

**Submission  
No 9**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

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# Submission into Home Education in NSW

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## **1. Introduction:**

My research into home education was conducted in 2012 and 2013. I undertook qualitative interviews with home education families in Queensland, particularly focused on unschoolers. My research has been published in the Journal of Unschool and Alternative Learning and the Home Education Researcher Journal.

I have a long research relationship with questions of school choice. I completed my MEd (Research) in 2005 (QUT) and looked at why parents chose non-government schools. In 2013, I completed my PhD (Griffith University) examining the reasons international students come to Australian schools. My post-doctoral concern has been with questions of home education choice.

## **2. Research into home education**

The following is a literature review of the research into home education, conducted in Australia, overseas (predominantly in the US) and also my own research.

### **2.1 Outcomes of home education internationally and interstate**

Research suggests that home education graduates outperform their conventionally schooled peers in literacy, numeracy, and cognition. They also are said to achieve excellence in higher education. To illustrate, Ray (2003; 2014) argues that home-educated students in the US score between 15 and 30 percentile points above conventionally schooled peers. These results are regardless of whether the parents have been to university, were ever teachers (or trained as teachers) and are not dependent on household income. In addition, Ray (2014) argues that these students outperform conventionally schooled peers on both SAT and ACT measures and are sought out for admission by colleges.

### **2.2 Financial costs of home education**

Anecdotally, my research reveals that home education families are generally lower in terms of median and mean income measures than those families who school their children, and this may be explained by the absence of one parent from the workforce. However, the families who choose this option are not from one social class and the families I researched were all highly educated. Ray (2003; 2014), Coalition for Responsible Home Education (2013) and Paine (ND) suggest that there is no single demographic home educating family in Australia or overseas.

The financial costs are borne by these families in a way that conventionally schooled families do not bear the costs. The costs may come from:

- one parent who is not engaged in the workforce or two parents who work part time
- no government assistance to home educators now that the School Kid Bonus has been terminated and due to the budget's proposed changes in family assistance

- tax paid by home educators funds both private and public schools, but the whole costs of educating the child in a home education family are borne by the family.

### **2.3 International research into its choice**

Research suggests that there are a number of reasons parents choose to home educate. These include:

- the strengthening and fostering of familial relationships affected by the hours of schools (Paine, ND; English 2013; 2014, Ray, 2014)
- customizability of the home education curriculum (Ray, 2014)
- educating children with special needs (Parsons, Guldberg, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty & Balfe; 2011; Payne, ND; Ray, 2014; McDonald & Lopes, 2014)
- enhancing the family's values (Morton, 2010; English 2013; 2014, Ray, 2014)
- a general dissatisfaction with schools and institutionalized education (Morton, 2010; Ray, 2014)
- A belief that families have the primary responsibility for educating their children, not the state or religious institutions (Commission For Children And Young People, ND).

However, it is generally accepted that there is a combination of reasons for families to choose to home educate.

### **2.4 Research findings into home education choice**

My research examined the link between parenting practices and home education. Specifically, I looked at those parents who identify as Attachment Parents and their decision to home educate. I found a strong correlation between home education, particularly unschooling, and adherence to an Attachment Parenting family ethos (English, 2013; English, 2014; English, forthcoming). The findings of a link between Attachment Parenting and unschooling is supported by the work of Gray (2012; 2013).

## **2.5 Findings on home education registration avoiders**

Several of the parents I interviewed spoke privately about their failure to register.

This work has not been published but my anecdotal findings about families who fail to register suggest they choose not to register because:

- the length and difficulty of the paperwork is overwhelming
- they do not want to have ‘inspectors’ enter their homes and ‘judge’
- they do not see the link between the inspectors’ criteria and the unschool or natural learning philosophy they were following
- they fear of educational institutions, generally from their own experiences of school
- they lack of trust in the institutionalized education that is represented by the process
- they fear they are not being able to construct a school discourse for the purpose of registration.

## **2.6 Comparison of home education types**

There are several home education types that my work suggests exist on a spectrum rather than as neat and organized parts.

*Structured home education* → This style of home education looks like ‘school at home’. Parents will register, follow a curriculum and engage in a timetabled approach to learning.

*Unstructured home education, natural learning, unschooling* → This style of home education is a natural learning approach where the child will be encouraged to follow their interests and parents will allow the child freedom to learn what they want. This style of home education is often associated with ‘radical’ unschoolers who practice other forms of child-led parenting such as not managing their children’s food, television/media or bedtime.

*Distance Education* → In Queensland, parents can undertake distance education programs for their children regardless of their distance from a school. There are both private and public distance education providers.

### **3. Regulatory frameworks**

The following is drawn from both my research, anecdotal data I collected in that research and also from published sources.

#### **3.1 Ways to reduce unregistered home educators**

It appears there will always be families who choose not to register. The unregistered cohort are likely to be choosing to home educate because of a distrust of institutionalized education, a fear of government intervention in the family and, possibly, a belief in the parental role as principal educator. However, registration can be encouraged by:

- providing model plans online
- providing assistance to families preparing their plan
- taking a non-punitive and non-judgmental approach to in-home visits
- recognizing and valuing non-traditional learning plans, such as those prepared by unschoolers.

#### **3.2 Registration practices in Queensland**

In Queensland, a form must be completed. The parents/a registered teacher must educate the child at his/her home. The application must include an education plan:

“To demonstrate that these conditions are being met, a parent must provide documentation about the proposed educational program or how the chosen learning philosophy is to be implemented to meet the child’s education needs for the coming year.

This documentation should show evidence of a high-quality education that:

- a. is responsive to the changing needs of the child concerned;
- b. has regard to the age, ability, aptitude and development of the child concerned;
- c. is conducted in an environment conducive to learning;

- d. is responsive to the child's need for social development;
- e. reflects and takes into account current understandings related to educational and other development of children;
- f. takes account and promotes continuity of the learning experiences of the child concerned;
- g. is supported by sufficient and suitable resources; and
- h. uses strategies for monitoring educational progress".

Queensland Government: Education Queensland, 2013

In addition, demographic data about the parents' education and employment is collected.

### **3.3 Adherence to the National Curriculum and other syllabus documents**

Most home education families adhere to the national curriculum, as it is essential for registration. However, unschoolers need to find a link between the child's activities and the national curriculum documents. In addition, Christian families often buy curriculum from companies located in the US.

### **3.4 Benefits and impediments to child safety/welfare**

As West (2009) and Webster (2013) acknowledge, home education provides a mechanism to avoid detection of child abuse and neglect. However, in my research, I found highly motivated families who cared deeply about all aspects of their children's lives. I acknowledge that my study involved a self-selected cohort.

### **3.4 Regulatory regime problems**

The regulatory regime is not working currently as many families choose not to register and thus can not be followed. It is likely that failure to register will allow families to avoid detection for child neglect or abuse.

#### **4. Support for home education families**

I suspect that parents could be engaged with the BoSTES (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards) in much the same ways that teachers are engaged with panels in Queensland. I also suggest that many of the points raised above could assist families to feel supported in their home education journey. The points were:

- providing model plans online
- providing assistance to families preparing their plan
- taking a non-punitive and non-judgmental approach to in-home visits
- recognizing and valuing non-traditional learning plans, such as those prepared by unschoolers.

In addition, I would suggest establishing a peer-mentoring scheme for new home education families.