

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 87

November 2004

More NCEA Controversy

Warwick Elley, a retired professor of education who has worked in all the major New Zealand universities and built up a world reputation as an authority on literacy and language education, has analysed the NCEA system. He is now the country's most trenchant critic of the NCEA. He says that asking teachers to "assess their students against vague standards, using unstandardised tasks, makes only for chaos and injustice, as results already show". According to Elley, not only is the NCEA playing-field far from level, "This costly experiment has gone too far."

"I mean, the kinds of standards they use in history or English, they're not standards at all, just very vague statements like 'Communicate historical ideas' or 'Read and understand unfamiliar text'. The tasks that the students are set vary so much in difficulty that it's just a lottery."¹

Howard Lee, PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Otago's Faculty of Education, says the NCEA is an embodiment of the philosophy of seeking outcomes in education, but that this system is fatally flawed. "New Zealand is positioning high school students as guinea pigs in a bold and risky experiment. The NCEA reduces education to discrete and measurable learning outcomes. It is breaking each subject content down into parts, rather like dismantling a car engine, identifying all the components but being unable to put it back together again. It is an attempt to micro-manage teaching and learning."²

Home Educators can identify with this last statement. Little by little the MoE appears to have been attempting to draw more of what individual families do under its power to control and approve — to micromanage. There is no statutory list of subjects home educators (or schools either, for that matter) are required to teach, but home educators are increasingly being pressured by both MoE and ERO staff to include specific subject areas in exemption applications and at reviews, when none are specified in law. "Outcomes" is also a new buzzword the MoE wants to introduce to home educators, but we must oppose this as also totally outside

the parameters of the Education Act. We see no reason to saddle ourselves with extra requirements that are not even required!

The recent controversy around how Cambridge High handled the NCEA, by ensuring they had a 100% pass rate for two years running, was partly centred about the *Recovery Room* to which they took students who were not passing. These failing students were not said to be failing; they were not yet achieving. In the *Recovery Room* these students were "guided" towards achievement. "In other words," says Michael Drake, Principal of Carey College in Auckland, "they were given the answers, wrote them down, and gained their awards...It always has been and still is NZQA policy that students who do not 'achieve' should be guided to achievement by, among other things, helping them to 'develop their answer further'...The reason guidance can

Home Education Awareness Week Promotions

The annual Home Education Awareness Week (HEAW) was 11-15 October this year. Here is how two support groups raised the home education profile in their communities:

Wanganui:

As parents realise that maybe school isn't right for their children, we get a number of enquiries regarding Home Education at the beginning or end of each term. We decided that as the schools start promoting themselves at this time of year, then we would do the same. Having a National Awareness week means that the media are more interested in jumping aboard.

One of our parents decided to coordinate our efforts. This involved contacting families and asking them to write up a short report on their home education experiences, asking for children's work and also children who would be interested in writing about their home education experiences. We also had copies of brochures published by the Home Education Foundation and another for our local contacts. We had a good response for this with enough material to put up a display in our local Shopping Mall as well as at the Public Library. These displays were up for the whole week. The shopping mall and library both supplied the display boards for us to use and

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be given to enable a student to write a correct answer in an assessment is that NCEA is about process not content. Once a qualification meant you knew or could do something. Now it means you have been through a process.”³

Because students are allowed to re-sit NCEA exams again and again, re-sitting only those parts they fail (oops, I mean, those parts they didn't yet achieve), it is nearly impossible for anyone *not* to gain the NCEA qualification. The idea is that anyone having the approved NCEA learning experience (going through the process) will be awarded the NCEA qualification, whether they really know (as we used to understand “know” as meaning having “mastered” or “fully understood”) the material or not. The emphasis is on process, not content.

Kate Colbert, Group Manager Secondary Education and NCEA Implementation at NZQA, was alluding to this fact when she said, “What was happening at Cambridge is they were being assessed without a learning programme. They were being assessed on skills they already had.” Credits earned on the basis of

what students know are invalid unless they gained that knowledge through a process called a “learning programme.”³

“It’s not just Cambridge High School that needs to be reined in,” wrote Terry Locke, an associate professor in English language at Waikato University. “It is the NCEA itself which has created the environment which is spawning the very practice which the Qualifications Authority so piously condemns.”

Locke has been concerned about the NCEA from the outset. “We’re producing a monster at the moment where assessment is driving everything, and I think it’s changing the culture of teaching. You’ve got instances of teachers drilling, drilling, drilling students to pass achievement standards. It’s like a version of the [Cambridge High] recovery room. All schools have got some equivalent to that – drilling students in order to get them to jump just high enough to pass through the hoop, drilling students to imitate exemplars. I could go on. You tailor courses not so much for the good of the kid, but so that you

can increase the number of credits they get. Now that’s a very superficial measure of whether a kid’s having a successful education or not.”¹

“What has happened [at Cambridge High] is symptomatic of a wider malaise endemic to the nature of the NCEA system,” said B. Lewis, Principal of Avondale College.³

Bill English agrees that Cambridge High’s troubles are indicative of a deeper problem. The current policy, says National’s education spokesman, “encourages schools to get credits for every kid. Schools have pretty much a free hand as to how they do that. And so there are wide-

spread practices in schools which are about letting kids get credits easily.”¹

Notes:

1. “Lessons at School”, *NZ Listener*, Vol 195, No. 3355, Aug28-Sep3, 2004.
2. Howard Lee, PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Otago’s Faculty of Education, “NCEA Fatally Flawed”, 28 Aug 04.
3. “Christian Education Current Issues – The Fruits of NCEA at Cambridge High”, posted 10 Apr 04. <http://careycollege.com/education/currentissues/?id=431>

Look-Say Mistake

Professor of Educational Psychology Bill Tunmer has carried out extensive research into New Zealand children’s literacy standards over the past 10 years.

He says the results of his research are extremely disappointing but not surprising. The Ministry of Education has resisted calls for fundamental changes to the way reading is taught in New Zealand schools.

“The Parliamentary Education Select Committee report on reading unanimously recommended including explicit and systematic teaching of phonics skills at the earliest stages of reading instruction. We supported those recommendations because they were based on sound scientific research carried out in New Zealand and overseas.”

The Ministry of Education has strongly promoted faulty methods over the past 20 years. The strong opposition to including explicit and systematic phonics instruction over this period almost exactly coincides with New Zealand’s steady decline in international studies of literacy achievement.

Research clearly shows that the heavy reliance on context and pictures for working out unknown words is a disastrous strategy for beginning readers.

(From *Massey News*, 1 May 2003, <http://tinyurl.com/4btty>)

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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The Language Police, Part 3

How did these "Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines" for publishers come into existence?

Educational psychologists launched an attack against the content of curriculum by changing the way students were tested. In the early decades of the twentieth century, psychologists brashly claimed that they could measure not only what children had learned, but what they were capable of learning. Cloaked with the authority of science, they belittled teacher-made tests and essays as too subjective and unscientific.

One of their casualties was the College Board examinations, which relied heavily on elaborate and detailed student answers; these exams were replaced in 1941 by the multiple-choice Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Psychometricians liked the SAT because it was objective, reliable and could be scored by a machine. *The old College Boards had tested mastery of a prescribed curriculum and included an annual*

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also allowed set times when we could have manned tables set up so that we could hand out brochures and display some of the curriculum that home educators use.

We also put announcements over the radio station in the community notices section drawing attention to our displays. Contacting the local newspaper led to an article in Tuesday's paper. The article was quite long, was on the third page with a good picture of children working and had a decent write up: it really stood out. The next day we had already received two phone calls in response. One was from a local radio station who wanted to interview someone for their weekly education programme. Another was from a mother who was thrilled to finally have some contact details regarding home education. We also had a photo of one of our displays with more of our children in the community newspaper. The other community newspaper did not respond to our contacts .

This has been a positive experience, even though it was a little nerve wracking to put ourselves

list of what literary classics students were expected to know; the SAT claimed to be content-free.

For much of the past century, the leaders of the nation's [colleges of] education — an eclectic mix of progressive pedagogical experts and psychometric experts — have seen themselves (sometimes heroically) as the vanquishers of the academic tradition. In every subject field, progressive educators have assailed the established order, whether it be the teaching of literary classics in English, the study of events in chronological order in history or the mastery of computational skills in mathematics.

Thus, when the culture wars began in the late 1960s, the antagonists of a traditional curriculum were pushing against an open door. When critics on the Left

in the public eye. Community response has been quite positive, and we look forward to what we can do next year!

(Marice Hill, Mum to Aaron (13), April (11), Zachary (8) and Isaac (6), Wanganui Home Educators)

West Coast:

A small group of us joined for a photo in the local paper accompanied by an article on home schooling prior to the week. This also advertised the morning tea held during HEAW hosted by three home educating families. It was held in Greymouth and invited anyone interested to attend. We had a good display of resources and a nice morning tea and a few mothers available to talk with the three mothers with families who attended from the wider community. With the closure of several schools in the Grey Valley we saw this as an opportune time to raise awareness. There was also an information board in the local library over the week. In Hokitika publicity was also given to a Maori cultural two-day session with about 25 children participating. Currently about eight families in Greymouth and at least 16 in Hokitika are home educating.

(Louise Dekker, Greymouth)

complained that English classes paid too much attention to the writings of dead white men and that the characters and stories represented women and minority group members in demeaning ways, the status quo had few defenders. When the critics said that these omissions and representations damaged the self-esteem of students from these groups, many education leaders agreed: the system was guilty as charged. When critics said that too much attention was being paid in social studies classes to the actions of white males, educational publishers rushed to revise their textbooks, even hiring some of the critics to serve as in-house consultants on the issues that troubled them.

But the pressure for change did not come only from the Left. By the 1970s, members of the religious Right had joined the crusade against the traditional curriculum, lobbying

publishers to purge anything that might give offense to the faithful. In his book *Battleground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of Our Classrooms*, Stephen Bates recounts a legal challenge to the popular Holt reading series by fundamentalist Christian parents in rural Tennessee. The parents accused the Holt series of teaching secular humanism and violating their religious beliefs. As part of the litigation, Holt, Rinehart & Winston released over two thousand pages of internal files, which detailed the inner workings of the textbook publishing process and revealed (in Bates's words) the company's "almost pathological fear of controversy."

The memoranda circulated among writers and editors showed their desperate efforts to placate any protests about gender, race, and ethnicity by revising their guidelines and content. By 1977, at least half of all characters in stories and illustrations had to be female, and representations of minority groups were closely scrutinized to avoid stereotyped behavior. As the publisher's guidelines evolved, the rules for representation grew more elaborate (Jews must not be shown as "diamond cutters, doctors, dentists, lawyers, classical musicians, tailors, shopkeepers, etc.," and the elderly must not be depicted "in rocking chairs, knitting, napping and watching television"); authors, stories and photos were chosen not for their literary quality or their contribution to teaching reading but on the basis of "the latest U.S. population figures."

Even though the fundamentalists' critique of the Holt reading series ultimately failed in the courts, educational publishers took their complaints to heart and added evolution, religion, divorce, disobedient children, Satanism, magic and fantasy to the list of forbidden topics in children's textbooks and standardized tests of reading comprehension. Consequently, the content of today's textbooks and tests reflects a remarkable convergence of the interests of feminists and multiculturalists on one side and the religious Right on the other. No words or illustrations may be used that

might offend the former groups, and no topics can be introduced that might offend those on the other side of the ideological divide. The Left gets censorship of language usage and pictures, and the Right gets censorship of topics.

(Edited by Genevieve Smith from an essay by Diane Ravitch titled, "Education After the Culture Wars", <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/education/ed0188.html>)

NZ Home Educators Make Submissions

After the MoE tried to introduce some changes to the Exemption Application Form back in June 2004 and were met with hundreds of emails and letters complaining about both the changes and that the MoE had not consulted widely enough, the MoE did two things. It immediately re-wrote the proposed changes adding their own explanations for the changes. Then it invited submissions on these proposed changes from Home Education organisations. The deadline for receiving these submissions shifted a couple of times and finally ran out at the end of this month, November 2004.

During this time, the MoE also wrote a two-page letter to Home Educators, some receiving it as from Kay Phillips of MoE Head Office, others receiving it as a letter from the Minister Trevor Mallard himself. It is an extraordinary piece of prose, making a statement about the apparent policy direction the MoE is hoping to adopt with Home Educators. This writer has been unable to get any answers to specific questions about it from the MoE even though trying monthly since August.

This writer recommends that all Home Educators read this letter carefully and consider its implications. The letter, plus this writer's comments on it; the MoE's draft of the proposed Exemption Application Form changes plus three

submissions on it are all posted at www.hef.org.nz under "Latest from the MoE".

More Doubts about School Computer Use

Although a simpler interpretation of a major international study of 15 year olds had suggested more computers meant better performance, newer research suggests that students who use computers a lot at school have worse maths and reading performance. In addition, those using computers several times a week performed "sizeably and statistically significantly worse" than those who used them less often.

In mid November this year Prince Charles complained of "computer-driven modules" in a letter to the Association of Colleges conference. He wrote: "I simply do not believe that passion for subject or skill, combined with inspiring teaching, can be replaced by computer-driven modules, which seem to occupy a disproportionate amount of current practice."

The UK government's computer agency, Becta, stresses that computers are simply tools, not something to supplant other teaching. The belief that there is an educational benefit, a positive relationship between students' interest in computers and their literacy, has underpinned huge investment by governments — and many parents — in information and communication technology (ICT). Are these investments justified?

Shedding some light on this question is a new study, *Computers and Student Learning*¹, done by Thomas Fuchs and Ludger Woessmann of the CESifo economic research organisation in Munich. They used the test performance and background data from the 2000 PISA study involving tens of thousands of students in 31 countries, including the UK, organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Fuchs and Woessmann found that the more computers there were in

students' homes, the better their test performance. But more computers went with more affluent, better-educated families. So they took this into account in their statistical analysis.

The result: the more computers in a student's home, the worse the student's maths performance. In schools, they found students performed worse in those which reported a significant lack of computers. But again, once they took into account the schools' general resources, the same pattern emerged.

"That is, the initial positive pattern on computer availability at school simply reflects that schools with better computer availability also feature other positive school characteristics." Once these were taken into account, computer availability was not related to student performance.

They then considered computer use, particularly internet access, e-mail and educational software. At home, greater use went with better test performance. And those who used these the least did significantly worse. But in schools the effect was different. Students who hardly ever used computers did a little worse than those who used them between a few times a year and several times a month. But those who used computers at school several times a week performed "sizeably and statistically significantly worse" in both maths and reading.

The researchers say their analysis just describes what the statistics show without explaining the findings. But they suggest two theories.

One is "ability bias": it might be that teachers do not want low-ability students to use computers. But this is less likely to account for the negative impact of high usage, which might instead be "a true negative effect of excessive computer use". And it might be that some computerised learning is beneficial, but at higher intensities it crowds out more effective teaching methods and hinders students' creativity.²

The study seems to show that ICT is

only useful for raising standards up to a point. With more frequent use, its influence appears to be counter-productive. Steve Farnsworth, deputy director for schools in Sheffield, agrees, saying: "Everybody has been waiting for the revolution. But the crucial part of education remains the pupil's relationship with the teacher."³

Notes:

1. "Computers and Student Learning: bivariate and multivariate evidence on the availability and use of computers at home and at school", by Thomas Fuchs and Ludger Woessmann, CESifo working paper no. 1321.
2. BBC News, "Doubts about computer use," 22 November 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4032737.stm>
3. BBC News, "How computers can help in class," 22 November 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4033043.stm>.

Too Many "Early Release" Exemptions

In 2003 more than 300 Counties Manukau 15-year-olds were granted exemptions to leave school early. Nationwide there has been a 37 per cent rise in the past five years in the number of students allowed to drop out of school before 16. The number granted exemptions jumped from 2802 in 1999 to 3842 last year. Eleven years ago, the number was 314.

This "early release" exemption process is similar to what home educators do: it is initiated by parents or guardians, with an application to the Ministry of Education. A condition for "early release" exemption is that the teenager has a job lined up or is enrolled with an education provider.

Aorere College principal Mike Williams says it doesn't serve any purpose to keep anyone in school when it is not working for him.

James Cook High had 52 students granted exemptions last year, the most of any school in New Zealand. Principal Bryan Smith says if parents are sufficiently motivated to go through the school, apply to the ministry and get their son or daughter enrolled or employed, it is likely they will keep an eye on their children. This is exactly what Home Educators have been saying for years.

But there are some who are so convinced of the need for state control and oversight of everything that they have fears that exempted students may quit their jobs or courses soon afterwards, leading them into crime and drugs, with little or no follow-up from the ministry. Others would ask what good such follow up would do? Do we not already see far too many who stay on in school until age 16, but who still have no qualification and who do in fact lead lives characterized by crime and drugs?

Yet this *Manukau Courier* article of 30 October 2004 ("Concern Over Students' Exemptions", <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3080406a11,00.html>) actually quotes a sitting MP as saying, "Even if these students are moving into trades and the like, they still need qualifications in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. I can't see how that can occur if they are allowed to leave school before they have even sat level one NCEA." Bryan Smith replied that many private training providers are also good at teaching basic literacy and numeracy.

These statements are very instructive. An MP with years of teaching experience implies that getting NCEA Level 1 would indicate the 15-year-old can read, write and do numbers. I say that after 10 years of compulsory classroom instruction he had better be able to do a lot more than that! If that is the *least* MPs are expecting, and the Minister himself Trevor Mallard has indicated that this is so (see *TEACH Bulletin 80*, April 2004, p. 5), then it simply is not good enough. It indicates expectations that are at ground level: that 10 years of compulsory classes should produce children who can at least read and write

(Continued on page 6: *Early*)

Coming Events

Tue-Fri, 18-21 Jan 2005

Code Blue Christian Worldview Conference

Venue: Willowpark, Auckland
Contact: Carol: Ph. (09) 410-3933,
Email cesbooks@intouch.co.nz

Keynote speakers:

Dr R C Sproul, Jr.: A graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary, and Grove City College. He received his D.Min. from Whitefield Theological Seminary. R.C. is the editor of *Tabletalk* magazine, associate pastor of teaching of Saint Peter Presbyterian Church, and the director of the Highlands Study Center. He has written or edited nine books, including *Almighty Over All*, *Tearing Down Strongholds*, *Bound for Glory*, *Christian Economics*, and *Eternity in Our Hearts*. At the Highlands Study

(Continued from page 5: **Early**)

is abysmal: after that length of time and with that much money being spent on them, they should at least be expert essayists and debaters, masters of algebra, conversant with basic physics equations, intimate with the periodic chart and able to set a budget, keep to it and balance a cheque book.

Instead we hear that "many private training providers are also good at teaching basic literacy and numeracy." Why should PTPs be in this business at all, when the students they get have already done 10 years or more in the schools? Only one answer is obvious: too many schools fail in the most basic function they are assumed to be doing: teaching the 3 Rs. Too many indicators point to a surprising conclusion: that state schools at least no longer have this as their primary function.

In the 1840s Horace Mann predicted an end to crime and evil coming with universal public education. Today we see the results of such thinking: while public schooling is heavily financed as the key to social salvation, it produces instead only social decay, the very crime and evil it promised to remove.

Center, R.C. teaches the Tuesday Night Bible study for the community, most of the Highlands Academy classes, the resident students, and serves as senior editor of *Every Thought Captive*. He and his wife Denise are a Home-schooling family with seven children.

Paul Henderson: A writer and researcher for the Maxim institute. He was born in the UK and is a graduate of the Universities of Aberdeen and Cambridge.

Lewis Meyer: Has a BSc in Biochemistry, author of four small books including *Evolution or Factor X?* Is well known for speaking in secondary schools against evolution.

Michael Drake: Principal of Carey College and has been involved in Christian education for over twenty years. Author of the booklet *The New Maori Myth*.

Programme

Day One: Tue, 18 January 2005
7:45 pm: SALT AND LIGHT:
The need for a Christian
Worldview - Dr. R.C. Sproul,
Jr.

Day Two: Wed, 19 January 2005
9:00 am: SIMPLE (Part 1): One
Lord, one worldview - Dr. R.
C. Sproul, Jr.
11:00 am: Worldviews in the current
political scene in New
Zealand - Paul Henderson
(Maxim Institute)
2:00 pm: The Christian World-
view and Maori Culture - Mi-
chael Drake
7:45 pm: SIMPLE (Part 2): How
our worldview impacts our
priorities - Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr.

Day Three: Thurs, 20 Jan 2005
9:00 am: SEPARATE (Part 1):
Recognizing false world-
views - Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr.
11:00 am: The Creation Factor -
Lewis Meyer
2:00 pm: Debate
7:45 pm: SEPARATE (Part 2): A
City on a Hill: the distinctive-

ness of a Christian Worldview -
Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr.

Day Four: Fri, 21 January 2005
9:00 am: DELIBERATE (Part 1):
The deceitfulness of humanism -
Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr.
11:00 am: DELIBERATE (Part 2):
The importance of presupposi-
tions - Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr.

Cost :

Option 1: Live-in pass (includes all
lectures, accommodation, and
all meals)

\$185 per adult

\$170 per student

Option 2: Full conference non live-
in pass (includes all lectures,
morning/afternoon teas, lunch,
and dinner)

\$100 per adult

\$85 per student

Option 3: One Day pass (for ONE
day, includes all lectures, morn-
ing/afternoon teas, lunch, and
dinner)

Standard fee: \$35

Option 4: Evening pass: (includes
all evening lectures)

Standard fee: \$25

Organizing Committee:

Mark and Carol Munroe
Rodger and Christine Whetton
Craig and Barbara Smith

Tue, 1 Feb 2005

5th Annual Home Education Celebration

Venue: Auckland venue to be con-
firmed

Contact: Dawn Burgin, Ph (09)
274-3296, Mob: 027-435-8922

Time: 10:30am-2:00pm

Co-ordinated by Auckland Home
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