5% a. (10) Yes **87.1% b.** (249) No **8.4% c.** (24) Don't know/not sure
8. As a HE would you like access to College of Education (Teachers' College) Professional Development courses?
24.5% a. (70) Yes **18.5% b.** (53) No **41.3% c.** (118) Not really interested **13.3% d.** (38) Don't know/not sure
9. Which of the following Professional Development activities have you ever done? (More than one answer is OK on this one.)
96.5% a. (276) Read HE articles or magazines or journals.
72.0% b. (206) Read professional Teaching/Parenting/Child Development articles or magazines or journals.
92.0% c. (263) Read a book on Home Education, Home Schooling.
89.5% d. (256) Read a book on Parenting/Teaching.
87.1% e. (249) Read a book on Child Development/Learning.
50.3% f. (144) Searched Internet for information relevant to HE.
96.2% g. (275) Discussed HE issues with other HEs.
80.1% h. (229) Attended a HE conference, seminar or workshop.
76.9% i. (220) Subscribed to a HE magazine or journal.
43.7% j. (125) Subscribed to Parenting/Teaching magazine or journal.
17.8% k. (51) Subscribed to Child Development/Learning magazine or journal.
25.5% l. (73) Subscribed to HE email discussion group.

School's programme includes a lot more physical activities and challenges, such as doing the most skips with a rope, pull ups or push ups. Andrew Calvert, whose nine-year-old son Aaron is in this particular behaviour modification programme, says the one-on-one attention has helped him enormously. "He loves it, and he tries so much harder because someone is taking an interest in him." Even though the programme is endeavouring to deal with the mysteries of self-esteem and developing

social skills, Mr Calvert has very eloquently identified the solutions to the vast majority of problems with children: one-on-one attention and someone taking an interest in the individual child. This is why home education is so easily successful both academically and socially: totally "unqualified" parents can provide one-on-one attention and take an interest in their children, while even the most highly qualified and capable teachers are prevented by typical classroom logistics from employing these simple yet powerful strategies.

(Some material condensed from *Christchurch Press* article of 12 December 2000.)

Coming Events

Sixth Annual TEACH Forum

Saturday 28 April 2001
Greenlane area of Auckland
An open home education leadership forum and opportunity for HEs from all over to meet and discuss any and all issues of common concern, both local and national, and plan whatever further action seems appropriate.

North Shore Workshop

Saturday 5 May 2001
Windsor Park Baptist Church
550 East Coast Rd.
Mairangi Bay
Auckland

- Various Workshops
- Resource Displays

10. HEs currently have access to National Libraries. How concerned would you be if this access was cut?
43.0% a. (123) Majorly concerned
39.9% b. (114) Moderately concerned
16.8% c. (48) Not really concerned
11. Should HEs be *required* to participate in any kind of "Professional Development" as a condition of either gaining or retaining an exemption certificate?
2.4% a. (7) Yes 91.0% b. (260) No 5.9% c. (17) Don't know/not sure
12. Is there any area of HE with which you would like more assistance?
25.2% a. (72) Yes — Please specify _____
46.9% b. (134) No
19.9% c. (57) Don't know/not sure
13. How would you rate the present method of gaining an Exemption Certificate from the MoE?
13.3% a. (38) Excellent — wouldn't change it
51.0% b. (146) Good — could use a few adjustments
19.2% c. (55) Fair — needs one or two major changes
3.8% d. (11) Poor — needs a total rewrite
23.1% e. (66) What if anything would you change? _____
- Or just counting the 250 who actually gave the MoE a rating: E=15.2%, G=58.4%, F=22.0%, P=4.4%.
14. The Education Act requires a separate exemption for each child. Would the convenience of needing only one exemption *per family* be worth the long-term lobbying efforts needed to try to change the Act's wording?
49.0% a. (140) Yes 27.3% b. (78) No 21.7% c. (62) Don't know/not sure
15. The Education Act says that someone in the MoE must be "satisfied that the person (the child you wish to home educate) will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school". There is no reference to educational outcomes or evidence of learning on behalf of the child, only "that the person *will be taught*" in a certain way. Increasingly the ERO is asking for *evidence of learning*. Are you happy for this trend to continue?
21.7% a. (62) Yes — please say why _____
39.2% b. (112) No — please say why _____
23.8% c. (68) Well, I have some reservations — please explain _____
11.5% d. (33) Don't know/not sure
16. Most ERO reviews take place in the HE's home. What is your response to a review taking place in your home? (More than one answer is OK on this one.)
53.1% a. (152) We have nothing to hide and so much we want to show them! (Bulging bookshelves, projects, etc.)
44.8% b. (128) I would look forward to any professional advice and ideas the ERO officer might give.
58.0% c. (166) It is very convenient and comfortable being on our own turf.
28.7% d. (82) I would like to know if we are doing OK; to be approved by the ERO would help my confidence.
28.7% e. (82) It is essential that HEs be properly and regularly reviewed so that the entire HE community can maintain some credibility with the rest of society.
40.6% f. (116) I am torn between being a gracious hostess trying to offer open, friendly hospitality to this nice ERO officer while at the same time dealing with the large and powerful bureaucracy represented by this person.
19.2% g. (55) I resent a person from this large and powerful bureaucracy coming into my home to sit in judgment not only on my family's chosen lifestyle of home education but also to judge how I relate to my own children.
4.9% h. (14) We won't let them into our home: it sets a fearful precedent.
17. In its continuing desire to be "satisfied" about HEs, do you think the MoE should offer HEs options apart from ERO reviews, such as self-evaluation written reports, standardised test scores, independent reviews, etc.?
40.6% a. (117) Yes — (And your favoured options? _____)
30.8% b. (88) No
26.6% c. (76) Don't know/not sure
18. How would you rate the present method of being Reviewed by an ERO officer?
11.2% a. (32) Excellent — wouldn't change it
28.0% b. (80) Good — could use a few adjustments
9.1% c. (26) Fair — needs one or two major changes
20.3% d. (58) What if anything would you change? _____
- Or just counting the 144 who actually gave the ERO a rating: E=22.2%, G=55.6%, F=18.1%, P=4.2%.
- 2.1% e. (6) Poor — needs a total rewrite
39.2% f. (112) Never had one....don't know what's involved these days.
19. Should the MoE be able to specify any particular educational outcomes for HEs, things we *must* attain?
12.9% a. (37) Yes*
72.7% b. (208) No
12.6% c. (36) Don't know/not sure
*Such as? _____
- (It is planned to have an analysis of the written responses to Qs 12, 13, 15, 17, 18 and 19 in the February issue of *TEACH Bulletin*.)