

**Submission  
No 54**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

**Name:** Mr John Barratt-Peacock

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Home Education  
in  
New South Wales

Submission

by

**John Barratt-Peacock BA., PGCE., BA., MSc., PhD.** (Home Education)

Select Committee on Home Schooling

New South Wales Legislative Council

2014

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## Introduction

### Home Education: understanding before legislation

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this enquiry. I have been a home educator as well as a formally qualified and experienced teacher for well over four decades and I am the author of the first major research carried out on home education in Australia<sup>1</sup>. It is still recognised internationally as the authoritative work on the subject.

I have read the e-brief on the subject of Home Education in NSW by Talina Drabsc. I believe that she has presented a clear and accurate summary and I thank her for her excellent work.

However, there are serious misconceptions in the minds of many, especially those whose background and employment is in the administration of state school education. I wish to address this shortcoming specifically and to add a few further remarks that might be of interest to those having the difficult task of devising a fair and responsible oversight structure that will allow the government of NSW to exercise its legal duty of care to the home educated children of that state without unduly trespassing upon the freedom and responsibilities of their families.

I have family living in Sydney and should be happy to appear before the committee to expand on, or clarify, what I have written and to assist in any other way. There is so much more than I have been able to note within the limits of a short written submission. I will be available until the end of August, overseas until the end of September but free thereafter.

Sincerely,

John Barratt-Peacock BA., PGCE., BA., MSC., PhD.

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<sup>1</sup> Barratt-Peacock, J. (1997)

### Becoming a Home Educating Family Is A Process Over Time

My research was Australia wide but one of the important findings was that just about every home educating family that had withdrawn children from a school started by attempting to reproduce school at home in some way. They do it because that is what they know about education through their own school attendance and because they are nervous. States like NSW foster that situation by imposing tasks and conditions through the Board of Studies that are useful and necessary in a school situation but pointless, irrelevant, odious and a time waster in a home education environment.

The “school at home” phase does not last very long because it does not work. Even when, as in my case, the parent is a professional teacher it still does not work because home education is a fundamentally different process, in every way, from schooling. However, many more conservative families have been persuaded to purchase curriculum material from the commercial sources that may be associated with their religious beliefs<sup>2</sup>. Those resources have not always been of what I would consider to be an acceptable standard. However my research clearly indicated that those families also relied on other materials and forms of education and that the overall “mix” of resources, strategies and activities was more than sufficient to exceed the standards and curriculum of an average state school.

Other families declare an informal approach to home education using terms like “natural learning” and “unschooling” etc. These families are thought by many to be further along a continuum than the “formal” families but, again, no matter what the family declared of itself, they also routinely included formal learning as an element in their mix.

I concluded that the declared denomination of a home educating family had more to do with self perception than practical reality and, to some extent, was the product of early, U.S. based research activity that felt a need to organise home education into sub categories. Thus my

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<sup>2</sup> At least one of those sources uses them to validly claim the family is doing a form of private distance education. However, my interviews and observations of such families indicates that they do enough of other activities to enable them to claim they are home educating. Thus the curriculum suppliers have found a way around bureaucratic impediments that attracts some families and is good for business!

research indicated that a family, mature in home education practise, would be more accurately described as “eclectic” rather than by any of the more common denominational titles.<sup>3</sup>

By the time a family has reached this stage in their home education development they are significantly changed such that education for every individual and the family as a whole has become a central part of all of their activity. Further, it is common for each member of the family to have developed a family recognised expertise in one or more specialities and for the others to bow to that expertise whenever it comes up no matter what the age of the expert. The primary change is in a growing sense of family self sufficiency and independence and in a sense of pioneering new territory, which fits very well within the Australian cultural self image. A significant part of that difference is that, over time, the role and status of children in the family changes such that they are given “the power of independent regard”. To explain that I need to go back to the first European settlement of this continent.

Imagine how utterly different and alien it would appear to the first “Poms” off the boat. Experienced agrarian folk of the ‘old country’ would find everything strange and even the parts that looked familiar would have soon been found to have worked differently. In such pioneering situations the guesses and opinions of children would be just as valuable as those of their elders, skilled and wise as they were in the environments they came from. Survival and prospering depended on all the members of the family including the children and, that being so, children played a much more more significant part in the family.

Given the development of modern communications and technology, the added pressures from a globalised economy and the multicultural nature of our rapidly changing society etc. home educated children are not isolated and exploited in wider society nor are they left to peer group excesses as too often are schooled children. Rather from within their primary grouping of family they play an important and supported/ supporting role first for their family and then out into the immediate local society and thence into wider society. This advanced

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<sup>3</sup> Just in passing, may I recommend the Inquiry access a copy of the “Home Education in Tasmania: Report of the Ministerial Working Party on Home Education” for further definitions and descriptions of forms of home education. Alison Jacob was the author

socialisation happens in a naturally controlled way over time driven by the readiness of the child and his/her already deep immersion in the local community. This is an opportunity largely denied schooled children who spend long hours every day isolated from their immediate community and captive to that unnatural and too often toxic institution, the peer group. The technical term for this kind of socialisation is situated learning and this learning sits within a perspective of the family as a community of learning practice.

### **Teaching Driven School or Learning Driven Home Education?**

Home education is not about teaching, it is about learning and there is an infinity of ways of learning that have little to do with teaching. In this circumstance parents act more as managers and resource finders for their children, and of course, providers of transport!

The role of parents, usually mothers, in the education of their children is still disgracefully under recognised. All teachers in all schools build on a foundation laid by often otherwise unqualified mothers. It is what children learn at home in families from birth to school age that makes schooling possible.

It is a gripe that I share with many professional school teachers that, these days, that foundation is too often poorly laid or entirely missing and the number of feral children disrupting classrooms is rapidly increasing.

Those families that do such a marvellous job laying the foundation are quite capable of continuing to build if they so choose and the research from the 1980s to this day consistently and routinely shows that their children have many advantages over schooled children. An average of 300 plus creative verbal interactions between a parent and individual child contrasts strongly with one or two in the classroom and situations in which teacher responses are single word orders, comments or 'control' instructions rather than responses designed to draw children out or really engage with their thinking and learning processes

In the classroom of even the very best of contemporary teachers, crowd control still takes up considerable time and energy. It is simply unknown in home educating families.

Education departments are legally obliged to provide externally chosen and a very limited range of knowledge and skills. As a teacher I know that I was often frustrated by this situation, particularly so when my pupils wanted to go further than the curriculum and time allowed. By contrast the only limit on what home educated children learn is their own stamina and interest!

### **Mass Produced or Hand Crafted?**

Because schools are based on the mass production progressive assembly line model it is necessary to subdivide any subject into smaller components the mastery of which can be checked at each stage. Dedicated and top teachers do their best to give individual attention but there is seldom enough time or space. In addition, state schools and teachers are bedevilled by constant checks and the production of reports and test results etc. That is as it should be in a mistrustful society because the whole enterprise is funded by the taxpayer, but all of this is alien to the natural development of children, to normal cognitive development and learning styles. It simply cannot fully adjust to the differing developmental and learning rates of any significant group of children. It is well established that children learn in bursts followed by periods of non learning in which we currently suppose that assimilation is taking place. The pattern of active learning/assimilation differs between individuals and genders but the school pupil has to go in lock step at a steady, distant committee decided, pace. The early sequences in the film "The Wall" by Pink Floyd clearly depicts the lock step nature of this mass learning.

### **Current State Regulation of Home Education:- NSW**

The 1990 Education Act definition of home education is seriously flawed and does not reflect the reality of the practice. Developing that fundamental mistake the Board of Studies Home Education Unit has compounded and proliferated it in the list of specific requirements that it has drawn up for NSW home educators. No other state or nation has such foolish, unnecessary, and onerous regulations. I will like to address them one by one with possible



alternatives.

***1) The educational programme is to be based on the curriculum provided by the Education Act 1990.***

Home education is a lifestyle not a programme and it is primarily learner directed. It is not difficult to include the curriculum items noted but they would be tiny part of the mix and they would not be dealt with in the same way as in schools because home education is differently organised and much more comprehensive in its scope. By the time a home educated child is of equivalent school leaving age the curriculum will have been covered but not in discrete segments served up to learners at even periods along the way. Home educators know better than to keep taking the cake out of the oven to check progress before it is fully baked!

***2) The education programme is to be based on and taught in accordance with the relevant Board of Studies syllabuses<sup>4</sup> .***

See response to 1) above . Home education is about learning NOT teaching, and goes well beyond the Board of Studies syllabi. This display of ignorance does no credit to the Board of Studies.

***3) The educational program must be suitable to cater for the identified learning needs of the child.***

Please note previous comments above. Since home education is primarily learner driven this happens naturally. A significant proportion of home educators choose that option because they can better meet the individual needs of the child, including a child with different learning abilities and needs. I have worked professionally in this area and can confidently state that any child who is a slow learner or who has an intellectual or social disability gets better and more attention in home education than in the average school, nor are they labelled or stigmatised at home.

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<sup>4</sup> The author of that sentence is obviously in need of learning the rules of punctuation in English. It is hardly a credit to school based education!

***4) There must be an adequate system of recording learning experiences and the child's progress and achievement.***

Why? How will that benefit the child? In real education the child is the record. This is just another symptom of the "check the progress of the baking cake" syndrome. Necessary in school, perhaps, though in my experience superficially done, if at all., it is impossible for the infinitely richer learning environment of home education. However, regular checking/observation by an AP or similar officer should cover it.

***5) The time allocated to learning must be sufficient to allow coverage of the curriculum and be comparable to the time allocated by schools.***

If I were a citizen of NSW I would be so embarrassed by this requirement and the utter ignorance it displays! I do not know just how much time is actually spent on the curriculum in NSW schools but I doubt if young children are in the classroom for more than five hours a day and of the time that they are there I doubt if more than 50 -60 % is spent on serious curriculum focussed learning activities. These comments are based on many years of classroom teaching experience. As a small part of my doctoral research I spent one whole day from waking to sleeping with a small number of children using a standardised procedure to record all the possible learning influences in their sensory environment. There was more time and richer ranges of experience for the individual child than would ever be possible in a school classroom.

***6) The learning environment must be suitable for effective home education***

Since the drafters of these regulations have clearly demonstrated their utter ignorance of home education practice, this regulation should be a joke . The learning environments routinely utilised by home educators all around Australia are richer and more numerous than any available to schools - except perhaps in NSW where the Board of Studies dominated practice severely limits true home education and disadvantages far too many children.

***7) The resources within the home and those accessed externally must be adequate to support***

*the learning needs of the child.*

When home education is defined as parents teaching a school-like curriculum to their children within the family home this might make some sense, but given that such a definition is nothing like the reality in the lived-in world, it is utterly off the mark. I could now, without a moment's notice, go into any home selected at random and identify a wealth of learning opportunities inside it and in the proximate and further environment that would cause those available to an individual child in a state school to fade into insignificance! Home education does not focus merely on the learning "NEEDS" of the child, whoever decides what that means, but the child's individual interest and imagination are let loose upon her environment and so guided as to incorporate any "needs" and go well beyond!

**An Alternative Checklist for Home Educating Families**

- 1) Do the children appear to be happy, healthy and contented?
- 2) Is their social behaviour age appropriate in a range of situations?
- 3) Does the house and surrounds provide a healthy environment?
- 4) Do individual children demonstrate a healthy personal curiosity with independent preferences and interests?
- 5) Is interpersonal communication demonstrably sound and developmentally appropriate?
- 6) Can the parent show a sufficient number and range of resources in the learning environments? This is not limited to professionally or commercially produced school-like learning materials .
- 7) What contribution do the children make to the running of the home and is this within their skills and capabilities?
- 8) What networks and friendships have the family and children developed in the local community and how do they serve their local community?

**Motivation**

It is not surprising that most school children are motivated by goals and rewards that are

extrinsic to the subject matter being studied because that is what they are given e.g. “Study hard and you will get a good job<sup>5</sup>”

Home education is delight directed or otherwise mostly driven by the learner and is wholly individual in nature with the possible exception of when pupils attend university lectures, Double Helix Club events, music tutoring or other such formal learning situations. The simple reason for its success is that the children are naturally programmed to learn and they learn in the context and environment that is natural to the species at this point in its social evolution, just as other natural species do.

### **The Vexed Question Of Registration**

I have always been completely open about my practice of home education and, in the early years, actively sought publicity for home education in the print and electronic media, but I have never either sought the permission of government or registered with them. Most of what follows is my personal perspective but whenever the question has been raised at H.E. meetings one commonly hears the following sorts questions raised.

“Which minister went through the pregnancy and labour pains that came with my baby?”

“ Which department was there for the 2 a.m. feeds?”

“ Who was on call 24/7 for the first 4 years of my son’s life?”

I was born in the middle of WW2 in the most bombed city in the U.K. I grew up surrounded by ruins. My friends commonly had missing relatives killed in action or family destroyed in the bombing. It has always been very clear to me that some governments serve and trust their people, preserving their individual rights and freedoms while others enslave and exploit them. Throughout my life there has always been a war going on somewhere and they have mostly been between governments that value the personal freedoms of their citizens and those that elevate the interests of government or party above that of individual citizens. There was the National Socialism (NAZI) of Germany and then the International Socialism/Communism of many countries led by the Soviet Union. The divide is still there at

<sup>5</sup> By contrast my junior school reports were depressingly consistent; “Johnny must try harder”.

an international level but globalisation has allowed many of the evils of the former totalitarian governments to seep into the current practices of formerly independent and free western nations. It is clear from history that governments begin the oppression of their citizens by registration. Ask any Jew, Slav or Gypsy. The lesson is burned deep into their psyches.

In 1968 I took the initiative of asking a beautiful and feisty young lady to marry me. From that marriage five children were born and, to date, six grandchildren. My wife, the only child of a troubled marriage, had no interest in producing a large family. Initially she had children just to please me but, naturally, found that she loved her children once they were born. In addition, a number of other children and young people attached themselves to our home educating family for significant periods of time and I include them, their spouses and children in my wider family.

No government was involved in any of this nor did any contribute in any significant way. The whole initiating responsibility was mine and my wife and I shared the subsequent nurturing and educating responsibilities. The majority of parents choose to largely surrender those responsibilities and privileges to the state by enrolling their children in the school system at ever younger ages. We did not.

Ultimately, I am responsible for what I have created. I cannot shift that responsibility to others nor do I want to. It is my duty and my joy and I will never give it up to any authority whatever, nor do I acknowledge that any authority has any legitimate interest, rights or privileges in the matter as long as my children are not suffering neglect or abuse.

Governments should only intervene when parents fail.

A family that I interviewed in my research recorded the following perspective.

“**Electra**<sup>6</sup> .I think it’s very dangerous to give the government too much responsibility for your children because, really, you can’t make the government responsible for anything in the end. If things go wrong, who is responsible for it? It is essentially the parents’ job. I mean we are caretakers of the children. We don’t own them, you know, we are supposed to take care

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<sup>6</sup> The names are pseudonyms

of them . That's our job really....

**Hans.** The government will put their thumb in as a basic structure and if it works they say , “Its fine” and if it doesn't work, “We alter it”. But I can't alter my children after a mistake has been made. I can't say, “Oh sorry, one has turned out a bum. We'll go round and fix it again” [The] child is already a bum... I think it [education] is the responsibility of every parent.”<sup>7</sup>

Never the less governments do have a responsibility for all of their citizens and child abuse in schools is currently much in the news. I make the point that home education is very demanding and relatively few persevere. In this way it is self regulating but if the oversight of home education is positive, separate from the school education bureaucracy and answerable to the minister I believe that most people will declare their home education status. This is what happened in Tasmania.

### **Home Education In NSW -A Possible Way Forward**

The current system is broken and utterly useless. Whatever system is chosen to replace it must be completely independent of the Board of Studies which has demonstrated an extreme degree of ignorance over an extended period. Rather it must have its own access to the minister through its own bureaucracy under an amended Act.

### **Developing A Structure For Administering Home Education In NSW**

I do not have contemporary data for NSW but I expect that a child who is home educated up to the the age of 16 would save the government many thousands of dollars. Whatever the figure, multiplied by the number of registered home educators it would more than cover the cost of an efficient and appropriate administrative structure with a serious sum left over. One should also bear in mind that home educators have approximately double the national average number of children in their families.

Any form of administration must achieve two goals.

i) It must satisfy the legal requirements included in the Act, and

<sup>7</sup> p. 79 The Why and How of Australian Home Education. Barratt-Peacock. J. Pub. La Trobe University (1997)



ii) it must be sufficiently user friendly that home educators trust it enough to come into the open about their practices.

As the Act now stands it is ineffective and unacceptable and must be amended to reflect the full range of home education practice in NSW.

By the time the present inquiry is completed members should have an excellent understanding of home education, especially so if they read my thesis and the more recent work of Dr. Alan Thomas ( Google his name for latest titles). May I suggest a next step of establishing a government Ministerial Working Party of a similarly balanced composition as the one that preceded the establishment of THEAC in Tasmania?

That committee was chaired by a ministerial appointee, had representatives of three different home education groups/styles, a university lecturer in education and a school headmaster with a very wide experience of mainstream and alternative schools. I am quite certain that a similar committee could be gathered in NSW and develop a form of administration tailored specifically to NSW conditions and expectations.

If an administrative structure similar to THEAC were established in NSW it should include a small number of Authorised Persons (APs) based in appropriate regional centres and reporting to it via the internet ( See Appendix B). Naturally, I cannot be too prescriptive because I have no idea of the distribution of registered home educators in NSW. The APs should be drawn from people who have successfully completed a training course on home education and/or have been successful home educators themselves. They should be paid and they should have a more user friendly title.

### **The Eight Learning Areas**

In general I think that dividing learning into other-imposed and discrete subject areas in a school-like, teacher driven, form is antithetical to home education but, in my extensive experience, I find that home educating families do include, in a connected and integrated way over time., the sorts of learning areas identified by Australian governments as basic

requirements. Please see Appendix A for a real life example of how one family tackled just one learning area even when it was not required by the government at the time.

The other problem of incorporating such a list into law or enforceable regulation is that it is always subject to change for political reasons or those of fashion. The evidence is that home educators in Australia include those areas and much, much more in their delight directed learning.

### Closing Comments

I should like to close with a quote from a very wise Australian who was primarily concerned with how we treat Australian children - Don Edgar of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. He described a double injustice that was done to Australian children by making them sacral and, at the same time, useless to their families. He said,

‘We deny or reduce their achievement of competent self worth, and we weaken the chances of greater social investment in childhood itself. A return to meaningful tasks, to learning skills and doing things that are useful to others, **now**<sup>8</sup> as well as later on, is essential if our children are to learn a sense of responsibility for others and a sense of self respect’

The parents who assisted my research made it clear to me that their practice of home education was, inter alia, a response in Edgar’s terms to the problem he identified.

After prolonged and more or less intimate contact with Australian home educating families, my own impression is that Edgar’s statement could equally apply to parents and parenting. I sensed, and many mothers made explicit, a particular feeling of responsibility, self worth and fulfilment in the lives of parents who had taken on home education.

Many parents indicated that an important dimension of parenting was diminished or lost when their children attended school. The authority and status of teachers replaced their authority and status. Others had the pleasure of stimulating the intellectual development of their children and observing the joy on the face of a child as understanding dawned. Guidance

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<sup>8</sup> My emphasis



officers, nurses, social workers and a host of other professionals took the responsibility of care for other aspects of the lives of their children and thereby the parents felt their own role diminished.

These responsibilities and the associated satisfaction, many felt, had been restored to them through home education.<sup>9</sup>

### **References**

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**Tizard, B., and Hughes, M. ( 1984).** Young Children Learning: Talking and Thinking at Home and at School. London, U.K. Fontana Paperbacks. This is old research that has regularly been replicated by more recent research ( see Thomas below for example) and continues to be confirmed in its findings.

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<sup>9</sup> Barratt-Peacock, J ( 1997) The Why and How of Australian Home Education. PhD Thesis, LaTrobe University .p.276

**Thomas, Alan. (1994)** The Quality Of Learning Experienced by Children Who Are Educated At Home. Paper presented to The British Psychological Association Conference, Brighton, U.K. Dr. Thomas has conducted extensive research in Australia and published several books based on that research. Unfortunately I have lost contact with him but I think that his work could be obtained through the "Home Education Network"

**Van Galen, J. A. ( 1987)** Explaining Home Education: Parents' accounts of their decisions to teach their own children. The Urban Review, v.19, n.3.,1987. (This is a USA publication.)

### Appendix A.

There is no need to list areas of compulsory learning for home educating families. It only inhibits and restricts and is therefore counter productive. Here is an example of LOTE (Languages other than English) in school and in home education within my family.

My wife studied French in school and passed all her exams. I studied German. On subsequent travels in those countries my wife was inarticulate trying to work out the correct grammar in her head before she spoke. I recalled nothing!

At sixteen our eldest daughter won a Rotary scholarship to live in Japan for a year. Upon her return her Japanese was so good that the University of Tasmania offered her a degree in the subject if she completed two terms of their course.

Our middle daughter, who started university at the age of 15 and was well into her Masters' when her contemporaries were completing year 12, decided that she would like to visit Japan to collect data for her doctorate. She has lived and worked there for seven years to date and, with her Aussie husband, is currently adopting a Japanese boy. Learning the language in its every day lived context has not only aided her skill in speaking it but immeasurably enriched her understanding of its cultural context and ability to read and write within its framework.

For our youngest daughter we hosted a German exchange student for a year. It was a wonderful experience and I very much wish that we had taken the opportunity to host other

students earlier. When our daughter went to university she was able to add German to the Music and English she had planned to study. The University of Tasmania has a sister university in Germany and our daughter took advantage of that to win a year studying her subjects at that university. She struggled because the standards, even in English, were so much higher and more demanding but she loved the challenge and rose to it. She is currently living, teaching and studying for her doctorate in Germany and she plans to marry her German boyfriend next year. Now all of the family here is learning German conversation in preparation for attending the wedding! ( Did I mention that home education is a whole of family business?)

Our elder son won a place on an Australian government sponsored student exchange/goodwill programme to Indonesia. There he learned Indonesian in context at village level AND he met a lovely Sydneysider who was also on the programme and whom he subsequently married and who has immeasurably enriched our family.

Our younger son opted to attend high school. My children always had that choice. He also went to university but, having learned to give the peer group unwarranted influence on his life, he got into the drug scene and dropped out. He grew out of that episode in his life and currently runs a successful business. He has not learned a second language in spite of it being a mandated part of the school curriculum.

In school what is taught is imposed from above regardless of the interests or commitment of the learner. The learner has little or no choice in the matter. Even in the best of circumstances and with the best of teachers and in a class where every student is keen to learn<sup>10</sup> only a little will be mastered, probably less retained and all of it in a context alien to the culture within which the language has developed. That is **not** a reason for dropping LOTE from the school curriculum but it is a demonstration of the inferior results that come from imposed learning via teaching when compared with the self selected, delight directed, learning of the home educated child. Neither is it just a case of, "location, location, location" It is a whole other and

<sup>10</sup> The impossible dream of every teacher!

infinitely richer world view and process.

### Appendix B

It should be possible to set up a dedicated and secure web site that home educators should contact four times a year with a tick list for an agreed range of basics covered, a short description of some significant learning experience over the period and opportunity to ask for suggestions in a particular learning or other situation. The ubiquitous nature of Internet access and the roll out of the NBN should make this a cost effective measure.

Those few families who have no access to the Internet at all, or who are allergic to it, could use Australia Post.

In addition, There should also be a group of monitors, distributed around regional centres, who would visit HE families in the same helpful spirit as is done in Tasmania but still corroborating , or not, the Internet data. This would also provide a means of checking for possible child abuse etc. Although that is so rare as to be discounted, it is still worthwhile to have a structure in place “just in case”. Such monitors should be remunerated and preferably drawn from experienced home educators where possible.

### Appendix C

Extract from my original letter to Upper House Committee Deputy Chairman; Dr. John Kaye. To be read immediately after, **Closing Comments**

Accompanying that restoration was the enhanced feeling of self worth, and a renewed sense of status and purpose. It was not just about children learning<sup>11</sup> but about whole families developing new relationships, perspectives and attitudes as they learned together, becoming in the process communities of learning practice.

Van Galen also found strengthening the family and restoring the status of women to be a major concern of home educating parents in the U.S. In Australia Mullaly recorded the satisfaction a select group of mothers obtained from their extended role through home education. The current research has shown that Mullaly's findings in this regard have a wider application than his sample allowed and that there are strong similarities between the U.S. and Australian experiences.

However, when all of those motives and benefits have been acknowledged, important as they are, they only reveal facets of the home education experience. ...

...In these circumstances, Lave and Wenger's (1991) portrayal of learning as a process of becoming - of developing an identity, a perspective- through being a legitimate peripheral participant in a community of practice is particularly apposite. Its emphasis on learning as a social process within the field of authentic adult practice rather than as the unproblematic individual absorption of decontextualised knowledge in a dedicated institution as a result of teaching sits well with the experience of mature Australian Home Educating families.

Formal instruction did occur in varying degrees in all of the families studied by my research but it occurred under one or both of two conditions. Either it was immediately contextualised because it occurred "on the job" and was necessary to the successful completion of the task in

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<sup>11</sup> There is a great deal of evidence that children learn easier, faster, wider and to a higher standard in home education than their contemporaries in school.

hand, or it occurred as a legitimate part of the adult practice of the family.

Formal study was a significant aspect of the daily experience of many of the participating families. Further, as a result of involvement in the home education of their children, many parents also began to extend or continue their own education...

... The perspective of the family as a community of learning practice developed by my research, then, provides a fresh, fruitful and comprehensive explanatory framework for Australian home education.”

My interest in finding a accurate description and model for Australian home education was driven by the realisation of its utter difference from schooling. Until that difference is realised and authorities stop trying to force home education into the schooling model, no progress is possible.

My quotes have been few and somewhat random. I strongly recommend the whole research thesis be read. It is recognised internationally as the standard work on Australian home education and I humbly venture to suggest that there is little point in allocating more taxpayer dollars, forming more committees and conducting further investigations until this all Australian work has been read and understood. Detailed descriptors of authentic home education practice are included in the thesis.

So! Have there been any significant changes since 1997 that would bear on the question of why there has been a significant increase in the uptake of home education, not only in NSW but more generally around Australia and the world? Yes there have, but we must begin by more closely defining what we mean by education and socialisation

R.S.Peters long ago defined education as a process of initiation whereby the ignorant savage was so dealt with that when he found himself within the realm of society he recognised what he found there and appreciated it. Peters was focussing on school education at the time.

Berger and Luckmann around the same time noted two stages in the socialisation of children. The primary stage was completed within the home and family environment but, they argued,



the more complex secondary stage was completed in school. Much later, Lave and Wenger commented that they could equally as well have focussed on socialisation or education when developing their theory of learning.

Before schools were established, first by the Christian church and then taken over by the state, socialisation was not segregated into two stages but experienced naturally and directly as a person lived her life in society. With the development of the industrial revolution a demand arose for the particular kind of personal discipline necessary to manage machines. In this context the state school system developed and attendance became compulsory. Nevertheless, it was recognised in English speaking countries that schooling was only a necessary supplement to actually playing a full part in society according to one's age and station in life. This was not the case in the newly formed nation of Germany under Prussian leadership. There, everything was focussed on the state and schooling.

When Germany defeated France in 1870 the French concluded that the superior discipline and skill of the German soldier was the result of his Prussian schooling. In WW1 it was only the influx of troops from Australia and the U.S.A. etc. that prevented an allied defeat. In the inter war years this gave rise to a great debate among English speaking educators about whether they should adopt the German model in which socialisation was the main business of state schools or continue with their own system in which schools supplemented direct experience of society. They rejected the German approach and chose to continue with their own system, but over subsequent years, industrial development was such that schools took on ever increasing responsibility for preparing students for the work force and for further education whether at university or some form of training college. Thus schools became the gatekeepers for access to further education and the arbiters of whether a person found work at the meanest level or had the opportunity for better and more well paid employment as a result of accessing the knowledge and skills deposited in monopolistic centres of tertiary education and libraries. Two technical inventions changed all that and destroyed the

monopoly.

The internet, first made available through desk top computers, currently available through mobile telephones and soon to be available through the rims of eyeglasses, has broken the monopoly and made all knowledge available to the individual.

What about that other widely claimed function of schooling; socialisation? Applications and programmes such as Face book have taken over the playground gossip and communications but not really provided role models as such. That is the job of television in our brave new world.

From its inception television producers set out to influence individuals and society along lines they thought appropriate and/or profitable. Back then it was crude propaganda and role modelling through such programmes as, "The Brady Bunch", "Meet the Huggets" etc. The titles have changed but the process continues and, as if houses with TVs in every room were not enough, one need never be without TV because, I understand, it can be accessed over the ubiquitous mobile 'phone!

Observation suggests that schools have partially bowed to the inevitable by using these media at all levels for a considerable portion of the school day.

Although the motivation behind much of what comes through these media is clearly economic profit rather than the high ideals of good professional teachers I am not questioning that. I am merely observing that the ills as well as the benefits of school based education are magnified through these media and that parents can increasingly provide all that was once the exclusive domain of schools while maintaining the core values and beliefs of their families. The reality is that the child care function of schools has become their most useful service.

When I was first teaching professionally, one could rely on parents sending their children to school well rested, well dressed and well fed. Since the introduction of the "Baby Bonus" by the federal government that is decreasingly the case and consequently the 'c crowd control' function of the teacher has become more prominent and difficult as the rift between school



and some homes widens

Penultimately, in some states, the social engineering ideal of inclusion has resulted in damaged, mentally ill, and disabled children appearing in the classrooms of mainstream schools rather than in specialised schools. In spite of the employment of teacher aides to deal with the situation, the chaos caused seriously mitigates against good teaching and efficient learning. Finally, the routine drugging of large numbers of children for what used to be considered normal developmental behaviour and which may have moved to extremes as a result of exposure to inappropriate material via other media has made the experience of school even more difficult for dedicated professional teachers and for children wanting to learn.

This is not just a rant about what might be wrong with the school system. Rather, I wish to make the point that all of this is well known to parents through the experience of their own children as well as through the sensationalist media. Taking all of the above information into account it is not at all surprising that increasing numbers of parents opt for a continuation, or reclamation, of their primary role of socialiser and educator of their children.

Not only so, but by extending their operation beyond the home into the local community they are able to access such a rich variety and source of learning and skill sharing that they are able to outperform schools in the richness and scope of the resources available to them and their children. Add to all of this that Australia is a comparatively rich country where parents are able to afford the costs of so educating their children.

Commonly schools have a teacher /pupil ratio of around 20 -25 to one. Experienced home educating families have a "pupil / teacher" ratio of at least 20 - 25 teachers to one child over time!

Continuing revelations of sexual and other assaults by adults on children in schools and of extreme bullying by gangs of other pupils have a strong influence on parental decisions to home educate.

For some time now international comparisons have placed Australian school education with

that of third world countries. That should be very worrying , given the relative wealth of Australia and the amount of money poured into state schools. Many parents are aware of this disgrace.

I have no information on teacher training in NSW but in Tasmania it is very poor and far too many poorly performing students are attracted to teaching as a result. Your committee might like to consider the situation of teacher training in NSW.

Home education is the way first world societies are currently moving and NSW would do well to encourage, or at least, support and facilitate it Every child educated outside of the school system ensures an increase of funds available to those within it and that is a win all round as long as the home educated child is not neglected and that is best monitored by people who understand the completely different approach of experienced home educating families. The Board of Studies, bound by old fashioned and unhelpful laws and attitudes, does not so qualify