

The Case for Cold Turkey:



Willard F. Reese
University of Alberta

Most of us who have been concerned with metric education are convinced that the best way to get the job done is by total immersion. We believe that metric units should be used exclusively in order to facilitate the ability to "think metric." We're right, of course, but up until now there is no research evidence to back up our contention.

While preparing a metric workshop for teachers, it occurred to the authors that here was an opportunity to test the cold turkey hypothesis.

The forty teachers who participated in the workshop were all pretty much on square one, as far as knowing the metric system was concerned. As they entered the workshop room, every other teacher was asked to step on the bathroom scales to the right and read the weight (mass) in metric units. The next teacher was asked to go left and do the same thing. The scales were identical except that one had only kilogram graduations, whereas the other showed both pounds and kilograms.

An hour into the workshop, the teachers were asked, "How many of you can honestly remember your weight in kilograms?" Sixteen of 20 who weighed on the kilogram scale remembered, but only 9 of 20 who weighed on the double scale still knew their weight in kilograms.