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**PARENTAL CHOICE AND EDUCATION: THE PRACTICE OF
HOMESCHOOLING
IN NEW ZEALAND**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports an investigation into eight New Zealand homeschooling families. It also offers an opportunity, to these parents, to share and discuss the reasons why they chose to educate their children at home and how they went about doing so. The families interviewed were all volunteers and, with the exception of two families, all interviews took place in the family homes. The families, urban and rural, were distributed from Wellington to Northland. All families had an opportunity to review and revise their narratives and my reviews of the narratives which related to them. No attempt was made to verify the stories of why families chose homeschooling but there was good accord between their stated reasons for homeschooling, and the practices they adopted.

The reasons advanced for choosing to homeschool were found to be complex. They ranged from parental experiences and philosophical beliefs to concern about teacher behaviour and sustaining their culture. The variations in teaching/learning practices and curricula, which were largely parent designed in consultation with their children, were equally complex. The testimony and experiences of these families bear out the notion of “communities of learning practice”, with all families repeatedly emphasising the centrality of the family. It was evident that the families changed over time, in the reasons for their choice and their practices. One significant feature was that all families elected to teach their children the basic skills of language and mathematics, with the intention of facilitating independent learning.

Homeschooling was seen by the families studied as a way of gaining some control over the education of their children, and thereby strengthening the family unit, whilst providing opportunities to cater for individual needs and preferred approaches to learning. Comparisons with overseas studies thus demonstrated some commonalities and some significant differences regarding the New Zealand sample. The study suggested that further research is needed to provide an accurate picture of homeschooling in New Zealand.

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The object of getting all school-aged children to school and keeping them there until they attain the minimum age defined in compulsory education is routinely used in the sector of education, but this objective does not necessarily conform to human rights requirements. In a country where all school-aged children are in school free of charge, for the full duration of compulsory education, the right to education may be denied or violated.

The core human rights standards for education include respect for freedom. The respect of parents' freedom to educate their children according to their vision of what education should be has been part of international human rights standards since their very emergence.

(United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Statement by Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education.)