

**Submission
No 266**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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To the Committee,

My submission will refer to several, but not all, terms of references.

Comparison of practices within other jurisdictions in Australia

Each state in Australia has its own regulations in relation to home education. In Queensland, where I reside, it is currently a legal requirement to register with Education Queensland or a private school that has been approved to support home educators.

When registering with Education Queensland the parent/guardian needs to apply through the Home Education Unit. It is noted that this unit states they have the right to approve or decline permission for the applicant to home educate.

Private schools offer different services and have different requirements depending upon the educational philosophy of the school. There is quite a variety of approaches available, but essentially they support families in their home education efforts by providing curriculum advice, teaching support if needed, workshops, and assisting parents to fulfil Education Queensland requirements.

Reasons for unregistered home schoolers

The extent of unregistered home schoolers would be hard to determine. Of the home educators I have met who are not registered, most do so because they believe *their* children are *their* responsibility, not the state's responsibility. In fact, they completely object to the state interfering in the education of their children and assert that the state has overstepped its jurisdiction. At the core of these home schoolers belief is the matter of who is responsible to care for their children. Do children belong to parents or the state? They would passionately declare their children do not belong to the state and, in doing so, will not allow the state to encroach on the education of their children.

Current regulatory framework:

Adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses

I believe home school parents should not be forced to adhere to any syllabus. Diversity and protection from mass indoctrination can only be found where there is freedom from government control of education. To the person who believes this is an overstatement I urge them to learn from history. It is a conflict of interest when the government controls the minds of the nation's youth. The Bantu Education Act shows how political agenda can, and is, infused in to the curriculum. Government control of education and syllabus only serves the government, not the family or society. Adolf Hitler knew the importance of controlling education. He outlawed home schooling and is quoted as saying "He alone who owns the youth, gains the future".

Training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

Put bluntly, teacher qualifications are a myth. There are many studies which confirm this, with one such study performed by Dr. Eric Hanushek of the University of Rochester. He surveyed the results of 113 studies on the impact of teachers' qualifications on their students' academic achievement. Eighty-five percent of studies found *no positive correlation* between the educational performance of the students and the teacher's educational background. Although 7 percent of the studies did find a positive correlation, 5 percent found a *negative impact* (Dr. Eric Hanushek, "The Impact of Differential Expenditures of School Performance," *Educational Researcher*, May 1990).

In September, 1988, Dr. Sam Peavey, professor emeritus of the School of Education at the University of Louisville testified before the Compulsory Education Study Committee of the Iowa Legislature. Not only did he have advanced education degrees from Harvard and Columbia, he had served on numerous committees dealing with accreditation and was involved in the preparation of thousands of prospective teachers for state certification. On the subject of teacher qualifications he stated:

May I say that I have spent a long career in developing and administering programs for teacher certification. I wish I could tell you that those thousands of certificates contributed significantly to the quality of children's learning, but I cannot.....After fifty years of research, we have found no significant correlation between the requirements for teacher certification and the quality of student achievement (Home Schooling The Right Choice, p.240)

Yet another expert, professor of education for the University of California, Dr. Donald Eriksen, stated:

Some of the worst teachers I've seen are highly certified. Look at our public schools. They're full of certified teachers. What kind of magic is that accomplishing? But I can take you to the best teachers I've ever seen, and most of them are uncertified ("The ABC's of Reform: Give Parents a Choice," *Insight*, September 24, 1990, 13).

I would suggest that teacher qualifications have very little to do with the effectiveness of a teacher. In fact, as an experienced Education Queensland itinerant LOTE teacher, I can attest to the farce of teacher training and certification. Test scores and university grades mean nothing when it comes to making a good teacher. Home school mothers around the world prove this to be true.

Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved

In my opinion the current registration processes are an encumbrance to home educators. Parents do not, and should not need to seek approval from the state to educate their children. They should not have to jump through any hoops or tick any boxes for the state. They should have complete freedom to educate their children as they see fit.

As a general observation, home school parents are choosing the harder option of schooling and they don't enter into it lightly. It is much easier to send children off to a stranger day in and day out, blame the pitiful academic results of your children on the failing state school system, blame the teachers for not preventing your child from being bullied, and not really know what your child learned today, struggled with today, or excelled in today. It is much easier to use the system as child care while you get on with life, perhaps working so you can afford things you couldn't if only on one wage, or having some time for yourself.

The easier option is to offload the responsibility of your children's education. However, the state deems it necessary to scrutinize those parents who most likely sacrifice the most for their children. Is this because the state is truly concerned for these children? What about the thousands of children failing in state schools? What about the children who are bullied and suffer physically and emotionally in these institutions? How audacious to think the government should regulate parents who home school their children! Look at what the government subjects children to on a daily basis!

Comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education:

Academic comparison

It's no secret that our schools are failing. The 2012 Program for International Student Assessment compared Australia to 65 other countries and reported that 15 year old Australian students are slipping further behind in reading and math skills. We were placed equal 17th in math, equal 10th in reading and equal 8th in science. According to an ABC 2012 news report, The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study revealed that a quarter of Australia's year 4 students failed to meet the minimum standard in reading for their age.

Studies that have been conducted on the academic achievement of home schoolers show they achieve on par or better than their schooled counterparts. In Christopher Klicka's book "Home Schooling The Right Choice" he refers to many studies, including those carried out by state departments of education.

The Tennessee Department of Education found that home schooled children in second grade, on average, scored in the 93rd percentile, while their public school counterparts, on the average, scored in the 62nd percentile on the Stanford Achievement test. Similarly, the State Department of Education in Alaska found home schooled children scored approximately 16 percentage points higher, on average, than the children of the same grades in conventional schools. According to the Arizona State Department of Education, 1,123 home schooled children in grades 1 through 9, on the average, scored *above* grade level in reading, language arts, and math, on standardised tests for the 1988-1989 school year. Four grades tested were a full grade level above. These are just a few examples.

Why is it that home schooled children can achieve such good results? As opposed to a school environment, home schooled children can learn in a place where they are most comfortable, where they can truly be themselves, where they do not need to fear humiliation or intimidation, and where they can fail without embarrassment. In contrast, schooled children can feel insecure or nervous in the school environment, most of them cannot be themselves due to the enormous amount of peer group pressure, they can face constant bullying, and they can feel to be failures due to the constant measuring and comparing of their "performance". The home is truly the most conducive learning environment due to these emotional barriers being lifted.

On top of this, home educated children can work at their own pace at each subject. They don't have to wait for others to catch up, or be left behind because they are free to work according to their ability. The school system's way of educating is completely illogical when one considers that children all develop at different rates and times. We do not pressure babies to crawl by the time they are 8 months, and we don't put toddlers in the "slow group" if they don't toilet train by the time they are 18 months. However, the school system puts expectations on developing brains to conform to a standard set by "experts" who think they know what and when that child should learn. To add insult to injury, the children who do not fit into the school system's boxes are then labelled as failures.

Cost comparison

Recently pressure has been put on our government to increase funding in an effort to improve the situation in our state schools, but history shows that more money does not equal better results. For example, in the US from 1982 to 1992, per-pupil spending nearly doubled from \$3,000 per student to just under \$6,000 per student. However, SAT scores declined (Lee Mitgang, "Survival, Not Reform, Is Agenda for Nation's Public Schools", *World*, September 14, 1991, 5). Other studies show there is no positive correlation between money spent on education and student performance.

Contrast this with home schooling. In a 1997 a study of 5,402 students entitled *Strengths of Their Own: Home Schoolers Across America* was released. The researcher found the average cost per home school student was \$546 while the average cost per public school student was \$5,325. Yet the home school children in this study averaged in the 85th percentile while the public school students averaged in the 50th percentile on the national standardised achievement tests. Home schooling is the most cost effective way to educate children.

There will be those who lament that if home schooling numbers increase there will be less tax revenue, but I would argue that to encourage home schooling would in fact open up employment opportunities as mothers leave the work force to home educate their children. Moreover, society as a whole would benefit from healthier families.

Socialisation comparison

Contrary to critics who ask how home schoolers will fare in the real world, a closer look shows it is actually public schooled children who are not living in the real world. Public school children are confined to a classroom for at least 180 days a year with minimal opportunity to be exposed to the workplace or go on excursions. The children are trapped with a group of children their own age with little chance to relate to children of other ages or adults. They are given little to no responsibility, and everything is provided for them.

Home schoolers, on the other hand, do not have these problems. They relate regularly with adults and with children of all ages. Depending on the family, home schooled children can be exposed to more workplaces, more employment options, and they can enjoy more hands on learning through excursions and travel. Home schooled children can be more responsible for their learning and self directed. The only aspect of the "real world" they miss out on by not attending public school is unhealthy peer pressure.

Home schooled children do well socially. Thomas Medley prepared a master's thesis for Radford University of Virginia on "The Socialization of Home School Children." Using the Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales to evaluate the social maturity of twenty home schooled children and thirteen demographically match public school children, Medley concluded that home schooled children were *better socialised and more mature* than the children in the public school (Thomas C. Smedley, M.S., "Socialization of Home Schooled Children: A Communication Approach," thesis submitted and approved for Master of Science, May 1992).

Dr, Larry Shyers compared behaviours and social development test scores of two groups of seventy children ages eight to ten. He found that the home schooled children did not lag behind children attending public or private schools in social development and they had consistently fewer behavioural problems. Shyer reflects that the results seem to show that a child's social development depends more on adult contact and less on contact with other children (Dr. Larry Shyers, "Comparison of Social Adjustment Between Home and Traditionally Schooled Students," unpublished doctoral dissertation at University of Florida's College of Education, 1992).

On top of these findings a study released by J. Gary Knowles, University of Michigan Assistant Professor of Education, found that of the 53 previously home schooled adults who were surveyed two-thirds were married, none were unemployed or on welfare, 40 percent attended college and 15 percent had completed a graduate degree. Nearly two-thirds were self-employed. He stated, "That so many of those surveyed were self-employed supports the contention that home schooling tends to enhance a person's self reliance and independence".

When one looks at the "socialisation" that is occurring in public and private schools, one can only wonder why anyone would want that type of socialisation for their child. Unhealthy peer group pressure, bullying, drug use, teenage pregnancy, gangs, exposure to pornography and bad influences are found in school environments. Home schooled parents can better protect their children from these negative and sometimes life changing influences. Every parent shelters their child to some degree and home school parents choose to shelter their children in these ways to enable their children to mature and develop into a person who establishes and maintains healthy relationships.

Family relationships comparison

Home schooled families also enjoy more time together as compared to families with children in school. School children are away from home at least 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, 40 weeks a year. They are removed from parents and siblings for most of their waking hours. Compare this to a home school family where teaching and learning can be adjusted to allow fathers to spend more time with their children, where mothers are home each day with the children, and brothers and sisters do not become segregated by age differences. Added to this, home school families generally do not place their infants and toddlers in day care centres, so these children are free from the negative effects that studies have shown come from such a situation.

Conclusion

It is clear that home schooled children fare well in all areas and that their parents take on a commitment that involves sacrifice. From these undeniable facts, we can conclude that home school parents are in no need of regulation.

It is also clear that if the state chooses to impose itself on parents by way of compulsory registration the state is in fact declaring that children are no longer under the care and responsibility of the parents. It would appear that children belong to the state and parents are mere incubators and part time carers of children. If that is the case why would anyone wish to have children?

My recommendation is for the state to make no legal requirements of home schoolers. Registration should be completely voluntary for those home schoolers who wish to gain support or other benefits they feel might come from registering.

Thank-you for taking the time to read my submission. I hope it has been helpful.

Yours Sincerely,
Lyndell Williamson