

ABC Reading Eggs

www.readingeggs.com

Publisher Blake Education

Price \$19.95

ABC Reading Eggs is a sequential program that supports the acquisition of basic reading skills. The program includes books and workbooks for each level, but it's the online component that is most likely to engage new or reluctant readers. Once logged in, children complete a short test to assess their current knowledge level. They are then presented with a map that allows access to lessons aimed at their learning needs.

The Level 1 pack focuses on essential first reading skills such as letter recognition, letter-sound connections and high frequency words. Each lesson includes games and activities to help children consolidate their knowledge in a variety of appealing ways. A nice touch is that while the educational activities are loading, children can play simple games such as "How many 'j' eggs can you catch?" to maintain interest.

As activities are completed, children are awarded "golden eggs". After 50 golden eggs accrue, children gain access to Reggie's Shop, where they can choose a game to be added to their personal collection. This game can be played at any time. In the recently released Level 2 version of the program, children can also trade their golden eggs for clothes and "house stuff" such as furniture and wall decorations that can be added to a personalised "My House" section of the website.

Both Levels 1 and 2 are aimed at children aged four to six, while a new area called Reading Eggs World is being developed for ages six to eight. The website is easy to navigate and has been constructed to hold children's attention. My children particularly enjoyed the characters and songs that feature throughout the lessons, and being able to create an avatar or character to represent themselves.

The support materials are sold separately



and relate directly to the online lessons. The workbook is eye catching and has varied activities, although the font used in the writing exercises is not used in all states, so may not be the same as what is taught in the classroom. The books are identical to those presented online. Each set comes with a poster and reward stickers to show children what they have achieved.

For a school environment, ABC Reading Eggs is a relatively expensive investment, especially if the number of computers in the classroom is limited, as it is unlikely to be used every day. It could, however, be effectively used to support children who are having difficulty with early literacy concepts such as letter identification and sight words. Teachers also need to be mindful that the presentation of letters and sounds might not exactly mirror the phonics program they are using. In a home setting, where children could access the program as often as desired, ABC Reading Eggs offers an engaging way to enhance a child's first reading experiences.

Annie Facchinetti

Publisher's information

In the 12 months since ABC Reading Eggs was launched, the program has been used by over 2500 Australian teachers and 125,000 students; with over 85% of students showing improvement in their reading motivation and skill level after using the program for just a few weeks.

By early 2010 we will have added a lot of material suitable for early fluent readers. Annual class subscriptions start from \$199 plus gst.

As well as student lessons and activities, we are continuing to add to the teacher resources in the teacher's centre. In the teacher's centre, teachers can:

- ◆ Download teaching guides and worksheets that match each lesson
- ◆ Keep track of the progress of each student
- ◆ Open up higher level lessons for more advanced students
- ◆ Simply add and remove students.

By early 2010 the teacher centre will include:

- ◆ More interactive activities suitable for use with interactive whiteboards
- ◆ More downloadable lesson plans and activity sheets
- ◆ More interactive teaching tools for reading and writing.

Quarterly Essay – Radical Hope Education and equality in Australia

Author Noel Pearson

Publisher Schwartz Media

Price \$16.95

In this issue of the *Quarterly Essay*, activist, lawyer and director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership Noel Pearson, makes a thorough, often passionate case that education lies at the heart of the preservation of aboriginal culture.

Pearson contends that disadvantage should never be used as justification for academic underperformance, rather a rigorous education should be secured to give the disadvantaged "the means to negotiate the wider world".

He writes: "Is it time to ask: are we aboriginals a serious people?... Do we have the seriousness necessary to maintain our languages traditions and knowledge?... The truth is that I am prone to bouts of doubt and sadness around these question. But I have hope. Our hope is dependent on education. Our hope depends on how serious we become about the education of our people."

In a wide-ranging essay, Pearson explores the nature of education, questioning whether it is capable of transforming the lives of the disadvantaged many or whether it is destined to merely raise up a fortunate few.

Pearson places teachers at the core of education's success or failure, remembering some of the educators that had a profound influence on his own development, "indeed the relationship must be one of love," he writes.

For Pearson, problems with the quality of teaching staff and the methods used to teach children have translated into decreased academic performance among aboriginal students.

Those are just two of the hard truths told in this exploration of education and its effect on indigenous culture.

There's a review of the educationalist Seigfried Engelmann's stunning achievements with the Direct Instruction approach to teaching and his subsequent jobbing at the hand of the US Education Department, an allegory for the politicisation of education in our own country.

Pearson introduces new findings from research and practice and doesn't shy away from taking on difficult and controversial issues. The essay is worth reading for its breadth and for Pearson's enthusiasm for the subject which glows beneath the prose.

