INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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The Director
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To Whom It May Concern:

As a researcher in the area of home education and home schooling, I have made a submission comparing the findings of a research project commissioned and reported by the Office of the Board of Studies (2000/2004) with the available Australian research literature. In this submission I have emphasised the consistency of findings between this report and all other research available in Australia to identify those features which impact the creation of an effective legislative and regulatory framework.

I completed my doctorate of philosophy in education at Monash University in Melbourne, Victoria and it was highly commended by my examiners in 2009. My research topic explored the experiences of parents, educational professionals and students who had been directly engaged in home education or with home educated families. Earlier (1999), I completed a Masters in Educational Studies at Monash University on home education and its legal and regulatory framework around Australia. I am the author of several peer-reviewed papers on various aspects of home education in Australia. Two recent co-authored peer-reviewed papers have examined the legal and regulatory frameworks of home education around Australia. With this experience, my credentials as a researcher on home education in Australia and its legislation and regulation are sound. I have recently established a consultancy business: Australian Home Education Advisory Service to provide information and support to home educators and educational professionals seeking research informed information about home education and home schooling. To illustrate the breadth and depth of Australian research on home education, I have included a recently updated Summary of Australian Research.

Thank-you for inviting my submission and I hope that it provides a research informed basis on which further legislation and regulation can be effectively formulated.

Yours truly,

Glenda Jackson, PhD

Australian Research on Home Education:

And how it can inform legislation and regulation

Glenda Jackson, PhD.

Invited submission to the NSW Parliamentary Enquiry into Home Education, August, 2014

Abstract

The New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies conducted a survey of home educators in New South Wales which was reported in 2000 and again in 2004 (OBOS 2000/2004). The findings of this report are consistent with findings in all other Australian research conducted by both state governments and academics which has involved over four thousand participants.

These findings have found that home educators come from all geographic locations around Australia and that home education is not practiced because of geographic isolation from schools and other educational institutions. Families come from all income ranges, have all types of educational qualifications and career pathways.

Families who home educate could plan to do this for short periods of time, or more commonly for longer periods of time. However, this is usually with the proviso that it is in the best interests of the child. Parent reasons for home educating could be categorised into two categories: the negative influences of schooling and the positive benefits of home education. Although there are no large scale studies on academic outcomes of home educated students, the overall findings of Australian research indicate these children do as well if not better than their peers in schools. Home educators consider the social question uniquely. They believe that a child's ability to mix with all ages in society is more important than being able to mix just with same aged peers as occurs in schools, although many parents make efforts to ensure their children mix with same aged peers. Many parents think there should be greater public access to information on home education because of the many benefits they have experienced and observed in their children. Students' perspectives, as the recipients of the practice of home education, are important. They have consistently reported many benefits of home education over attendance at school, although they also appreciate some aspects of school, especially in the senior years. Parents and children have consistently explained that children's self-worth, self-determination, autonomy, motivation and independence have been improved while at home.

Home educators use a variety of practices, usually starting with more structured ones, but almost always move to less structured ones in response to the flexible and expanding needs, interests and motivations of children. The need for flexibility and ability to modify programs is very important in order to best meet the needs of children as they arise—one of the most significant educational benefits of home education. This is particularly true for students with special needs.

Legislation and regulations that ignore the consistent research findings on home education and its practices contribute to significant misunderstanding and non-compliance. At home, children develop their sense of self worth, autonomy, motivation and independence by being directly involved in their learning pathways and outcomes in ways not possible in schools. As a result, curriculum design and implementation needs to be flexible and modifiable on a regular basis. It is in this area of curriculum provision and implementation that home educators have the most problems with legislation and regulation.

Legislation and regulation will have a positive impact when developed through an understanding of home educator motivations and practices and as identified in Australian research in the area of home education. When these children have the opportunity to develop as independent and motivated learners, something many of them have found difficult in mainstream schools, they will ensure our society is a better community.

Australian Research on Home Education:
And how it can inform legislation and regulation

Home education in Australia has been researched for over thirty years and the research findings are surprisingly consistent across both large and small scale studies. Family demographics, parental reasons for choosing home education, home educator practices, the responses of parents and students to the home education experience and their concerns have been consistently researched and identified.

All governments around Australia have acknowledged the legitimacy of home education as a lawful educational alternative. When most laws are made, it is common practice for the most recent research to contribute to the nature and application of laws and regulation. However, the regulation of home education has often been developed and applied without reference to available Australian research, or any other research, on home education. When governments have applied research findings to the development of regulation of home education practice, there have been less tensions and higher compliance.[1] The difficulties generated by this failure to develop legislation and regulation with reference to Australian research on home education have predictably contributed to growing tensions, misunderstandings and non-compliance by home educators in a number of states across Australia.

Discussion

Australian Research

Governments and researchers from as early as 1989, when the Carrick Report reviewed schools in New South Wales and included a brief summary of submissions and discussion of the practice of home education, have conducted research into home education in Australia. Significant government research projects have been conducted for the Tasmanian government in 1991,[2] for the New South Wales government in 2000 and re-presented in 2004 (OBOS 2000, 2004), and for the Queensland government in 2003 and 2004.[3]

Four Doctorates of Philosophy,[4] several masters in education and psychology and many peer reviewed journal articles have contributed significant research material on the home educating community and home educator practices in Australia.

Government reports have tended to focus on demographic features of home educators, their reasons for choosing to home educate, acknowledgement of the variety of home educator practices and their responses to government regulations and interactions with

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[1] See Jacob, Barratt-Peacock, Carins, Hoderness-Roddam, Home & Shipway 1991.
[2] Jacob, et. al. 1991.
[3] Education Queensland 2003, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004.
[4] See Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 2011, Jackson 2009, Reilly 2007.

home educators. The four doctorates of philosophy have explored similar topics as well as added qualitative depth to the types of findings made by government commissioned research reports. These topics have included the reasons families choose home education, how they operate these programs, the impact of home education on families and children, use of home education practices by families with special needs children, the views and experiences of home educating parents on a personal basis and in their interactions with government agencies and personnel, teachers and professional views and experiences with home educated students, student experiences learning at home, and the roles home educator parents take on when home educating their children.

Numbers of Australian Research Participants
As an indication of the scope of Australian research, an approximate count of the number of participants included in all research projects exceeds 4 100 participants. Because these research projects have been conducted in all states over a long time frame, it is highly unlikely that there has been much cross over of participants between projects.

Consistency of Australian Research
A collation of findings across all available Australian research shows that themes found in the OBOS 2000/2004 research reports are consistently evident in all other major and minor research projects.[5]

The Findings
Demographics of Home Educators

Location
As found in the OBOS (2004) report a number of other research projects have noted home educators are found in capital cities, rural towns and remote areas.[6] Parental choice of the home education option is usually made for reasons other than distance from schools, although for a few that may be the most significant reason for choosing to educate children at home.

Parent Educational Levels
All levels of education, from late secondary school, TAFE and trade certification through to post graduate degrees from university were evident in home educator parent populations.[7] Most recently, a study of trained and experienced teachers who home educated students was completed providing a personalised view of professional experience and evaluation of the effectiveness of the practice of home education (Croft 2013).

Family Income Levels

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[5] Particularly in Education Queensland 2003, Harding1997, 2003b, 2006, Jackson 2009, Jacobs et al 1991, Jeffrey and Giskes 2004, Patrick 1999.
[6] See Education Queensland 2003, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 1997, Jackson 2009, Jacob et. al. 1991, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Patrick 1999.
[7] See Brosnan 1991, Croft 2013, Harding 1997, 2006, Harp, 1998, Jackson 2009, Krivanek 1988, Maeder 1995, Patrick 1999.

All income levels and trade and professional occupations can be found in home educator parent samples.[8] Families generally consist of two parent families, although most larger studies have noted there were a few single parent families involved in home education. In all studies, the mother has usually been the primary educator, although a few families share the role and in a very small minority of families, the father has taken on the role of educator. While there are families with one child, the average size of home educating families is generally three or more. The research has consistently shown that a majority of families educate children at home in the primary aged years, and that a significant number of families educate children through secondary education and beyond.

Expected Length of Time Doing Home Education
Many families took the position that they would continue their home education program as long as it suited the best interests of their children and often had a long term perspective on this option. All these findings are consistent across studies and with the findings in the OBOS 2000/2004 report.

Reasons for Home Educating Children

Across studies, the reasons given for home educating children could be divided into two major categories best described in Patrick (1999) as the 'push and pull' aspects of the two main educational options available—namely, the negative influences of mainstream education and positive qualities available in home education.

Negative Aspects of Mainstream Education
Parents cited negative aspects of mainstream education as: lower academic achievement, unmet needs of children with learning difficulties, perceived weaknesses in curriculum, and social problems such as bullying, negative peer pressure, children's low self-worth, unacceptable values instruction, and children's general unhappiness in mainstream schools.

Positive Aspects of Home Education
Positive qualities available through home education included: ability to provide higher academic opportunities for children, provision of broader curriculum, flexible learning opportunities for individualised needs, one-on-one teacher/student rations, holistic learning environments connected to the real world, effective and stronger social experiences mixing with a wide age range of people than is available in schools, values education, and stronger family relationships.

Although the OBOS 2000/2004 report did not particularly focus on parental reasons for home educating children, most other research projects, including government reports, consistently found these reasons for parents choosing the home education option.[9]

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[8] See Brosnan 1991, Croft 2013, Harding 1997, 2003, 2006, Jackson 2009, Jacobs et. al. 1992, Lampe 1998, Maeder 1995.

[9] See Barratt-Peacock 1997, Croft 2013, Education Queensland 2003, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Harding 1997, 2003a, c, 2011, Harp 1998, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jackson 2009, Jacob et al. 1991, Kidd & Kaczmarek 2010, Krivanek 1985, Lampe 1988, Maeder 1995,

Academic Outcomes

There have been no significant research studies in Australia on the academic outcomes of home educated students. Because of the often hidden nature of the home educating community, standardised testing has not been a viable option to discover how home educating students perform. However, many of the research projects found these students generally had no difficulty making the transition into mainstream educational institutions, and that many of these students achieved results equal to or above average to their mainstream peers.

Children generally did not have difficulty making the transition to mainstream institutions. When they did, they had usually left mainstream institutions because of difficulties with mainstream practices or social environments originally (Jackson 2007, 2009, Thomas 1998). Other studies and surveys have found students achieved equally as well, whether in regulated or unregulated states (Carins, 1997, 2002, Harding 2003a, McColl 2005). A few researchers (Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2009), including OBOS 2000/2004, noted there were parents who would like to access a variety of standardised testing opportunities and this would provide sounder Australian data on academic outcomes for home educated students.

Socialisation

One of the general public's concerns about the practice of home education is whether or not children are able to effectively socialise with children and this concern is evident in the OBOS report (2000/2004). While no Australian research project has specifically focused on socialisation of home educated children, the question has been addressed in many research projects.[10]

The findings indicate that most students appreciated their social experiences while learning at home and some contrasted these very clearly with the negative social experiences they had experienced in mainstream schools and TAFEs. New parents to home education practices may express some misgivings about socialisation when starting their programs, but most parents quickly appreciate the breadth and meaningfulness of social experiences available to their home educated children. Parents generally endeavour to ensure their children meet with others in many different ways through: local home education networks, clubs, sporting organisations and events, music, drama or other special interest groups, church or religious associations, and volunteer groups in order to provide children with social opportunities. These students generally show evidence of improved self-esteem, independence from peers, the ability to mix and converse with people from all age groups, tended to rate their families higher than their mainstream peers and generally found home education helped to prepare them for adult life. One researcher eloquently described the different approaches of home educators to the socialisation question to those involved in mainstream education. She described mainstream educational socialisation as being a horizontal socialisation experience contrasted

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McHugh 2007, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, 2007, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998.
[10] See Allan & Jackson 2010, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Broadhurst 1999, Brosnan 1991, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2000, Clery 1998, Harding 1997, 2006, 2011, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jackson 2009, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Krivanek 1988, Lampe 1988, Maeder 1995, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2007, Simich 1998, & Thomas 1998.

with the vertical socialisation experiences valued by home educators (Honeybone 2000).

Student Perspectives on Home Education
As the prime object and beneficiary of home education practices, students' views and experiences provide an important perspective on any discussion of the impact and value of home education. Several studies specifically explored or included student perspectives of and participation in their home education experience and the findings were generally consistent.[11]

Students regularly identified positive features of home education: flexibility of curriculum and time use, ability to exercise meaningful autonomy over their own learning, receiving prompt assistance when needed, learning at one's own speed without the drawbacks or pressure of having to stay with the rest of the class, learning more efficiently than when in school, more personal time and the ability to finish school work early. These students valued having extended time to pursue topics and projects they were interested in. When in school, many of these students were high achievers in class and in their higher school certificate. Some younger children enjoyed more time with 'Mum'. Most thought they would home educate their own children. Many appreciated the opportunity to make friends across age groups. Most expressed a great connection with family—parents and siblings.

Students identified negative areas of home education: for older students they sometimes wanted access to subject specialists and involvement in meaningful class discussions. Some students, particularly those using a more structured curriculum, felt they missed out on social opportunities although a number of these students thought missing school friends was not a reason to return to mainstream institutions.

Student comments about their negative experiences and views of mainstream education were usually expressed in stronger terms: institutional practices that interrupted their ability to work and learn effectively, poor social situations in which they felt victimised, wasted time waiting long periods for teacher help, disconnected learning from real life and their interests, and lack of time to learn concepts well, or explore topics of interest to a depth they were able to at home.

Interestingly, students across studies and age groups explained that their academic opportunities and achievements were higher at home than when at school. Student self-awareness, self-determination, sense of self-worth and opportunity to better understand and accept oneself were identified by parents and students as qualities students improved to a greater extent at home than at school.

When home educated students entered or returned to mainstream schooling, most found they easily fitted in and achieved well. Those students who did find it more difficult to fit in had often had negative experiences in school in their younger years, or had significant learning difficulties that were not the result of home education practices.

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[11] See Broadhurst 1999, Brosnan 1991, Carins 2002, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2007, Krivanek 1988, Lampe 1988, McColl 2005, Simich 1998.

Availability of More Information on Home education

OBOS 2000/2004 noted that home educators thought it important there was more information available to the broader community about the practice of home education, a finding supported by other Australian research.[12]

Practice of Home Education

Varying Approaches to Home Education Practice

A consistent finding across Australian research, and noted in OBOS 200/2004, has been the ways home educators engage in the practice of home education. Home educators are known to practice home education using a range of approaches often starting with more school like or structured approaches, and then moving to more eclectic or semi structured approaches, to very unstructured practices commonly referred to as natural learning or unschooling.

Common Move to Less Formal Practices

It has also been noted that families usually become less school like and more informal over time as they gain experience and confidence in their children's learning abilities and outcomes. This move to less formal approaches is usually driven by the children's direct response to and active engagement with their learning opportunities. Another reason for this move to less formal approaches is provided by parental practices of regularly and specifically including real life and connected learning experiences in children's educational opportunities as found in the everyday experiences of family life (something rarely available in mainstream education). It is unusual for families to maintain a strict and structured school approach throughout their home educating experience, particularly in long term home education families. The ability to modify programs to meet the immediate interests and motivations of children has been one of home educations most important educational qualities. This aspect of home education practice has been the source of the greatest tension between home educating families and regulators.[13]

Special Needs

The use of home education by families with special needs students has consistently been reported in a many studies across Australia, including OBOS 2000/2004.[14] The most pertinent studies of families home educating students with special needs were conducted by Reilly (2002, 2004, 2007) and more recently Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) and McDonald and Lopes (2014).

Consistent findings across studies indicated children with special needs quickly adjusted positively to home education, especially if they had been in mainstream

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[12] See Croft 2013, Jackson 2009, Kidd and Kaczmarek 2010, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, 2007, Reilly et al. 2002, Simich 1998.

[13] See Barratt-Peacock 1997, 2008, Clery 1998, Croft 2013, Habibullah 2004, Jackson 2007, 2009, Jacob et al. 1991, Lampe 1988, Kidd and Kaczmarek 2010, McDonald & Lopes 2014, OBOS 2000/2004, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, 2007, Simmich 1998, Thomas 1998, Trevaskis 2005.

[14] See Education Queensland 2003, Harding 2003b, Jackson 2009, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Kidd 2008, Kidd and Kaczmarek 2010, McDonald & Lopes 2014, Patrick 1999, Reilly, 2004, 2007, Reilly, et. al. 2002, Simich 1998, Trevaskis 2005.

schools where it was regularly reported these children experienced significant academic and social problems. These problems generally arose because institutions were not able to be flexible when meeting these children's academic requirements, professionals frequently did not understand the children's needs or how to adapt for them, and many children experienced bullying by peers.

At home, parents were able to be flexible in both curriculum and time to suit the changing needs of their special needs children. Children were less stressed, developed a healthy self-worth, experienced healthier social growth and interactions, and students achieved better academic results while families developed greater cohesiveness.

The parents of special needs children expressed a need for more support and understanding. Many of these parents found the help offered by professionals and by education departments was often of limited benefit as they felt their particular needs were not understood or met. Because these parents were constantly modifying their programs to meet needs as they arose, they needed flexibility when planning and implementing curriculum and timetables. The expectations of education departments did not usually support or encourage this need for constant modification of programs.

These parents wanted the public to be made more aware of the positive benefits of home education for special needs children and they expressed appreciation of and a need for effective home education networks.

Challenging Aspects of Home Education
Researchers have consistently noted two areas home educators have found challenging. Many mothers who have chosen to home educate value this experience. However, there are some mothers, particularly those who have felt forced by circumstances to take on home education in the best interests of their children, who have explained they have experienced significant stress and need of appropriate support. This is particularly true for mothers of special needs children.[15]

The second area of concern was in home educator dealings with education departments when trying to meet requirements and demands they believed showed little knowledge or understanding of the practices of home education. This tension is evident in the significant levels of non-compliance to regulation and registration around Australia. As reported in the OBOS 2000/2004 report, home educators explained they would be more comfortable with guidelines rather than regulations. This finding is highly consistent with other Australian research.[16] The types of things parents found challenging have been regulations or guidelines formed with little attention to the way in which home educators operate their learning programs at home, interactions with departmental staff when staff have displayed little knowledge of home education practices or understanding of parental experiences and concerns,

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[15] See Barratt-Peacock 1997, Clery 1998, Habibullah 2004, Honeybone 2000, Kidd 2008, Kidd & Kaczmarek 2010, Nicholls 1996, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, 2007, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998, Trevaskis 2005.
[16] See Carins 1997, Harding 2003c, 2006, Harding & Farrell 2003, Jackson 1999, Jacob et. al. 1991, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Kidd & Kaczmarek, McDonald & Lopes 2014, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, 2007, Trevaskis 2005.

and the lack of effective support for home educators—especially for those families catering for students with special needs.

Home Education in Australia and the USA

A number of Australian researchers, particularly those who have done one off projects on home education for government projects or journal articles have tended to equate Australian home education practice with research in the United States of America.

It is important to recognise that while many of the findings in the United States of America may provide broad similarities to Australian home education practice, Australian home education has developed in a different place and has its own culture and history.

These distinctions were noted by a number of researchers.[17] The most significant difference was that parental reasons for choosing to home educate children were less likely to be motivated directly by religious beliefs and based more directly on the needs of the child. As a result, the types of curriculum chosen and programs used have tended to be more reflective of the child's educational needs than particular religious curriculum, although there are many families who access curriculum from the United States of America in their programs. When legislating and regulating for home education in Australia, it is important that Australian research be used first to contribute to informed decision-making.

Home Education Legislations and Regulation

There has been wide recognition of differences of opinion between home educators and legislators and regulators ever since home education started in Australia in the late 1970s. As found in OBOS 2000/2004, the need for more research informed approaches by legislators and regulators to the practice of home educators has been acknowledged by both government appointed researchers and academics.[18]

There are over three decades of research into home education practices in Australia and this research, as in any other situation, should inform legislators and regulators when making decisions about the governance of home education. Failure to recognise this research or its implications have unnecessarily created the main source of tension between the home educating community and regulators in those states where these findings have been ignored. Home education is an important educational alternative and for many children and provides a sound educational option that many of these children have failed to gain in mainstream institutions. As a satisfactory and workable educational alternative ensuring these children have a meaningful future in our society, it is here argued that legislators and regulators actively support the home education option in the best interests of the child and society.

All states and territories require home educators to provide the eight key learning areas in their programs. This requirement can be met by home educators in different

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[17] See Allan & Jackson 2010, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1990, 1994, Jackson 2009.

[18] See Allan & Jackson 2010, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Carrick 1989; Education Queensland 2003, Harding 2003c, 2006, Harding & Farrell 2003, Hopkins 1993, Hunter 1990, 1994, Jackson 1999, Jackson 2009, Jackson & Allan 2010, Jacob et al., Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Lampe 1988, Lindsay 2003, Simmich 1998, Varnham & Squelch 2008.

ways allowing them to effectively select the approach most suited to their particular family values and children's needs. The two most significant home educator needs are for families to be able to select from a wide range of curriculum style and delivery options, and the ability to constantly modify programs to meet the changing needs of the child. This is important for all families, particularly those with students who have learning and/or social difficulties often developed or highlighted while attending school. The most recent comprehensive overview of legislation and regulation on home education around Australia highlighting these needs was given in Allan and Jackson 2010.[19]

Transitions, Collaboration and Distant Education
About half of home educating parents have moved students out of schools into home education and many families plan to move students back into schools or post secondary institutions. These transitions have generally been smooth, with students achieving well on their return to schools. Problems entering mainstream institutions were professionally recognised as usually not the result of home education, but of learning difficulties or differences, social problems from earlier experiences in schools and other professionally diagnosed issues (Jackson 2009). Families choosing the home education option has not meant these families will not interact with formal education in the future. Many researchers have been aware of these transition movements between the two types of educational practice.[20]

The option of part-time use of schools and other mainstream institutions has been accepted in Victoria (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009). Research on part-time schooling is sparse, however, the existence of the part-time option is evident in brief discussions of the benefits and drawbacks, particularly to home educators described in a few research projects.[21] A few professionals recognised benefits in part-time relationships with home educators for both the school and for the home educating families (Jackson 2009).

While distant education is not the same as home education, a minority of home educators have always used it in a variety of ways. Access to distance education programs has been of benefit, especially to children with learning disabilities and older students completing their higher school certificate. Senior secondary school students benefited from access to the specialist teachers available in distance education programs and regularly succeeded to a high standard in these subjects. However, one of the problems for many of these students has been the rigidity of these programs to accommodate the changing needs and interests of home educated students. As a result, a number of these families either substituted more flexible and meaningful work or moved to more flexible home education practices.[22]

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[19] See also Jackson & Allan 2010.
[20] See Barratt-Peacock 1997, Education Queensland 2003, Habibullah 2004, Harding 1997, 2003c, 2006, Harp 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2009, Jacob et al. 1991, Lampe 1988, OBOS 2004, Patrick 1999, Reilly et al. 2002, Reilly 2004, Thomas 1998, Trevaskis 2005.
[21] See Krivanek 1985, Jackson 2009, Reilly 2007.
[22] See Education Queensland 2003, Green 2006, Harp1998, Jackson 2009, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Reilly 2004, 2007.

Conclusion

Consistency in findings across large and small research projects, conducted by governments and academics on thousands of participants, gives reassurance that Australian research on home education provides a sound basis on which to understand home educators and the practice of home education in Australia. As is the practice in any good law making, current research and understanding should be included in the process of developing effective legislation and regulation. The New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies commissioned research on home education that was reported in 2000 and 2004. Its findings were consistent with this body of research and as such provides an important basis on which to develop effective legislation and regulation.

Australian research shows that home education is an effective form of education encouraging students to achieve academically, develop broad social connections, develop a healthy self-worth, independence, motivation and self-determination—all qualities that contribute to good citizenship. Many families choose home education because they think this form of education is most effective for achieving the development of healthy, engaged and contributing young adults. Many more parents choose to home educate children because they have observed their children becoming less motivated and independent, more challenged and struggling through their experiences in schools. For parents of children with special needs, whether they are learning or social problems, the option of home education is even more important.

Apart from ideological positions about who is most responsible for a child's education, the area of greatest tension between home educators and regulators has always been over the regulation of curriculum and its implementation. In mainstream education, departments and teachers manage large numbers of students and are more easily able to set fixed curriculum and implement it in predictable ways. At home, children are able to effectively influence the curriculum and its implementation according to their interests, motivation and abilities to a far greater degree. In this sense the children own their education much more effectively than their peers in regular classrooms. For many of these children this aspect of home education ensures they are able to mature into contributing and engaged citizens.

The OBOS 2000/2004 report found that home educators, particularly the more experienced ones, found regulation of curriculum and its implementation onerous and impractical. Other Australian research consistently made the same findings and provided reasons why this approach created problems. In the best interests of the child, parents respond to their learning needs with immediacy and effectiveness. Structured programs that are not responsive to the child's needs are far less effective and often de-motivating. Regulations that are developed within an understanding of this researched framework will be more effective and applicable.

Any legislation and regulation on home education should understand what happens in home education and ensure the best aspects of home education are supported effectively. One of the best ways to ensure these children do achieve their potential is to construct legislation and regulation that supports the best aspects of home education—its flexibility and responsiveness to children's learning needs.

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SUMMARY OF AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH ON HOME EDUCATION

6th August 2014

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SUMMARY OF AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH ON HOME EDUCATION

Research on home education in Australia has a small but growing presence. Parent reasons for home educating have been extensively explored while student academic success has not attracted much Australian research. Socialisation has been examined in different ways by a number of studies. Demographic material on home educating families has been collected. A few projects have specifically focused on student perceptions of their home education experience. Students with specific needs have been conducted by a couple of researchers. Home educator interactions with networks, their use of community resources and their needs for appropriate information have also been analysed. Throughout the research problems with home education were identified. The most contentious issue identified was parent resistance to legislation and regulation. The developing theory of home education has distinguished home education as quite distinct from the education provided in formal schools and institutions. A few researchers have included Distance Education in their definition of home schooling and a few academics have addressed the possibilities of home education in the Australian context. This resource was developed as a direct result of Victorian Legislative changes and was originally presented to the Minister of Education and Training of Victoria when comments from officials within the department to home education representatives were made indicating their understanding that there was little Australian research on home education.

Australian Home Education Research

There is a small but growing of body literature available in Australia on home education. Most of this is contained in unpublished theses but there is also some published work available. This literature includes professional journal articles, a book, and documents from Parliamentary Reviews and Departments of Education. The topics covered in this literature cover the reasons parents home educate, demographic information, studies of how parents manage the home educating process, student perceptions, special needs, academic success, the process of learning in home schooling, student competencies and social development, legislative and legal situations in all states of Australia, and home education as an alternative form of education in rural areas.

Reasons for Home Education in Australia

Australian parents choose to home educate for many reasons. These can be grouped into two major categories: negative features of formal institutions and the positive attractions of home education. Many researchers have addressed this question.

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Academic Success

While there are no specific major studies on the academic success of home educated students, a couple of small studies and most other research indicate that Australian home educated children have achieved an equal or higher than average result to their formally educated peers.

Harding, T. (2003a). A Comparison of the Academic Results of Students Monitored by the State, with the Academic Results of Students Not Monitored by the State. In *A submission for the Home Schooling Review* (pp. 6). Brisbane: Australian Christian Academy.

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Socialisation

Studies which have looked at the social experiences of home educated students indicate that the students have broad, healthy social interactions although a few students would have appreciated more interaction with peers, particularly in home education network groups. Studies have also shown that some students who have been hurt socially at school have been able to recover when home educated.

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People Who Home Educate Their Children

Home educators come from all walks of life, from every corner of the country, from varying income brackets, and with various levels of education. None of these features appears to impact upon their success in educating their children.

Collis, M., & Dickens, K. (2008). School at home. *Nurture, 42*(1), 8-9

Croft, K. (2013). Exploring Motivations For, and Implementation of, Home Education by Qualified Teachers in Australia. MA. Faculty of Education. Cooranbong, Avondale College. http://research.avondale.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=theses_masters_coursework

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Patrick, K. (1999). *Enhancing community awareness of home - schooling as a viable educational option.* Unpublished In partial fulfillment of the requirements of Bachelor of Education (Primary)(Honours), Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW.

Student Views of Home Education

Students have generally reported positively about home education. Comments about missing peers at school were generally tempered by the benefits of being able to flexibly learn at their own pace. Self-esteem appeared to be healthy among these students with a number of them crediting their own self-image directly to their home education experiences.

Broadhurst, D. (1999). *Investigating young children's perceptions of home schooling* AARE Annual
       Conference. Melbourne, AARE: 12
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       Unpublished B Ed (Hons), University of Tasmania, Hobart.

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       Educational Research, 17*(1), 62-84. http://www.iier.org.au/iier.html

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       eight primary school aged children and their families.* Unpublished Thesis (B.Ed. (Hons.),
       University of South Australia, Adelaide.
Lampe, S. (1988). *Home Education: A Survey of Practices and Attitudes.* Unpublished MEdSt, Partial
       Fulfillment, Monash, Melbourne.

McColl, A. (2005). *ACE Homeschooling: The Graduates Speak.* Unpublished Masters of Education,
       part fulfillment, Christian Heritage College, Brisbane.

Stroobant, E. (2006). *Dancing to the Music of Your Heart: Home Schooling the School-Resistant Child.*
       Unpublished PhD, University of Auckland, Auckland.

Stroobant, E., & Jones, A. (2006). School refuser child identities. *Discourse, 27*(2), 209- 223.

Special Needs
Special needs students (including school refusers) and their families especially
appreciated the learning and social opportunities provided by home education. This
group in particular felt the need for interaction between formal institutions and home
education.

Jackson, G. (2009). *'More than One Way to Learn': Home Educated Students' Transitions Between
       Home and School.* Unpublished PhD, Monash University, Clayton.

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       in education settings? ; Coming home : exploring the experiences of mothers home educating their
       children with autism spectrum disorder. Faculty of Computing, Health and Science. Curtain, Edith
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       Spectrum Disorder. *Issues in Educational Research, 20*(3), 257-275.
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McDonald, J. (2010). Seeking progressive fit: a constructivist grounded theory and autoethnographic study
       investigating how parents deal with the education of their child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Home Education Networks

Many home educators valued their home education networks as they catered for social and education needs of both students and parents.

Education Queensland, (2003). *Home Schooling Review* (Research-Parliamentary report). Brisbane. http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/homeschooling.pdf

Habibullah, A. (2004). *"Mum, when's recess?" A glimpse into two contexts of home schooling.* Unpublished Honours of BEd, Monash, Melbourne.

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Reader, P. (2009). 'Learning in community': making sense of home education and the changing context of schooling. *Entering the age of an educational renaissance: ideas for unity of purpose or further discord: ANZCIES 09 conference proceedings of the 37th annual conference*. University of New England, Armidale, University of New England.

Reilly, L. (2004). *How Western Australian Parents Manage the Home Schooling of Their Children with Disabilities.* Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education (28 November - 2 December 2004), University of Melbourne.

Simich, M. (1998). *How parents who home school their children manage the process.* Unpublished MEd, University-of-Western-Australia, Nedlands WA.

Thomas, A. (1998). *Educating Children at Home*. London: Cassell.

Use of Community Resources
Parents use a wide variety of community resources. These include the use of libraries, clubs, tutors and specialist classes as well as relevant excursions.

Barratt-Peacock. (1997). *The Why and How of Australian Home Education.* Unpublished PhD, La Trobe, Melbourne. (Published by Learning Books, Yankalilla, SA)

Harding, T. (2006a). *A Study of Victorian Home Educator – Home School Law Reforms.* Paper presented at the Home Education Symposium and Parliamentary Presentation, Camberwell Civic Centre and Victorian Parliament, Melbourne.

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Parents Seeking Information and Public Understanding
Many parents wanted access to information relevant to their home education programs.
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Greater Public Awareness

Home educating parents frequently expressed the wish that the general public had a better understanding of home education and its benefits.

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Problems with Home Education

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Trevaskis, R. (2005). *Home Education - The Curriculum of Life.* Unpublished MEd, Monash, Melbourne.

Professional Experiences with Home Educated Students/Student Transitions between Home and Mainstream Institutions

Professional experiences with home educated students and student experiences through transitions into and out of mainstream educational institutions indicates that most home educated students move easily between the two systems. Movements are occurring in both directions to benefit student educational and social outcomes. When there are problems for students moving into mainstream institutions, these are usually the result of learning needs different to average student abilities, family dysfunction, prior negative experiences in mainstream institutions and mismatch with particular mainstream institutional structures and features rather than from the practice of home education.

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Home Educators: Legislation and Regulation

The greatest cause of tension and ill-will for home educators was centered on legislative and regulatory bodies and their requirements. Resistance to regulations was significant. In the *Home Schooling Review* it was noted that most home educators did not comply with the provisions of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 Qld.*

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Harding, T. (2003a). A Comparison of the Academic Results of Students Monitored by the State, with the Academic Results of Students Not Monitored by the State. In *A submission for the Home Schooling Review* (pp. 6). Brisbane: Australian Christian Academy.

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Hunter, R. (1990). Homeschooling. *Unicorn, 16* (3), 194-196.

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Barratt-Peacock, J. (1997). *The Why and How of Australian Home Education.* Unpublished PhD, La Trobe, Melbourne. (Published by Learning Books, Yankalilla, SA)

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Trevaskis, R. (2005). *Home Education - The Curriculum of Life.* Unpublished MEd, Monash, Melbourne.

History and Futuristic Possibilities for Home Education and Journalistic or Academic Comments on Australian Home Education

There have been a few interested journalists and academics who have read home education literature and prepared opinion pieces or journal articles on the Australian research possibilities or Australian home education.

Amies, M. (1982). Schooling at Home in Nineteenth Century Australian Fiction. Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education **3**(1): 40-56. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0159630820030103

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Researchers who have included Distance Education as part of 'Home Education'
It has mainly been Queensland researchers who have included Distance Education students as a category of home education in their research. Most other researchers make a distinction between the two types of education.

Crump, S. and Boylan, C. (2010). Interactive distance e-learning for isolated communities: finishing the jigsaw. *Interactive distance learning for isolated communities: ARCL project discussion papers 2008-2010*. Newcastle, University of Newcastle, Charles Sturt University**:** 31-52.

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home educators. Education. Wellington, New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington. Master of
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