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

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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.)*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Most parents in New Zealand believe that going to school is compulsory for their children. Many of these parents also believe that this compulsion begins when the child turns five. Both beliefs are wrong and have been wrong since the 1877 Education Act. The 1877 Act spelt out that, while education is compulsory, education at a school is not. Compulsory education begins when the child turns six, not five. That these beliefs are contestable is illustrated by the fact that homeschooling is a legal and increasingly popular alternative to education at school.

Being taught at home by parents and/or extended family and, in the case of Maori, by members of whanau or hapu, has been the most common education system for thousands of years. From time to time this approach was varied with an apprenticeship approach, and only in rare cases were peer groups used in the learning situation. Brickman (1988) informed us that “Compulsory education, for all children, is in historical terms a recent practice” (p. 247). Thus the teaching of children of both sexes in peer groups separated from their homes by trained professionals in structures called schools is a relatively new phenomenon. In many of the English speaking western countries, although education is compulsory, there is now a legal right to teach children at home if certain preconditions are agreed to. One form of this alternative to attending school is homeschooling. The conflict between the notion of compulsory education for all children, usually in a ‘school’ setting, and the right to freedom of choice by parents wishing to educate their children at home, as expressed in the introductory quotation, is a central one to the homeschooling situation. This conflict is evident throughout most of this thesis and implicitly underpins the central questions this study seeks to address.

#### **The central problem and the purpose of this study**

My interest in homeschooling had an early start. Like many parents with school-aged children, there were times when my wife, Shannon, and I as a primary school teacher and one-time secondary teacher, felt that the local school was not catering for one of our children as well as we would have liked. We contemplated teaching him at home but because of our career commitments we did not do so. At the time there

appeared to be no public information available and I had not been given any information, in training or in practice, on the possibility of parents using a legal right to teach their children at home. I went so far as to make inquiries into homeschooling and was surprised by the lack of knowledge of fellow teachers and senior staff as to how to go about this or the legal requirements involved. It may be that homeschooling as a viable alternative can be an emotional issue for teachers because their self-esteem can be threatened and a significant increase in the number of homeschooled children means their jobs could be at risk, because most teaching positions are dependent on healthy school rolls. Homeschooled children can reduce school rolls in New Zealand as they cannot be enrolled simultaneously with any registered school or with the Correspondence School.

As Shannon and I continued to search for answers we met a farming family who homeschooled their younger children. The family had simply abandoned the Correspondence School programmes they were entitled to use. Shortly after we had met them the family moved to a small town in another area. The children attended a local the parents selected and where they functioned successfully. Meanwhile oschoour youngest child contined to be unhappy at school and left as soon as he could.

Much later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as a school principal, I was approached at various times by parents who planned to homeschool their children. The parents sought advice on how to go about obtaining exemption from school attendance and information about what programmes might be available to parents as a guide. I had worked for two years with the Psychological Service and, while there, I was asked frequently for information about homeschooling and access to teaching programmes. In addition, I was making recommendations for students who were finding school attendance very stressful, or who had been suspended from school and would work better at home on a correspondence programme. The reasons advanced by parents varied from concern about a particular teacher, concerns that the school was not catering for the child's needs, and concerns about the attitudes of other children. These confirmed my earlier suspicions that schools did not suit all children and could not cater for the needs of some.

With the publication of the Taskforce to Review Educational Administration (1988) *Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education* (commonly

referred to as *The Picot Report*) I went back to teaching in the belief that here at last was the introduction of more autonomy for schools, more real involvement and decision making by the local community and a true partnership between the school and the community. How wrong I was. *Tomorrow's Schools* (1988), the Labour Government's official response to the Picot Report, put the curriculum firmly under centralised control. As Codd (2000) pointed out, when speaking of *Tomorrow's Schools*, "This is a curriculum of social control to ensure that centrally formulated social and economic objectives are met...The central aim of education becomes the narrow instrumental one of preparing people for the shrinking job market" (p. 5).

My later work, in the 1990s, with Specialist Education Services, involved me in visiting a wide variety of schools. I was surprised by the lack of information, and the negative attitudes of some principals and staff about homeschooling. As a teacher who had functioned at classroom and administrative levels over the full range of student ages and achievements, my curiosity became aroused about this apparently emerging challenge to the school system. I discovered, after two years of compulsory university papers for an Ed. D degree and an initial literature search of homeschooling, that Nolan and Nolan (1992), Baldwin (1993), Bathgate (1995), McAlevey (1995), Austin, Edwards and Parata-Blane (1997), and Kerslake, Murrow, and Lange (1998) had been the only academic researchers to investigate New Zealand homeschooling. These New Zealand studies, however, while valuable, have left many issues unanswered. Perhaps the most pressing of these is the fact that the existing literature is divided sharply over homeschooling and its value, which in turn reflects widely varying assumptions about the nature of the homeschooling process. Central to the research, therefore, supported by historical debate, is the very nature of the homeschooling process and consequently the 'rights' of the state as opposed to the 'rights' of the parents. For example, Revell (1995), Callan (1997), Apple (2000), and Reich (2002) support the rights of the state while others, such as Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, and Marlow, (1995), Charles (2000), Werles (2001) and Glanzer (2008) support those of parents. I decided that the best way of addressing this issue was to seek the answers to two questions:

- Why do some parents choose to homeschool their children?
- How do they go about the practice of homeschooling these children?

As my research proceeded, however, it became evident that still wider issues were involved. First, the international literature on homeschooling, as well as the historical

evidence, revealed that there was an ongoing debate concerning the rights of the state as opposed to the rights of parents to educate their children at home. Second, as evidence from my interviews mounted, it seemed to me that homeschooling inevitably raised significant pedagogical issues. A number of homeschooling families told me that they learned from their children. Learning from children is an area of debate especially as teachers are recommended to adopt this practice and students, in training to become teachers, are being encouraged to do so because of the new National Curriculum (2007). Traditionally it has been the task of teachers to know and the child to learn. Hence the interpretation of learning theory becomes a significant issue.

I decided consequently that answers to these questions could be developed by using a modified narrative inquiry approach and by using some selected techniques from grounded theory, in an interview situation. These I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three.

### **Defining Homeschooling**

An early problem in this research was that homeschoolers tend to define themselves by a variety of terms. Those terms used most commonly are ‘homeschooler’ or ‘home educator’ by those who object to the notion of ‘school’ at home, and ‘unschooler’ by those whose approach is towards child-directed or child-centred learning. Unschooling will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Six. A further problem is that the term ‘homeschooling’ is defined in different ways, according to particular countries. In the United States, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2001) defined homeschooling as:

Students whose parents reported them being schooled at home instead of in a public or private school and if their enrolment in a public or private school did not exceed 25 hours a week, and if they were not being homeschooled solely because of a temporary illness. (p. 2)

This definition has little relevance to the situation in New Zealand because the Ministry of Education here does not allow homeschooled children to be enrolled at any school, to attend school, or to have free access to basic education publications. In this country parents do not advise the Ministry that they are homeschooling. Instead they have to apply for, and be granted, a certificate of exemption for their children from attending school before they can legally commence to homeschool.

In Australia, Barratt-Peacock (1997) cited Jacob's (1991) definition of homeschooling provided by the *Tasmania Report of the Ministerial Working Party on Home Education*:

Home education occurs when the parents choose to educate their children from a home base. The choice is the outcome of a conviction that home based education will better meet the child's needs, and may not simply be the result of the child being unable to attend school because of disability or geographical isolation. The parents plan, implement and evaluate the child's learning program using a variety of resources... The total responsibility for home education rests with the child's parents. (p. 14)

As with the NCES definition, there are aspects of the Tasmanian definition which do not seem relevant to the New Zealand situation although, in some ways it represents a more comprehensive definition. Children in New Zealand whose parents claim special conditions, such as geographical isolation or ill health, which may prevent them from attending a regular school, can be enrolled with the Correspondence School, which is deemed to be a state registered school. In New Zealand parents may choose to homeschool, but cannot do so legally until they have been granted a certificate of exemption, while the Education Review Office (ERO) accepts responsibility for ensuring that each homeschooled child is being educated to a satisfactory level.

In New Zealand, Kerslake, Murrow, and Lang's (1998) operational definition of homeschooling is, "The education of children in the compulsory schooling ages (6 to 16 years) whose parents have obtained an exemption from regular schooling for their children" (p. 117). This still, however, defines homeschooling more by what it is not, rather than what it might be. Early in the study, however, it became apparent that the above definition was too narrow. Consequently, the homeschooling definition I finally adopted in this thesis is widened to include "Those who have achieved exemption and who have undertaken to educate their children from a home base and allow the Education Review Office (ERO) access to these children." This definition encompasses more substantially the breadth of homeschooling, excluding temporary illness. It also emphasises that the exemption is a contract between parents and the Ministry of Education.

As already intimated, there has been very little research done in New Zealand on homeschooling. Nolan and Nolan (1992), in their brief paper, presented notes on two

homeschooling families, while Baldwin (1993) and McAlevey (1995) each worked with a number of families. Bathgate (1995) reviewed data on homeschooling numbers from 1990 to 1995 and Austin et al. (1997) put forward suggestions for the management of homeschooling families. Kerslake et al. (1998) reported on a Ministry of Education 1996 survey of New Zealand homeschoolers. The literature review (Chapter Two) shows that this previous research leaves a significant number of unanswered questions about the nature, and purpose, of homeschooling and in particular its considerable diversity. Thus there is a gap in the earlier research that I wish to fill, and which is concerned with the reasons for and the experiences of families homeschooling in New Zealand in the earlier years or the 21st century.

### **Choosing to Homeschool**

The first decision parents have to make is to choose to homeschool. This is not an easy decision as it involves factors such as having 24 hour responsibility for their children and a single income. These factors, and those issues listed on pages 4-5, together with others of a more personal nature, clearly establish a rationale for my first question: *why these parents choose to homeschool their children*. Once the decision to homeschool is made the obvious next problem is how to obtain permission to teach their children at home and *how to actually teach them*. Both involve significant inquiry, and consequential learning, at least by the parent who plans to stay at home.

I would argue that each family's philosophy of education could be linked to their reasons for choosing to homeschool. My discussion with them was based on this assumption. I was also interested in how homeschooling parents catered for the needs and abilities of their children, and in the teaching skills parents chose to adopt. Even if parents followed a prescribed curriculum there are always factors in the relationship between them and the child which create, as every experienced teacher knows, inevitable curriculum variations. Thus my second question, - "How do they go about the practice of homeschooling?" -is vital. I expected the responses to this question would also provide insights into their beliefs about education as well as an understanding of their complex, teaching/learning behaviour.

The teaching of a child at home makes significant demands on adult skills, knowledge, time, and equipment, such as the appropriate books and the use of technology. It is

apparent that, at least for those parents beginning homeschooling, some support, guidance and information would be appreciated. In the New Zealand situation, homeschooling families are not entitled to free access to schools or to Ministry of Education materials which are supplied free to state registered schools. Managers in every educational institute in New Zealand are very aware that additional funding, staff, facilities and equipment may improve the learning of their students, which they usually perceive as their central task. I also expected that homeschooling parents would be aware of ways in which some of these supports could help them. I thus anticipated that information on their perceived support needs might well emerge in the interview process.

A pilot study assisted me in revising and further developing the two sub-questions to be followed in the interviews as well as increasing my confidence in selection of those families who elected to take part in my research. This confidence was a stimulating antidote to the expectations I had arrived at from reviewing the literature, which often implied that homeschoolers were wary of outsiders and were not open to research. My own teaching experience, while being of value in understanding the learning processes of children, had to be open to learning and hearing about concepts not normally accepted, or possible, in schools.

I interviewed sixteen families, but had not anticipated the amount of data that this would generate or the variability of the interview material. Some participants reflected more deeply than others in the interview situation. After consultation with my supervisors I chose to focus on reporting the interview material from eight families representing a variety of locations, ethnic and social patterns. These eight also expressed their reasons and practices clearly, while each family was unique in some of their views. I accept, however, that no two families were identical either in their reasons for choosing to homeschool or the practices they adopted.

The methodology and method I came to adopt, after much thought, are both discussed more fully in Chapter Three. However, these could not be adopted without a major consideration of the literature available on homeschooling, examined in Chapter Two. All eight chapters are briefly outlined below.

## Chapters

My research problem, its associated questions, together with my chosen methodology largely shaped the organisation of this thesis. Accordingly, in Chapter One I provide a broad introduction to the study including a rationale for the research. This chapter also identifies gaps in current research and the major issues relating to New Zealand research on the reasons for and practices of homeschooling.

In Chapter Two I provide a review of literature published about homeschooling in English-speaking countries. I also examine the differences of opinion put forward by some researchers on the value of homeschooling. The international literature is essentially divided about homeschooling, thereby posing a number of unanswered questions. The relatively few examples of research into the New Zealand situation, despite the rapid rate of expansion of homeschooling in this country, are outlined in this chapter. In turn this research justifies the two questions used to develop answers to the central and related issues I raised on page four, namely:

- Why do some parents choose to homeschool their children?
- How do they go about the practice of homeschooling these children?

These questions have to a large extent dictated the methodology adopted.

In Chapter Three I illustrate how the research questions, mentioned above have also helped to establish the methodology and method adopted in the study. My use of a broadly narrative approach, supported by aspects of grounded theory, is also explained. There is also a brief description of the families interviewed, their locations and other factors significant to the study. An outline of my approach to this study is also provided. Recognition of the limitations of my approach, data analysis, coding, recognition of privacy and ethical considerations are also given considerable attention. For the family, adults and children, information on my interpretations of their interviews is provided.

In Chapter Four I examine the history of homeschooling in New Zealand. It is based largely on my archival research in Wellington and Palmerston North. Any comprehensive analysis of homeschooling in New Zealand needs to consider the historical contexts in which it is carried out. It provides, from the late 1800s, an

historical account of the related parliamentary and institutional processes, and conflicts between the role of the state and the rights of the individual to claim exemption from attendance at school. These conflicts are usually related to the social environment of the times. The current social and political reactions to the recent upsurge in homeschooling are also examined. The two chapters, which follow this chapter, provide some detail about the background of the families studied as well as a discussion of extracts from their interviews.

Any study of why a family chooses to homeschool requires a historical portrait of them, because their antecedents are, to some extent, causal of their eventual behaviour. Therefore, my fifth chapter provides a background to the eight families who became the focus of this research, their reflections on the reasons why they chose to homeschool, and their views on the nature of education.

While in Chapter Six I extend this to focus directly on the interviewed families, I also focus on how they go about educating their children, the various curricula they use or design, and their developing teaching styles. I also consider the extent of child involvement when selecting, or creating, curricula and timetables.

A discussion of the families' responses in relation to the key questions is discussed in Chapter Seven, while themes developed from the accounts of their reasons, practices and individual differences are also noted. It also examines the findings in relation to the literature and highlights the points of agreement, disagreement or illumination from one or more studies that relate to the finding or theme. The Chapter also outlines the nature of the support which parents would most like for facilitating their homeschooling.

Finally, Chapter Eight presents the conclusions derived from the research, findings relating to a search of the literature, and from the key questions posed in Chapter One. The strengths and weaknesses of the research are also discussed and suggestions made for future research. It also expresses some of my conclusions, which may provide directions for future educational and administrative policy.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Because of the limited extent of research into homeschooling in New Zealand it is necessary to review the overseas literature in order to establish a base, and to help to identify issues for this study. These issues will be seen to revolve around the central issue of the homeschooling process, along with the consequential issue of the “rights” of the state as opposed to the “rights” of the individual. As intimated in Chapter One I decided that these issues are best resolved by interviewing families, asking why they chose to homeschool and how they went about carrying out this choice. Significantly this literature review demonstrates that much of the existing research, both nationally and internationally, is bedevilled by strong prejudices relating to these issues. These prejudices, excluding the commonly expressed lay-person view that homeschooled children are disadvantaged academically and socially, are either strongly ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ homeschooling and are often based on assumptions about the rights of society and the rights of the individual. They are also often focused on their local community and do not transfer readily to the international situation or to other societies. This can reflect a tension in some political settings, such as in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, between state jurisdiction and individual rights. Openshaw (personal communication, October 20, 2004) commented that:

It needs to be recognised that, in general, English speaking societies, particularly the United States, Australia and New Zealand, have a much more equivocal attitude between state jurisdiction and individual rights than do some continental European states.

#### **The Need for Research**

Western societies reflect both common trends and significant differences in their development and legal practices of homeschooling. For example, in virtually every state of the United States, the desire to homeschool led to legal claims, based on the “*Bill of Rights*”, and the rights of parents to choose how their child is educated. The legality of homeschooling and exemption of children from attending school was confused initially but is now based on a Supreme Court ruling. The ruling established the right of parents to make educational choices under the “*First and Fourteenth Amendments*”(State of

Wisconsin v Yoder, 1972). The ruling led to a series of state-based legal opinions with the result that all states now allow home schooling and in some cases require schools to cooperate with the homeschooling families.

There is now considerable variation in the degree of control the various American states exercise over those who homeschool. For example, Nicholls (1997) explained that “In Oregon, for example, parents have only to notify the local school authority of their intention to homeschool” (p. 18). Other American states require annual proof of satisfactory progress and some require that a parent be a competent, qualified teacher. Parents in many American states are required to keep adequate records of progress made by the homeschooled child. The State of Idaho is unique in the United States in that it does not regulate or monitor home school instruction. One feature of the American approach is the amount of commercially available material covering all aspects of homeschooling from curricula to teaching and record keeping methods. It is an unspoken expectation that parents teach and children work from commercially created curricula. These commercial curricula focus frequently on discrete groups in the homeschooling community.

Little research has been done into homeschooling in New Zealand even though it is an increasingly prevalent alternative to schooling in this country. In 1983 only 80 children were registered to be homeschooled, whereas Education Statistics (2008) show a total of 6,501 registered in 2008. Kerslake et al. (1998), in their introduction to a Ministry of Education exploratory study of homeschooling in New Zealand, stated:

At that time, 1994-1996, the Education Review Office did not regularly monitor these families so consequently the Ministry of Education was able to say very little about the quality of homeschooling....As little is currently known about homeschooling and the families involved in it, research both into the quality of homeschooling and to find out more about homeschooling generally would be useful, especially given the increasing numbers of students involved. (p. 170)

This lack of research echoes the claim of Baldwin (1993) that, “Until more research is conducted on homeschooling in New Zealand it will not be possible to identify a really comprehensive range of homeschool philosophies” (p. 29). McAlevey (1995), who confirmed Baldwin’s claim, concluded:

Although homeschooling continues to grow at a rapid rate, little research is carried out into it. This is particularly true of this country, where a dearth of homeschool research material has been produced. There is a definite need for more research to be undertaken for a variety of reasons. (p. 154)

McAlevey went on to claim that, whereas most research had been carried out in the United States, much of this did not fit the experiences of New Zealand homeschooling families. She suggested that research would benefit families contemplating homeschooling, public educators, and education officials as well as the general public.

The limited research by either survey or interview in New Zealand, into homeschooling, does little to establish how the underlying beliefs and attitudes of those families moved them to homeschool. Kerslake et al.'s (1998) survey suggested that these families are wary of how the collected data might be used, particularly by government agencies or those with political agendas.

#### *The New Zealand Research*

The research designs of Nolan and Nolan (1992), Baldwin (1993), and McAlevey (1995) also suggested another issue that requires clarification. They all used a model based on studies by Van Galen (1988) in the United States. Van Galen carried out extensive qualitative research into families in Ohio and categorised the families into either "ideologues" or "pedagogues". The assumption of only two categories by Van Galen may well have been appropriate to the situation in the state in which she researched. The families she studied reflected a very strong Christian presence in homeschooling at the time. However I will suggest this presents an unduly narrow perspective, from the New Zealand point of view. The broader international literature refers to the diversity and complexity of both reasons to choose to homeschool and the practices followed in carrying out the homeschooling. Classification of all families into ideologies or pedagogies may apply in particular situations, but there is no evidence to support the use of such a narrow perspective in New Zealand. My study will go further and avoid a preselected framework. Instead, factors will be considered as they emerge.

Nolan and Nolan, (1992) in their five page paper, presented at a 1992 joint Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Associations for Research into Education, stated that the purpose of the paper was to report on home schooling in New Zealand as a viable

alternative to conventional schooling and as one worthy of attention by mainstream educational researchers. They reported on two case studies. One family they describe as “a “fervent” religious family of parents who openly acknowledge that they are “born again Christians” (p. 3, original emphasis). The other case was a study of a farming family with a gifted child who had special needs which were not being met at the local school. They concluded that the observed parents played:

a diversity of teaching roles ranging across explicit teaching of knowledge content, orchestrator of group discussion, provider of one-to-one instruction, guide and facilitator of learning, mentor and friend, and organizer of activities and projects. (P. 4)

Nolan and Nolan also concluded that both families, while following the National Curriculum, appeared to have developed a hidden curriculum much the same as that which operated in schools. Their request for more attention by academic researchers, however, has gained little response to date, while their concern that the homeschooled children were not provided access to State educational resources and services appears to remain a common concern today.

Baldwin had lived, married, and reared children in what she identified in her thesis as a Christian fundamentalist setting but moved away from this subsequently. As she stated, “My perspectives, theories and commitment to the fundamentalist Christian discourse began to change gradually” (p.viii). Baldwin (1993) went on to explain that “I moved into Women’s Studies and Sociology of Women’s Education” (p. x), which led her to adopt feminism. These life experiences may have contributed to her very critical views of Fundamentalist Christian homeschooling. Hence, she was highly critical of homeschool ideology which she perceived as stunting the growth and development of children. She claimed that “They also believe that since God has ‘called’ them to home school, they are more interested in what they describe as ‘wisdom’ than knowledge being imparted to their children...” (p. 180, original emphasis). This assertion places her firmly in the group who perceive homeschoolers as being narrowly traditional and conservative as well as being an impediment to the liberal roles embraced presently by the state education system. The question is, though, to what extent did her prior orientation and her adopting an uncritical methodology contribute to her interpretation of the data? There is a danger in an uncritical narrative approach that the interviewer’s perceptions or interpretations do not truly reflect the interviewees’ expressions unless

they, the interviewed, have opportunities to correct interpretations and validate the reported outcomes.

McAlevey (1995) used the simple criteria of ideologue and pedagogue to classify her sample and claimed that the families simply adopted an alternative curriculum. She also claimed that children in pedagogue families, as described by Van Galen (1998, p. 60), “are given many opportunities to express and explore their creativity and spontaneity” (p. 59). She also quoted Knowles, Marlow, and Muchmore’s (1992) commentary that the curriculum is “learner driven.” If three of McAlevey’s families cater for spontaneity, and if learning is child driven, one could question her claim of “merely adopting an alternative curriculum.” By any criteria, parents must be involved in adapting a curriculum if they cater for children’s interests and spontaneity. It seems more likely that each family would have had personalised and continuously modified curricula. It follows that no imported curricula could cater for all these variables. There is also the problem that the category of ‘religious’ will not encompass all ideologies. All people have beliefs, or ideologies, but not all people are religious. Such a classification is clearly rather crude and simplistic. Kerslake et al. (1998) indicated that only 12% of the respondents chose to home educate for religious reasons. The families Baldwin interviewed stand in contrast to this finding, while McAlevey’s group is close to the proportions indicated by Kerslake et al.

Austin, Edwards, and Parata-Blane (1997) considered homeschooling in their *Achieving Excellence: A Review of the Education External Evaluation Services: Self management, Self-review, Self improvement, Whaia te i kahurangi (Strive for the Ultimate)* for the State Services Commission, although it constituted but a small part of their findings. Their review was of the existing provisions under the Education Act (1989, Section 21). After some brief comments (p. 46) they advocated no change in the programmes of the time, but (p. 48) did make two recommendations:

No. 42. That homeschooling caregivers be reviewed on an ongoing basis and continue to be required to provide a written annual report to the Ministry of Education as the exempting authority. (p. 46)

No. 43. That the Education Review Office prepare protocols for the audit of home school providers, including access to the learner and the learning environment, where caregivers are willing to give access and make them available to those included in the review each year. (p. 48)

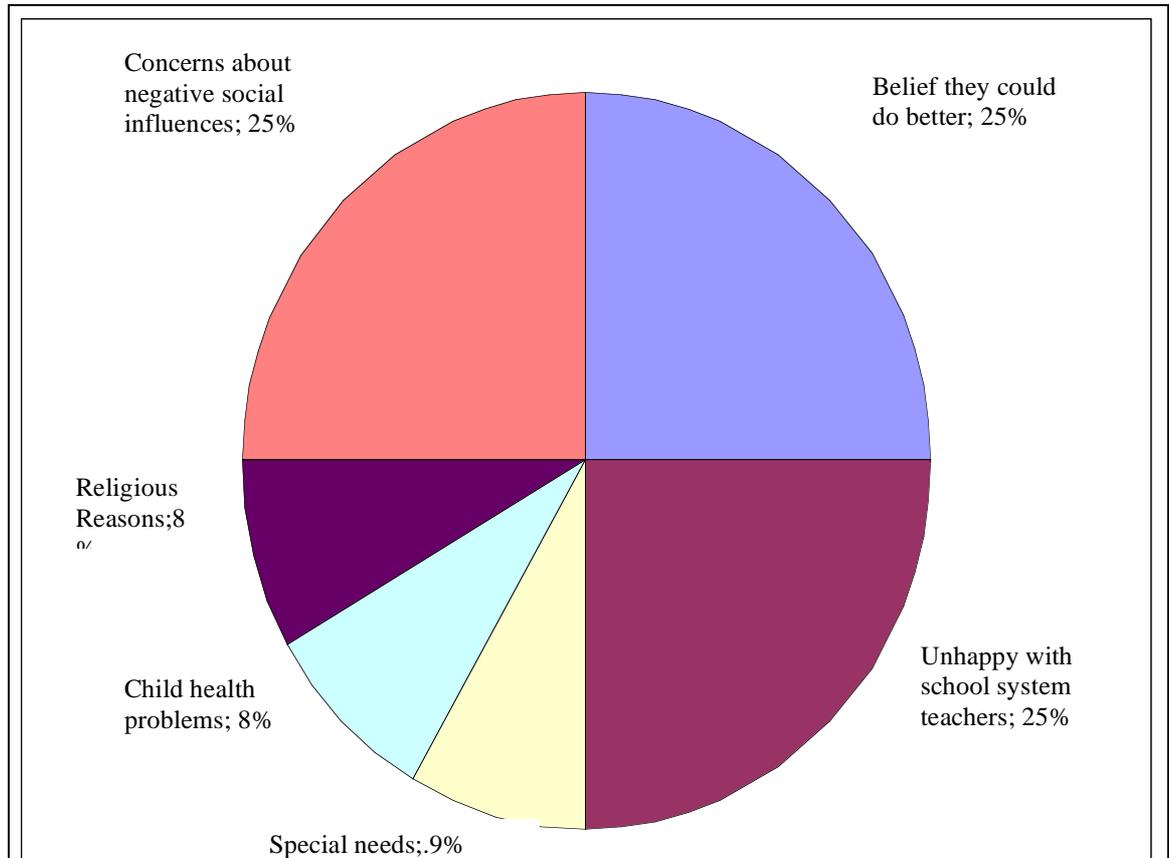
Today homeschooling families are reviewed on an ongoing basis, but usually not yearly, and parents do not provide annual reports to the Ministry.

A further question, posed by existing overseas and New Zealand research on homeschooling, concerns the reasons why parents choose to homeschool. Keslake et al. (1998) reported a survey of 725 families who were either currently homeschooling their children or had done so recently. The survey sought information about aspects of the families' practices and attitudes towards homeschooling and demographic data. Simich's (1998) Australian research, which indicated a degree of conflict between the state and homeschoolers, could be held to indicate that Keslake et al.'s link to the Ministry of Education resulted in some reluctance to respond, as the poor response rate indeed indicated. Keslake et al. (1998) did, however, note that the low response rate of 44% meant that the results could not be generalised. The report did suggest that there were some common reasons for homeschooling. Among those who did respond, a quarter of those cited negative social influences at school as their first reason. An eighth claimed religious reasons, and the same proportion responded that catering for the health or special needs and abilities of the learner was the central cause.

Nevertheless, Keslake et al.'s (see Figure 1) study can be useful for providing an initial broad picture. However, their survey was unlikely to have taken into account the complexity of parental interaction and the resulting complexity of responses. Survey data is usually aggregated over all the subjects, and this tends to conceal the distinct individuality of each family. Mayberry et al. (1995) indicated that a survey approach is completed with reluctance, whereas an interview is responded to eagerly. Discussing this point (which will be further considered in Chapter Three), they suggest:

One of the indictments often raised by these parents against survey research is its potential inability to represent the complexities of home education. In addition, some parents are very hesitant about research activities that may not adequately portray the intensive process of home education. (p.4)

Kerslake et al.'s (1998) conclusions, relating to New Zealand and referred to previously, are shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Proportions of responses made to the question on the reason why parents chose to home school (Kerslake et al. 1998).*

Kerslake et al. (1998) concluded that, “with the estimated response rate of 44% certain groups of home schoolers are over-represented in the responses. The results of this survey cannot be generalised to all home schooling families” (p. 118). They did not suggest that homeschoolers had complex reasons for choosing to do so, but the structure of the survey would not have allowed for the expression of complexity. My study examines these complexities, and issues about the process of homeschooling, by using an interview approach to the question of why do parents choose to homeschool and how they go about the practice of educating their children.

### **Why Some Parents Chose to Homeschool**

Choice is the first essential element in homeschooling. What, then, are the reasons these families choose to homeschool? Parents apparently choose to homeschool for a complexity of reasons. Knowles, (1987), Mayberry et al., (1995), Bielick, Chandler and

Broughman (2001) in the United States and Thomas (1998) in the United Kingdom and Australia illustrate the complexity of reasons. Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000) posed questions about reasons for choosing to homeschool in the Australian situation which also suggest a complexity of reasons. Knowles (1987), seeking comprehensive life histories of homeschooling parents, concluded that their own experiences in school were the central reasons for choosing to homeschool their children. He found, in a series of interviews carried out in Utah during 1985, that the parents' main reason for choosing to homeschool had been because of their own or their siblings' negative experiences of school. Accordingly, he decided that "central were parents' experiences in school. Past experiences often seemed to be more important than present educational conflicts as inducements for home schooling" (p. 2). Knowles concluded, from the data he had collected in structured reflections by parents on their experiences, both family and school- related perspectives, that the four rationales for homeschooling their children were:

- The parents' experiences as children.
- School and learning experiences in childhood.
- Adult perceptions of their conflict with school practices, beliefs and environments.
- The formulation of beliefs about home being a better place than school for children's learning.

There are factors in Knowles' study, however, which leave the findings open to some questions. The principal problem is that his study was based on four families, selected from a very large sample. All parents, except one, indicated that they had come from a dysfunctional or disrupted family. Moreover, the Utah environment may have been a contributing factor and possibly distorted the findings. Utah, at this time, was a politically and religiously conservative state. More importantly, Knowles failed to account for all those parents who also had unfortunate school experiences and who still sent their children to school. It would indeed be unusual to find that only 1.7% of adults had such school experiences in the United States.

A study by Mayberry et al. (1995), however, confirmed some of Knowles' findings when they reported that "parents tend to think about home education through the lenses of their own prior experience" (p. 47). While their own experiences might cause them to think about homeschooling as an alternative, it does not mean that choosing to do so is

caused this directly. Mayberry et al. had carried out a comprehensive study of 1,497 homeschooling families in Nevada, Utah, and Washington in 1995. The study used a 56 item interview-based questionnaire focusing on occupation, income, education, religious affiliation, household size, age of parents, and divisions of labour. Their results showed that their sample was predominantly white, religious, and middle-class. Most parents were under 40 years of age and 97% were married. 43% had had tertiary education and 33% were college graduates. In this study mothers carried out nearly all the education. Seventy one percent of the respondents to the question had claimed that religious commitment was very important, while some 20% percent of the sample did not report a religious affiliation.

Bielick et al. (2001) reported on an NCES survey, which used a broad-based sample of 57,300 home education households. Bielick found some commonality with Mayberry et al. but also revealed some significant differences. The key points of the NCES survey were that there were similar proportions of boys to girls and the movement was still predominantly white with an average family size of three plus children. Some 80% were two-parent families and 25% held bachelor degrees. The most significant difference lay in their reasons for choosing to home educate. Nearly half the sample sought to provide a better quality education for their children, and a quarter felt the school was a poor learning environment. Only 38% identified religion as a reason for choosing to homeschool. The families were able to provide more than one reason for choosing to home educate. There is apparent conflict between the data of Mayberry et al. and that of Bielick et al. concerning the reasons for choosing to homeschool. The change from religious dominated to pedagogical, if one chooses to employ these descriptors as categories, may be accounted for by the samples used or by the time the data was collected. Mayberry et al. (1995) may have sampled conservative, religious states or it may be that there were changes between the times of their sampling (1995), and Bielick et al.'s 2001 sample. In the early 1990s pressure was put on smaller church schools by increased taxes, and many closed. The result was that some of these religious families turned to homeschooling. Ten years on it is possible that there could have been a new wave of homeschooling parents and a different proportion with religious affiliation.

Thomas's (1998, p. 29) findings from the United Kingdom and Australia on why parents choose to homeschool their children were, interestingly, different from those of Mayberry et al. (1995). Thomas used survey and interviews with 100 families from

London and Tasmania. He separated homeschooling families into those who chose to home educate before their child went to school and those who withdrew their children from school. Of the first group, 84% chose to do so because of their contact with homeschooling families and the influence of the media. This was followed by 44% who chose to homeschool because of their perception of the schools, and 22% because of their belief that homeschooling was a natural extension of the existing family life. Of those who withdrew their children from school, 53% did so because of the influence of the media and other homeschoolers. Second most important were the 44% who chose to homeschool because their child disliked school, while 31% did so because of bullying. Only 11% of either group nominated Christian values as a reason. Thomas (1998) pointed out that the reasoning behind the decision to homeschool is often complex and is made sometimes after a great deal of deliberation. (Percentages do not add up to 100 as multiple choices were permitted.) This result is very different from the apparent significance of religion found by the aforementioned Mayberry et al. (1995) in their studies of American home education in the early 1990s.

Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000), after reviewing the literature on homeschooling in America, the United Kingdom and Australia, concluded that, "there is a relatively small and certainly incomplete research base" (p.19). They proposed a set of eight research areas into concerning why parents choose to homeschool in Australia:

- Dissatisfaction with traditional schools.
- Religious motives.
- The claim that schools cannot provide children with the personal interest and attention they can get from their family.
- Protection from unwanted influences.
- Negative schooling experiences.
- Maintenance of the family unit.
- Views on child development.
- New Age influences.

It is important to note that these proposed research areas had not been researched previously, to any extent, in the Australasian region. Moreover, choosing not to attend school could suggest that there are factors in the educational practices at school which do not agree with the parents' beliefs and views about education.

*Views on the Process of Education*

It would seem reasonable to assume that homeschoolers' views on education relate closely to their reasons for choosing to teach their children at home. Meighan (1996) and Thomas (1998) made it apparent from their research that individualisation, a personal curriculum, and enhancing family social concepts are central to homeschoolers' concepts of the purposes of education. Lowe and Thomas (2002), from extensive interviews of homeschooling families, reported that "The concept of home education differs fundamentally from the school model" (p. 8). They also expressed the view that "Every family has their own priorities and every experience of education will have a different balance and emphasis" (p. 55). It would appear that as the parents gain in confidence in teaching their children, they move towards individualised approaches with conversational and interactive learning between parents and children. It can be assumed that these reflect their real views on education. Ray (2002), claiming to discuss the philosophy of homeschooling worldwide, suggested that it involved

a high degree of parental involvement in their children's lives, community-oriented education, success in academics and an emphasis on the transmission of cultural values by family, friends and one's own religious community, rather than by society at large or by a selected group of educators. (p. 35)

Stevens (2001) added another voice about homeschoolers' views on education when he claimed the structure of schools tells us that

for most home schoolers I have met, the troubles with schools are chronic and structural. They have to do with the difficulty of accommodating individual differences inside of bureaucratic organizations, with tensions inherent in teaching standardized curricula in intellectually and spiritually diverse communities, and with the disjuncture between parents' singular interest in their own children and schools' general interest in whole cohorts of kids. (p.17)

Davis (2005) went even further. From her personal homeschooling experience and her observation of homeschooling families in the United States, she commented: "Many who homeschool believe that the educational approach of schools is fundamentally

flawed and that kids simply don't learn the way that we teach them in the public school system" (p. 6).

### *Teaching and Learning*

What teaching or learning practices are evident in homeschooling families? The use made of curricula, reasons for choosing to homeschool and the link between choice and practice all suggest that approaches to learning and teaching change over time and with experience. Some indicators are that they may differ from family to family, but it is suggested in the literature that they all are focused on the individual needs of the child more than is possible in schools.

Barratt-Peacock (1997), a teacher and homeschooler, researched families from all states in Australia. He drew on earlier ideas of Dewey (1915) and Reiss (1981) and, on the basis of his research, proposed homeschooling families as "Communities of Learning Practice", particularly in the sense of shared responsibility and mutual learning between parents and children. Thomas's (2000) notion of reciprocal communication and informal learning, which he derived from his extensive research into homeschooling, appears to cover these homeschooling situations. Given the structure of most families, where children are of different ages, it seems inevitable that much of the learning will be individualised. If, as Werle (2001) insisted, children are active participants in decision making relating to education, then it would be apparent that the individual's needs would be catered for and be the centre of learning. Ray (2002) suggested that in homeschooling strategies, "Teaching and learning are treated as a seamless and organic part of living within a family, geographic community, local faith community and nation – that is the real, everyday world" (p. 139). Lowe and Thomas (2002) declared that "most parents try to ensure progress in literacy and basic numeracy while presenting lots of opportunity and choice which allows the child to decide on the rest of the education" (p. 50). They do not clarify the meaning of education, but it is assumed that it is used in reference to formal education. In a prelude to setting out a series of questions or observations that parents needed to make to establish their approaches to learning, they stated:

The one-to-one nature of home education makes it possible for parents to discover and use the ways of learning which are most natural and rewarding

to each child. You can find out how your child learns best simply by observation and by asking yourself questions....(p. 43)

### **How Homeschoolers Practice Teaching**

From the existing literature, what can we learn about actual homeschooling teaching practices? Lowe and Thomas (2002), from their observations of United Kingdom homeschooling families, suggested that, “Most families have elements of both informality and structure in their home education arrangements” (p. 45). Ray (2002), supported by Meighan and Meighan (1991), Meighan (1996) and Thomas (1998, 2000), indicated that there is a significant diversity of approaches to the curriculum in homeschooling families.

Simich (1998) found a similar situation in Western Australia. In her study based on a series of interviews, she found that all families started from formal classrooms, timetables and curricula and moved, with experience, to loosely structured curricula, timetables and organisations. She explained that “as time progressed the parents found planned and structured content did not fit with their philosophy of ‘natural learning’ and they turned to unplanned learning without any formal preparation of content” (p. 155). This theme of movement from formal to informal appears to cover all aspects of homeschooling teaching.

#### *Types of Curricula Selected*

What types of curricula are selected and what are the reasons for these selections? It is apparent that most homeschooling parents choose a curriculum based on their own concepts of education. Ray (2002) insisted that from his observations of homeschoolers, “the learning program is flexible and highly individualized, involving both homemade and purchased curriculum materials” (p. 37). The Three Moms (2004), when offering multiple curricula to American homeschooling families, assumed that parents would choose “the right program and style for you and *your* child” (p. 1, original emphasis). They also suggested that “Your child may be bored out of their mind with one, and another may unleash your child” (p. 1). It appears that the homeschooling curricula, for

many American homeschooling families, needs to be child-centred and amenable to the beliefs and purposes of the teaching adult.

In the United Kingdom and, if we accept Werle's (2001) comments, the wider European community, it would appear that curricula are developed frequently by the family and thus may be expected to reflect the views and ideas of the family. It is frequently claimed, of United Kingdom families, that the child has a significant part in the selection of the curriculum. Meighan (1996) concluded that "learner-managed learning (autonomous education) is at present more frequently found in home-based education" (p. 2). Autonomous education is not usually compatible with prearranged curricula. The assumption must be that each curriculum is developed at home at the time. The greatest danger to successful home education, in Meighan's eyes, is the rigid adherence to a set programme or curriculum. This perception may be true in the United Kingdom environment, but many thousands of American homeschooled children follow commercially provided curricula and appear to be successful.

Lowe and Thomas (2002), from the United Kingdom, claimed, in relation to curricula, that:

Parents are free to establish their own philosophy and goals...parents use a variety of methods and approaches. These range from formal, structured arrangements to informal approaches which are completely child-led. Most home educators seem to evolve their own approach which falls somewhere in the middle between these two extremes. (p. 10)

Thomas (2000) emphasised the notion of reciprocal communication as a feature of homeschooling. He approached his research from two perspectives. The first was that "the meeting of two minds is fundamental to the pedagogical process" (p. 3). His second perspective was that "more informal and individualised teaching and learning occurs largely through social conversation with an adult" (p. 3). Some features found in his interviews with homeschooling families were that:

- Timetables are unnecessary – they work until the children finish or until they want to stop.
- Detailed planning is unnecessary – parents learn alongside their children and adapt teaching to fit.
- Informal learning is very important almost all teaching is individualised.

Thomas also observed that informal learning occurred in a variety of environments often outside the home, and frequently involved the learner in communication with an adult other than a family member. Informally communicated learning frequently grew to assume the most significant place in the family's learning environment. Meighan and Meighan (1991) in the United Kingdom, compared school-based to home-based education and in their view, "Schools tend to focus on 'how to be taught' whereas homes tend to teach 'how to learn'," concluding:

Schools use a conveyor-belt standardised approach while home-based uses more personalised educational outcomes; school is age segregated and the emphasis in homeschooling is on self-discipline and self-direction in contrast to the institutional conformity of schools. Communication in schools is mostly one-way whereas the home situation is largely an interchange one. (p. 10)

In New Zealand, if we are to believe Baldwin (1993) and McAlevey (1995), homeschoolers are traditional and conservative and adopt external curricula, which are very prescriptive, to fit their religious beliefs. By contrast Smith (2001), talking from the perspective of a New Zealand homeschooling parent, insisted that:

Learning the three r's, or teaching them, is no big mystery....It is almost a natural extension of what parents do all the time: teach a brand-new baby to speak and understand language. Once people learn to read, write, compute and have some research skills they can teach themselves virtually anything. (p. 23)

It may well be that the homeschooling population has changed in the ten years since Ian Revell, the Chairman of the (1995) *Education and Science Select Committee inquiry into Children at Risk through Truancy and Behaviour Problems*, in an interview on Radio Rhema, clearly supported the notion of a prescriptive curriculum for all. In reference to policy, he asserted:

What I don't support, personally, is the option for people to diverge dramatically from the National Curriculum. Given that the National Curriculum, that has to be followed by all registered schools, is designed to equip young New Zealanders with the skills they need to actually enter the workforce and participate in society, it must be a concern....(p. 24)

When asked a question about the National Curriculum being culturally, socially, or religiously offensive to a group in society, he responded:

I don't personally feel there is anything in the National Curriculum that is offensive in any of those three directions. I don't believe it is in the child's best interests for the schooling to take place on a completely different plane to that which is taught in mainstream schools. (p. 25)

These comments place Revell in the conservative sector of society regarding homeschooling. His views, that the priority roles of schools and "education" are geared towards a "workforce" needs/demands are in conflict with Codd (ibid) and which suggests that he takes, as Lee (20<sup>th</sup> September, 2006, p.3, personal correspondence) maintains, "a very functionalist and not universally accepted approach to learning and teaching". The Committee's (1995) recommendation to the Government to some extent reflects Revell's views because it included a recommendation that "A portion of the Homeschooling Supervision Allowance be paid to ERO for conducting assurance audits of homeschooling tuition when the National Curriculum is not being followed" (p. 23). This could be seen as an assumption that homeschoolers should be strongly encouraged to follow the National Curriculum and thereby conform to social norms, or be penalised if they do not.

In the New Zealand situation Williamson (2002), Senior Officer for the ERO group tasked with reviewing homeschoolers, while addressing a homeschooling workshop in Palmerston North, claimed that most successful homeschool families developed their own curricula. This view of Williamson would appear to place most of these families in line with those families in the United Kingdom, and in contrast to homeschoolers in the United States where there is a wide choice of curricula being offered, commercially, by a wide range of publishers. In the United States there are frequent "curriculum fairs" where publishers vie with each other selling their curricula. It is apparent that the outcome for most American homeschoolers is to use published curricula. Stevens (2001), when discussing support groups for homeschooling families in America, concluded that "Common agenda for support groups are rap sessions about such topics as choosing curricula" (p. 44). By contrast, in the United Kingdom such sessions would be primarily for creating curricula. Meighan (1996), a teacher who had studied many homeschooling families, in a report on homeschooling in the United Kingdom for Research Information for Teachers [SET], concluded that:

Homeschooling can go wrong when families adopt the one right curriculum approach and homeschooling is usually successful when parents describe themselves as “fixers” or “learning site managers” who help arrange the learning programme. (p. 4, original emphasis)

### **The Place of the Family**

The family is an aspect that seems to have had little attention in both early and more recent research, although it often attracts comment from researchers. There is no question that by having their children in parental care fulltime, emphasis is placed on the family. Does homeschooling define or even redefine the family? Barratt-Peacock (1997) believed that it did. He was at the time a homeschooling parent. He conducted 205 interviews and spent over 70 hours of observation with families throughout Australia, except the Northern Territories. He asked two questions: “Why do some Australians choose to home educate their children and how do they do it?” (p. 1). Barratt-Peacock made a unique contribution to the Australian literature on homeschooling in his identification of the significance of the family. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining his conclusions in more detail in the New Zealand situation. He recognised the special role of members of the family and provided evidence that homeschoolers are frequently, “communities of learning practice” which have “developed an alternative form of secondary socialisation to that provided by schools in a post industrial society” (p.121), often as a protest against the fracturing of the family structure. His work also makes a significant contribution because he linked together aspects which had often been identified originally in isolation by other researchers. He also cited the writings of John Dewey who, in his discussion of learning in the family, believed that in the ideal home parents know what is best for their children and cater for their needs through social conversation within the family. Barratt–Peacock (1997) talked of literature suggesting, of modern families, that they created “their own cultures with attendant world views and rituals...” (p. 136), while Reiss (1981), writing of early isolated American families, claimed that:

The family had an extraordinary originative role in the creation of a sense of order, balance, and coherence in its life: its members could weave this out of memories of the past (their own childhood), out of the maintenance of

custom... but, most important, out of an experience of their own fecundity:  
the vigor of their children and their survival by their own efforts. (p. 169)

Change “survival” to “total education” and this could be a reference to many of today’s homeschooling New Zealand families. As mentioned previously Barratt-Peacock (1997) also suggested that the family sees children as active contributors to the family, as a part of a community of learning practice. In a later discussion he concluded that

My model of the home educating family as a Community of Learning Practice differs from the model proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) in that members of the family are physically proximate to each other and this is not a requirement for Lave and Wenger’s Community of Practice. (p. 270)

Wenger has since written two books on communities of practices. The first was released in 1998; it which is theoretically based and focuses on a social theory of learning and covers a broad range of activities well beyond what is considered by Barratt-Peacock. Wenger’s more recently published book, *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (2002) elaborates on the social aspects of his 1998 publication but Barratt-Peacock’s comments are still applicable.

Barratt-Peacock also took a very different stand from the views of many other researchers by seeing homeschooling families as neither bound by tradition nor being necessarily a site of educational exploration. It is evident that, from his point of view, it is inappropriate to suggest that homeschooling families are conservative, backward looking entities. Each community, in his eyes, brings and develops its own reasons for homeschooling and develops its own practices. It follows from this that, in theory, a family could express traditional, conservative views and also be involved in ongoing innovative or creative practices. From this, it would appear to be futile to be concerned with fixed notions of either “conservative” or “innovative”. Given that families have their own personal reasons for choosing to teach their children at home and that each family selects their own style and content for teaching, it also would seem difficult to impose an artificial unity on homeschooling families, except for a common rejection of schooling. With this approach the notion of homeschooling as a movement becomes irrelevant or at least a distractor contributing to misunderstanding. Moreover Davis (2005), supports the position advanced by Barratt-Peacock when she suggests that homeschooling is “A personal choice not a movement” and that “A movement implies

the group is collectively organized for the purpose of pursuing a commonly-held agenda” (p. 1).

From Barratt-Peacock’s perspective, homeschooling families are often involved in a network of other communities of practice. This network frequently entails communicating with others, seeking advice, encouragement and voicing explicit concerns. In a home setting there is also a direct connection between domestic work done by family members and the content of family communication. This includes children being supported by parents as mentors, as they (the children) learn from the fields of full adult practice in the wider society as well as from clubs and societies in their immediate neighbourhood that they are encouraged to join.

Van Galen (1987), in research described previously, was the first to vigorously develop the idea of family in relation to homeschooling in the United States. She developed a design that incorporated both survey and interview. She claimed, under the subheading of “strengthening the family”, that “virtually all of the parents in this study believe that modernization and secularisation are eroding the strength and importance of the family as an institution” (p. 164). Barratt-Peacock concluded that homeschooling is chosen because it is family-centred. By contrast Knowles (1995), from his studies of homeschooling parents in the United States, concluded that the reasons why they choose to homeschool is often because of their own schooling experiences and not as a protest against the fracturing of the family. McDowell and Ray (2000), after interviewing homeschooling parents, concluded that “mothers-teachers perceive home schooling to have a positive impact on both their families and themselves” (p. 204). This was despite finding no evidence that family unity was a reason for choosing to homeschool. While this may not necessarily support Barratt-Peacock’s claim of the unity of the family as a reason for choosing to homeschool, it does support the notion that homeschooling will strengthen the family.

By claiming that homeschooling is a community of learning practice, Barratt-Peacock also implied that learning needs to be applied, arising largely from within the family and that the child is a valued contributor to the family. Holt (1969), in the United States, who has had a major influence on homeschooling as a whole, emphasised that one of the central concepts was “children are unique individuals from the moment of birth, and their essential beings are demeaned by conventional schooling” (p. 27). From his

perspective schools are factories with their standardised curricula and practices that could make children, who otherwise would be good, into learning and behaviour problems. A family learning situation was, in his mind, ideal. The importance of “family” in choosing to teach children at home is worthy of further research although it must be recognised that having the children in direct parent control all day for seven days a week will naturally enhance the focus on family. I was, therefore, interested in what New Zealand research might reveal about views of the family in homeschooling.

Barratt-Peacock advanced a convincing argument about the family as a community of learning practice but perhaps these claims may not only be applied to the families who educate their children from a home base. His claim, that they will also be proximate might also be true of some families who send their children to school. Perhaps it could be that home educating families are apparently quicker to declare their children’s widely based socialisation than do families whose children attend school. Again, while accepting Barratt-Peacock’s claim that home educating enhances the intensity of the family, could not all families, home schooling or not, focus on enhancing family intensity?

When the practices of home schooling families are examined, the question of who does the teaching in the home environment also arises. Stevens (2001) clearly stated:

Home schooling happens largely through women’s labor. It is peopled by women, from many walks of life, who appear to have jumped headfirst into an elaborate domesticity. Homeschooling is an extraordinary diverse social movement. They are system challengers. Yet they are people who nurture relations with other people. In the New Zealand setting there is a need to ascertain who, with what qualifications, carries the major responsibility for the learning based in the home. (p. 16)

If practices of New Zealand homeschooling families support this claim then answers to Stevens’ proposition may be found when parents explain how they practice homeschooling.

### **The Opposing Viewpoints**

The discussion thus far has suggested that there are opposing points of view on the controversy of state versus individual rights concerning homeschooling in New

Zealand. There is also a good deal of concern that any rights must include the rights of children. However both the state and the individual are tasked with the responsibility, in New Zealand, of ensuring these rights, as spelt out in the United Nation's (1989) *Commission on the Rights of Children*, Articles 28 and 29, are recognised. The United Nation's criteria have been adopted by New Zealand but these are not the only consideration needing attention. In any discussion of homeschooling, children's developmental needs in relation to education also require attention. Smith (1998), in her book *Understanding Children's Development*, presented a New Zealand perspective and a strong case for the need for any new points of view to take children's development into consideration.

As I have noted, in the homeschooling literature there are two distinct research groups who see homeschooling in very different lights. Each group has both a political and an educational point of view. One view has it that homeschoolers tend to support traditional, conservative, white values and practices which limit the choices available to children. Other researchers have suggested that homeschoolers are a considerably more diverse group than this verdict concedes. They argue that, far from being unified, homeschoolers in many cases are characterised by negotiation between parents and their children. In education their emphasis is on innovative learning styles. It is important, therefore, that this thesis seeks to clarify the issues posed by these rival explanations. Mayberry et al. (1995) in the United States, Charles (2000) in the United Kingdom and Werles (2001) in the Netherlands are supportive of the latter while Baldwin (1993), McAleve (1995), and Revell (1995), in New Zealand, and Callan (1997) in the United States, support the former.

Callan (1997) is an adamant advocate of compulsory schooling, in his sense of "a true common school". He believes that children in the common school receive a common curriculum to provide a strong sense of citizenship for the future with the ultimate goals of the liberal democratic state. He argued that:

Schooling is likely the most promising institutional vehicle for that understanding since the other, extra-familial social influences that impinge heavily on children's and adolescents' lives – peer groups, the mass media of communication and entertainment – do not readily lend themselves to that end. (p. 133)

Callan also claimed that parents do not have the right to reject schooling for their children' ethical servility, and that the learner could be brainwashed into believing the parents' limited view of the world. In his introduction he stated:

The need to perpetuate fidelity to liberal democratic institutions and values from one generation to another suggests that there are some inescapable shared educational aims, even if the pursuit of these conflict with the convictions of some citizens. (p. 9)

He also declared that:

Large moral losses are incurred by permitting parents to rear their children in disregard of the minima of political education and their children's rights to an education that protects their prospective interest in sovereignty. (p. 176)

These comments from Callan, however, do not appear to sit well with his title "*Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*". I wondered whether making "schooling" compulsory fits with his notion of a liberal democracy. Compulsory education rather than compulsory schooling might well do this because it could be regarded as a reasonable requirement of a democracy requiring an educated society able to make informed choices. But the problem still remains as to how to compel a child to acquire, or love, this concept and to make informed choices.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989, Articles 28 & 29) is very pertinent to the debate between the rights of the state as opposed to the rights of the individual. Article 28 sets out a series of statements relating to the state's responsibilities as far as education is concerned, while Article 29 sets out a basic framework which qualifies the state's power over the education of the child and the individual rights it must adhere to. Of particular significance is the second section which declares:

No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

The notion of homeschooling gains significant support from the emphasis on the liberties of the individual and particularly in Article 29 (1c) which claims the state must ensure:

The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural

identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Clearly, the United Nations Convention is not opposed to homeschooling, but it does imply the right to have one's children learn about their inherited culture, provided that they are also prepared for "a responsible life in a free society" (Article 29, 1d).

However, children's rights mean very little if the parents and the child are not aware of these rights. As Clark (2000) pointed out, "It is more likely that adults will exercise their rights responsibly if they have learned early on how to exercise rights as a child" (p. 15). He went on to state that, "this means [parents] must themselves know how to exercise their own rights responsibly as well as how to guide their own children in the acquisition of rights" (p. 15). I would add, however, that parents also need to know that, while they may initiate children's rights at a young age, older children need to learn to exercise their own.

In the United States Apple (2000) has argued that home education is an antisocial, conservative, movement of largely middle-class whites in favour of the "traditional" cultural and religious values. Through withdrawal of their children they are attacking notions of a progressive, integrated society without racial and social differentiation. Apple's concerns are largely politically focused; however, he did recognise that

there are clear elements of good sense in its [homeschooling] criticisms of the bureaucratic nature of all too many of our institutions, in its worries about the managerial state, and in its devotion to being active in the education of its children. (p. 269)

He concluded that if schools do not change "this would be a tragedy both for the public school system and for our already withered sense of community that is increasingly under threat" (p. 270). Although opposed, politically, to homeschooling in the United States, Apple supported homeschooling parents' concerns about the educational system and also supported their commitment to their children's learning.

Representing an alternative perception Werles (2001), speaking generally of homeschooling in the EEC and in opposition to the educational views of Baldwin, McAlevey, Revell, and Callan, alleged that:

The dominant approach of homeschoolers in all the EEC countries surveyed is a child-centred one as it is a partnership between parent and child. Curriculum is negotiated with the parent as persuader using reason rather than veto. Usually this involves a deeper understanding of each other's individual needs. It seems apparent that homeschooling parents, as teachers, probably make variations on, or even ignore, the state curriculum. (p. 36)

Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, Charles (2000), from personal experience as a homeschooling parent, supported the claims of Werles and clearly disagreed with the conclusions of McAlevey and the views of the New Zealand Committee for the Review of Education and Science (1995), when he declared:

There are as many ways of home education as there are families doing it, and it is generally assumed that everyone fits somewhere on the spectrum, from school-within-the-home with textbooks, fixed curriculum and timetables, to learning-from-life with nothing fixed whatever. I used to think that most families came between the two ....Now I view it differently: it is my children themselves who have prompted the changes. (p. 15)

What, then, do we need to know about New Zealand homeschoolers in order to adjudicate on this dispute between pro and anti homeschooling? The key question is, do the parents provide alternative educational strategies of potential or are they indicative of defensive resistance and withdrawal? In short, are homeschooling families abdicating their social responsibility or embracing it?

## **Summary**

This study uses a review of New Zealand and overseas literature to help establish the central issue of this research which has been prompted by the basic dispute concerning the purpose and process of homeschooling. To answer this issue I decided to focus on two central questions, as stated in Chapter One, which are:

- Why do some parents choose to homeschool their children?
- How do they go about the practice of homeschooling these children?

The next chapter will explain how I went about seeking answers to these questions.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Qualitative research is a methodology that consists of a range of interconnected methods, as Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated, to “make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 4). However, qualitative research is bounded by a series of assumptions. Tolich and Davidson (1999) viewed the epistemological assumptions underlying qualitative research as being based on concepts of reality as a social construct. The subject matter is also of prime concern because the variables can be complex and interwoven. In this study the focus is on the participants’ constructs of reality, its variables and complexities in relation to homeschooling. While talking of qualitative research, Tolich and Davidson also claimed that the research should take place in a contextual situation and that responses would require interpretation. They also believed that while research is emergent and always from someone’s perspective, it is also initiated and implemented by the researcher. Shibutani (1995) described ‘perspective’ as “an ordered view of one’s world – what is taken for granted about the attributes of various objects, events, and human nature” (p. 564).

My literature review has also indicated that research into homeschooling lends itself to a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, approach. Thus I chose not to use a survey approach, as demonstrated in the New Zealand situation by Kerslake et al. (1998). Their survey approach may have signposted the “architecture” of homeschooling families and their major reasons for adopting this approach to learning, but it did not fit with my intentions. Surveys tend to promote a low response rate in Australasian homeschoolers. Kerslake et al. (1998) achieved only a 44% percent response rate in their research (although it could be argued that 44% would be very satisfying for many researchers). In Australia, Krivanek (1985) constructed an account of homeschooling in Australia based on survey data. He used a group of 50 families, of whom only 26% responded to the questionnaire despite the fact that the survey had been commissioned by the Alternative Education Resource Group and the sample drawn from its members. Knowles (1987), in a presentation to the Australian and New Zealand Conference on Research into Education, from his extensive studies into homeschooling in the United States, concluded: “The results suggest survey inquiries about rationales for home schooling may reveal only superficial or contemporary motives, since more deep-seated

reasons were uncovered in this study. Results verify that home schooling motives are complex” (p. 32). Also critical of a survey approach were Mayberry et al. (1995), who quoted a homeschooling parent as saying “Many of your [survey] questions seem to lack the understanding that not only are we moving away from but moving to something. It’s not just education, it’s a way of life – a style, a family structure” (p. 45). It is clear that the speaker is suggesting that surveys do not indicate such things as changes in lifestyle. As indicated, a survey approach to homeschooling families is likely to have a low response rate and may lead to conclusions which have little validity. Instead, an interview approach using a blend of narrative inquiry and grounded theory theory was adopted.

In harmony with the views of Lincoln and Guba, (2000) and Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, and Marlow (1995), I am aware of the need to be conscious of the need for qualifiers. Qualifiers allow for adaptation of any method adopted in my research. As Mayberry et al. (1995) declared:

Merely identifying the common and disparate characteristics of parent educators, however, both neglects the unique experiences that shape their journey into homeschooling and glosses over their interpretations of what it means to educate children at home. (p. 8)

This notion of the uniqueness of their experiences and their interpretations, together with the literature review, indicates the expected complexity of reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children and the actions taken in teaching them. Clearly, therefore, there is the need for a methodology catering for those factors. In addition, my archival research aims at providing a better understanding of the structures imposed on homeschooling families, the Ministry of Education’s position, and assumptions made by our contemporary society. For example, in order to understand our political and cultural context we need to understand the 1877 Education Act and all consequential Acts relevant to homeschooling, because these Acts provide the legal framework, and administery context, for removing children from school and sustaining their education at home. The Acts also provide an historical catalogue of the changes in New Zealand society and attitudes, over an extended period of time.

In support of the previously outlined expected complexities, and in contrast to the results of Kerslake et al. (1998) and Krivanek (1985), the research by Nolan and Nolan (1992), Baldwin (1993) and McAlevey (1995) found that in an interview approach

families responded very openly. They also found that responses were lengthy, complex, and that they differed significantly from family to family. Their findings clearly indicate that, in the New Zealand homeschooling environment, interview techniques are more successful than surveys in seeking out the underlying beliefs and characteristics of these families. As Mayberry et al. (1995) had cogently argued, surveys are not appropriate vehicles for these objectives.

My research methodology involved a judicious selection of elements from a number of established approaches, because this turned out to be the most appropriate for my study. Initially I had adopted the “narrative inquiry” model as advocated by Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000). For them, narrative inquiry is an approach to understanding human behaviour through collections of anecdotal material which are necessarily different from story telling. I eventually came to the realisation that aspects of narrative inquiry, employed together with aspects of grounded theory, could be a more useful approach to facilitate the participants being able to fully explain the families’ reasons and practices and to better enable consideration of their points of view.

This study is, therefore, founded on the belief that knowledge is a construct of human experience and that elements from both narrative inquiry and grounded theory will facilitate this research in support of interviews. To this end Polkinghorne (1995) declared: “Stories are linguistic expressions of this uniquely human experience of the connectedness of life” (p. 7). Experiences differ with each individual, occur over time, and previous experiences often influence and are influenced by current ones; however, these experiences need to have been internalised by the receiver. Because these constructs are complex and usually contain a cultural element any explanation of them, therefore, is more amenable to interviews and narratives than other approaches. However, as already indicated, a survey approach can reveal some broad features, or ‘architecture’ of homeschooling, but cannot reveal much about the complex experiences of each homeschooling family. This is what Mayberry et al. (1995) have described as “the journey into homeschooling” (p. 8).

While both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have merit each has its place, as indicated, I have selected a blend of narrative inquiry and grounded theory as my preferred methodology, given the nature of my study. Some aspects of the narrative inquiry based approach are very appropriate in this research, because narrative inquiry

is the study of the ways people experience the world and has been used increasingly used in studies of educational experience. Put another way, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed that “[it] may also be sociologically concerned with groups and the formation of community” (p. 1). As is already established, homeschooling can be seen as a community of learning practice. The central task becomes evident when it is recognised that people are both living their stories, in an ongoing experiential text, and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others.

I needed to consider this as I related to, and collaborated with, the participants to establish a relationship in which both the researcher and participant have a voice. “Voice is the meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). Important in this context is the way I think about the researcher-participant relationship and the ‘voice’ of each. Clearly there is a need for time, space, relationship and voice in all narrative inquiry research. Voice produces the recorded field text of each participant. Again, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) make it clear that “We see teacher’s narratives as metaphors for teaching-learning relationships” (p. 3). They raise a central issue of all narrative inquiry, that of establishing relationships. Developing this relationship involves feelings of ‘connectedness’ in a situation of equality, caring, and mutual purpose. However, while field text is the first step in narrative inquiry we are always working towards a second text which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as “research text”. Research text requires the inquirer to read and reread the field text before composing his or her text. Personal reflection, as a participant in each interview, and additional notes both contribute to the understanding of the field text and are essential for this second level. Finally, there is the analysis and interpretation of this second text which enables the researcher to arrive at some conclusion, or themes, he or she perceives to have been produced. It is for this third stage that I have used some aspects of grounded theory.

I selected some aspects of grounded theory because I am conscious of the weaknesses of narrative inquiry. The two most significant weaknesses are:

1. Like all qualitative research narrative is able to be criticised on the grounds of reliability, validity, and generalisability. The first two can be strengthened by providing opportunities for all participants to review, and change, all text relevant to them.

2. Generalisability remains a problem as replication is not possible, and studies are usually based on a relatively small sample.

While recognising these weaknesses Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim that narrative inquiry has “an *exploratory, intentional quality*, as well as having *adequacy* and *plausibility*” (p. 185, original emphasis). Dorson (1976) was an early proponent of narrative inquiry and identified a range of aspects amenable to this approach. He suggested research into education as a possibility. This possibility could include the use of custom, ballads, recollections, and myths. My study fits comfortably within Dorson’s suggestions. Hence, because of its focus on experiences and the qualities of life and education, narrative is situated in a matrix of qualitative research.

As mentioned, all approaches to qualitative research have their own strengths and weaknesses. Narrative inquiry is no exception because it is based always on a small “sample”. One of its weaknesses is that its results, while relating to a broad theory, are based on a limited sample of a “possible” theory. It can also be criticised for its apparent “undue stresses on the individual over the social context” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). However, the strength of narrative is its quality and flexibility of subject matter together with the ability to convey meaningful personal and social experiences. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out, we are:

Constructing narratives at several levels. At one level it is the personal narratives and the jointly shared and constructed narratives that are told in the research writing, but narrative researchers are compelled to move beyond the telling of the lived story to tell the research story. (p. 10)

Because collaboration occurs throughout the interview expressions of opinion and belief are revised, after consultation over text or further data emerges. Grounded theory can be used to provide structure for aspects of the methods employed to analyse or recording this data.

As Chamaz (2006) pointed out, “grounded theory ethnology gives priority to the studied phenomenon or process – rather than the setting itself” (p. 22). Creswell (2005) provides a more detailed statement on the nature of grounded theory design by claiming that:

This theory is a **‘process’ theory** – it explains an educational process of events, activities, actions and interactions that occur over time...grounded theorists proceed through **systematic procedures** of collecting data,

identifying categories [*aka themes/concepts*], connecting these categories and formulating a theory that explains the process. (p. 396, original emphasis)

Glaser and Strauss (1965, 1967) created the concept of ‘Grounded Theory’ which has in the following 40 years developed into an approach that, in Charmaz’s (2006) terms, is “used to theorize how meanings, actions and social structures are constructed” (p.151). She had earlier (2000) claimed that constructionists “recognise that the viewer creates the data ensuring analysis through interaction with the interviewed. Data do not provide a window on reality” (pp. 523-524). Charmaz went on to claim that “the *discovered* reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural and structural contexts.... The viewer then is part of what is viewed rather than separated from it” (p. 524, original emphasis). Casey (1995) supported this use of grounded theory when he declared that:

On the basis of the many unexpected turns open-ended interviewing has taken, making generalizations about teachers based on demographic data no longer seems sufficient; even surveys become suspect when the researcher cannot be sure of asking questions of any salience to the subjects.

Participant-structured conversations have become an imperative addition to the research repertoire. (p. 239)

Rose (2006), in her *Seminar and Presentation for Victoria University*, concluded that, “grounded theory presented opportunities, and flexibility for researchers to change research plans; potentiality for developing theory with practical relevance and producing a testable set of propositions, or research questions, that lead to future research” (p. 32). It is clear from this claim/argument that grounded theory allows me, as the researcher, to remain an active empathetic participant in the accounts and to develop propositions relating to these homeschoolers’ narratives.

As already explained, grounded theory has continuous comparison at its centre. In this case, one interview is compared with another so that theory may emerge. What is relatively unique to grounded theory is that it is explicitly emergent as it deliberately attempts to find out what theories or propositions account for the actual research situation. The researcher does not attempt to fit the research to a prior theory but theory emerges from the data. As such my qualitative research analysis, in keeping with a

blended narrative inquiry and grounded theory approach, will not be static but will emerge and be revised as the study evolves. As Charmaz (2006) explained, “A constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as related from shared experiences and relationships with participants” (p. 130).

Tolich and Davidson (1999), supported by Gergen and Gergen (2000), also suggested that grounded theory is especially suited to this understanding of the meaning for participants of the events, situations and actions they are involved in, and the accounts they give of their lives and experiences. Grounded theory also considers the particular context within which the participants act and the influence that this context has on their actions.

The written report, based on grounded theory and narrative inquiry, is usually descriptive and often presents hypotheses about theories and future research. The researcher may be required to be involved personally and to be empathic. Grounded theory, like narrative inquiry, is very flexible and can be applied to narratives that are accounts through which people view, understand, and make sense of their experiences. This also fits the aim of this research, which is to understand how some homeschooling parents think and act in the situated context in which they live.

This study, as noted, uses a blend of both narrative inquiry and grounded theory, with the principal focus on narratives, in homeschooling, as the vehicle of communication by participants about family experiences and social relationships. As Crook (2001) explained, “It takes the individual out of isolation and conceptualises knowledge as participatory, as distributed and as socially situated” (p. 25). Matthews and Crow (2003) also pointed out that Dewey’s belief that people need to make sense of learning based on their experiences and that Piaget’s emphasis on the learner’s construction and reconstruction of knowledge shows they were early advocates of a narrative inquiry approach to research. Johnson (1987) broke away from the notion of pure objectivity or pure subjectivity and argued, as did Lincoln and Guba (2000), that “knowledge is an historically and culturally embedded, humanly embodied, imaginatively structured event” (p. 175). Similarly, Eisner (1998) expressed the view that while objectivity might be a desirable approach to social science it is neither achievable nor desirable and overlooks the human aspect of mind. As Broadhurst (1999) maintained, “Reality not as

it exists, but as it appears to a person, is what is of importance for understanding behaviour and development” (p. 3). People’s perceptions of reality can be expressed in a variety of ways but, as Bruner (1990) explained, “People do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events into larger structures” (p. 64). These larger events, or structures, are expressed verbally in narratives and by other media. Charon (1998) made it clear that in his view:

We are not controlled by what happened to us in the past; we are not simply playing out personality traits we developed early in our lives. Our actions are always caused by what happens in the present situation, more specifically, how we are defining what is happening there. (p. 28)

The focus remains on the method to achieve the main aims of the research, which are to document the reasons, practices and experiences of these families who are homeschooling their children in New Zealand. Narratives will be used throughout the research to describe the families’ accounts of their thinking and behaviour.

In summary, I used narrative inquiry for my basic approach and extrapolated some methods from grounded theory to analyse and develop theories which relate to the beliefs and concepts of the families who joined me in researching a sample of New Zealand’s homeschoolers. The key points in any adoption of grounded theory are:

1. Note taking and reflection after each interview. I chose to tape-record my interviews because I believe that ‘note taking’, while recording, can be a distraction to both the participants and the researcher.
2. From these notes and reflections personal memos emerge. These memos are then developed into a simple coding system which highlights the theory implied in the data. Glaser (1998) suggested two main criteria for judging the adequacy of the emerging theory; that it fitted the situation, and that it worked. That is, what worked for the participants and me. This coding meant that I examined each sentence and noted the unspoken messages the participants conveyed.
3. If these ‘codes’ are found to have a high frequency, in other families as well, they become core categories. It needs to be noted that core categories can develop only after several families have been interviewed. My literature research had indicated that each

homeschooling family is, in some ways, unique. Thus, I did not expect that any category would be common to all.

4. Memoing, in parallel with data collection, is a continuous reality and one I recognised would help me develop one or more categories or theories for the reasons parents choose to homeschool and the practices they adopt in doing so.

Parts of grounded theory, therefore, are appropriate for this study as they facilitate my analysis. My analysis also suggests that research into homeschooling has to be able to facilitate the participants' expression of complex factors and to be able to develop theories which emerge from these narratives. This approach puts the researcher and his/her constructions of personal experiences within the inquiry. Kemmis (1986) claimed that when individuals note something of their experience, either to themselves or others, they do so in narrative form. For him, people by nature lead storied lives and tell narratives of those lives. Interviewers can describe such lives and write narratives of these experiences by others and develop theories which may help, or guide, future researchers. These narratives and theories are the closest we can come to their experiences. The present experiences, as presented by the interviewees, provide the values they ascribed to the events and emergent theories and allow for the notion of intentionality. As illustrated already in this study, there is a need for the development of a set of guidelines for me, the researcher.

There is also an imperative that I, the researcher, maintain a focus on the purpose of the research even though the research itself may change during the study as new information and new directions of inquiry emerge. Inquiry into personal or small group experiences also involves a complex of different responses. In this research the purpose is to document the experiences of these families and through the research process, gather information on these homeschooling families. The narratives heard by the researcher impact on her/his experiences in the same way as does those of the other participants and influence the meanings taken from the experience.

Acknowledgement that the researcher has something to say also applies. This is a matter of balance between purpose, participant and researcher. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained this balance as follows:

One of the researcher's dilemmas in the composition of research text is captured by the analogy of living on an edge, trying to maintain one's

balance, as one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to tell of the participants' storied experiences and to represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research that will speak to and reflect upon the audience's voices. (p. 147)

It is also imperative that narratives have a purpose, a discernible sequence and have some causal relationships. They, however, do not have to be constructed as tightly as, say, a legal presentation. The people, their sense of self and their interactions, remain central. It also enables access to the larger structures which are uniquely human experiences of the connectedness of life. The researcher must also take into consideration the historical precedents affecting the participant's meanings. Researchers need to empathise, when it does not conflict with their own beliefs relative to the research, and pay attention to the particular. There is also a need for some ordering of the events that are part of each narrative. In many cases these events will follow a linear time pattern so there is a need for causal linkages. Gergen (1999) described the ideal narrative as "One in which every event is causally related to the preceding in a seamless tale" (p. 59). An ideal narrative is relatively uncommon, but any claim to narrative must fulfil most of the above criteria. Glynn (2002), discussing the methodology used in a collaborative study of activated whanau (extended family) processes within a community and school literacy partnership, summarises his approach as:

A methodology that recognises that the people and their communities are essential participants in the research process (Bishop, 1996). Their lived experience and their own ways of knowing and sharing knowledge bring validity to the research process. (Te Henepe, 1993; Cole, 1998) (p. 3)

Glynn also believed that his approach:

Maintains and respects the integrity of storytellers and the knowledge and culture they represent. It allows researcher and researched to co-construct narratives of the research process. Hence it offers an approach that demonstrates how the research process and outcomes may be understood through the agency of key research participants, rather than through the agency of the researchers alone. (p. 3)

This relationship between the active participants and the researcher, with the acknowledgement of the activeness of the participants, is a central factor. In this study it was anticipated that the participants would participate actively in the research process, give their accounts of their experiences and review the transcripts and the constructs of

the researcher. Any revised text would then be shaped necessarily by this relationship. The interpretation of research text into coding depends on the researcher's involvement, the degree of collaborative construction, and the degree this is influenced by the researcher's commitment. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggested:

Inquiry into small groups evokes complex responses which can be classified as inward responses involving the sense of hope, internal values and feelings while outwardly involving short and long term roles, relationships and the existential life of the participants, and also the historical, current and future intentions of them. (p. 64)

This is an important opinion. I have needed always to be aware that as a researcher I am bound to respond to the situation I had committed myself to. I also needed to be aware of the overriding ethical considerations involved in any research concerned with people.

I have, as Jordan (2003) did, adopted the definition of ethics offered by Smith (1990). Smith regarded ethics as “[a] complex of ideals showing how individuals should relate to one another in particular situations, to principles of conduct guiding these relationships and to the kind of reasoning one engages in when thinking about such ideals and principles” (p. 141). It leads to consideration of the notions of power and authority. It is clear that this is especially true, given my position as a recorder, when power-related problems occur. This is a particular concern in a homeschooling situation where parents and children are present in a relatively continuous, intimate, interaction. Children create an additional problem, which is why I have been very conscious of their “rights” as established under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and ratified by New Zealand in 1993.

My preferred solution was not to interview children separately. They were, however, free, throughout the interview, with parental consent, to attend, leave, and comment as they saw fit. However, I expected that some comments and their opinions would be recorded. My decision was based on an awareness that homeschooling makes the child dependent on a parent all day and every day. Moreover older children will be aware that their teaching-parent has given up a career, and the associated income, to teach them. Hence they would be very cautious about expressing any opinion which may reflect poorly on, or be in conflict, with those of their parents. Any negative comments by the child then would have to be judged in this light. The situation is made more difficult because I am an outsider and do not know the children as well as their

parents do. The literature does suggest that children are contributors to the content and practises of their homeschooling curricula, but this occurs in an intimate situation to which I did not have direct access. I decided, early on in this study, that children in a homeschooling situation were heavily dependent on parental goodwill and I did not wish to place parents or children in a conflicting situation. Smith (1998) pointed out that while Langsted (1994) had argued for children's perspectives on the quality of their childcare environments to be considered, he did, however, recognise that "children did have more choice in their childcare centres than at home" (p. 74). If I interviewed a child then a parent was legally expected to be present. Finally, I wished to establish a good relationship with the whole family. Smith (1998) claimed that Scandinavian countries have "a very strong belief in the importance of children's viewpoints and understandings, and have made a deliberate effort to include them in both research and practice" (p. 73). I, however, deemed that interviewing children separately would not be conducive to a good working relationship with the family in the New Zealand context. Interviewing homeschooled children would be a good topic for future research.

This study has followed the principles, criteria, and conditions set out by the Massey University (2000) Code of Ethical Conduct for Teaching and Research Involving Human Subjects. The material I provided to the homeschooling families to achieve these conditions is appended in full in Appendix A. A brief summary of the material provided to them follows.

An introductory letter was sent outlining the research intentions, giving a brief outline of the researcher's background and actions they could take if they had concerns. It also provided the names and contact numbers of the research supervisors. Those who indicated interest in the proposal were sent a more detailed outline and were invited to join the research and complete individual consent forms. Even though I did not intend to interview children a simplified consent form was nevertheless provided for the children, to cover any eventuality, given that they might be present during interviews and sometimes participate in discussion. Once acceptance had been confirmed a location, date, and time for the interview was agreed to. At the interview permission was obtained to tape record the narratives, and participants were advised that they could stop the interview at any time. Children were advised that they could, with the consent of their parent or parents, leave the interview at any time. It should be noted that no child was

excluded from the interviews and children contributed their views freely on the discussion taking place.

The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. A copy of each transcription was sent to the relevant family. They were invited to make any alterations they thought were needed and to add any additional thoughts and ideas they wished. The revised transcripts were then sent back to the families who were again invited to make any changes that better described their intentions. Each family was later sent a copy of the research text together with any quotes used, as they related to them. Once again they were invited to comment and alter any statements if they wished. All conditions set by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee were followed. These included ensuring privacy and secure storage of transcripts, for which I remain accountable.

The sixteen homeschooling families, who had volunteered to work with me, were interviewed. All had exemption under Section 21 of the Education Act 1989 for their children not to attend school and to be educated at home. In the analysis stage the eight families, as indicated in the introduction, were chosen for indepth analysis of the data collected from their interviews. These families were also chosen as they represented a broad perspective and provided a range of reasons for and practices of homeschooling. They also provided a variety of locations, economic statuses, ethnicities, philosophies, and a diversity of educational approaches. Each family's overall homeschooling experience was also considered when I made my final decision. A need to keep costs down and provide easy access to families was also a factor. There was good access to the main centres of Auckland and Wellington, and local rural families were readily available. Six of the families were interviewed in their homes. Two families were interviewed simultaneously in a local café. Times of meetings and locations were negotiated with the participants. These diversities are discussed further in Chapter Five.

After the initial introductions were made some time was spent telling the families, in detail, of my own family and my childhood so they would have a clear picture of the person with whom they were sharing their narratives. Individual rights, especially those of privacy and of children, were also reviewed. Follow-up discussions with all families were used to clarify areas of ambiguity or interpretation and to provide opportunity for participants to change or add to their stories. Families were invited to change or add to the transcriptions, wherever they felt appropriate or where it did not convey their

intentions. All families took advantage of this opportunity. In two cases significant changes were made while two families continued to forward additional information.

One of the selected families had been homeschooling for two years, whereas at the other end of the scale one family had been homeschooling for over eighteen years. Families were located in areas from between Wellington and Auckland with a mix of rural and urban. All families had volunteered and most heard of the research through their own support group. There was also a range of income, from solo parents receiving state support to successful professionals. At the time families ranged from one child to six children with an average family size, at the time of the main interview, of three children. In all but one case the dominant teacher, or facilitator, was the children's mother. The exception was where teaching was shared because the father worked from home and both parents had heavy commitments to the spreading of belief in home education. The eight families in this research study comprised:

- Two from urban Wellington.
- One from a town in the Wellington area.
- Two from rural areas in the lower North Island.
- One from urban Palmerston North.
- Two from an island in the Hauraki Gulf.

The people who joined me in an interview have been given pseudonyms and their precise location is not revealed. The names of larger organisations were not changed.

A pilot study, not included in the reported research, was carried out with one family who were invited to participate in the research. They were asked to participate openly and to comment on the questions, the format, and all other aspects of the research as well as to make suggestions on how the researcher's personal approach might be improved. The family received copies of the key questions (Appendix A1) prior to the interview. Inevitably minor changes to procedures and questions occurred following the family's comments on the narratives shared with them. In fact there were few prompts required and there was also less need for further questions to stimulate answers to the two key ones. Subsequent family narratives confirmed the pilot study's findings, and again prompts were seldom required.

Taking a neutral stance, from a participatory position, is not possible. Patton (1990) tried to differentiate rapport from neutrality in an interview and concluded that "Rapport

[is] the stance vis-à-vis the person being interviewed whereas neutrality is a stance vis-à-vis the content of what the person says” (p. 316). Even if we accept Patton’s definition, neutrality to the content cannot be achieved in this research. The view taken here is that the interviewer is not a passive recipient of the participant’s answers. This said, there are ways of reducing bias and enhancing neutrality. In this study there was a particular need to be aware of the importance of responding to participants’ personal questions with informative answers while at the same time establishing the boundaries, if any, for the researcher’s own self-disclosures. There was also a need to act with care over how far a sensitive topic should be followed or how much of a topic outside the study should be allowed. Clearly, self-critiquing one’s interview skills while the research is in progress is important. No matter how careful the researcher is to inform and work with the participants, the final product remains the researcher’s interpretation and presentation. To be able to adopt a detached, totally objective, approach in an interview situation is an unattainable dream, because we all bring our own prejudices with us to all situations. It should be added that self-reflection, which considers all the elements, was a central element in the success of the interviews with these families.

The issues surrounding data collection also need consideration. The steps taken to conduct this research, while following Massey University guidelines, are based on an adaption of the steps suggested by Thomas (2000) who had carried out extensive research of homeschooling in the United Kingdom and Australia. Those steps are to:

- explain to the participants the realms of experience that were the focus of the study.
- explain why the study could be of value and that the rights of the participants, in relation to the interviews, would be protected.
- invite the participants to speak freely as co-participants and point out that the narratives were being recorded.
- prompt the participants or encourage elaborations of aspects which appeared unclear or in need of further development.
- provide the participants with a copy of the transcribed material so they could review it. (I also made it clear that this right to review remained open.)

In addition, I accepted the views of Charmaz (1994) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000), that the central factors were the narratives and the interpretations that family members made of their lives. Consequently my coding was based on my research

questions which separated the reasons expressed for choosing to homeschool from the practices they adopted in teaching their children. Each of these two sections was separated later into subsections with themes as they emerged from the individual narratives. Finally, possible relationships between reasons and practices were sought.

This study was based on literature and a limited sample of participants that were seen to be relevant to the research area. Analysis and data collection were both concurrent with and subsequent to the event. As Charmaz (1983) stated of grounded theory, “Grounded theorists shape their data collection from their analytic interpretations and discoveries, and therefore sharpen their observations. Additionally, they check and fill out emerging ideas by collecting further data” (p. 110). To bring out the themes present in the narratives of these families it was necessary to carry out a dialectical process as I moved between the family transcripts and the themes which had emerged in previous studies. Because of the paucity of New Zealand based studies, it was necessary to make use of overseas studies despite their potential cultural and societal differences. It became clear that some aspects of this study produced some data unique to these families and that any overseas studies used needed to be eclectic, while verification was improved by providing the opportunity for participants to revise and review the data. All comments and modifications requested by the participants were included in the text.

There are, however, limitations to this or any similar study. Narratives from a selected group are not fail-safe devices for revealing how characteristics are distributed throughout a population. Nor do narratives provide entirely trustworthy generalisations for understanding and treating people, other than those whose personal narratives have been compiled. But as one researcher has observed, “narratives do have the potential for demonstrating both the uniqueness of individual’s lives and the similarity among lives that are lived under different circumstances” (Thomas, 2003, p. 39). I accept also that there are limitations to the reported narratives because they are not attached to significant longitudinal observations of the practices carried out. Undoubtedly, however, observation would have changed the phenomena as the presence of an observer always changes behaviour. My intention was to report on and carefully examine these families’ stories as they were revealed to me at a particular time and place. It is accepted that this research is based on a sample and therefore cannot be taken to represent all New Zealand homeschooling families.

Submitting all text to participants and requesting correction, modification or elaboration gave them an opportunity to validate the researcher's interpretations. The full texts are also presented in this thesis as appendices to the study (Appendix A and the attached CD). Due note has also been made of the limitations of narrative inquiry and grounded theory, ethical factors, organization, coding and analytical practices related to the study. Extracts from, and interpretations of, the narratives are developed in Chapters Five and Six. Following this chapter, because there has been no indepth search for a historical perspective, Chapter Four examines the historical antecedents of the practice of homeschooling in New Zealand.

In summary selected elements of narrative inquiry and grounded theory, as subsets of qualitative research, have underpinned my approach to methodology and method in this research. This seemed to me to be the most appropriate approach because it best facilitates individual and family narratives, as well as allowing the researcher to become a participant in these narratives. A survey approach was rejected because of the limitations discussed already. Massey University Research Ethics Guidelines are followed throughout. In addition, the rights of the parents and children are recognised at all times.

## CHAPTER 4

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HOMESCHOOLING IN NEW ZEALAND

This chapter's main focus is on the conflicts of opinion present in 1877 along with those historical patterns which led to the present upsurge in numbers electing to homeschool. In New Zealand's recorded history there are two periods when there has been a significant focus on homeschooling. The first was during the introduction of legislation for compulsory primary education under the Education Act (1877). The second was the introduction of "*Tomorrow's Schools*" in 1989, which was followed by the present upsurge in homeschooling.

It could be argued that the conflict promoted by the 1877 Act is paralleled by similar reaction, just over one hundred years later, with the introduction of *Tomorrow's Schools* in 1989 and the new *National Framework for the Curriculum* (2007). If this is so it could help to explain the rapid growth of homeschooling and its quick adoption by the parents of nearly one percent of the school-aged population.

In this chapter, I briefly examine the current situation and then look back to the Education Act (1877) and the consequences of the inclusion in that Act of the right to exempt children from schooling in the New Zealand education system. I also consider the subsequent Education Acts, and their revisions, in relation to the initial exemption clauses. Finally, I review the developments in educational processes and the responses to the upsurge of homeschooling in New Zealand since the late 1980s.

A century on from the original Education Act, New Zealand has become a multicultural society influenced by global trends and themes. According to Simpson (1992), New Zealand culture of the late 20th century was:

Increasingly liberated from the "cultural cringe" associated with a colonial mind-set, more confidently centred in its outlook, more accepting of the given conditions of location and cultural context, more "different" from other western countries. (p. 571)

Williams (1987), cited in Simpson (p. 572), has pointed out that "New Zealand society became assimilated into the prevailing forms, culturally as well as economically, of

western capitalism” (p. 16). Williams concluded that the New Zealand culture became less different from other places but simultaneously more sensitive to differences, especially of gender and ethnicity, within the society. These comments need to be born in mind when reviewing homeschooling families and their responses.

### **Factors Leading up to the 1877 Education Act**

Despite opposition the concept of free, compulsory, primary schooling was becoming increasingly supported in the New Zealand colony prior to 1877. Kingsley (1869), in a parliamentary debate prior to the introduction of the 1877 Act, declared that “If a citizen has one right above all others to demand anything of his country, it is that he should be educated, that whatever capabilities he may have in him, however small, may have a fair chance of development” (p. 563). McKenzie (1975), referring to the 1860–1880 period, believed that “it was held as axiomatic that the provision of schools would give all an equal chance to be rescued from otherwise inadequate learning environments” (p. 93). In subsequent discussion (1982), he raised an interesting point about the social situation in the late 1880s when compulsory education was first introduced, arguing that:

What we are looking at during these early years is a small colonial society with a reasonably high literacy rate (New Zealand Census, 1886) and with a public rhetoric that was strongly attached to the virtues of universal education. But, rhetoric apart, what we are also looking at is a society in which substantial numbers of families refused for one reason or another to take school attendance seriously. It was a society in which there was a marked initial distaste on the part of officialdom to force children to attend school against the wishes of their parents. Ideologically, there was a reluctance to accept the proposition that ‘good’ and ‘decent’ people might not want to send their children to school regularly even when the evidence clearly indicated that that might be so. (p.1)

Graham (1992), writing of the New Zealand settler society, was of the opinion that “Colonial children were growing up with much of their parents’ practical outlook... youngsters were actively involved in farm labour and [were] tired in the evening” (p. 132). She also claimed of the society that “there was little subservience...their staunch egalitarianism arose from their new-found pride, their prosperity and their numbers”

(p. 1). It was a predominantly rural society (62.6% in 1871), but this was changing slowly. By 1891 this proportion had dropped to 54.5%. Graham (ibid) also considered that “the growing towns contained large numbers of children categorised as destitute, neglected and criminal,” (p. 137). The society was predominantly British colonial and indigenous Maori, with the colonials’ perspective still focused on the motherland, but there was (apart from the notion of egalitarianism) a growing awareness of differences from the homeland. Graham cited Jane Marie Atkinson’s (1880) view, while visiting England, saying she had “almost forgotten what the disadvantages of this country were till I was here again” (p. 139).

### **The 1877 Education Act**

The only possible form of education available for many of the immigrant families in New Zealand in the 19th century was to teach their children at home. There were schools in each of the provincial centres but these varied in quality and availability. They could not accommodate all the children in established areas and teacher numbers were very limited. Many families lived in, or were moving into, remote areas far from established schools. The Education Act 1877 sought to solve some of these problems and to centralise control of education with the Department of Education. The Department was then to delegate authority to education boards. In turn this was delegated to local school committees. The ultimate control remained vested in the Department of Education in Wellington.

The Act, with its concepts of free, secular and compulsory education, established the framework for New Zealand primary education. It has remained the foundation for all consequent Acts. It did not, however, bind Maori children to its provisions as there was already the Native Schools system under the 1867 Native Schools Act, amended in 1871. Rowe (1877) was one of the few who spoke out for the inclusion of Maori and stated “Now there are many Maoris and half-castes who could avail themselves of the advantages of the Bill, and I see no reason why the colour of their skin should debar them from doing so” (p. 235). In fact, early in the 20th century (Census 1916) the majority of Maori children attended public schools rather than Native Schools.

The 1877 Act made it compulsory for attendance at a recognised state school, if the local school committee agreed, while also making provision for exemption from

attendance under section 21 subsection 90 of the Act. Long-term exemption from enrolment was possible under the following conditions:

An employee of the Ministry [religious] designated by the Secretary for the purpose (in this section and section 26 of this Act referred to as a designated officer) may, by a certificate given to a person's parent, exempt the person from the requirements of the Act on the parent's application; and if satisfied that the person will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school. Every certificate shall state why it is given. A certificate continues in force until revoked under this section.

The designated officer was intended to be the chairman of the local school committee or the school's head teacher. When a certificate, under this section, was declined the applicant parent could appeal to the recently appointed Secretary of Education who would confirm the refusal, or grant a certificate of exemption. The decision was final and the Secretary could cancel a certificate at any time. He could not revoke a certificate unless, after having made reasonable efforts to get all the relevant information and having considered a report on the matter from the Chief Review Officer, the grounds the certificate was granted originally on were deemed unsatisfactory. If the Secretary thought any person exempted under this section would be better off receiving a special education the certificate could be revoked and a direction issued under section 9 of the Act. The phrase "at least as regularly and as well as in a registered school" remains central to all applications to be granted exemption and the opportunity to homeschool. Definitions of "regularly" and "well" were essential in any monitoring of the applications for a certificate of exemption and the criteria for the monitoring of practices. "Regularly" and "well", however, still create problems for the monitoring agencies today.

It is noteworthy that the 1877 Act was based largely on the Australian State of Victoria's Education Act 1872. The New Zealand Act was not overwhelmingly supported by the members of parliament. Its reception during the debate was somewhat mixed. The eventual result was a compromise between the views of C. C. Bowen, who was Minister of Education, the provincial representatives and those politicians who were concerned about the imposition of centralised state control over education. Mackey (1967) was of the view that, "It was with a knowledge of this cross current of conflicting views and loyalties that framed the compromises that distinguished his [Bowen's] Bill" (p. 184). Among the conflicting views, the then concern about state

control is a feature common to many homeschooling families today and some educationists.

It would be a mistake to assume that by including section 21 of the Act Bowen was being farsighted and totally democratic. At the time of the implementation of the 1877 Act there were not enough schools or teachers to provide education for all children, despite primary schooling being made compulsory. It would be possible to consider exemption as a device to allow children not to attend school, particularly because in many areas schools and/or teachers were not available. Bowen, in his report to Parliament in 1878, made this very obvious when he expressed concern at the large number of children not registered with a school. Despite only 800 children being reported to boards as not enrolled with a school the rapid progress of new settlements meant that many families had no access to schools. In 1877 only 62% of the population estimated to be of school age attended a primary school. This enrolment increased steadily and by 1896 there had been an increase to 77.7 % in the number enrolled in state schools. There was a regular increase in attendance over the same period.

#### *Debate on the 1877 Act*

The Act was not without its critics. Mackey (1967), quoted H. H. Lusk, representative for Franklin, in the 1877 debate who objected to the centralising power of the Act. Lusk claimed it was an attempt to reduce everything to uniformity:

I cannot conceive any reason whatever why all those things should be placed in the hands of this central power; but the meaning of it all is very plain to my mind. This system, which is professedly to be a locally-administered system, is really to contain within itself the elements of becoming the most centralized system possible. (p. 465)

Mackey also cited J. Wallis, member for Auckland West, as being critical of the secularism of the Act:

In our time the difficulty arises not from the fanaticism of religionists, but from the fanaticism of secularists; for, in their determination to do away with all religious teaching, they set up a sect on the narrowest possible basis. (p. 191)

O. Curtis (1877), of Nelson City, speaking to the Education Bill's second reading, argued:

The honourable gentleman, Bowen, has borne well in mind what was the view of the people of the colony in framing this measure, for he has made it free, compulsory, and secular, without at the same time driving any one of those principles to the extreme. (p. 175)

Bowen, while supporting this belief expressed by Curtis, was also a believer in socially appropriate education. He believed:

It is not intended to encourage children whose vocation is that of honest labour to waste, in the higher schools, time which might be devoted to learning a trade when they have not got the special talent by which that higher education might be made immediately useful. (p. 242)

Notions of egalitarianism, held primarily by the majority of the colonial settlers, together with emerging ideas of citizenship, underlay the move to a universal, secular, primary education. While there was concern that this was to become a state controlled institution, it was clear that the other notions of ensuring equality, consistency and developing citizenship overrode these concerns. Homeschooling today is seen, by some, as threatening these notions of equality, consistency and citizenship, just as it did then.

Most disputes centred on the compulsory aspects of the Act. Bowen, the Act's architect, had made a compromise by the second reading. He declared:

It will be found that the compulsory clauses of the measure are of a very mild character and are only to be put in force when the committees think fit. I apprehend that they will not be in any hurry to enforce these clauses unnecessarily against their neighbours, but will only do so in cases where parents grossly neglect the educational welfare of their children. (p. 241)

In his reference to committees, Bowen was referring to the school committees established by the Act to administer each state school. It is clear that he was prepared to compromise on the issue of compulsory school enrolment and attendance but not on state schools being secular. Secularism in state schools creates concerns in some homeschooling families today and sometimes has a bearing on their choosing to educate their children at home.

J. A. Tole (1877), Member of Parliament for Eden, in the same debate about the compulsory component of the Act, commented:

There are certain poor people who are compelled to look to their children for domestic support, and if these children, at a serviceable age, are compelled to go to school such compulsion amounts to a hardship on the parents. Then, again, the granting of exemptions under the compulsory clauses is made to depend entirely upon satisfying the School Committees. I can quite understand the clodocrats of some committees, from stupidity or prejudice against the parents of children, refusing exemption, though those children may be under most efficient instruction. (p. 217)

By allowing school committees to elect out of the compulsory clauses, Bowen effectively made the need to apply for exemption from attendance at school redundant because most committees chose to ignore the compulsory clause. Butchers (1932) claimed:

The Act provided that the above provisions should come into force in each school district only upon the vote of the majority of the School Committee. Consequently the clauses remained to all intents and purposes a dead letter for many years. (p. 237)

The phrase “dead letter” was a common one used to describe something which was of no consequence and of no significance. It was based clearly on the idea that a dead letter could not be delivered. Butchers, as his introduction to his many publications demonstrated, was strongly pro-state education as a force for advancement of democracy and science. The evidence of non-attendance at school, in the post 1877 Act period, would have concerned him greatly. Fisher, representing the Heathcote electorate, also mentioned the exemption clauses in the Act. He stated, in the second reading, that:

I approve of the clauses which provide that, so long as a child receives education, no matter where, he is not obliged to attend school. So far as my experience goes, there are some people who will not educate their children, and there are others who will do it at any sacrifice. (1877, p. 227)

Throughout the debates the right to exemption was never challenged. Both Tole and Fisher expressed concern, not about the inclusion of the exemption clauses but that parents may be declined unfairly.

Webb (1937) suggested that in New Zealand the apparent purpose of the Education Act 1877 was based on concepts of equality. Openshaw, Lee, and Lee (1993) challenged this view, arguing that it was a controversial Act with a compromise being achieved only after protracted debate. It is apparent, from appraisal of the debates, that there was vigorous debate and that compromises were made. Openshaw et al. (1993) claimed that:

It can be suggested that a pragmatic desire for economic skills was one of the more likely purposes of the Act as New Zealand had a very real shortage of schools, trades people and teachers at the time and limited resources for a rapid increase in any of them. (p.86)

The above discussion clearly illustrates that there was a tension between those wanting a centralised, state controlled, education system that would perform certain centrally mandated tasks and those who saw the dangers in this unless there were alternatives provided. The related debate over compulsion centred on the rights of the society, expressed through the state, versus the rights of the family and individual. Both these tensions could be reflected in the recent rise of homeschooling.

#### *The impact of the 1877 Act*

There were not enough schools or teachers to implement the Act of 1877 fully. Nor was it likely that sufficient schools could be built in the near future, so exemptions could be seen as a pragmatic attempt to avoid criticism for not enforcing the Act. The economic situation in the colony actually worsened in the 1880s-90s, and school building was unable to satisfy the demand for schooling despite the slow down in immigration. At no time did the Minister of Education report to Parliament on the numbers of exemptions requested or granted. This may have been as a result of insufficient departmental staff but it seems likely that exemptions from school, having been granted by the local school committee chairperson or the local head teacher, were simply not reported to the Department. The mechanism for providing exemptions by the Department was largely absent and the state was not in a position to grant exemptions.

It is also the case that many school committees made a pragmatic decision not to enforce the compulsory provisions of the Act. In his report to Parliament 1879 for the year 1878, the first full year of the Education Act, Bowen (1879) revealed that there were 105,208 children of school age in the colony and of these 62,866 were at public schools, 14,611 were at private schools, and 9,684 were being tutored at home (p. 546). These figures leave 18,047 children, presumably getting no education. Of the 9,684 reported as being 'home schooled', there is no evidence that all or any had applied for and been granted an exemption. The situation becomes still more complex because some children, registered with a school, received only part-time education. In 1878 there were 44 schools in which children were taught only part-time as the teacher was required to teach for the other half a day at another separate school.

The Legislature was acutely aware that the child population at large was not well educated and that homeschooling was not an alternative. Again the notions of equality and consistency are to the fore despite the lack of schools and teachers. Bowen (1879), in his report as Minister of Education to Parliament, made it clear that he was not an advocate of homeschooling as he reported that:

It is evident that the number returned as "receiving tuition at home" is misleading, for it is well known that, except in families in which a tutor or a governess is engaged, home tuition, if imparted at all, is necessarily in most cases of a very indifferent character. (p. 387)

Again, a report by Hill (1884), the Chief Inspector for the Hawke's Bay Education Board, stated that:

The compulsory clause, though nominally in force in all the larger districts, is really a dead letter. In a single instance only has the aid of a Magistrate been invoked against neglectful parents and the case was dismissed. (p.7)

An amendment to the Education Act in 1885 required all children between the ages of seven and thirteen to attend for at least 30 days during each quarterly term, thus, in theory, removing the school committee's right to choose to not adopt the compulsory clause in the original Act. It can be assumed that because of a continuing shortage of teachers and schools, the costs related to taking the parents of a child not attending any school to court, and the difficulty in receiving a satisfactory result, few if any school committees adopted the new compulsory clause. Most committees continued to function

as if the 1885 revision had not taken place. McKenzie (1982) supported this thesis when he claimed that the School Attendance Act 1885 itself was a dead letter, because in country areas school committees maintained that it was still their right to decide if compulsory schooling should be introduced.

The first mention of a truancy officer to enforce attendance came from Cohen (1887), then Chairman of the Education Committee Wellington, when he declared that:

To all intents and purposes the compulsory clauses of the Education Act have not been possible to enforce. Where such has been done the results are appreciable. Auckland has its Truancy Inspector who has brought a large number of the street waifs into the truancy-school. (p.2)

There were a limited number of people available or employed to enforce attendance, which was seen as more important than checking for exemptions, or inspecting for non-enrolment merely to provide statistical information. These truancy officers could work only if they were accredited by school committees. Especially in rural areas, they were reluctant to do so because they often had neighbours whose children were kept home as helpers on their farm at critical times such as lambing, haymaking and caring for younger siblings when their mother had a new baby. Most education boards did not employ an officer to ensure attendance. Hawke's Bay Education Board did not employ an Attendance Officer, or Truancy Officer, even though an amendment to the Education Act in 1885 permitted such an appointment. This amendment was made because schools and education boards were paid on the basis of the average attendance of enrolled students, and many school committees had previously declined certification of an officer of enforcement or attendance. The concern of an attendance officer was to ensure that the actual attendance, on average, of enrolled children was as high as possible. Hill (1887), as Chief Inspector with the Hawke's Bay Education Board, made it clear that his priority was to ensure the attendance of those already enrolled at school. Only one attempt at enforcing enrolment, which failed, had been made in the Hawke's Bay area by 1887. The Inspector also suggested that, because of the difficulty of working with police and magistrates in enforcing attendance, the power to enforce attendance be given to school inspectors. No mention was made of children whose parents might have certificates of exemptions from school attendance and were legally excused.

Each education board was required to make an annual report to the Minister and summaries of these reports were presented to Parliament. The education board reports, while noting enrolments and attendance, rarely gave any indication of actual numbers of children of school age in their district and made no mention of those being legally homeschooled. It is apparent that there was no need, in most cases, for a certificate of exemption because compulsory enrolment was seldom enforced. A report by Ormond (1884), Chairman of the Hawke's Bay Education Board, to the Minister of Education, documented the increase in school enrolment compared with previous years but made no mention of those not enrolled in any school. He declared that the number of children enrolled in schools in 1878 in Hawkes Bay was 1,520, and that this had increased annually to 3,728 by 1883. He made no mention of exempted children.

The first reference made in Hawke's Bay education documents to the numbers of children not enrolled at school is by Ormond (1886) some nine years after the passing of the Act. In his report to the Minister he explained that:

The census returns of population which were taken during 1885....At the close of the year 7,500 children of school age, exclusive of Maoris, were residing in the district. It is not possible to account for more than 5,500 as attending board or private schools, so that no fewer than 2,000 children of school age have still to be brought under the operating of the Education Act.  
(p. 3)

There is no recorded response to his concerns, but this is the first indication that popular opinion was moving towards compulsory education for all children of school age. Thus Hill (1887) observed:

The question of school attendance is certainly beset with difficulties, and in some of the school districts compulsion is not needed, but there are districts where something should be done to improve what at present is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. (p. 6)

There is some confusion in the use of the term "compulsory." Some inspectors used it in the sense of being enrolled in a school. Others used it as compulsory attendance at a school once they were enrolled. The problem was brought about because education boards received grants from the Department of Education based on the average attendance at school, so there was a strong incentive to increase daily attendance. Better

attendance meant improved payments being received. There was also inspectorial approval of schools and their school principals whose attendance percentage was high. There was no incentive for teachers to push to enrol students who would likely be poor attenders. This could explain why daily attendance at school featured so much in reports to the Department. Ormond (1889) reported, again to the Minister that “No attendance officer is employed by the Board, and in only a single instance, as far as the Board is aware, has any attempt been made to enforce attendance under the Education Act 1877” (p. 11). By referring to the Education Act 1877 Ormond apparently ignored the 1885 amendment, which was concerned with those children not enrolled in school. He reinforced Hill’s views about the compulsory clause in the Act but, again, it is evident that education boards were concerned more with daily attendance than compulsory enrolment. Increases in school enrolment were a result of changes in parental attitudes rather than any response to compulsion. The steady increase in school enrolments, despite the small national population growth, suggests changes in attitude rather than more efficient administration in education boards. A survey of the reports, from the twelve education boards, and of the inspectors of schools in 1890, presented to both Houses of the General Assembly made it clear that their concern was for daily attendance at school rather than failure to enrol. At no time, in any of the reports, was there mention of either those not enrolled nor those granted a certificate of exemption from attendance, even though the inspectors were the persons who would have had access to the number of exemptions granted. It would appear that so few requests for exemption were made that they were not considered significant and that compulsory enrolment was still, as Hill had claimed six years earlier, “a dead letter.”

Butchers (1930), when surveying state education during the late 1890s and early 1900s, stated that the President of the Teachers’ Institute, in his address to the Ninth Annual Meeting in Christchurch in 1892, implied that:

It is well known that, although there is a ‘compulsory clause’ in the Education Act, it is seldom put into force; but who will wonder when they consider the machinery employed? In the town there may be, and probably are, thousands of children who are not attending any school, and whose names are not known to any School Committee. In the country the members of the local committee cannot be expected to risk the odium, which would inevitably result from a prosecution in which they appear as complainants,

and their neighbour, and probably fellow-committeeman, as defendants. (p. 47)

Openshaw (21 May, 2004, personal communication) claimed that, “Butchers was a product of his times and this set of statistics would have concerned him. He was, as the Department’s commissioned historian, committed to supporting the view that State education should provide maximum opportunities for all children”. Certainly, a joint report of local inspectors to the Taranaki Education Board in 1893 expressed a common concern at the time that “Irregular attendance is still to the front, and will continue to be so until, by legislation, the School Committees are relieved of the burden of enforcement of the compulsory clauses of the Act” (p. 6). Even after 16 years of the Education Act, with its inclusion of the right to homeschool, no education board made mention of those children with certificates of exemption except exemptions granted under article two, section 21, subsection 90 in cases of health, intellectual impairment or psychological problems.

Head teachers and school committees had the right to grant certificates of exemption from attendance at school; however, the focus still remained on attendance. McKenzie (1982), talking of the growth of school retention in the period 1878 to 1900, insisted:

School retention rates reflected in part the growth in availability of schooling, in part the enactment of legislation to remove children from a tight employment market and in part the development of stricter school attendance law. (p. 28)

Later he commented, “I have also noted that this is not sufficient as an explanation. In particular, I have drawn attention to the growing number of occupations which required more advanced educational qualifications for job entry” (p. 82).

### *The 1901 School Attendance Act*

Hogben, as Inspector-General of Schools, was sensitive to the changing mood of New Zealand society regarding compulsory attendance. His 1901 School Attendance Bill clearly reflected this, and met little opposition both in and out of Parliament. The report of the Royal Commission on Sweating (1890), concerning abuse of children in the industrial workforce, was publicised widely among the urban population and was strongly endorsed by them. The Royal Commission on Sweating recommended that:

No boy or girl shall be allowed to work in any factory under the age of 14. He/she must deposit with the local factory inspector where possible a certificate of birth, and also a certificate stating that he or she has passed the fourth standard. (p. 27)

According to McKenzie (1982), a revised Factories Bill was adopted by Parliament in 1894 which slightly changed the definition of “factory” but added the condition, in keeping with the Commission, that no child could be employed if he or she were under 14 years of age. It also modified the schooling requirement so that any person under 16 years of age, who lived within three miles of a school, had to have passed the fourth standard before he or she could be employed.

Control over attendance and enrolment was finally taken from schools and transferred to education boards and their truancy officers. Hogben (1901), in his report to Parliament, wrote:

The importance of maintaining a high standard of regularity of school attendance will be better appreciated if it is remembered that the leading authorities on juvenile depravity and crime are agreed that those social faults have for the most part their origins in truancy and in the acquiring of the nomadic habit; and accordingly the margin between a low rate and a high rate of school attendance...represents to a large extent those individual children who will, if still neglected go to swell our industrial schools and reformatories, and, at a later age, our prisons, refuges and lunatic asylums. (p. iii)

Change the style and terminology and it would fit well into many of today’s statements on education and crime. It certainly exemplifies the move away from the pragmatism of the late 19th century. What remains obvious, however, is that education authorities can be successful only when they are supported by society at large.

There does not appear to be any record, for the years 1879 to 1908, of the number of requests, if any, for exemption or the exemptions that may have been granted by school committees or education boards. It could be that the applications for exemptions were very few or were seen to be of little importance either by the Minister or by any education board. It could also be that the machinery to record these claims was simply

nonexistent. By the end of 1901, compulsory and free primary education was established and supported nationally. School age was set at the ages of five and fifteen, but compulsory schooling remained at six to thirteen. Over 90% of suitably aged children were attending primary school, thus indicating that the notion of compulsory education was more acceptable to the society at large. Schooling was not compulsory for children thirteen and over. However, most of these attended school but some, mainly in the larger towns, did not attend any schooling.

Fisher (1902), in a Parliamentary debate on education, claimed that:

There, in Auckland, the truancy officer gathered all the street arabs of the city – urchins without boots or socks, ragged clothing – and took them to the truancy school. It was crammed full of children of that status. It was a perfect picture of a ragged school. (p. 585)

This idea of a truancy officer was adopted later by some of the other education boards. Southland devised a combined appointment of a drill instructor and truancy officer. Otago used a Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals officer as a part-time truancy officer while Wanganui tried to use the police as Truancy Officers, paying them a bonus for their successes. The focus, however, still remained on ensuring the attendance of children already enrolled rather than those not enrolled at all. Education boards had little idea of how many nonenrolled children they had, so they concentrated on increasing attendance because that was how they were financed. The only example of an education board using census data to approximate a potential school population is that of Ormond in Hawke's Bay (1889), who has been cited already. It is apparent that enrolment in schools increased because of the society's beliefs in the benefits and advantages of education rather than any legal enforcement. The views of McKenzie (1982), already cited in reference to the late 19th century retention rate, still have validity here. There is no evidence that parents of children not enrolled at school were holders of certificates of exemption.

### *Significant Overseas Factors*

The International Congress on Family Education, with an objective of attaining high quality education at home, started in 1906. It held four yearly conferences in Brussels and was supported by North American and European governments. The New Zealand

Government was invited to attend the 1906 and 1910 Conferences, but declined. The Government did pay a membership fee for the 1914 Conference but the conference was postponed because of the First World War. The avowed purpose of the fee payment by the Government was to provide a nominal representative and so get copies of the material of the congress. After several cancellations, the conference reopened in 1930. The then Minister of Education, Harry Atmore, declined an invitation from P. de Vuyst, President of the Coordinating Committee of the Congress, but claimed that he was in hearty accord with its aims. It is apparent that the Department of Education was, at least from 1906 to 1930, little concerned with families practising education at home, and heavily committed to education at school.

Some immigrants to New Zealand expected to have to educate their children at home. *The Girls' Own Annual*, a popular British magazine, was published monthly but commonly bound into an annual. It was a companion to many families immigrating to New Zealand from the United Kingdom, and frequently contained articles on education. In the magazine, Lynch (1914) wrote that:

The chief occupation of the mother should be the education of her child, and rare is the teacher whose qualifications make her teaching equal to that of the mother. The mother must either fulfil this duty, as the natural educator of her child, or choose someone else fitted for the work. The wise mother will hesitate to delegate her most important duty to such a teacher as is frequently appointed for her – an overworked woman, with forty children in her care. You know the child's mind and body, you know his needs and possibilities. You know the importance of sincere living, of work manfully done and well.

Education should be perfectly simple, and it is when the parent is an instructor. Above all, you will know when to leave the child alone. Your method of teaching will naturally grow out of the needs and nature of your child, and will fit the demands of the moment; you will seize every opportunity, and take advantage of every wind and wave to make harbour.  
(p. 33)

Here, Lynch was enunciating a child-centred approach to learning that seems extremely modern to our ears. One may ask whether, in fact, this represented a traditional teaching method lost by the political and industrial needs of a school based society? Downs

(1975), writing about Pestalozzi, a 19th century education philosopher, claimed he was the father of modern pedagogy. Certain Lynch was making similar statements to those of Pestalozzi. Homeschooling parents, I was to discover, also supported this approach, thereby making education an inseparable part of family life.

### *The 1914 Education Act*

In contrast to Lynch's (1914) preconceptions, the 1914 Education Act, and subsequent revisions, demonstrated that the government, education boards and teachers were committed to promoting school development and enrolment. However, improving attendance at school remained the focus of education. The Act centralised power by making school inspectors accountable to the Department of Education rather than to education boards, as they had been previously. The teachers also came under the umbrella of the Department because school committees lost the power to appoint or dismiss teachers and a national grading system was introduced.

The Education Act (1914) also changed the granting of exemption from school attendance to "The Committee of the District, in which the child resides, or from the Chairman and one other member thereof or from the head teacher of any public school in the district" (p. 40). This meant that the compulsory clause in the Education Act was being enforced and the right of school committees not to adopt the clause, as in the 1877 Act, had finally been withdrawn. The right of appeal against non-exemption remained but the final decision was transferred from the education boards to the senior inspector of schools in each board. Exemption could be granted no longer on the grounds of remoteness, or impassable roads. Children could be compelled to join a correspondence school or classes.

The Correspondence School, set up in 1922, consolidated all of the many correspondence schools into one and was intended to provide a nationwide network, using the approved curriculum. It may have acted as a diversion from homeschooling because it provided a curriculum-based programme but allowed the children to learn at home guided by a parent. It allowed parents some control over what and how the children learned and avoided the problems some parents saw in attending a school. It was possible, if recommended by the Psychological Service, for children who had

access to a school to withdraw from this school and learn at home with the Correspondence School.

There was little change in education relating to homeschooling in the period 1914 to 1935, except for the steady increase in the number of children going on to secondary school, the introduction of intermediate schools, and the setting up of the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER). The NZCER, among other services, provided in its publications a source of information available to the public on ideas and trends in education. The Labour Government in 1935 and throughout the Second World War placed a high priority on education. The government's emphasis on prioritising education led to the appointment of Dr C. E. Beeby as Director of Education. From 1940 to 1960 Beeby favoured a liberal curriculum, and encouraged flexible teaching methods designed to induce understanding and active participation in the learning process on the part of the child. Beeby could be seen as a radical, for his times, and not representing the views of the wider population. As Openshaw (2003), referring to the early post-war Department of Education, pointed out:

Although the early post-war Department under C. E. Beeby and his successors exercised considerable restraint in promoting Labour's educational reforms, it nevertheless encountered intense and sustained pressure from various critics. (p. 136)

Similar points are made by McLaren (1974) and by Beeby (1992) in his autobiography. However, it might still be concluded that at the time there was no significant dissatisfaction with the notion of "schooling" among the bulk of parents and consequently no major drift to homeschooling, but there was nevertheless some concern about curriculum content and teaching structure. Beeby's move towards more child-focused teaching and a liberal curriculum may have satisfied the concerns of some parents who may have wished to homeschool, but it caused the alienation of some parents from what they regarded as an overly liberal system with failing standards, which was the main criticism of the day. The so-called "Beeby era" also upset many Catholic parents, who felt that schools were becoming an increasingly secular and socialist system in their own right.

School attendance, rather than school enrolment, remained a central concern. A search of *National Education*, the monthly magazine of the New Zealand Educational Institute

(NZEI), during 1957 and 1958, made no mention of exemption from schooling or nonenrolment at school, but made two references to absenteeism. A remit from the Ruapehu Branch to the national meeting in 1957 asked that the legislation be amended to increase the penalties for absenteeism from school. In 1958 the National Executive of NZEI, supported by the Education Boards' Association, pressed for significant fines for persistent absenteeism from school. The reports of the Annual General Meetings of the New Zealand Educational Institute from 1916 to 1991 had no statement that showed a concern about those not enrolled in any school, or the number who might be exempted from attendance at school. There were only two remits seeking heavier penalties for parents whose children were chronic absentees. Certificates for exemption from attendance at a school thus remained a nonissue.

Enrolment at school continued to increase, supported by a popular belief in education, over the period. By 1964 over 97% of school-aged children either attended school, were on the Correspondence School roll, or were exempted on the grounds of special needs. Some of the remaining three percent could be accounted for as not being enrolled in a school because they were in transition between schools. There was pressure, from schools and education boards, for the employment of truancy officers to deal with the non-attendance of those enrolled. Over time this ensured that, apart from illness, attendance percentages were very high.

#### *The 1964 Education Act*

The Education Act 1964 followed closely on the release of the Report of the Commission on Education in New Zealand (Currie Report) in 1962 which in its 884 page document devoted eleven pages to compulsory education and made no direct reference to the right of exemption from attendance at school. The Act made no changes to the rights of exemption from attendance at school, except an administrative one in that in Section 4, subsection 123 it was made lawful, but not compulsory, for education boards to appoint an attendance officer to ensure that all children enrolled as pupils of any school under its control were regular in their attendance at school. This removed the right of school committees to have any certification power over the officers, but the concern remained focussed on nonattendance rather than nonenrolment. The 1914 Education Act, Section 4, subsection 60 had made the school committee chairman and one other committee member (or the head teacher), able to issue, on the

prescribed form, certificates of exemption. This practice was to remain unchanged until the 1964 Act. Under the new Act, the issuing of the certificate became the responsibility of the head teacher of the local primary school or the principal of the secondary school. There would appear to be two possible explanations for this change. It could be that it was an attempt to remove a possible area of conflict that might occur between the school committees and the school principals, or conflicts of loyalty between committee members and the local community. Another possible explanation, supported by the lack of mention in the Currie Report, is that requests for exemption were so few that the rare applications could be regarded as an infrequent and minor administrative activity of the principal.

Until 1964, most education boards did not employ truancy or attendance officers. It was not until 1969 that Hawke's Bay Education Board (HBEB) employed a fulltime Truancy Officer. This officer was employed for the period 1969 to 1976, nearly a hundred years after the initial Education Act. In May 1975, the Assistant General Manager of the HBEB reported that "Prosecutions have been largely ineffective owing to the small fines imposed" (p. 4). In the same year as the final report from the truancy officer, in 1976, the General Manager recommended the appointment of the Assistant General Manager as attendance officer together with his other responsibilities. This would appear to be a pragmatic approach to the economical use of staff rather than any concern about nonenrolment. In response to a questionnaire from the Auckland Education Board in 1976 the Hawkes Bay Education Board (1976) replied: "No – we do not employ a full-time attendance officer but that attendance, is handled by a board officer who spends an estimated 4-5 hours weekly on the task" (p. 1).

The Hawke's Bay Education Board seems to have misread the 1964 Act and its subsequent amendments. From 1969 to 1976 the Board's employees continued to emphasise, quite incorrectly, that under the Act all children must be enrolled at a school. This claim of compulsory enrolment was made to both to parents and schools. Under section 4, subsection 109 of the 1964 Act compulsory enrolment applied, but the right of exemption remained under section 4 subsection 111 of the same Act. The right to request a certificate of exemption was never mentioned nor was it offered as a possible alternative to families or schools in the Hawke's Bay district. For example, the Office of the Hawke's Bay Education Board (1976), in correspondence with several families, stated that "The Education Act requires that every child must have his or her name

enrolled on the register of some State primary or secondary school, Correspondence School or other registered school” (p. 1).

### *The 1987 Education Amendment Act*

For most New Zealand education boards homeschooling was an infrequent or non-issue. In the United States, however, as Ray (2002) has pointed out, “the writings of educational reformists (Holt, 1969; Illich, 1970; Kozol, 1967) had stimulated cries for educational reform. By 1978 approximately 40,000 (American) children were being homeschooled” (p. 29). By 1985, these reformists had influenced some New Zealand families and as (Smith, 21 January, 2002 personal correspondence) pointed out, “a conference of homeschoolers attracted homeschooling families from all over the country.” This new growth in homeschooling had an effect. Under the 1987 Education Amendment Act, No.2, the issuing of certificates of exemption from enrolment at school was changed from school principals to the District Senior Inspector of Primary Schools or the District Senior Inspector of Secondary Schools, whoever was appropriate. Principals, under section 25A, could however grant short-term exemptions or release a student from tuition on religious or cultural grounds from any class or subject provided that the student would be supervised adequately during the tuition and the parents had asked because of sincerely held religious or cultural views. For the first time homeschooling had emerged as a significant factor in New Zealand education; significant enough for it to be brought to the attention and the responsibility of District Senior Inspectors of Schools.

In 1989, after the 1987 Education Amendment, and just prior to the revised Education Act 1989, the Hawke’s Bay Education Board engaged in a protracted dispute which led to a formal appeal against the refusal of a certificate of exemption by one of its employees. Both the appellant and the Board sought legal opinion and representation. Much of the dispute was about the interpretation of the 1964 Act’s statement “at least as regularly and as well”, unchanged since the 1877 Act. The Board’s representative, who visited the family concerned, viewed this phrase as demanding five hours a day of schooling, following the prescribed syllabus and using the prescribed textbook for mathematics, (Brookers, 2001). She also questioned the applicant’s knowledge of the syllabus despite the parent being a qualified teacher. The Board representative also claimed that, because there was a preschooler in the family, the parent would not be

able to devote all her time to the two boys for whom the exemption was requested. She also wanted a schoolroom in the home, or at least a desk in each boy's bedroom. It was very obvious that, to the Board's officer, the prevailing school model was the only acceptable possibility. The parents, however, after protracted correspondence with the Board, employed a lawyer to act on their behalf. They also kept the two boys at home and the Board, quite correctly, legally speaking, insisted that the boys be enrolled at a school until the review had been made. The situation became more complicated as the Board attempted to delay a decision until the new Education Act, 1989 became law. The parents resolved the situation eventually by enrolling the children in a private school.

### *The 1989 Education Act*

From the foregoing account it seems that there is little to indicate any significant interest in homeschooling. There had been little social protest or government interest in homeschooling until the late 1980s when the numbers of homeschooled children began to rise rapidly from a total, reported by the Homeschooling Federation of New Zealand in 1989, of 83 children to a Ministry total of 6,501 in 2008. This change may also have been the product of changes brought about by equal rights legislation, restructured industry and new technologies. These moves also created changing roles for women, from nurturer and caregiver, to having wider economic functions. As Cook (1983) explained:

These changes have all combined to affect family structures, child rearing patterns, the roles and value systems within our society. The contradictions arising from such ideological and structural shifts have led to polarization between those who advocate change and those who fear any challenge to the existing institutions and values. (p. 2)

Certainly, in the mid 1980s, the few families who were homeschooling felt isolated. For instance, when telling their story to me of setting up a homeschooling conference, this feeling of isolation was well illustrated by Abel and Susan Smith (2002):

We had been doing it since 1987. That is helping other people. Our first conference was in 1987. We had people spread from Invercargill, to Opononi up north and Tokomaru Bay, around the east coast and Hokitika down the west coast. Most of them felt that they were the only people in New Zealand doing it, homeschooling. In this conference, here in

Palmerston North, the atmosphere was just amazing. These were people from all over the country and so much happened. The people from the Invercargill newspaper, I'd sent a press release to all the newspapers, rang and said who are all these homeschoolers? The six families homeschooling in Invercargill came out of the woodwork and all six of them up till then did not know that the others existed. That's when the support groups started to pop up. (p.1)

The Smiths estimated that at least 120 people, including children, attended the 1987 conference. Given that not all homeschooling families attended the conference, this brings into question the assertions of the Homeschooling Federation of New Zealand that there were only 83 children being homeschooled in 1989. Some homeschooling families did not join any association, so the 83 children put forward by the Homeschooling Federation may have reflected only those of whom they were aware.

The Department of Education was aware of the increase, because all exemptions had to be approved by them and they would have been aware of the growing overseas movement into homeschooling. A Ministerial report entitled, "*Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education*", subsequently known as The Picot Report (1988), recommended that to get an exemption to homeschool their children "Parents have to fill out a charter for each child being homeschooled, giving details of aims and objectives and educational goals which had to fit in with the National Curriculum" (p. 109). It also recommended that "The children involved have the right of access to appropriate Correspondence School lessons" (p.109). Neither recommendation from the Picot Report was adopted. In 1989, the Department of Education wanted all homeschooling families to write charters, as the schools were required to do, but these charters were to be 85% pre-written by the Department. Smith (2003) claimed that "The National Federation of Homeschools supported the Department's proposal but concerted action by the other homeschool associations led to the Department dropping this requirement" (p.4). This tension between allowing parents to homeschool but also obliging them to write charters that effectively demanded conformity to state-mandated education goals, was an indicator of the tension existing between the state and homeschoolers - an issue which occurs frequently.

All subsequent governments have continued to maintain the original 1877 statement that home educated children must be taught at least as regularly and as well as in a state

registered school. The Education Act of 1989 added the word “state” to registered schools. The Act maintained all the existing provisions for exemption from attendance at school, but for the first time since the 1877 Act certificates of exemption gained significant attention. In 1990, the Ministry of Education appointed an officer to act as coordinator of homeschool inquiries and applications. The Home Schooling Supervisory Allowance was also introduced. In 1996, for instance, the Minister for Education, Wyatt Creech, in a letter in response to a question from a parent about the responsibilities of homeschooling parents, made it clear that homeschooled students should be “taught at least as regularly and as well as in a state registered school”. (1 April, 1996, personal correspondence) These actions could be seen as a reaction to the recent and rapid growth of homeschooling in overseas countries, particularly the United States of America and the United Kingdom. It was also a result of the emergence of numbers of homeschooling families in New Zealand.

A search of *Brooker’s New Zealand Case Law Digest* (2001), for the period from 1877 to 2000, returned a total of zero recorded hits on homeschooling. A recent search of Brooker New Zealand and LexisNexis New Zealand (In July, 2005) revealed only one legal case concerning homeschooling. The case, *Millist v Millist* (2001), NZFLR (New Zealand Formal Litigation Review, 1085), was held in the Family Court and involved a civil action between the guardians of the children. The father sought direction that the children be registered in a state integrated school while the mother favoured homeschooling on religious grounds and signaled her intention to move to Nelson, because her aged parents lived there. Expert opinion, the wishes of the children, and the Guardianship Act (1968) section 23 were referred to. The Court found in favour of the father. This would appear unusual, because the courts frequently appear to consider the mother as the more appropriate caregiver. Could it be that the mother’s intention to homeschool the children was an influential factor? From the above, it would appear that legal action has been a rarity in the New Zealand homeschooling situation.

### *The International Historical Setting*

Western democracies, with their compulsion to ensure the educational welfare of all members but at the same time allowing freedom of choice among their citizens, have a dilemma with compulsory schooling. Each has resolved this dilemma in its own way. All the English-speaking societies have compulsory education, but not compulsory

schooling. There is provision for parents to choose to teach their children at home. The views of the philosophers Mill (1956) and Kant (1960) on liberty are used to rationalise these decisions. Mill, while a strong advocate of universal education, would not have supported the notion of a single education authority, namely the state. As Berlin (1969) so aptly put it, “it is not rational both to believe that choices are caused, and to consider men as deserving of reproach or indignation (or their opposites) for choosing to act or refrain as they do” (p. xxii). It follows that a society electing to follow these philosophies allows choice in education, but to date, the choice has not been allowed without debate, struggle, or sacrifice.

In the United States, the Supreme Court’s (1972) decision in the case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* ensured that all states would allow homeschooling. Stevens (2001), speaking of the United States, declared that “Between 1985 and 1992, twenty-five states passed laws explicitly exempting homeschooled children from compulsory attendance requirements” (p. 14). Canada has a similar history, in respect to legalisation on homeschooling, to that of the United States. According to Holt (1981) the “*Ontario Education Act, Section 20/2*” provides that “A child is excused from attendance at school if he [sic] is receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere” (p. 287). Other provinces adopted the Ontario model, and all Canadian provinces now permit homeschooling. As in the United States, each province in Canada sets differing criteria for parents wishing to educate their child at home. In British Columbia parents have a high degree of freedom about what, when, and how they teach their children, but in Alberta parents must evaluate the student’s progress, keep a portfolio of student work, keep a record of the method and times of evaluation and the levels of achievement of each child, be available for a regular review of the child’s achievements, and ensure the student sits the grade 3, 6, and 9 provincial achievement tests at a set time. Parents are also required to keep a record of the results in a student record book. In Ontario, parents do not need to get permission to homeschool. By contrast, the province of Quebec requires parents to have their teaching methods approved by their local school board. Erzinger (2003) claimed that since 2002, provincial education standards in Canada have required a greater degree of assessment of homeschooled children.

In the European Community the situation is different again. The United Kingdom has had provision for exemption from attendance at school since their Education Act of 1944. Another feature of United Kingdom homeschooling is that, unlike the USA and

Canada, families are encouraged to develop their own curricula in the belief that homeschooling will be more successful if they do so. Most other European countries have provision, or are developing provision for homeschooling as a consequence of the “*European Convention on Human Rights*” (1950), which states:

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes, in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. (First Protocol, Article 2)

This protocol again brings to attention the conflict between the rights of the state and the rights of the parents to educate their children according to their beliefs, and is in basic agreement with the “*United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*” (1989), Articles 28 and 29. The rights of children, parents, and the state in relation to homeschooling have been referred to previously in Chapter Two.

Australia closely parallels New Zealand in the development of exemption from compulsory school attendance. Both countries were unable to provide adequate schooling for their children in the late 19th century. They had a shortage of schools and teachers, thus a significant population in remote rural areas could not be provided with schooling. Education at home was, for many parents, the only possible choice. When the Federation of Australian States was established in 1901 there were changes to education. Brosnan (1991) concluded: “The aim was to provide a state controlled system of schooling to allow all children from all social and economic backgrounds to climb the ladder from primary to secondary to tertiary studies” (p. 9). Hunter (1994), however, observed that while the Federation established a compulsory school education model it was soon challenged. In 1902 homeschooling became legal in all states. Australian states now have control of the format by which the right to homeschool is applied so there are variations in the criteria applied across or between states. For example, Queensland requires the homeschooling parent to be a registered or licensed teacher whereas New South Wales applies no such conditions. Klika (1999), in a special report to the Home School Legal Defence Association, pointed out that several states were revising their education laws and tightening up on home education. Homeschooling parents in all Australian states are required to keep adequate records of progress made by their children.

From these descriptions, the New Zealand procedures for exemption to homeschool can best be described as “middle of the road”, in that there are expectations that parents seek approval before commencing to homeschool and that the Education Review Office (ERO) have access to the programmes being run and access to the child on a regular basis. The teaching parent does not have to be a “registered teacher” nor is he or she required to provide annual returns of progress to the Ministry of Education. In addition, in New Zealand homeschooling families are paid an allowance by the State. This apparent middle of the road approach does not mean that research into New Zealand homeschooling is not required, because every society differs from all others and groups within societies also differ. However, the present upsurge in homeschooling is of considerable interest.

Homeschooling in the English-speaking, western world has now become a significant educational practice. The present upsurge in homeschooling, according to Toppo (2008), now accounts for approximately 2.9% of American school-aged children. In the United States in 2007 this amounted to some 1,600,000 children. The growth rate was estimated by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as being in excess of 30% percent annually, with expectations that this would continue. New Zealand has had an average annual growth rate of homeschooling in excess of 25% over a period of fourteen years; however the expansion rate, according to New Zealand Educational Statistics (2008), has fallen off over recent years and in July 2008 numbered 6,501 children. This statistic raises questions about this upsurge.

In the United States and in Canada, the provision of choice was a result of legal action by parents wishing to have their children exempted from school attendance. However, in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, the right of parents to educate their children at home has come through legislation after vigorous debate. The United Kingdom affords an example of compulsory education which allows the parents to choose how their children are educated. It is a modern illustration of this freedom of choice concept in application. For England and Wales the Education Act 1944, Section 26, allowed parents to choose the child’s schooling while protecting the rights of the children to be educated. The Act reflected the British Labour Government’s desire to be seen to be responding to parental choice in reference to schooling and provides a further twist in an extended debate over the relative rights of state and parents; over equity and choice. Their later 1996 Education Act stated that:

The parents of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him (sic) to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his (sic) age, ability, aptitude, and to any special educational needs he (sic) may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

“Or otherwise” is critical for it allows parents to choose, but the education provided must be suitable and efficient for that child. Most Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the United Kingdom ask parents for information about the education they plan to provide, and all authorities have a legal duty to take certain steps if it appears that the child is not being given a suitable education. Defining “suitable” can be a problem for both authorities and parents. Parents who are homeschooling in the United Kingdom do not have to follow the national curriculum, conduct tests or examinations, follow a timetable, or use a qualified tutor to teach their children. These children are not required to work to set hours or any particular number of hours a week. This freedom to choose has produced a rapidly expanding alternative education. Henson (1996) held that as many as 12,000 children were being homeschooled in England and Wales in 1995, and that each month approximately 100 additional families joined Education Otherwise - a self-help group that supports parents who homeschool. Other countries in the European Economic Community (EEC) are responding to a similar legislated right to homeschool as they recognise separately the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), article two. Werles (2001) asserted that European countries vary in their approaches to homeschooling. He gave, as an example, the Netherlands, where every child was subject to compulsory schooling from his or her fifth birthday. This means that every child must be enrolled at a government approved school and attend this school whenever it is open, barring certain circumstances such as illness. Homeschooling, in the Netherlands, is not yet legal, but some families have been successful in gaining an exemption from compulsory education. Their exemptions are based on a law in the Netherlands exempting parents from sending their children to school if they object to the “direction” of all schools within a reasonable distance of their home. Court precedents have made it clear that “directions” means a religion or philosophy by which the family lives. Werles also mentioned that of the members of the EEC only Germany and Norway did not yet allow some form of homeschooling.

New Zealand and Australia have long had legislation allowing parents to apply for exemption from school attendance to educate their children at home. As already mentioned it has been legal in New Zealand since 1877, and in Australia since the

Victoria Education Act of 1872. In both cases the final Education Acts were a result of vigorous debate including opposing views on the rights of the state as opposed to those of the individual. Debate still continues over homeschooling and will continue so long as the rights of the state and the rights of the individual remain.

### **Criticism of Homeschooling**

Since 1990 criticism of, and an urge for review of, homeschooling in New Zealand has grown significantly. The 1992 Annual General Meeting of the New Zealand Educational Institute passed a remit that “the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) lobby the Government for an effective, national system of monitoring and evaluation of home schooling” (p. 28). This was the first indication that teachers had become concerned at the rapidly growing homeschooling movement in New Zealand. The executive of the Primary Principals’ Federation, meeting in Dunedin on 12 August 1994, concluded that “Some children receiving homeschooling are at risk because their education is not being monitored” (p. 7). The President, John Fleming, in 1994 told an interviewer that the Executive believed that the country was looking at social problems in the future if they allowed homeschooling, because in some situations children were not getting the education they were entitled to. He did not specify the social problems.

As mentioned in Chapter Two an interview on 29 March 1995 on Radio Rhema with Ian Revell, Chairman of the Education and Science Select Committee set up to inquire into children in education at risk through truancy and behavioural problems, demonstrated some of these concerns. It has to be assumed that the Select Committee saw homeschooled children to be at risk. Revell (1995), in the interview, said he had three main concerns with homeschooling. They involved the ease by which exemptions were obtained, the lack of checks on curriculum and achievements, and the lack of research data on claims of homeschooling success. He elaborated on these when he said:

We (The Select Committee) are concerned that many children among those who are being homeschooled are not receiving an appropriate standard of education, and are receiving a curriculum far different to the National Curriculum that other children in New Zealand receive. (p. 24)

Revell went on to claim that the Committee said that there needed to be a far better checking process at the time of application for exemption from school for homeschooling purposes instead of it being a semi-automatic process as it was then. The

Committee, he claimed, was also concerned that many exemptions granted for homeschooling were for purposes other than education. While agreeing that there were many well-meaning people out there, Revell was concerned that there were also “a lot of not-so-well-meaning people who have agendas that are quite separate from the agenda of mainstream New Zealand. They don’t believe in many aspects of the current education system” (p. 24). This could be taken as an implied threat to homeschoolers. Because they were not required to follow the National Curriculum he claimed that this created problems for ERO in trying to compare those homeschooled children with their peer groups who attended school. ERO had been withdrawn from reviewing homeschoolers from 1 July 1994, which may have provoked the Select Committee’s reaction. In reply to a letter in 1995 from Smith, a homeschooling parent, in reference to ERO, the then Minister of Education, Dr. Lockwood Smith (1995), said in relation to checking on homeschooling families:

The situation is such that I simply could not justify the expense of ERO reviewers travelling thousands of kilometres to review the education of individual students, whose parents have made the choice to withdraw their children from the mainstream education system. In the time that ERO has been reviewing homeschooling, there have been only two occasions when it has recommended the revoking of an exemption certificate. ERO will still review homeschoolers when concerns are brought to its attention. (p. 1)

According to Smith (2003), the initiating homeschooling parent:

Lockwood may have had another motive for dropping the reviews. The regular reviews were actually being conducted outside the parameters of the Education Act, which only provided for two occasions when reviews could take place for homeschoolers: when a problem with a specific home educating family came to the Ministry of Education’s attention or when the Ministry turned down a parent’s application for exemption, and the parent requested a review. (p. 4)

Revell (1995) also claimed that the Select Committee felt that homeschooling parents should contribute towards the costs incurred by ERO in reviewing their children and that the National Curriculum be followed by all students. Clearly the suggestion that homeschoolers pay part of their allowance to ERO was so that, at least part of the time, it could ensure that the National Curriculum Guidelines were being followed. In relation to accountability, he claimed that because these homeschooling parents chose to teach their children at home they should also be obliged to demonstrate to the state that they

were doing at least an equivalent job. In keeping with the Committee's emphasis on conformity he declared: "there are people out there, I'm sorry to say, who live in a very diverse society, whose interests are not those of mainstream New Zealand" (p. 26). This suggested that, from the Select Committee's perspective, the National Curriculum had a social and political agenda, as well as an educational one. It was apparent that the Select Committee would have liked to restrict the freedom of homeschoolers by imposing formal assessment and the National Curriculum. It is also a reasonable assumption that there would be a restriction in numbers because of these constraints.

The Committee's recommendations to the Government, in reference to homeschooling and exemptions, were that the Ministry of Education be required to conduct in-depth screening of parents, that the National Curriculum was to be followed before granting certificates of exemption, that the homeschooling allowance should be dependent on the compatibility of their curriculum with the National Curriculum, and that homeschoolers present - preferably in a standardized form - regular reported on their children's achievements. The Government took little notice of these recommendations on homeschooling by the Select Committee except to make a more careful study of applications for exemption. The Minister of Education, however, did reintroduce ERO visits to homeschooling families in 1996. The new Minister of Education, Wyatt Creech, in April 1996, replying to a letter from Delwyn McAlister (1996), a homeschooling parent, wrote:

I do not foresee any major changes to the current Government policy on homeschooling. Government remains committed to providing parents with as much choice as possible for the education of their children. This involves the opportunity to homeschool their children provide that the Ministry is satisfied that the children will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a state registered school.

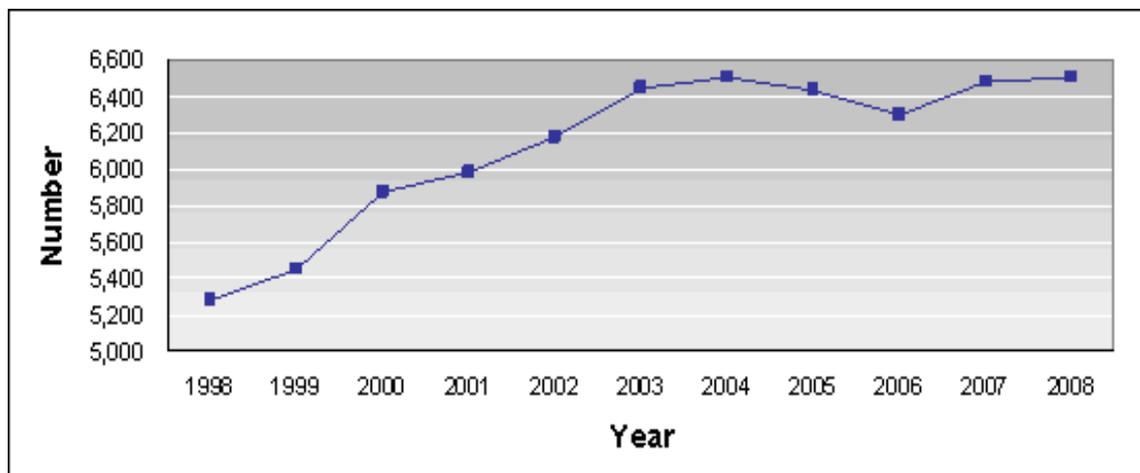
While it is not compulsory the National Curriculum, as embodied in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework and its associated National Curriculum Statements, is sound and balanced and has, I believe, relevance to all New Zealanders. I would unhesitatingly recommend it to homeschoolers, who may find it useful in developing their own programmes. (p. 2)

For all teacher organisations attendance and enrolment at school meant both income for the school and employment for the teaching staff, so children not attending or not

enrolled were regarded as an economic and employment threat. Homeschoolers, or other absentees, could also be seen as actively criticising teachers and the teaching process as well as representing an assault on the value of both. It is of interest that throughout New Zealand's educational history, as Openshaw ( 25 July, 2003, personal correspondence) noted, "the use of the terms 'truancy' and 'absenteeism' as blanket descriptors for all those who choose, for whatever reason, not to attend school is revealing" (p. 1). That the tension between state and homeschoolers continues, in various forms from the Picot Report (1988) to the present day, is underlined by the continuing ambiguous attitude towards homeschooling.

### The Current Situation

The upsurge in the homeschooling movement since the mid 1980s, as measured by the Ministry of Education, has been considerable, rising from some 80 children in 1983 to 3,379 families with 6,501 homeschooled children by July 2008, a rise of 23% over the period. However, between 1 July 2007 and 1 July 2008 the number of homeschooled children grew only by 28 students. Homeschooling has thus become an approach to education requiring some serious attention by scholars. The Ministry of Education Table 1 which follows illustrates the growth of homeschooling over the last ten years.



*Table 1: Ministry of Education, (2008) Number of homeschooled students in New Zealand 1998-2008.*

For the twelve months ending 30 June 2008, 36% of the homeschooled children were six years of age and 82% were within the primary school age. Primary school age is usually between six and twelve years. The data also suggest that more than one third of

the new homeschooled children had never attended school. Statistics from the Ministry of Education (2008) also stated that 98% of those asked responded to questions of ethnicity 81% of whom claimed European/Pakeha identity and 10% claimed Maori identity. The school population over the same period showed European/Pakeha children making up 61% of the population and Maori 22%.

Section 21 of the Education Act 1877 which allowed parents to gain an exemption for their children from school attendance on condition that they provided an education “at least as regularly and as well as in a registered school” was contested politically and socially at the time. It was not anticipated that a century later this phrase would be interpreted very differently by the current political parties in New Zealand. The previous Labour Government advocated no changes to the present legislation, which is still based on the 1877 Act, but did propose some changes to the conditions of application for exemption. The National Government would like to see increased monitoring of homeschooling because they believe that there is inadequate control on learning and assessment of homeschooled children. To date the newly elected National Government has made no moves to change the status quo. The minor parties advocate changes in both monitoring and funding. No political party questions the right of parents to apply for exemption. Until the last fifteen years there had in fact been little interest in the exemption clause of the 1877 Act, but this has now been stimulated by the present upsurge in families applying to homeschool.

### ***The Ministry of Education’s Reaction***

By 2002, the manager of the homeschool section of ERO was able to claim that ERO frequently sent back requests for exemption for clarification and elaboration. D. Miller (1999), the Senior Advisor National Operations at the time responsible for homeschooling, prepared a facts sheet demonstrating the Ministry of Education’s interpretation of the 1989 Education Act in relation to certificates of exemption. This was readily available and reflected a much more open approach to providing information and advice on homeschooling than in earlier statements. The facts sheet made clear the Ministry’s views and openness to homeschooling. It stated:

Homeschooling is made possible by a certificate issued under Section 21 of the Education Act 1989, exempting a person from the requirement to be

enrolled at a registered school between the ages of 6 and 16. (Persons outside this age range can be homeschooled without the need for a certificate.)

A Ministry officer may grant such an exemption if satisfied that the person will be taught “at least as regularly and well as in a state registered school.”

(Miller, 1999, p .2)

Miller also suggested the following as key messages to parents intending to homeschool their children:

Applications for a certificate of exemption must be made in writing and a thorough presentation is required. The Ministry interprets “at least as regularly and well” to mean that an application must indicate a commitment to certain routines appropriate to the maturity level and abilities of the child; and display a coherent curriculum vision, characterised by balance and exhibiting planning; and demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes appropriate evaluation and assessment. (p. 3)

These homeschooling parents are required to complete a statutory declaration twice each year stating that they are continuing to teach their children at least as regularly and well as in a registered state school. Homeschooling programmes are monitored by the Education Review Office. Parents of homeschooled students are paid an annual supervision allowance for the first child of \$743, for the second child \$632, the third \$521, and subsequent children \$372. The Resourcing Division of the Ministry pays the supervision allowance on receipt of the statutory declaration.

It needs to be noted that in 2003 (Central Region of Education, 30 August, 2003, personal correspondence) for each child attending a state registered school the Ministry provided income to that school of \$4,250 per year for Years 1-6 children, increasing to \$6,790 for Years 11+. This is excluding allowances for transport and for children with special needs. Under the criteria of equity, the allowances per child made to homeschooling families seem inadequate in comparison and requests for parents to pay for ERO reviews extraordinary.

In a Ministry of Education (1994) *Review of the Activities of ERO*, commissioned to examine the role and responsibilities of ERO, the lack of knowledge and interest in homeschooling is evident. Homeschooling is mentioned only twice in the review, and then only as a part of a group of additional responsibilities of ERO. They did not consult

with any identifiable homeschooling association or group. Although they received one submission from the Homeschooling Federation of New Zealand no mention was made of it in the summary of submissions.

Since 1996 a unit of ERO has been tasked with reviewing homeschooling and now carries out regular onsite reviews of all exempted families. The Education Review Office (2001, pp.12-13) reported on a survey of the homeschooling children they had visited during the 12 month period ending 30 June 2000. This was a study of 619 exempted children, approximately 10% of the New Zealand homeschooling population, from 316 families. Of the children seen by ERO, 89% were selected on ERO priorities, 9% on requests from the Secretary for Education, and 2% were follow-up reviews. ERO concluded that 90% were taught at least as regularly and as well as in a regular school, 66% of the learning programmes had been developed by their parents or caregivers, and that 33% were based usually, to some extent, on a commercially developed programme such as ACE. In nearly all cases, ERO went on to say, the delivered programme reflected the original application, or a modification of that outline, and learning programmes were generally good, well managed, and suited to the children's abilities. The programmes were usually flexible enough to allow homeschoolers to follow avenues of interest. They claimed that many parents saw particular benefits in homeschooling and in general the homeschooled children, in their study, appeared comfortable with the learning process, were progressing educationally, and their socialization was not at risk.

Robert Williamson (2002), manager of the ERO homeschool unit and a Senior Review Officer, presented a paper at a meeting of homeschoolers in Palmerston North. He said that homeschooling was a growth industry. Homeschoolers come and go, but more and more parents were opting to educate their secondary school- aged children. He encouraged parents to see homeschooling as a way of life, and encouraged completion of their children's schooling at home. The current model for ERO is to review and assist but originally it was to review only. Until 1994 every homeschooler was seen regularly. In the years 1994 and 1995 only three reviews were carried out. From 1995 onwards a full review programme was begun again, and has been continued. Homeschoolers today are seen as low risk because most are doing it for their children's sake. He went on to say that when homeschooling first started, people who wrote their own programmes were at more risk than those who used a commercial programme. Williamson continued

by explaining that today (in 2002) those who design their own programmes are less at risk of failure than those following a commercial programme because it is more flexible. The National Curriculum is unlikely to be imposed on homeschoolers because private schools, not registered with the state, do not have to follow it and it is unlikely they would accept having to do so. No government is likely to impose the National Curriculum on homeschoolers and not others. Williamson considered homeschooling a way of life linked to real life experiences. He believed that there are two reasons for assessment. First, what the child knows and secondly what the child is ready for. To homeschoolers Williamson was a very acceptable ERO member, and was seen by them as a liberal officer opposed to complex administrative demands and practices.

The Ministry now has a centralized system of evaluation and recording of applications to homeschool. This means that consistent evaluation is more likely to occur and reliable statistical data more readily, and possibly more accurately, collected. From 2005 the application for exemption form is a single page, easily read document accompanied by seven pages of material intended to provide guidance and to make application easier. The current application form for exemption from attendance at school and the other supportive material provided by the Ministry are found to be acceptable by the majority of homeschooling parents, but this is changing as the Ministry has proposed changes to the application form. A copy of the application form for 2005, and the other supportive material supplied by the Ministry, is attached as Appendix B.

At a meeting, 19 July, 2004, between Ministry of Education officials and representatives of homeschooling parents in regard to proposed changes to the application form for exemption from school attendance, there was clearly tension over the issue between the parties. The new proposals included notions of predicted outcomes and assessment. Despite the Minister claiming, in response to questions asked in the parliamentary debate of 11 August, 2004, that the changes were relatively minor administrative ones, there was significant concern among the homeschooling community, especially among a few homeschooling parents, who believe they have absolute right in the education of their children and the government should have no rights.

## **Emerging Political Party Perspectives**

Smith (July 11, 2002) asked the political parties represented in Parliament at the time for a statement of their party's policy or attitude towards homeschoolers. Most parties agreed with some support funding for homeschoolers but these ranged from supporting the status quo by the Labour Party to a review of funding by the National Party. The ACT Party would not provide public funding while the Christian Heritage Party would have advocated a voucher approach to funding. More than a third of the political parties wanted to increase the monitoring of homeschooling. This would not have pleased most of those who are homeschooling and who believe primarily in the least government involvement possible and the least monitoring possible, given the rights of the child to receive a higher quality education. The only changes have been in relation to those who may issue certificates of exemption and the exclusion of the part-time exemption provision. The right to exemption is unlikely to be revoked in the foreseeable future because all political parties indicated their support for this provision, just prior to the 2002 elections.

As noted, ERO (2001) reported that 90% of the homeschooling families reviewed were teaching their children at least as well and as regularly as in a state registered school. This would not provide a good rationale for increased monitoring. Compelling homeschoolers to follow the National Curriculum is an unlikely option because the right to choose an alternative curriculum was embedded in the first Education Act of 1877 and has been endorsed ever since. Moreover, the possible imposition of the National Curriculum was one of the most commonly expressed concerns of the homeschooling families interviewed. Codd's (2000) criticism of the National Curriculum would support these concerns:

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework is based on a forced separation of curriculum processes from learning outcomes, which will inevitably lead to a narrowing of content to focus on product rather than the process of learning and thinking. This is a curriculum for social control to ensure that centrally formulated social and economic objectives are met. (p. 5)

From 2003 the National Curriculum was further revised, and in 2007 a new National Curriculum was presented and adopted subsequently. That there were problems with the outcome-driven curriculum has been recognised by the Education Review Office

(2000), supported by the Minister of Education's (2001) request for a curriculum stock-take which would include reviews by overseas experts. Donnelly (2002), an Australian educational consultant, was very critical of the curriculum claiming that it was outdated and seriously flawed. Homeschoolers, then, may not be totally without support in being suspicious of state-imposed solutions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **BACKGROUNDS OF THE FAMILIES AND WHY THEY CHOSE TO HOMESCHOOL**

This chapter presents an introduction to the eight selected families who participated in this research, together with their responses to the key question of why they chose to homeschool. It also includes my initial responses, after initial analysis and reflections, based partially on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) model incorporating aspects of grounded theory. In this way I have attempted to draw out the meaning and significance of these narratives. Generally speaking my approach has embodied a search for themes or patterns between groups or from individuals' experiences. Casey (1995) was one researcher who also used a similar approach to analyse what she regarded as "the tension between immersion and analysis and between detachment and concern" (p. 232).

At this juncture I wish to clarify coding procedures for interviews. Any reference to the Abraham family's narrative is listed as Appendix C followed by a page number, for example A.C. p 1. The other families' narratives, because of their extended length, are listed in reference to the enclosed CD, for example CD. p 20. It should also be noted that I have used pseudonyms for all participants

#### **Family Backgrounds**

Each family's function and beliefs are influenced obviously by what each parent brings to the shared venture. Accordingly, a brief background of the parent or parents of each family is provided. The word 'influenced' is a central one; central because parents and children interact, and the results influence the subsequent decisions made within the family. Each family member, however, is also able to make independent decisions. These families provided data, as noted in Chapter Three, by face-to-face discussion, by mail or by e-mail on their:

- parents' occupations and tertiary education;
- siblings and their own place in their originating family;
- occupations and tertiary education prior to marriage;
- occupations before their first child was born; and

- post-marriage education.

Other historical information was provided frequently as part of their own narratives. Each family is presented separately so that aspects of consistency, inconsistency, interpretation, concern and confidence can be readily discerned.

## **Family Interviews**

### *The Abraham Family*

The Abraham family lived on the edge of a large state housing block in a university city. The family room was the centre of the homeschooling activities. Melinda, the mother, was responsible for the majority of the teaching. She had a nursing diploma and was nursing before she married. She was one of three children and had two brothers. Her parents both had tertiary education. Melinda's father had been a primary school teacher and then a Salvation Army Officer. Her mother had practised as a midwife and later became a Salvation Army Officer. Dale, the father, was a 'dropout' law student and was painting houses when he married Melinda. His parents had both been Salvation Army officers before moving into teaching and guidance counselling. Dale was one of five children with two brothers and two sisters. Both Melinda and Dale were successful at school, although Melinda believes she was never challenged academically. She said,

*When I left school, I didn't have the skills, I wasn't a self-learner at all. I found school quite easy but I also didn't learn how to learn for myself. (A.C. pp. 3-4)*

When Dale and Melinda first married they both did community work and later worked on a substance abuse programme. They decided to homeschool when their first child, Anne, was born. She was born in a small central North Island township. They have four children. None of their children had attended school. At the time of the interview, Dale was working as an assistant university lecturer while completing a postgraduate degree. Both Melinda and Dale were present at the interview as were their three older children - Anne aged 11, Kate aged 10, and Patricia aged 6.

The family explained how they began to homeschool:

*It started when Anne was born, wasn't it? With our GP being a homeschooler so that was what we perceived, in our heads, as an option.*

Dale: *An option and we respected him and his family. We knew him and his family and so we saw that if our kids could turn out like that we would be pretty happy.*

I had wondered about what assumptions about schools they had made, and considered what they might be. Accordingly I asked, prior to their child, Anne, being born, what it was that they both had assumed about education.

Melinda: *What everyone in society assumes. That the way to educate your children is to send them to school, because that is what they did to us and that's what you do.*

Dale: *Yes, that you are often just not aware of the options, and so this made us aware of them. That week made us aware of a number of our principles which we wanted to live our lives by and the goals we saw for our family and the relations within our family.*

Melinda: *Yes, that family thing is very important.*

Dale: *We felt very strongly in the family and the family working together and in spending time with our children and that the best way we could do that was to have maximum input and control and that the homeschooling gave us that. Raising children in the broadest possible sense is the responsibility of the parents. This puts total responsibility, without any excuses, on the parents and a huge responsibility on Melinda as their teacher. (A.C. p. 1)*

Melinda and Dale's emphasis on family may relate particularly to their Christian beliefs, particularly those of the Salvation Army. Their original families demonstrated strong links to the Salvation Army. One of the tenets of the Salvation Army is the important place of the family. Dale also made it clear that control and responsibility was also part of their agenda. He moved on to talk of some of his early ideas:

*I did a Certificate in Adult Teaching back in the early 90s through the C.I.T in Wellington. Some of the stuff coming up was really good, but I saw it as being impossible for schools to achieve that because of their limited resources. For example in schools the teacher to student ratio. So I saw homeschooling as providing us with the opportunity to achieve that low student:teacher ratio. Subsequently, I have changed and I see home schooling as being much more an overall learning experience. You know that whole thing of asking who and when questions, rather than the how and*

*the why. They need to develop minds just looking at why and how, not anyone to tell you who did it on what date. Our religious faith influences our decisions. (A.C. pp. 2-3)*

For the first time religious significance was brought up. Dale developed this theme later when he talked about being a Christian family and a Christian parent. I recalled that at an earlier discussion Dale had talked about the role of primary schools and mentioned that he thought the primary schools were working with knowledge too much instead of developing minds. Dale responded:

*Yes, there is that, but I think it was more than that. There is the whole social development thing. There is the character of the child, and it's interesting. Have you heard about the situation? There was this conference in the States, and one night they had a panel of homeschooling experts up the stage and they were asked questions, and one of the questions was "What would you do differently if you were to homeschool your children again?" Their answer was "We would focus much more on attitude."*

*I see now that homeschooling is much more of an opportunity to develop attitude and personality characteristics. From those will flow successful education and thus success in their chosen occupation. It gives us the opportunity to develop those characteristics which traditional education has conceptualised as a by-product of education. I think that what I see home schooling to be now is that you produce the personality characteristics and everything else will fall into place. So while we do the traditional educational things, the focuses are on having the children develop the appropriate attitude. So my views have changed, and they have changed on other dimensions as well, ... see originally, I had thought of homeschooling up to about ten. (A.C. p. 2)*

Dale stressed the importance, to him, of his Christian values. At another stage of the interview he commented:

*I think the difference - see everybody has values, and they have those values that they will believe and they want their children to live by. I think the difference, as a Christian parent, is that we believe that the importance of those values and beliefs have much bigger consequences, and so for us it's much more important that they achieve those, or they hold those values. I'm*

*just trying to think about why as a Christian it's important, why the majority of homeschoolers are Christian?*

*Say, if you were a non-Christian, I am only supposing here, if your child chooses not to live up to your values, say if you got married and your child chooses not to, and decides to stay with her partner. It is not as big an issue as it is for a Christian because we believe that those choices have much bigger consequences. Melinda was very keen to homeschool all the way through. I have subsequently changed my mind, and I would be really happy to support the children all the way through now. Because I enjoy the experience, plus I enjoy seeing my children at home and I see that personality-wise, characteristic-wise, they are doing very, very well. I think that educationally that will be more of a challenge to us. (A.C. p. 4)*

Melinda supported him but was also emphatic in re-emphasising the place of the family and her concerns about schools:

*There is also that whole thing of the state not telling your child what the state doesn't want them to know. As parents we are important people in our children's lives rather than the teacher who they would be spending up to eight hours a day with at the school. So they learn from us, our values, rather than learning from the teacher the teacher's values, or their peers' values. (A.C. p. 4)*

Both parents expressed concern about the school-based peer group and its potential threat to their children's values. I thought back to Dale's comments on homeschooling all the way through compulsory education and asked if he would tell me a little more about the secondary level.

Dale: *At secondary level it will be more of a challenge. I think that though they develop more personality, they will also develop more of the characteristics which allow them to succeed in life, even more so because they will have to become independent children.*

Anne [the oldest child]: *I go to a netball practice at Cornerstone Christian School on Fridays but when I went to sleep that night, I wanted to go to school because it was fun, and we had all been together and we were all*

*these sorts of friends. Because we were all friends, but at home I had my sisters but I don't have my friends so...*

*Melinda: remember we also talk about that; about friends at school who aren't always friendly, that all the children at school aren't always nice. But we do make an effort for the girls to see friends. Anne had a friend around on Saturday afternoon, and you often go – you either have a friend here or you go to see a friend, at least once a week. If not more? You go to Guides or have friends here, or at Sunday School. (A.C. p. 2)*

Both Melinda and Dale were also concerned about the apparent loss of the chance of children to enjoy childhood. This again could link to their beliefs in family and their personal form of Christianity.

*Dale: I don't know whether this is a romantic view of the childhood, but we hear of stories of 10 - 11 year olds who have got one to two hours of homework every night. They have had like five or six hours of school and they come home, and spend an hour or two doing homework. I don't know whether it is romanticised view, but I don't think childhood should be like that. We go on trips don't we?*

*Anne: Yes.*

*Melinda: We like going on trips, don't we?*

*Anne agreed.*

*Melinda: When we go on holidays, it seems to become a.... some days might be concentrated on school. Like when we went to the South Island, we went to the gold mine, so that's all just learning you know. Let's talk about it – we went to Martha mines, earlier on this year and we went on a tour. When we came home, while we were up there I had said to the girls, "I'm allowing you to do this and this", and when we came home they had different projects they needed to do. I arranged for us to go to a jeweller, and he showed how you got a lump of silver (work with silver and gold being the same), and he made it into a ring. And he just gave the ring to the girls! (A.C. p. 4)*

I took the discussion back to the notion of values and particularly the fact that both parents felt strongly that they wished to protect their children from the influences of their peer groups. I suggested to them that Melinda was really talking about what we

now term emotional safety. Had she meant being pulled in all sorts of different directions or being scared?

Melinda: *You can get badly bullied and hurt at school, and that stuff doesn't get dealt with until you come home at about 3.00 o'clock, and then you've often forgotten why you are hurting.*

Dale: *I use the analogy of 'Lord of the Flies'. I often think that of the schools, not because teachers do a poor job but because they are out numbered. The school situation is very much like 'Lord of the Flies' where everybody is learning from people who don't know. So you follow what the others in the school are doing. People learn and follow and learn from what other children are doing, and those other children don't know what's right, and so they are learning those ways of coping and dealing with problems which you then have to try and re-teach them not to do. (A.C. p.4)*

Melinda and Dale's perceptions of the limitations of schools and both parents' Christian approach to family values were very evident here. I think it appropriate for Dale to conclude this narrative, for he would appear to have experienced the most personal changes and yet retained his central concept of priority of the family. As he says,

*I'm so happy with the character development and relationship development they've gained. In the end, I also think that if you were to put the effort in, homeschooling could be a huge advantage academically to your children. Homeschooling offers a totally positive endeavour, with the whole family. (A.C. p.4)*

### The Carpenter Family

The Carpenter family lived on a homestyle property on the outskirts of a small rural town. They dwelt in a small cottage on the property while they built a new house. The house was free of chemically treated material and, by using solar power and a clay wall, was very energy conservative. The new house in many ways reflected their approach to family life. All the family participated in the building, but Peter did most of the physical work while Kay spent most of the day caring for, and teaching, Joseph and Anna.

Kay was a second generation New Zealander. Her mother was a primary school teacher and homemaker, and her father a mechanical engineer. He had been a grocer. Kay was

the third of three children. Before she was married she had been a secondary school teacher.

Kay: *My mother is a teacher, and my brother and my sister are both teachers. Originally they were quite surprised at us. My parents certainly weren't very supportive. They felt like we were kicking our own education in the teeth. We who had been educated teachers now were saying it's not good enough for our children.*

Peter: *I can see it's hard for them to understand that. It does seem more than ironical.*

Kay: *But I must say now Mum will keep books for us, which she doesn't do for the others. I mean she has other things with the other grandchildren. She looks out for resources for us that she thinks might be useful. My brother has finished teaching and he's given us a whole lot of stuff. So they are aware that we would like resources and they are supportive in that way. (CD. p. 13)*

Peter's mother was a homemaker and his father a personnel manager. He was the third of eight children. He had a number of qualifications and before he was married worked as an artist and industrial designer. He became a secondary school teacher after he married. Kay had both their children by homebirth. Since the initial interview they now have a third child, also a home birth. This baby has not affected their wish to continue to homeschool. When they decided to homeschool, Kay was developing a cottage industry and Peter was teaching. The family was central in their lives. Their beliefs are shown in their approach to the children's education, the practical lifestyle they led, and the new house they were building. Peter, Kay and their children (Joseph aged 8 and Anna aged 6), were present at the interview. They explained why they chose to homeschool:

*It did seem like a natural progression. Joseph was a home birth and everything is focussed on home. It did seem to be a natural progression. We were at home, we looked at things and we did a lot of things. Because I'm a teacher maybe, I don't know. We just did a lot of things at home anyway and then gradually....Joseph had a couple of experiences with pre-school where he was bullied a bit. That added to the impetus to look at it, homeschooling.*

Peter supported Kay and added,

*One of the things that I was thinking about that it was for Kay and I being on a journey of a more instinctual type of life. That is one that is based on your intuition. We'd been on that journey for quite a while really. We've been in*

*touch with cultures that are more like that and so we are more like that in our life. So both of us are trying to live a life that we hope is one where we do things from a personal perspective. We read and we listen and we make up our minds based on our judgments. We listen to other people but homeschooling seemed sort of natural. For me it's a natural thing. It is the same as having a baby. Having a birth where you live. I couldn't see why we had to go a hospital. So to me it seems kind of a bit weird to go to a school, despite the fact that I taught in school. We've moved away from doing things because others tell you, from the centralised government perspective on education, into actually empowerment of yourself. We'd seen the education vocation, as Kay said, a little bit about Joseph being bullied, but we'd seen more of that. We'd seen the politics of running a huge school and large numbers of children and what that involves, and knowing Joseph....(CD. p. 12)*

Kay: *We got to know Joseph better in terms of what would be good for him.*

Peter: *What would be a good style for Joseph? We thought he'd be very easily turned away from learning and in turn very quickly hushed and his confidence would go.*

Kay: *He is an extremely motivated learner. As I think all children are to a certain extent. (CD. p. 12)*

This idea of self-motivated learning reflected their notion of an intuitive lifestyle, but they differentiated themselves through a belief in children as 'natural children'. They held a belief that schools tend to weaken children's natural drive to learn. Both Kay and Peter were successful students, but Peter considered that his brothers suffered significantly under the school system. His brothers' unsatisfactory school experiences had had an influence on his current opinions. He explained:

*I've got three brothers, but two of my brothers were you might say products of the education system, the failures that you still hear about. I've done a lot of reading that shows there's only a small percent, fifteen percent or something that come out of it academically inclined. I've got two really bright brothers; both were bullied. One was systematically bullied and he doesn't even talk about it now. He has a huge number of problems. Both self-esteems were knocked and it almost extinguished their love of learning. That was a negative and I saw it myself. I went to the same school and*

*witnessed it in my own class and saw some things. I taught at a boys' school until last year. A boys' school, a fairly hard school in some ways and the boys are fairly wise to things that can happen in life, and I told them, the staff, some stories of bullying at school and they didn't believe me. They said "You're making that up" I mean that's how I lived through it and didn't participate, but I suppose I feel a little bad that I didn't do more against it, but that is a fact of the education system.*

*Society and school are quite sort of violent, on a lower level. I've done relieving in the local schools as well and it strikes me that it's a very harsh environment. It's very harsh the way that people talk to each other. It's not actually all to do with bullying, like punching, but it's violence on the lower level, but it's bloody endemic. (CD. pp. 13-14)*

Kay also had experiences while teaching which moved her towards homeschooling. She explained:

*In terms of education I don't think schools are that much of an education. I said many years ago that I thought I could teach the School Cert. syllabus to a child from third form to fifth form, that amount of maths, I could teach it in ten weeks and they could pass. (CD. p. 14)*

She went on to describe an experience she had:

*When I taught, I tried to also be a facilitator. I mean in a school obviously it's a bit different because we've got a set thing to do, but I try to teach like that and that was one of the reasons why I left. I had an experience with several seventh formers at school and I was trying to get them to be more independent and more responsible for what they were learning. Even within the syllabus you don't have to have everybody learn exactly the same sentence to pass the exam. They didn't like it; they refused to do any work for me. They didn't want to do any experiments. These experiments were in chemistry and physics. They wouldn't experiment. I couldn't cope. I had to leave. (CD. p. 16)*

Kay promoted an idea similar to that of children as natural children. Her views on the need to develop independence closely paralleled those of Melinda. She continued the theme of facilitating:

*I really like doing that with Joseph. We go to the library and I'm good at finding all the resources for all the things in his area of what he likes.*

Peter added to Kay's last remark and introduced their concept of family.

Peter: *The other cool thing is that, I mean for Joseph and Anna, their learning is very much a part of our day as well. So learning to do the things that, the basic skills, we call them living skills, which involves anything from eating to talking to ringing to cleaning, whatever, or going out to social events. That's part of what we consider very much a part of learning.*

Kay: *Well we've had to because we talk about all of us being able to live together and to do it. This way we actually need to work together and they are quite compliant. They are quite happy to work together with us.*

Peter: *We take the view that children can learn to respond in a kind of an altruistic way. A lot of models of children say that is not possible, children can't reason, they only understand a whack on the arse, but they can. They can respond to quite high ideals. If you sit and talk at their level it's – well, they are humans like us and that's the thing. So we probably, I don't know, I'm sure there's faults in the way we do that. We don't expect them to act like adults, but we know that they can operate out of doing something of good value because it makes somebody else feel better or it helps the world to be more equal. They understand those ideas quite well. (CD. p. 17)*

Kay and Peter incorporated their beliefs in a practical lifestyle in keeping with their views on personal and family responsibility in values and learning. They also expressed their views on school culture very strongly. I think it appropriate for Peter to conclude this narrative, because he appeared to express a view common to both himself and Kay when he claimed:

*There's a lot more autonomy with the child, with the student, with the person really. That's what I'm hoping for. I'm hoping that we are helping to sow the seeds of self-confidence, self-esteem. That's pretty high goals. If we can foster those I'll be happy. (CD. p. 15)*

*The Dunn and the Gain Families*

Carmen was a solo parent with four children who came from a family with strong educational ties. Her parents were both teachers and her siblings were also in the education profession. She has teacher training and a university degree directed towards education. Carmen was a close friend to Rita, who joined in the interview which was held in a local cafe. Rita had one child who had just qualified for homeschooling. Rita had no tertiary education and came from an immigrant family living in Australia. Carmen had been a mentor for her. They both lived in a village, on an island, and experienced the advantages and disadvantages of such a small community. Carmen's ex-husband frequently approached the Ministry of Education expressing his concern with her homeschooling practices. She had been visited on several occasions by ERO, because they were required to follow up his expressed concerns. Carmen and her children, Jess aged 13, Rob aged 10 and Page aged 7, together with Rita and her son Charles aged 7, were present at the interview.

Carmen was very clear about why she decided to homeschool. As she said,

*When my first child was four years old and I was out living in Te Manaera, I started looking at which school to send her to. There was no doubt that we were going to send her to a school; the only decision we had to make was which school would be the best option. I looked at many schools, probably six or seven in all including our local primary school, St Doreen's College, (my old school) and a Jewish private school. I honestly can't remember all of them now.*

*I collected prospectuses from all of them and talked to either the Principal or Deputy Principal of each school, and came away thinking that each of the schools had something to offer but none of them had everything that I wanted. For example, the local one was absolutely overcrowded and had a huge waiting list yet the teachers were really committed and it had the advantage that many of Jess's friends attended it.*

*The big "mental shift" came for me when instead of looking at what each school had to offer I decided to turn the question totally on its head and ask instead "What kind of person do I want Jess to be when she completes her schooling? What do I want her to know? What attributes do I want her to*

*possess? “I wrote out a list of the things that I really valued and hoped to impart to her and it became glaringly obvious that on the list of things which were really valuable academic achievement was only one of many! (CD. p. 22)*

Clearly, from her own and family background, academic achievement had held an important place. Carmen continued:

*Other qualities such as being self-motivated, respectful, compassionate, confident, etcetera were at least as important as being able to read and write correctly. These things weren't going to be served at all by her going to school. That left me absolutely stumped. I thought I've got no idea what to do now. Then I read, I think it was a book about somebody who had been a teacher and was very scathing about the effects that schooling has on their child and had become a passionate advocate of homeschooling. It was John Taylor Gatto I think I read first and thought, “Aha”. I contacted the Ministry - this is now more than ten years ago. They were relatively helpful. They actually gave me the contact number for Claire of the Home Schooling Federation and sent out the Ministry's daunting application to exempt your child from having to attend school. I believe the application has become even more daunting unfortunately. I contacted Claire and just never looked back. Once I made the switch from “What can school do for my kids?” to “How can I best nurture and raise my child to be the best possible adult?” it was really easy. (CD. p. 22)*

I thought that this was a major mental shift in Carmen's thinking, and I asked if she would tell me a little more about Claire.

*Her passion, whether you agree with her or not, her passion is overwhelmingly inspiring and her enthusiasm and belief in both the children and their parents is probably the most precious resource homeschoolers who are just starting out can have! I think that the stumbling block was that I'd been through school, done bursary, done scholarship, been to University and studied education. (CD. p. 22)*

Her friend Rita supported Carmen's impression of Claire. Claire's passion fitted with Carmen's belief that the best learning takes place when it becomes a passion of the learner. Rita explained:

*I don't think I've met anyone else that thinks that way, about what to do, what I want them to be like. Everyone I know, apart from Carmen, thinks, "What do I want them to achieve?" So that was a huge shift. I know, that if more people actually thought that way we would have a different education system.*

*I knew Carmen before she had Jess and then being involved in that process of her looking at different schools, then when she discovered Claire and there was a home schooling meeting. Claire held it and I went with her and her mother. I sat there and I listened to Claire and I had no children at the time but I thought that "If I ever did have children homeschooling sounds like a really good idea." Charles, my son, was born and schooling was a long way away, but by the time he turned four I was going to have to make a decision and I think that I was 90% there. (CD. pp. 22-23)*

Carmen went on to outline her beliefs about education:

*The more I study the effects of education on the schooled children I know the more convinced I am that schools are bad for our kids. I have every belief in the necessity and virtue of education but schools no way! I doubt very much that any child benefits from attending school that could not be far better served in another style of education. I would have to say that I am now convinced that children will learn what they need to learn when they want to. (CD. p. 23)*

We spoke about Jess being at secondary school level and I asked Carmen how she felt about that. She replied:

*I actually feel probably more confident about it. I don't know that when she's fifteen she's going to know the same things as other children at fifteen who attend school would know. I don't know that she's going to know the exact same information, but I do know that she'll have the resources and the confidence to find it out if she needs it. I do know that she'll want to learn about things. Also as she gets older I see the difference in their personalities*

*more. She seems much more confident in being an individual for example than many of her schooled peers are. (CD. p. 23)*

Again the notion of child independence was advanced just as it had been expressed by Melinda, but this time by Carmen. Rita agreed with Carmen and explained, in her own way:

*They are given the freedom so therefore when they latch onto something they are really interested in it absolutely. They have the freedom to immerse themselves. Watch our children when they are into something, like we spent three weeks studying praying mantises then butterflies. I've got this little net and we actually watched a caterpillar right through to the butterfly coming out. We took a photo of the butterfly coming out on his hand and drying its wings. We watched it and we got books on it and it's all he concentrated on and he was free to do that. Now he remembers everything about it because he wanted to learn. (CD. p. 23),*

Carmen thought more widely about her ideas about commitment and passion, and elaborated on these ideas:

*I don't think you can really view a homeschooled child's education until they've finished it because their progression is more spotty if you like. They may be absolutely immersed in Mathematics for example and therefore way ahead of their school-aged peers but perhaps not as advanced in Science. Then maybe next month, or next year, they will become immersed in some scientific endeavour and race ahead in that area. I also think, with going to university, it is far better for a child to have such a real passion in mind that they want to attend university so that they can achieve this goal as opposed to "Well I've left secondary school, everyone says I ought to go on to university now." I believe that homeschooled children are tremendously efficient at following the steps they need to in order to achieve a goal of their own choosing. It does show that most people have got the idea that learning needs to be foisted on children. (CD. pp. 24-25)*

The notion of children as "natural learners", as articulated by Peter and Kay, is evident in Carmen's last sentence. This clearly implies that she does not support notions of children having to be taught to learn. I thought about the popular concern about the lack

of socialisation of homeschooled children and asked her about socialisation. She responded:

*That is easily seen. Have you seen the Time magazine article where they said that homeschooled children were “missing out on behaving like little savages?” That is a direct quote. Now if you take a view like the fact that homeschooled children are socialised, are friendly, are outgoing, are on the whole well mannered, or at least civilised and courteous and say “Well that’s unfortunate, they are missing out. They ought to be rude, violent, aggressive etc.” Then I don’t know how to answer that actually. It seems so truly bizarre to me. (CD. p. 25)*

Carmen, having expressed her concern about school culture, continued:

*I think it’s the grandparents too who are often a bit fearful or dubious about homeschooling but then when they see other children who are rude, who are sullen, who view the adults as the enemy, they notice the difference in that homeschooled children generally do not view adults as “the enemy” at all. As I said before it’s not that they are “better” than others but that they are more civilised, they are more courteous, more pleasant to be around. They enjoy being around adults as well as children. But it does show that parents who send their children to school can’t imagine keeping good relationships with their children and letting them learn. (CD. p. 31)*

Carmen, like the Abrahams, had concerns about childhood and talked of her beliefs:

*I think schooling parents feel defensive. I think they feel threatened and also their children are getting up at 7.00 o’clock and getting off to school for 8.30. They are coming home at 3.00 tired and grouchy. Their time to be with friends is so limited. That’s another factor; suddenly their kids are exhausted. They’re coming home and having a nap and being woken up for dinner and then going back to doing homework. (CD. p. 25)*

I mentioned my concern about absolutes, and my feeling that many homeschooling families were convinced that school was not suitable for all children. Rita picked up the idea of parents as first and best teacher, later expressed by Hera (mother of the next family interviewed), saying:

*What you mentioned earlier about the school not being suitable for all children is such a classic. I fell through the cracks when I was at school. I'm a kinaesthetic learner and the system doesn't cater for that. I immediately recognised that in Charles. So I was able to go, "Oh I know what he needs". So I was able to provide that. I mean had I not known about homeschooling, thanks to Carmen feeling confident over the years, he would have fallen through the cracks as well. (CD. p. 28)*

I thought it appropriate that Carmen summed up her views and the views of Rita:

*By the time my children have finished being homeschooled, hopefully they won't finish their education until they are ninety-nine or until they die, I'm pretty sure I'm going to like them and find them interesting people. That's important to me. I love them because they are my kids, but I like them for the way they are developing. Not that they are turning out like little clones of me at all, but that by being with me they've got a chance to become uniquely themselves, whereas school bashes them into becoming sheep. (CD. p. 37)*

### *The Kupe Family*

The Kupe family lived in a large state or ex-state housing block, in an exstate house. It had attractive views of the Porirua Harbour. Hera was very conscious of supporting her children's Maori heritage, particularly her extended family and kinship. She wanted her children to be strongly aware of tikanga and their whanaungatanga. The family identified strongly with the indigenous culture of New Zealand. Hera's partner, Wiremu, was from a Taranaki iwi, but he was then living outside the Taranaki area. Hera was born in the Wellington region. Hera and Wiremu's identification was with their iwi's mountain and river, and they had maintained contact with their tribe and hapu. They had three children - daughters Tahi aged 10, Rua aged 7, and a son Toru aged 4.

Both of Hera's parents had post-schooling education. Her father trained to be a plumber and her mother as a registered nurse. Hera is the oldest of three children and has two sisters. Her mother had worked, at least part-time, in her career to support the family. Hera was educated at a state school and was very happy and successful in the school environment. She was a registered teacher, and was teaching before she was living in

her present partnership. After moving into the partnership she taught in a total immersion class in a state school. Her teaching in a total immersion class and her identity as Maori made it clear that, for her, teaching Te Reo and Maori culture to her children was an important element. She was teaching part-time when she decided to homeschool.

Wiremu's father had no tertiary education, and his mother did some nursing and had some tertiary education. He had two siblings, a brother and a sister. Wiremu had no tertiary education and was working in horticulture for the local council. Like many Maori families, the importance of family was a significant part of their culture. The basic social group in Maori was, and still is for many, the extended family, which can comprise the extended family of either the husband or wife, and often both. Wiremu was unable to attend the interview, but Hera and the children shared their narratives with me.

I asked Hera why she had chosen to homeschool her children. She replied:

*It was a lifestyle choice really. I have a teaching background. I have worked in early childhood previous to going to Teachers' College and doing primary training. I largely worked as a part-time support teacher, not a full responsibility teacher, but I guess I found teaching a juggle with a young family.*

*I felt very stretched even when I was in a part-time role. So I began to really question things about how I was farming out my own children to teach other people's children. Your priorities change, and I began to question, "What is more important to me?" and I felt that the balance of work and taking the children to school and childcare centres was really crazy! I really questioned waking them up before they were ready, feeding them before they were ready, pushing them out the door saying, "Hurry, hurry, we have to be somewhere by this time" and feeling uncomfortable with that.*

*As an adult I started to think that their childhood is a time where we don't need to be pressuring them. I wanted to honour their childhood more really. So I decided to focus the priority as being on the family and work fitting*

*around a family rather than the other way around of the family fitting around work. (CD. p. 38)*

Like Melinda and Dale, Hera was of the opinion that schools deprived children of their rights to childhood.

I had assumed that some of their children had been at school, and asked Hera if either of the girls had been to school before she decided to homeschool? She responded:

*Yes. Tahi had three years at school. We had picked Tahi's school very carefully. We actually went to a school out of the area we lived in. I was very happy with the school, I had colleagues there, I liked the whole school and I also liked the whanau – the immersion whanau that Tahi was in. Which is why we had picked that school because all the children went through Kohanga Reo which I have been involved with and at which I still do some part time work as my bread and butter. I was very happy with the school. (CD. pp. 38-39)*

Giving her children access to Maori language and culture had clearly influenced Hera's choices for her children in having them attend Te Kohanga Reo and then in selecting a school with a total immersion programme. When we examine her practices later in Chapter Six it will be clear that cultural reasons also influenced Hera's decision to homeschool. Furthermore, she believed that all New Zealanders would benefit from a greater knowledge of Maori. A significant part of her choice of school had been its opportunity for immersion in Te Reo. Hera continued:

*I wasn't really unhappy with the school system, but it was really as a parent, and as priorities for myself as a parent began to change I began to question more. I started talking about homeschooling, you know. The idea came up, and I talked about it with a few people and then I saw an article in a "Little Treasures" magazine that really helped me. The timing of that coming along was quite good. It answered lots of my questions, and yes it affirmed all the reasons that I was thinking about for doing homeschooling.*

*So that gave me the confidence, to think "Oh, maybe I need to give it a whirl". Rua was coming up five. This was the end of '98, and her birthday is at the end of January, at the beginning of the school year, so it seemed like*

*the sensible time to start rather than putting her in school. I decided to take Tahī out, and to have two of them at home. (CD. p. 39)*

Hera asked her daughter Tahī how she liked the idea of homeschooling. Tahī replied:

*I wasn't used to it at first but I got used to it once I got to know people. I got to do more interactive things rather than going to school and sitting in a classroom everyday and when it's raining. We like not having to leave the house on a morning and when it's raining. (CD. p. 39)*

Following up on Tahī's explanation I then asked Hera how her family, her whānau, reacted to teaching the children at home. She replied:

*Um, I can't say that anybody was very anti but at the same time I don't feel like that everybody was pro. I think they all think I'm a little mad. And they questioned a lot, they asked a lot of questions and they expressed, not what I call concerns, but they wanted to ask questions and have a little bit of clarity. I think I have always been a little bit on the periphery of your 'Joe Average' kind of things, so in some ways it's not surprising. (CD. p. 39)*

Later she picked up this theme of doing things differently, and went on to say:

*You know I had a home birth and things as well which was considered by some of them to be pretty fringe. It all makes sense to me, but I have to say that the family have been reassured by seeing just how well balanced the kids are. I think the kids themselves are the best indicator to the family that they are not being inhibited and that they have a good cross section of skills, particularly socially. Socially is usually the 'biggy' for everyone but not for me. I have to say that the social aspect was one thing at school that I questioned more and more because I do think that people forget that kids learn a lot of mostly negative social behaviour at school. I have certainly seen that. Basically you just have to accept that there is a school culture. (CD. p. 52)*

This theme of concern about school culture was a recurring one. I wanted to refer her back to the school, and asked whether the whole school was total immersion or had it been a Kura. Hera replied:

*No it was a local state school with a strong Maori immersion unit within that. I knew some of the Kaiakoi, I trained with some of them. Yes, finding the right school was quite important to us, and like I say, I wasn't unhappy with the school but there were issues, like those social ones, where you have to actually compromise. You had to let go of those issues if you want to be in that context. (CD. p. 40)*

Again I referred back to her decision, and asked if she had spoken to any homeschooling people or families before she made that decision. Hera answered my query:

*No, I didn't meet any homeschoolers before I decided. I hadn't thought about that. I talked about it with other friends who lived rurally and in one case both of us were interested in that as a possibility but mostly it was about where we were at in our lives and what we were reflecting on as priorities as parents. One of the interesting things was that Tahi's classroom teacher, a good friend of mine, was actually a big supporter of me. She has also considered doing it for her children and she was the one, after talking with her in a social context, who encouraged me to go and get the Ministry information. She'd already done that for herself. My teaching colleagues, surprisingly, were most supportive. I was worried that I would isolate myself by being seen as a little "traitor" but that didn't happen. They have been so supportive with accessing resources that they can support me with and helped me with getting out of teaching, in a classroom context. (CD. p. 40)*

Hera followed this by introducing, for her, a dominant theme:

*I'm a firm believer that Maori should be core curriculum and all New Zealanders should have to learn it. It is an official language. (CD. p. 43)*

In our discussion it had been evident that the children were truly bilingual, slipping from Maori to English and back again. An earlier statement by Hera would seem to sum up her beliefs about homeschooling and family. She said:

*I must say my concepts of learning and teaching have taken a quantum leap since I've been homeschooling. I believe that parents are there to teach their children as first teachers and their best teachers. I don't believe that my kids are being short-changed by me. I don't believe that being at school would be*

*better for them. Schools should be fitting around a family rather than the other way around. (CD. p. 40)*

The family theme is again evident, as is the strength of Hera's belief in Maori culture and Te Reo.

### *The O'Donnell Family*

Moira came from a rural family. She was the oldest of four children. Dory, her husband, came from a large family and grew up in a large New Zealand city. They both have had tertiary education leading to professional qualifications. Moira worked in her legal occupation before having a family. Dory continued in his chosen highly skilled career. They had supportive parents and siblings. Both Dory's and Moira's parents were described by her as being conservative in their views on education.

They had three children - Bridget aged 11, Zac aged 10, and Helen aged 8 - all of whom were present at the interview. Dory regretted that he could not be present at the interview.

When I asked her why she choose to homeschool, Moira answered:

*When I come to think about it, if you had asked me in 2000, I would have had a bit more of an embittered view of school than I do now. I think that what I found was that I had a contribution to make to my children's education and I felt that I was shut out from being able to do that. I just had that uneasy feeling that school wasn't doing for us what we needed or what we expected. (CD. p. 46)*

Moira's sense of being shut out was similar to Mary's claim (in the last of my recorded interviews), that the school administration ignored her requests and opinions. I added a question about the children and their school experiences by asking if she felt that the children were suffering at school. Moira replied:

*Probably more suffering from neglect rather than anything else. I think of one of the comments that I remember getting from a teacher, at a parent-*

*teacher interview in Bridget's third year, that was her last year at school, saying "I'm not worried about Bridget." I know that she probably didn't mean it as it came across but I felt that Bridget wasn't a person that featured, for that teacher, as a person. (CD. p. 46)*

My own experiences as a teacher came to mind and I explained that unfortunately that did sometimes happen. A teacher sometimes focused on the child with behaviour problems or with learning problems to the disadvantage of the other children.

Moira stated:

*Yes I do remember the school report at the end of that year had a comment which had another child's name to it, which is a danger of word processing, but it just reinforced the feeling that she was just another child in a mass of children that nobody was taking an interest in. She had learnt to read very well in her first and second year, but in the third year she completely went off reading and wouldn't read anything at all and we were concerned that we couldn't carry on ignoring this lack of learning and loss of motivation. (CD. p. 46)*

Moira, because of concern about Bridget, had researched educational alternatives. She recalled:

*I'd started school with the Correspondence School. I still believe that it gave me a really great foundation. I actually rang up the Correspondence School and asked them if we could enrol there and they said, "No you can't unless you pay these huge amounts of money and then you would still be a homeschooler". (CD. p. 46)*

I recalled that she had mentioned previously that she had done some of her own schooling by correspondence, which, in New Zealand, usually consists of sets of material being posted to the child's home and the teaching being carried out by a parent. This structure meant that each child usually received individual attention and had his or her needs or approach to learning catered for. The teaching parent was encouraged to maintain frequent contact with the Correspondence School Teacher who may from time to time have visited the family home. Moira may have had very pleasant recollections of her early learning. In correspondence schooling there appears to be some elements in common with homeschooling practices. Moira continued:

*So I started doing some research and finding out what homeschooling would involve. I got in touch, first of all with The Homeschooling Federation, in*

*Auckland. They were in one of their helpful stages. I'm not sure that they would be the first point of call now but they put me in touch with Phil Astley, in Lower Hutt, who then gave me quite a bit of help with putting in my application and that kind of thing and off we went. (CD. p. 46)*

I asked if she had come from a farming background. Moira replied:

*We lived on a farm so I did my first 18 months of schooling at home. There were four children in my family and I was the oldest so when my brother got to school age they, the Department, extended the bus route another 10 miles up the road and of course as Mum had another two children at home my parents decided it was worthwhile to drive to the bus. (CD. p. 46)*

I asked if she had felt happy in her own schooling. She again replied:

*I was comfortable and enjoyed school. I did well and I don't recall struggling to learn. (CD. p. 47)*

I assumed that Dory was also happy with his schooling. Again, Moira said:

*Yes. We both did some of our schooling with the Nuns. It was quite a disciplined approach. He did his secondary schooling at a Catholic boys' school so he had the priests. I think that one of the things that he found in later life is that he had quite a lot of leadership skills that were not recognized when he was at school. (CD. p. 47)*

Thinking about family reaction to their decision to remove the children, I enquired about how her family reacted to their decision to homeschool the children.

*My Mother died before we had children and my Father still thinks that schools are the best place for children to be, but he has remarried and his new wife is a retired School Principal. She thinks that homeschooling is a quite good idea and he is influenced by her views so he doesn't make too much of a fuss. She is supportive. Dory's parents surprisingly, considering that they are older and generally more conservative, actually think that it is great and are most impressed. I think that they see the children are doing well and are happy. That reassures them that it's not such a silly idea. (CD. p. 47)*

I followed on and asked about her brothers and sisters. Moira continued:

*They are quite comfortable with it, and I think that that would be the same with Dory's family too. They realize that it involves quite a lot of commitment that they mightn't want to make, but they're quite supportive.*  
(CD. p. 48),

She moved from family affairs to talk of her more recent reading, and pointed out that:

*There is an interesting body of writing that comes out of the UK called the 21st century learning initiative. One of the things that they are talking about is that all the balance in school is completely around the wrong way. Actually more resources should be in primary school and that if you've developed the skills in primary school then you have got people to the point that, when they are at secondary age, when they want autonomy then they can work more on their own with guidance and with a lot less people. We should start devoting more resources to primary and less to secondary schools which shouldn't need it.* (CD. p.50)

I agreed with her, but added that I believed that secondary schools were very conservative. Moira continued, and came to a strongly expressed conclusion:

*I think all schools are very conservative. I think it goes back to the point I made earlier that once children can read and manipulate numbers to some extent it has opened all the doors for them to be able to go and do things on their own. Much of this secondary education could be done at home, especially with modern technology being so available.* (CD. p.50),

Moira, apart from her daughter's experience and the school's disregard of her opinions, had had a very pleasant time as a Correspondence School student. This positive experience had clearly contributed to her choice to homeschool her children.

### *The Smith Family*

Susan was the oldest of three children. Her father was a farmer and her mother a dressmaker. After she finished secondary school she attended a polytechnic. Before she was married she was Secretary/Administration Assistant for a large Asia and Pacific

company. When she and Abel decided to educate their children at home she was a homemaker and in partnership with Abel in a self-employed national dealership.

Abel was born overseas and was the second of five children. His father was a dentist and his mother a schoolteacher. He studied for one year at university. Abel worked for an air transport company until he and Susan decided to homeschool. After this decision he changed his occupation to become a self-employed dealer. They decided to homeschool before their first child was born. They have six children, all of whom have been educated at home. The family had been homeschooling (they prefer to call it “home educating”) for more than 18 years. Four of their children were now past compulsory schooling age, and all of these were studying or living away from home. Two of their older children were presently at home assisting in the family’s efforts on behalf of homeschooling in New Zealand. Much of Abel and Susan’s time was spent in lecturing, throughout New Zealand, on a variety of homeschool activities, including running workshops. Abel was very actively preparing and publishing information for homeschoolers and was involved significantly in any interactions with the Ministry of Education. Both Abel and Susan were present at the interview as were their two youngest children, Jeremiah aged 11 and Jedaiah aged 6. Their older children were referred to from time to time; Gloria aged 23, Zac aged 21, Alice aged 19, and Cher aged 16.

I began by asking when was it that they had decided to homeschool. Susan replied:

*When I was pregnant, with Gloria, our first child, we went to Parent Centre and the leader of this Parent Centre said, “Your children will grow up in spite of you.” We looked at each other and decided we didn’t want our children growing up in spite of us. That would be the first thing. That would be 23 years ago, 1979 or ’80, in Palmerston North. (CD. p. 54)*

This statement by Susan set out the couple’s belief that they intended, as parents, to ensure that they held a central place in their children’s growing up, and consequently in their education. Abel continued:

*The next thing was that we had Michael Cox around. Michael Cox was the MP for Manawatu so we invited him around for a meal. We didn’t realize that we were outside his electorate. He came and we’d invited some friends around to speak with him as well. They wanted to talk about Christian*

*education or education in private schools which of course we didn't. They really monopolized him all the time talking about education. Anyway that got us going and we started looking at homeschooling here in New Zealand. I went to a conference in 1983 about Christian education down in Christchurch and it was for Christian teachers in private schools and in public schools. A number of things struck me. The absolute necessity, from a philosophical basis, for Biblically based education coming from the Scriptures. The second thing that struck me, and this was with Christian teachers, and I'm sorry but I was unimpressed by them. I remember, walking away from that conference and one of the things I said to myself was that, "I know I can do a better job myself!" Call it arrogance, but back in 1983 Gloria was three years old and I had no shadow of a doubt that we could do at least as well as, probably a lot better, without any training and probably without thinking about it. (CD. p. 55)*

Abel reinforced the view, expressed by Susan, that they believed they were the best teachers for their children. I was curious about when they made the final decision to homeschool. I asked about when they had decided to homeschool Gloria.

Susan: *No, we were still pursuing the Christian education school system. It became evident that although the children were strongly inclined towards homeschooling they were still open to joining an appropriate Christian school.*

Abel: *We actually joined up with a bunch of other folks in 1984 and worked hard to get a Christian school established here in Palmerston North. They got Cornerstone Christian School going. By the time it opened its doors for registration we had been homeschooling Gloria for about a year. When the Christian school got started, having been on the organizing committee, I also saw that, most of the time, thought and resources went into administration, wages and peripherals. I lost interest very quickly. When they came to sign us up we said we're sorry, this is really embarrassing, but there is no way we are going to give this [homeschooling] up. We started home education because we were concerned about some of the teachers, not just the Christian teachers, other teachers we met and they were not what we wanted. The Johnson Report was going on at that time, about sex education*

*and that sort of thing in the primary school. The more I read about that the less comfortable I got.*

*Then I started to go through the Scripture and seeing what the Scriptures said about education. They said who is to do it and how it is to be done, the when, where and why of it as well as the presuppositions behind it, who's responsible for it, and what the objectives of education are. That kind of stuff was all in there so we decided that homeschooling was the way to go. I need to add: once I saw the necessity for thoroughly Biblical presuppositions in education I wrote to the then Minister of Education, David Lange, for the definition of the word "secular" in section 77 of the Education Act. He replied, "with no religious instruction or observance." Seeing this was incompatible with what I'd seen regarding education in the Bible, and being committed to the Bible, we had no choice but to home educate. (CD. p. 55)*

It was evident that, for Abel, using the Scriptures was going to be central to their approach to education. I wondered if the idea to homeschool had links to Abel's background, so I asked if he had brought any ideas about homeschooling to New Zealand because it was just starting to get big over in the United States.

Abel: *No, I didn't.*

Susan: *We just started reading. We didn't have a computer at the time and no access to the internet so there wasn't that free access to information. We started getting "The Teaching Home" so we were getting one magazine. The odd book was coming through, for example the "Moore's" and we'd get the occasional tape and video.*

Abel: *It was all just horror stories about parents in North Dakota, Montana or Idaho being hauled off to jail because they refused to put their kids in a registered school.*

Susan: *Yes. We were getting tapes and videos and that sort of thing from the States and stories about the jailing of people there for homeschooling. We didn't know the scene in New Zealand and the thought we had to make sure of was, "Were we prepared to go to jail for this?"*

I added that that was a thought which had never would have occurred to me.

Susan: *So we decided, "Yes we are willing to go to jail for it". (CD. p. 56)*

I knew the family were very involved in homeschooling and suggested that once they both got involved in homeschooling in New Zealand they committed themselves not only to family, but also to a particular concept of citizenship and family responsibility in relation to the state. Abel replied:

*Yes. If we are going to do this are we just going to go underground and settle for that or are we going to take the high position, make a lot of noise, because I know what happens when you do. You stand up there, make a lot of noise as if you know everything or you know a lot about it. Then the authorities will then think he knows a lot about it, he's an expert, so they leave you alone. So we decided to take the high road and that is exactly what happened. Information just flowed our way. I soon became a lot more "gend" up on the issue than I was before. We also had the desire to let other people know about it and to share what we had discovered with other folks to help them on their way. (CD. p. 56)*

Susan: *It's keeping them protected and while you protect them training them about what's happening out there and knowing how to meet the temptations and to be strong and not give in to them. It's not shielding them from life but helping them not just cope with life but to take it by the collar and say, "hey I'm here and ready for victory all the way." It is not just schooling but this is about training. (CD. p. 60)*

Abel: *Which concerned me because you hear or read a lot more. I was just reading something, before you arrived, about democratic learning. It claimed that with homeschooling you can really get into democratic learning because in a democratic family the child can choose what they want to do and you will not veto their decision. I just reject that whole concept. As a parent I know what my seven-year-old needs. My seven-year-old doesn't have a clue. He may know what he wants but not what he needs. (CD. p. 64)*

The Smith family, in adhering to Biblical presuppositions about education, could be described as having a Fundamentalist Christian approach to homeschooling. Abel summarised their reasons for choosing to homeschool by stating:

*We started homeschooling from a Christian philosophy, and after a year went by there were so many benefits which we hadn't really anticipated that we couldn't get over it. One thing which struck me, as a person, as a father, was that this was the most fulfilling thing I had ever done.*

*We started home educating our children for a simple philosophical reason: the Biblical instructions in regards to education (who is responsible, the objectives, the subject emphases, the motivation, the methodologies) and the schooling provided by the secular state were simply too diverse for us to do anything but teach them at home ourselves.*

*We believe the state schooling system is now motivated by many other factors over and above the education of children: providing employment for teachers, earning money for school institutions and inculcating their favoured world view we believe takes precedence over the welfare of the children forced to attend. (CD. pp. 65-66)*

### The Turner Family

Mary's parents were European and she was brought up in Europe, where she was educated and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She was the youngest of three children. Her father was a senior level member of an European airline and her mother worked from home. Both of her parents had tertiary educations. Before she was married she managed customer services and technical support for a large company. After marriage she stayed home with her children.

Donald is also from a European background and his father and mother owned a plant nursery. He was the oldest of four children, has a Master's degree and was I.T. Manager of a local bank. He held the same position when they decided to homeschool their children. They had three school-aged children - Claire aged 10, David aged 8, and Janice aged 6 - and lived in an attractive home enhanced by the art and craftwork of the children being displayed throughout.

Mary was very unhappy with the teaching and learning approach of the New Zealand schools. As she said:

*Well, before we had children I would walk the dog and see these children in the school grounds, or lining up. They always seemed to be outside instead of in the school. So that, being brought up in Europe, and having this idea from my education in that part of the world I felt it should be in the classroom and hardly ever out. I started to think about homeschooling. We don't have it in Europe. (CD. pp. 66-67),*

This concern about the time New Zealand children spend outside the classroom is in contrast to the teaching practices Mary adopts when she is homeschooling. It is clear, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, that Mary makes extensive use of the local environment to expand her children's learning experiences. Mary continued:

*I read about it and I thought it was interesting. Anyway, we finally had children and I sort of got the idea to homeschool but because we are immigrants and don't have family here I thought that everybody would say, "They will have no social life, they will be social outcasts because they have no family to fall back on, no family to play with, it's just us." That's why I decided to send them to school. We lived up in Auckland then, and I was very pleased with the school. Then we moved down to Wellington, and the school here in Wellington compared to the one in Auckland was far below the standards that I expected. So I looked at it for a while and did lots of parent helping, thinking it might help change it a bit. Then my second child went to school, and he's a May child. Because there were so many five-year-olds, they put the cut off date forward to just I think a week before (he's 23 May), and they put the date forward to 15 May or something like that, so he had to do new entrants again. I thought, "that doesn't make sense." Whenever you are born in New Zealand you can go at the time of your birthday. You know that say by the time you are eight, you should be in that grade, not "Oh, but he went to the school when there were lots of five-year-olds so he stays a year behind", that didn't make sense. The fact that all he had had was composite classes didn't appeal to me either. When I looked at my daughter, Claire, she was in a Year 3-4 class, well she was always in composite classes, but I only started to notice it when she was in a Year 3-4 class. That was when I looked at her homework sheets (she was a Year 3 then), it never*

*said “Year 4 do this extra, or Year 3 you don’t have to do this”. She was in the Year 3-4 class again the next year as a Year 4 and it was the same story, so I thought she was basically doing the same year twice. (CD. pp. 66-67)*

Mary’s idea that each child would move up a class and into new learning annually, was a common European one and meant that, to her, composite classes were merely a repetition of the learning of the previous year. This became a motivation to change to homeschooling. She continues: (CD. p. 67)

*I had thought that, having three children, if each child has only one after - school activity, I would always have to take the other children along. So if one goes swimming, the other two have to tag along as well. Even if they do one activity each, then you are out in the week there are three days that are gone.*

*Also they got homework on a Monday, and they had to bring it back on the Friday. I had asked the Principal if it was possible to get the homework on Friday, and then bring it back next week but they decided to say that it was very difficult, because ‘What would you do on Friday when one worksheet would come back with answers?’ You know it was very difficult for them. They didn’t have the concept of ring binders that you can just write answers on and put it in the binder. I also thought, “this would get the fathers more involved.” The father can sit down on the weekends with the children, instead of always it being the mother having to say, “do your homework.”*

*So every time the school holidays were over, I would go back, or bring the children back to school, and start counting “10 weeks to go.” Everybody always told me I should homeschool them. I thought, “You know what, I could actually do it”, because I could moan about the school system and do nothing about it, or I could honestly say, “I could actually give the homeschooling system a try. Do it for a year and if it doesn’t work then the children will go back to school and nobody has lost anything, we will only have gained.” So, that is why we decided to do it and I’m really pleased.*

*When I told our Principal that I was taking the children out because I wanted to go homeschooling she didn’t want to listen to me - Being a blunt Dutch person - I just wanted to tell her why. I said that it is nothing personal it is just that I don’t like the school system. And she said to me, “I’m sure lots of parents can teach their children really well but nobody can*

*teach them socialising as well as a school does.”I just laughed, and I said, “there is life after school – there are sports clubs, there is music, there are friends.”Then I just knew I’d made the right decision. I think that the very word homeschooling probably makes a lot of people think that you are home all day. (CD. p. 67)*

It appeared that Mary’s decision to homeschool was based on concerns about the school her children attended and, as outlined already, her recollections of her own schooling experiences, although her response to the school terms may also have reflected her personal loneliness. I asked Mary if I was correct in presuming she had meant she talked it over with her husband even though she knew that she was the dominant person. Mary replied:

*Well, I’m the one that saw and heard what happened at school. My husband has a very busy job, and he was also studying for an MA. So he was basically coming home, eat, go up stairs and study for his MA, so I had to make the choices for the children. Initially he said to me that I don’t have the patience for it, because I am known for not having much patience. I think, he saw how determined I was, and he decided that, “Ok if you really want to do it, do it.” And after two weeks of homeschooling, he actually said to me, “They are much happier”, and that the children would now actually, when he came home, come up to him and say, “Oh you know what we did today?” They never did that when they were at school. So he was very pleased with the change. Well it was like they were happier, more interested in what they did. I’m not claiming I do a better job than the schools but I think I do. (CD. p. 68),*

I asked if they both felt that their own first language was important in the family.

Mary summarised her views:

*It probably just makes sense. We are European so I teach them perfectly in my language. I know, it sounds really pathetic, but it’s actually the little things like not having to go into town at quarter to nine in the morning. You know, “Hurry, hurry or you’ll be late and I told you to put on your shoes.” -that sort of issue. You know all the stress is gone. There are no lunches to be made, and we can have special lunches. I mean if it is a beautiful day we*

*can take the dog and go for a nature walk and that's homeschooling too.*

(CD. p.69)

Concerns about the local school, a wish to have their children bilingual and the potential flexibility of homeschooling were clearly central to Mary's and Donald's choice as well as holding on to the family in a new environment.

### **Using a theme approach**

While all the families' reasons for choosing to homeschool were very different in complexity, there were some common concerns that can be identified. These commonalities are discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. Each major factor is considered separately thus showing the responses made by these families. This enables an overview of each of the major themes. Their narratives are centred around five themes:

- Controlling their children's input into educational, social and moral learning.
- Philosophical and religious beliefs, morality and lifestyle choices.
- Concepts of family and their definitions of family rights.
- Ideas of protecting childhood.
- Concerns arising from personal schooling experiences.
- Cultural preservation, both indigenous and immigrant.

These themes, arrived at after reflection and analysis, will be summarised family by family. They will be discussed, in more detail, in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE TEACHING PRACTICES OF THE FAMILIES

The notion and practice of teaching and learning implies the development of a curriculum. This may be either structured or unstructured, but all curricula contain some ideas of sequencing from easy to difficult, simple to complex or consequential. In New Zealand, teaching is carried out usually in a school setting either by persons trained for the teaching task or by persons having specialised skills appropriate to the child's levels of education. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) prescribes this school-based teaching. Homeschooling families, however, challenge these practices and structures. The teaching parent, usually the mother, may be untrained or have no specialised skills. Families are also not obliged to follow any prescribed curricula but must submit proposed curricula and timetables before receiving their certificate of exemption. In many cases the Ministry of Education requires some additions to or revision of, proposed programmes. It is on these programmes that ERO bases its review and advice about the teaching that each family carries out. As in Chapter Five, the families' practices are presented family by family so that aspects of consistency, inconsistency, and interpretation are more clearly evident in my analysis of and reflection on each family's responses to why and how they homeschool.

#### **Family Interviews**

##### *The Abraham Family*

Melinda was the parent responsible for most of the children's education. Like all families interviewed teaching and learning was not confined to learning at home or to any set hours daily, but took advantage of circumstances and from time to time involved both parents. Melinda offered an example:

*We went to Martha Mines, earlier on this year, and we went on a tour. While we were up there I had said to the girls, "I'm allowing you to do this and this." They had different projects they needed to do. Lisa had an assignment and she needed to, in poster form, present examples of what happened to gold, or what happened to gold when it was being made into a ring. Anne had an assignment. She had to find, on the Internet and through newspaper*

*articles, the arguments for and against mining. We went on this tour, and it was very pro-mining, and we wanted her to see there were other points of view and she needed to find that we don't want mining happening here.*  
(A.C. p. 5),

Although Melinda made good use of any environment they happened to be in, she also made it clear that she was in charge of what the children learnt and how they learnt it. “*I'm allowing you to do this, and this.*” It was also clear, in this family, that there was a great deal of sharing and consultation between the parents. The areas of language and mathematics were taught the most formally by Melinda. Reading to the children was a regular practice and, while they believed that children learned naturally from others, they also believed that children needed to be taught thinking processes and how to learn. In Chapter Five, Melinda had stressed that she had not learnt how to learn independently at school. This was a good example of how a parent's experiences had shaped his or her pedagogical practices. (I wondered at this point if previous parental experiences featured in the approach to teaching in the other families). Melinda saw that part of her task was to develop the mind and teach the children to ask questions, as well as to help them become independent children. She elaborated on this as

*Learning to ask the questions - why, how, who, when. (A.C. p. 3)*

Dale refined this by saying that their emphasis was on the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. He went on to say that

*You know that whole thing of asking of who and when questions, rather than the how and the why. They need to develop minds just looking at why and how, not anyone to tell you who did it on what date. (A.C. p. 3)*

It was clear that both parents believed schools failed to do this. I was reminded that Melinda had talked about the family experience at the Martha Mine and her concern about her own lack of education in thinking. I said that I had noticed that Melinda had focused particularly on that type of thinking approach. Anne, her oldest daughter, supported my perception:

*Ask her "how do you spell this word?" She won't answer it for us. She says you bring me how you think you spell the word, or some of the word, and I'll correct it. (A.C. p. 3)*

Dale continued to expand on Melinda's style of teaching:

*Everybody is totally focused and you do a number of short drills very, very quickly to a very high standard. One hour of this is worth three hours of the other. If you choose your activities carefully they can learn a lot of the stuff without it actually seeming like school. Especially things like persistence.*  
(A.C. p. 7)

I was reminded again that some of the central issues for Melinda and Dale's teaching were the lack of faith in schools, of ideas of flexibility in intensity and time, and the importance of character-building learning.

Dale: *We have done some work on "the food of the spirit", where we have gone through specific things...*

Melinda: *Like being loving, kind, patient, peaceful to people.*

Dale: *And talked through what those mean, and we have done some activities based on these.*

Melinda: *We do teach character stuff, but the rest of it mainly happens during the day when either I have said something or in situations...(A.C. p. 5)*

This teaching of moral/ethical values could also play a part in the teaching practices of the other parents. As we were talking, the idea of an apprenticeship occurred to me. I suggested this to them. Melinda, always the practical one, replied,

*Life skills. Yes, that is the way I look at it. (A.C. p. 7)*

Again, I was thinking back to ideas of learning from the environment. This thought prompted me to ask Melinda if her teaching was in fact not basically from 9am to 3pm, as in a regular school.

Melinda: *That's true. Our real structured teaching starts at 9.00am, everyone sits down at the table at 9.00am and we have family devotions and everyday we do Mathematics. They do a page of Mathematics every day. For Mathematics we were using the New Zealand Curriculum Mathematics Plus. We have also bought the English curriculum but only for when I've run out of ideas to do. When there's not really anything to do or there is no writing I want them to do in regards to the unit that we were working on.*

Dale: *We made a conscious decision not to use set programmes because I have a feeling about set programmes, in that they work for some people, but we*

*have met a number of people for whom they haven't worked and that becomes a burden to them and they could never keep up with it. There are a couple of reasons it might not work, because you might have a programme, and it might work really well for one child and not the next, and it really puts pressure on that child who has a totally different learning style. And the other thing is that some of them say "you need to do this within the week", and if you have got everyone sick in the week, and you are trying to do it, or even if the grandparents come to visit or... Well one of the things about home schooling is, one of the practical things, you only need to be one step ahead of your child.*

Melinda: *We find that in our family we need a little bit of structure and for us it's sitting down at 9.00am and doing what we can then. But the older girls are really good now, because they know what they have to get done in the day, and they will try and get it done in a day. We try and get it done by lunchtime, don't we Anne? (A.C. pp. 6-7)*

Dale returned to his ideas on homeschooling with particular reference to the teaching side, and said:

*One of the advantages I see with home schooling is the seamless nature of it. Melinda knows during the day when a child is struggling, she knows that child so well she also notices what happened in the morning, what happened the night before. She knows their personalities too so that, that seamless nature of the education, the whole existence allows for a better learning environment. Melinda can say, "Hey, it's a bad day today for you so go and read a book." The other thing is that we are actually teaching our children to learn, so they will be able to teach themselves. We will buy the appropriate books and they will read through them and there will be times when we will both have to sit down and nut it out. (A.C. p. 8)*

My first impression was that a flexible timetable, followed by a seamless learning environment, might well be a common theme with these parents. This concept of seamless learning was seen to be eroded in a formal school setting where notions of timetables accounting for each hour of the day largely prevailed. Dale and Melinda were very clear that they designed their own curricula and only occasionally used selections from the National Curriculum. This could be contrasted to the obligations of school

teachers to follow the National Curriculum, rather than develop their own ideas. Melinda referred to her focus on developing the children's skills to learning independently, following their interests and her intimate knowledge of the children. Another feature was the amount of participation in the development of learning practices shared by both adults. Dale was the theorist while Melinda came through consistently as the more practical member of the partnership.

### *The Carpenter Family*

In keeping with their belief in a natural, or instinctual, lifestyle Kay and Peter practised a modified form of "unschooling" in their home education. This was modified to the extent that both felt a need to teach basic skills in language and mathematics. As Peter said,

*It seems to me that a person, allowed the right conditions, can do and can think freely and widely, and children can go right to the edge of the universe. (CD. p. 18)*

Kay did most of the searching for materials needed for Joseph and Anna's teaching, because Peter was involved largely in building the new home. He regreted his reduced involvement with the children and felt sorry for men who have little family contact because of work commitments. Neither parent wanted any release time from the children. Kay described their homeschooling practices as follows:

*We sort of have a weekly timetable, because we have things like we were going to the science centre quite regularly on Wednesdays. So we put down that science things happen on a Wednesday. We go to the Library on Mondays quite often, or whatever day works. For the past couple of terms it's been a Monday. Quite regularly we sit down and talk to Joseph and ask him what kinds of things he's interested in, and we also know because we see him all the time. We did that last week and wrote down what the things were he would really like to do at the moment. (CD. p. 15)*

This was clearly an example of child-directed learning, or at least a high level of shared decision making, particularly about curricula and timetables. Again this was in contrast to schools which require a regular, fixed timetable. The differences can be accounted for, to some extent, by the complex school situation and the need for shared use of

facilities, as well as the need to follow the National Curriculum. It should be noted, however, that the new National Curriculum (2007) is more flexible and allows for more teacher autonomy and accommodation for student needs and interests. It is already apparent that individualized approaches to learning are likely to be a strong feature of these families.

Peter went on to talk about their teaching approach and of a love of learning and learning to learn, by saying:

*There's a lot more autonomy with the child, with the student, with the person really, which is what I'm hoping for. I'm hoping that we are helping to sow the seeds of self-confidence, self esteem. If we can foster that I'll be happy. Also a love of learning. Gee well, I'll be thinking we've done all right. If a lot of other things happen in life Joseph and Anna will make up their own minds about life, but if we can give them a good start like that, well I'll be happy. (CD. p. 15)*

This is in contrast to the findings of Baldwin (1993) and of McAlevey (1995) that homeschoolers are conservative in their thinking and approach to learning. However, it does emphasize again their readiness to allow child-directed learning. While child-directed learning was clearly very significant there was also some structure to learning, which was added by the parents, as Kay's weekly timetable on the wall by the table showed. Clearly this use of a timetable, framed around family cultural activities, took priority. As Peter had suggested, this related to their group of broadly based learning objectives and was very far from being conservative. Kay demonstrates this use of the community when talking about learning away from home:

*Like tomorrow we're going to the play up at Massey. They are just things that are on so we go. We went down to a concert in Wellington put on by the Symphony Orchestra for children. So we're free to do those things. As long as we find out about them. One of the difficulties is finding out about them and being able to book in.*

Peter: *She has to do a lot of sifting through and ringing up and locating. She's very good at it and you've got to be very proactive otherwise you'll miss the door. She's good at researching information. She enjoys it.*

Kay: *I really like doing that with Joseph. We go to the Library and I'm good at finding all the resources. All the things in the area of what he likes. (CD. p. 16)*

Kay recognised her children's natural curiosity and their different approaches to learning. She also accepted her teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy, areas in which Joseph is now independent. Talking of the differences she saw between Joseph and Anna, Kay explained:

*He, Joseph, is always keen. He's keen to read, keen to learn. He will pick something and go with that. But I think his personality is that way also. He will move with something, he likes it to be presented to him. Anna's is a different approach. She will go out and chip away at something to find what she wants. (CD. p. 16)*

Again, catering for individual differences is a key feature. In fact Peter articulated ideas similar to those of the Abrahams on life skills, adding to Kay's comment by saying:

*The other cool thing is that, I mean with Joseph and Anna, their learning is very much a part of our day as well. So learning to do the things that, the basic skills, you call them living skills, those which involve anything from eating to talking or going out to social events. That's part of it. We consider that very much a part of learning. (CD. p. 17)*

This was a feature of the Carpenter's homeschooling in that they recognised, and catered for, the varied learning styles and approaches to learning. While using a high level of communicative skills, both Kay and Peter having been teachers may have made this identification of differences more likely. Peter's declaration about a need for children to learn to be more confident and to love learning may have arisen from his observations of his siblings' negative experiences at school. Kay picked up on this and said:

*We've had to because we talk about all of us being able to live together. This way we actually need to work together and they are quite happy to work together with us.*

*Many times I'll learn from Joseph and Anna. There's no one-way. We don't do Monday to Friday either. We try to make sure we can do things so that all of us are involved. We also have a specific spiritual sort of a thing that the children and we look at each day. (CD. p. 17)*

Three things emerged here. The first was that they freely acknowledged that they had learnt from their children. This is not the case in many schools where teachers are expected to be the authorities. The second was similar to that demonstrated by the Abrahams at Matha Mines, where learning outside of 'school hours' was a common family practice. Third, again like the Abrahams, in purpose if not in content, they focused deliberately on the spiritual or moral values of the family. Peter elaborated on Kay's idea of spirituality by saying:

*A theme, or a kaupapa, for the day. For example one day might be 'giving'. The kids really like that. I was amazed. It was Kay's idea about themes, but the kids have taken it on board and they ask what day it is. Then they think about how could they give something to or do something for somebody else. They can respond to quite high ideals if you sit and talk at their level. They are humans like us and that's the thing. We don't expect them to act like adults, but we know that they can operate by doing something of good value because it makes somebody else feel better or it helps the world to be more equal. They understand those ideas quite well.*

Kay: *Well there's that really nice example last year, we went to Peter's great aunt's ninetieth birthday. Part of it was experience for Joseph, family history and meeting all these people. He met there another of Peter's great aunts who is blind. We were organising what we were going to do. We were doing a presentation, and Joseph was very concerned about Peter's brother and sister-in-law who are deaf and the aunt who is blind. Joseph said, "What about aunt...? She won't be able to see it and he can't hear it." So we said, "Yes we are going to do it on the overhead projector so they can see and be part of it. He said, "What about the one that can't see? What are we going to do about her?" We said, "Well what could we do? We will need to speak very clearly so she can hear." Then he was concerned because one of the clues - Anna and I were meant to be fish and she wouldn't have been able to see it. (CD. p. 17)*

In keeping with their tendency towards a modified unschooling approach, as in the sense first proposed by Holt (1969) and defined in Chapter Five, they did not "import" any curriculum from elsewhere. Here, it might be recalled that both parents were teachers and necessarily had an understanding of curricula. Kay explained:

*It wasn't actually such a problem for us because both of us knew the curriculum. We covered actually a wide range of the curricula areas, which was quite good. I couldn't believe that we received the curriculum documents after we had received exemption, and I made that point to the Ministry. (CD. p. 20)*

In later correspondence speaking of unschooling, Kay stated that: (CD. p. 22)

*Considering the children have never been schooled "unschooling" isn't really an appropriate term and we quite like the term "free range education". As he has got older Joseph doesn't like my input so much and often he is left to find out what he wants. He has also demonstrated a strong desire to use the computer. This is a challenge to me in accepting his autonomy in an area where he and I have very different outlooks. He also goes to 'one day school' and loves seeing other children once a week. He will take what he wants from it. He is, unfortunately, coming across some school behaviour which we find challenging. The inherent competitiveness is one. (CD. p. 22)*

"One day school" was held once a week in a city primary school and focused on children with special abilities. The Carpenters were open to using carefully selected school-based education, but not the National Curriculum. This "one day school" was used always at their son Joseph's discretion. The Carpenters also designed their own curricula, made differentiated approaches to learning, taught the basic skills of Language and Mathematics, and facilitated child-directed learning. They also directed some of the learning, and believed in the notion of natural learning with significant child participation in programme design and selection. They were also very strong in adapting to the learning style of each of their children, with the parents acting as facilitators for the child. Their teaching also echoed very closely their reasons for choosing to homeschool, which were close to their New Age beliefs and particularly with their concepts of shared learning. The family illustrated the idea of child participation, not only in educational situations but also as part of a family, in living skills, social responsibility, moral and ethical values. To some extent the teaching programmes were coloured by both parents' experiences as teachers, and by the experiences Peter had of the damage done at school to his own siblings.

*The Dunn and Gain Families*

Carmen came from a strong educational background and was of the opinion that children were natural learners. The term ‘natural learners’, in this context, is based on the belief that once children have mastered the basic skills of literacy and numeracy their own curiosity would move them to seek and learn those aspects of learning they saw a need for or those which interested them. Hence, these parents saw their first educational task as being to provide these basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Sometimes this meant direct teaching. Carmen’s approach to education had evolved over time and was basically one of unschooling. Together with Rita’s, it was the most radical, in practice, of all those whose narratives I shared. As Carmen explained:

*I’ve never used the New Zealand Curriculum. I started off using different textbooks and things which I heard about through the homeschooling conferences or through places like Edex and School Supplies. As I’ve got more confident and gained more trust in the kids my children are now almost totally unschooled. This means I do believe that children will learn what they need to learn when they want to learn it. There have been a couple of times when I’ve really had to struggle against my own schooling beliefs and prejudices. (CD. p. 26)*

She used an example of both unschooling and natural learning when she went on to say,

*Jess [speaking to her eldest daughter], do you remember that I was trying to persuade you to do hand writing and you argued back that it wasn’t important because you said you could email and use the computer. Do you want to tell Leo when you decided that it was important for you to be able to handwrite well? No, OK. Jess, like most ten or eleven year old girls, is absolutely horse mad. So we sent her away for her birthday, I think for a weeklong camp. Part of it was that you had to do pony care. Part of it was their riding and part of it was that they, in this case Jess, had to keep a journal of what they did each day. They were quite keen on the journal being a hand written journal. At the end of the camp they said that Jess had done exceedingly well in pony care, her riding was excellent, but unfortunately because her journal was badly written she missed out on one of the top awards. However I do believe that children have to be responsible for their*

*own learning and their own motivation. Then camp finished on Sunday and on Monday she said that she would quite like to learn to do handwriting. So we sat down together and for no more than twenty minutes each day, I worked with her as she practised her italic writing. Within probably two months Jess went from that to this beautiful cursive style. Just beautiful writing, and she is really proud not only that she can write so well but that she did it herself! It was her choice, she did the work and she reaps the results of it. It was awful that she had to go through that experience. It's not what I would have ideally liked to happen at all but the basic premise is true; once she felt and saw the need to do it, she was highly motivated to practise each day. I think that works with everything. Maths, of course, works with pocket money and buying lollies and what not and saving for things. Also doing carpentry and baking, hands-on things like that. So generally I go for the unschooling thing. Secondly I facilitate. They say they want to do anything whether it's art or maths or science or whatever and my job is to make sure they get that opportunity. Whether it's paying for classes or finding somebody else who can talk to them about it or teach them a skill that I don't possess. Jess is now doing voluntary work down at the riding corrals here. (CD. p. 27)*

Carmen was passionate about practical experience from local experts who exercise these skills from personal conviction. This passion, she believed, led to an enthusiastic response in the child, even where initially this came through modelling or imitating the artisan. Preschool or junior classes are excellent places to observe these childhood passions, but these appear to get lost as the child develops. This notion could link directly to the rights of children, as described in Chapter Five. As she explained:

*I think people say Jess shouldn't be spending so much time with horses. She's neglecting her studies. I don't think many people really grasp how a passion in one subject can lead into almost every other field. For example, while studying Ireland we also delved into religious freedom, what defines a patriot, freedom of speech, colonialism, the concept of what freedom means to different people, the importance of folksongs, poetry and folk stories as well as the authorised biographies etc. It is just a huge smorgasbord of different interests and passions stemming from one subject. (CD. p.29)*

This notion of the expert's passion for his or her chosen vocation and the need for her children to be exposed to this passion, and to learn from it, was very central to her educational beliefs. She continued:

*I'm also teaching the children to use that way of thinking. There's no point me saying, "Right I'll do that." I am constantly striving to empower them, which often means sitting back and letting them stumble about until they figure something out for themselves instead of just stepping in and taking over which can be really tempting! (CD. p. 30)*

Her friend, and fellow homeschooler, Rita agreed:

*They are given the freedom so therefore when they latch onto something they are really interested in it. They are absolutely involved in it. They have the freedom to immerse themselves. Watch our children when they are into something. For example we spent three weeks studying praying mantises then butterflies. We watched them and we got books on them. It was all he concentrated on and he was free to do that. Now he remembers everything about them because he wanted to learn.*

*But also I've tried lots of different ways with Charles to discover what approach to learning suits him best. Some children thrive on doing two pages and saying, "Right I can see what I've done today." If that's what they enjoy that's great. I like whatever suits them. (CD. p. 34)*

Like the Abrahams and the Carpenters, Rita demonstrated the homeschooling parents' opportunities to take advantage of the child's preferred learning style and to facilitate it. This is obviously something that is not readily possible in a school classroom situation, which often has thirty plus students. Carmen also expressed her opinion that she would not be concerned if a learner showed no interest in learning to read up until ten or eleven years of age:

*I mean, two weeks after Rob's seventh birthday we were on the "Cat in the Hat" and those dreadfully boring phonics books. By the time he was seven and a half, he was reading Harry Potter and he could read anything. Having the confidence to wait and having the confidence in Rob, my son, that when he was motivated and ready he would pick reading up easily. This he did! (CD. p. 35)*

Waiting for readiness and stimulating child confidence is a message common to many educators. Carmen was very active in her role of facilitator, as demonstrated similarly by the other homeschooling parents I interviewed. As she said,

*Probably not with the basic teaching them to read and write and their numbers, that's hands on, but once they can do that... (CD. p. 24)*

Carmen made an important point about ignoring the poor subject balance of learning that happens in homeschooling commitment when she stated:

*I don't think you can really view a homeschooled child's education until they've finished it because their progression is more spotty. They may be absolutely immersed in maths for example and therefore way ahead of their school-aged peers but perhaps not as advanced in science. Then maybe next month or next year, they will become immersed in some scientific endeavour and race ahead in that area. (CD. p. 24)*

Carmen has had many visits from ERO as a result of her ex-husband's complaints to the Ministry of Education. These visits continued, despite a series of positive reports by ERO staff. She hoped that something could be done to rectify this situation. Carmen said:

*I don't think that the Ministry really understands how very threatening the review process is to homeschooling families because it is not just the child's education at stake. It is actually the way we parent, the entire way we live our lives, that is under threat every time we have a review. I am not saying whether or not the reviews should take place. I am just pointing out that the stress created by the idea of being reviewed is very real and very detrimental to the education process. (CD. p. 26)*

The Dunn and Gain families practiced unschooling in keeping with Carmen's belief that children are natural learners. Both parents also encouraged their children to work and learn with local artisans and experts so that they learnt from those with a passion for what they did. However, she did teach literacy and numeracy directly but only when the two families believed the child was ready to learn these skills. Her friend Rita was clearly following an approach similar to that of Carmen.

*The Kupe Family*

Hera's practices were, by her own description, eclectic. She summarised her practices well and her belief in education - like Carmen, Rita, the Abrahams and the Carpenters - as a part of family life when she said:

*The description I think that fits me best is eclectic, that is a horribly difficult word to pronounce but it does stand for lots of methods and it is right for me. I draw from a range of sources of learning and philosophies and I'm constantly reading. I don't have enough hours in a day to keep up with what I want. (CD. p. 41)*

Hera adopted a number of approaches and functions, often as a facilitator and sometimes as an educator. She avoided the notion of teacher because home education, in her mind, bore no relation to teacher or school. Hera supported this by saying:

*I guess that from where you start to where you end up getting to, in a home context, is where life and learning become intermingled. They are not separated out. You broaden your view of learning. We did have some chairs and desks given to us. The kids actually liked them and thought it was quite fun but I didn't. It seemed too much like school. (CD. p. 42)*

It is worth noting the similarity of her reaction to desks to that of Abel Smith's response (to follow). One of the reasons Hera decided on homeschooling her children was to put them in touch with their culture and whanau. Hence many of her practices were focused around this aspect. The children were, allowing for their ages, fluent in Maori and able to practise Maori culture. They delighted in waiata and its accompaniment. Toru, her son, and Hera joined together in a lovely waiata. Hera explained:

*We do a lot of singing in the car as we travel between places. We have a waiata book in the car and Tahi plays the guitar. (CD. p. 43)*

She ensured the children were fluent in both languages and in mathematics. This bilingual fluency and learning revolved around practical experience. The experience ranged from accompanying her to Kohanga Reo and helping the younger pupils on one day a week, to whanau visits and research in museums and libraries, frequently from a

Maori perspective. The culture, especially the language aspects of Maori culture, were clearly very important to Hera. As she explained:

*I'm absolutely convinced that the minority language needs a lot of emphasis. If they are to be truly bilingual they have so much opportunity to practise English in the wider community and not nearly so much to develop their Te Reo Maori so I place emphasis on it.*

Hera gave another example of this when they studied the voyages of Kupe:

*I was looking out the window and thinking that you can do things like everybody else does and fit that kind of mode if you want to but you also have the freedom to not do so. That's the way we've decided to go. Yes, we are very eclectic and we don't have that kind of rhythm. Again that changes; we spend a lot of time focused on family issues. When my sister and her husband, who live down the road, went to Tokelau, he's from Tokelau, for six months it was hugely significant in our family life therefore our focus was on the Pacific Island and Tokelau. We were able to go to Te Papa and do lots of things at the discovery place. The Mana Education Centre, locally, lots of resources and again just made lots of things available to my kids, like going to "Voyages" recently. I knew it would be a really wonderful exhibition. You can take so many angles. We had done some Treaty of Waitangi and Kupe and this was a chance to get some new information. We've done some space studies and looked at the Maori New Year, in June, when we focused on the sky and constellations and again the navigation by stars linked them to Kupe. (CD. p. 42)*

I had been thinking about how this seemed to relate to her ideas of culture and the extended family. I then asked if sharing learning was very much a part of her programme and that, perhaps, it was very much culturally centred.

Hera replied:

*Oh yes, that is the only way to go! (CD. p. 42)*

I went on with the culture-related idea and explained that I felt she still had a significant input. I had noticed her saying that they were going to look at something because it was interesting or it related directly to the family. Hera again responded:

*Yes, but you have to balance it all the time. What I find is that there are so many opportunities going on in our local community. "Te Pataka" is a*

*wonderful place and we spend a lot more time at the library than we would have had if we had been at school.*

I followed on, asking her about socialization. She replied:

*Yes, it's so interesting, well for me it's a total non-issue. I just know that they have so many opportunities outside the school context to connect with others in meaningful ways. And I have to say probably that the social aspect was one thing at school, that I questioned more and more, because I do think that people forget that kids learn a lot of mostly negative social behaviour at school and I certainly had seen that. (CD. p. 42)*

This led, after elaboration on socialization, to talking about preferred ways of learning.

Hera explained:

*That is just responding to the kids as they give you messages about what works and what doesn't. I think that's a trend you would find in all homeschooling parents. (CD. p. 41)*

Hera was quite correct in her assumption, as far as the interviewed families were concerned, that catering for individual difference was a feature and that practices evolved over time. She said that she had,

*Started off from a more formal approach but now we free flow. I felt the pressure that the Ministry expected that [9am to 3pm teaching] when I started. I also felt the pressure that my family expected. My Dad will still sometime say, "Is school in?" My reply is that, "School is not ever in but life and learning are constantly in." (CD. p. 42)*

Hera elaborated on the seamless nature of most homeschooling family learning:

*So much so that in some terms we have been too busy. Some times I find it really good when we have a few days at home but there is so much available out there within the homeschool network, which is really fabulous, and is very well established. I can't wait until the homeschool newsletter comes out. It's always full of information and lots of opportunity to determine where our focus could be in the next month or so. Again that is purely optional. We might get inspiration from it or we might not. Usually we do. I knew we could go out on our own but I knew of the advantage of going with the group and having a person showing us around and supplying*

*information. In a home context life and learning become intermingled. (CD. p. 42)*

Hera was, however, very much in control of what and where her children learnt, aware of the wealth of learning experiences available in the community, and was evolving a form of seamless learning. Her teaching was oriented towards bilingualism and a commitment to re-establishing the extended family, or whanau. Hera also taught bilingual literacy and numeracy and encouraged child participation in choosing other programmes, provided they did not encroach on her perceptions of “taha Maori”.

### *The O'Donnell Family*

Moira's approach was based strongly on what she considered the children needed, while catering for their approach to learning. It was a mix of what she thought was appropriate and what the child liked. For example, they all had Spanish lessons and learnt the piano. In her mind the first year of homeschooling was relatively straightforward. As she said,

*The youngest was still at kindergarten and I actually kept her at kindergarten for that first year while we found our feet. So the people management was a simpler issue and there was also a very distinct timetable as she [the youngest child] was at kindergarten from 8.45am until 11.45am and the other two recognised that as a kind of a more formal work time. Once Helen joined us, when she turned five, it put a little bit more pressure on because she was at the point where she took a lot of time with learning to read and that kind of thing. Trying to organise everybody else and keeping everybody occupied was more difficult than the first year. (CD. p. 47)*

It was clear that, despite some time pressures created by the youngest child, the older girls had a significant input into the learning focus. Once the children became literate and numerate, Moira intended to become a facilitator in much the same way as had Kay Carpenter, Carmen, and Rita. I had thought about her teaching and organization, and asked if she had started with a formal curriculum. She replied:

*We didn't start with what I term a packaged curriculum. We started off with the idea that they first of all needed to be literate and numerate because up to a point, once you could do those things then you could open the doors to whatever you wanted to do after that. So I used a variety of bits and pieces. I*

*try to follow what they're interested in and try to develop material for them. I'm starting to feel almost at the point where I can say that I will let them go. That they will do. (CD. p. 49)*

In Moira's case this focus on literacy and numeracy was in response to Bridget's reaction to her school experiences that had turned her child off the joys of reading for a long time. Moira's approach to these aspects was to wait for interest to be shown, then to facilitate and encourage the learning. However, by reading to the children as a daily and extended practice, there was some implied priority given to language development. This idea of encouragement tied into her whole teaching pattern. As she explained:

*Certainly we found that with Bridget. She didn't want to read anything when we took her out of school. She had a negative attitude and most of that first year we didn't insist on her reading very much but I read to them every day and then she actually decided that she wanted to read. (CD. p. 49)*

She and the children also spent some time each day as Moira said:

*Playing around with geometric concepts. I've got little idea of geometry. One of the things I felt at school was that I could never understand the relevance of maths. Well I think a lot of things you were taught, particularly in the maths area, were not relevant. I did Mathematics to the seventh form and I passed but really I had no idea of what the point of any of that stuff was. It's only really recently, when I've decided to go back and look, that I can grasp what the point was. Bridget is particularly interested in art and I think that there are a lot of mathematical applications possible, particularly with computers. (CD. p. 49)*

She indicated that, as a student, she could not see the point of much that was taught as "mathematics". However, she is the first of these families to introduce modern technology as an important element in younger children's learning. From my observations I had become aware that, in all of the families, at least one parent was a regular user of a computer, particularly in facilitating children's learning. Moira elaborated on this point later and brought to notice some interesting ideas about schooling and the feeble efforts schoolteachers made to adapt to this development. Some children, from other families, used computers, but not as part of a serious learning process. Perhaps this was because of costs or the lack of skills in the teaching parents.

Moira then went on to talk about what she perceived as the value of extra curricula activity.

*We also go to piano lessons during school time which is an advantage because the teacher is very booked up. She teaches some children during the school lunch hour, which I think would be putting an awful lot of pressure on the children. Eat your lunch in the car on the way to the music teacher then go back to school. There are children who go to her at 8 o'clock in the morning but we just tootle up to her on Thursday afternoon. You can be much more relaxed about time. We had three terms at the pool during school hours. We hooked into the school's programme there and we had a group of homeschooling children that went and learnt flipperball, a water safety course and diving. We have a Spanish lesson once a fortnight. I also find that the children can approach these things feeling refreshed rather than having just rushed from school. They can also devote time to being well prepared for outside activities. (CD. p. 48)*

These parents took frequent advantage of the opportunity to utilise the resources of the local community during 'school' hours. The children spoke with joyful recollections of experiences in a TV presentation, observing through the Carter Observatory telescope, visiting a berry farm, and about how they used these experiences. This brought into focus again the notion of education in the wider world. With the continued parental emphasis on supplementary education, usually after school hours, child fatigue could be a factor. As Moira explained:

*We do a lot more things together. We perhaps think about things being educational opportunities more than what we would have done before. We still went to museums and things but I think now I probably keep more of an eye out for opportunities that are available in the community to extend the children. When they were at school I would not have looked for it as much. The children have always related pretty well to each other, and I think if anything their relationships are stronger from doing more together. (CD. p. 47)*

While the use of the local community continued to play a significant part, it was the notion of family which was again brought to my attention. I asked if, by homeschooling,

there was more opportunity for the family to take advantage of the things that were around them. She replied,

*Absolutely. Yes, one of the things that the children love is that you can go to the swimming pool without anybody else being there. Staff at the wave pool will turn on the waves just for you. Those kinds of things and you can go to all of those kinds of things like museums and art galleries etcetera when they are not really over populated. This is a great opportunity because often you get more of an opportunity to find a person who is trained, and when there are only a few kids they can spend a lot more time with them going through things and the kids get more of an opportunity to follow through on their questions and ideas than when you are in a big group competing to get your hand up to get attention. (CD. pp. 47-48)*

This notion of “getting attention” perhaps linked up to the attention she got from her mother, (as the teacher for the Correspondence School), that was possibly missed by her when she had to go to school. However, still with the thought of curriculum and timetabling in mind, I asked if she had followed a set timetable. Moira explained:

*Less and less as time goes by. I think the more that I’ve read about unschooling the more that I’d like to be an unschooler, but I find there is a leap of faith to be made by trusting that the children will get to a place when and how they choose. Ensuring they achieve their potential is the thing that concerns me. (CD. p. 48)*

I replied that I thought she described a homeschooling parent’s situation very well. Being prepared to wait was the essential factor, as well as catering for different approaches to learning. Moira again demonstrated that most of the parents of these children vigorously pursued knowledge of educational practice and theory. One of these was, and still is, catering for individual differences. I asked her about this factor. Moira responded:

*Yes. Helen [the youngest child] with her writing, she likes to write for practical purposes. She’s just organised, in writing, a birthday party for her toys. Writing out all these cards for the one toy whose birthday it was. The practical use of writing. Otherwise she decides that she wants to practise writing so she gets out a book and copies it from end to end. Something that I would not think to actually suggest to her but just something that she’s decided she likes doing. She hasn’t quite got to the point that she does all*

*that much creative writing. I think that will probably happen. There's a lot of imaginary stuff gone into the birthday party. (CD. pp. 48-49)*

I asked if she was moving towards child-directed, rather than child-centred, education.

Moira answered:

*Yes we started being a little more formal and we now have a few basic rules. Such as that you can't use the computers before lunchtime unless there is a really compelling reason to. I've been quite impressed with the way that they have learned. I haven't really taught them library skills as such but we do go to the library at least once a week and they know how to get onto that computer at the library, look up things they are looking for and find things that they need. They mightn't know it's called the Dewey Decimal System but can use those numbers on the back of books to get what they want. I think that the practical going to the library each week has been more valuable than no matter how many lessons you could give them on library skills. Even with things like baking a cake the maths is much more useful as they are measuring in a practical way for a purpose. I think there are a lot of practical skills they gain with easy access.*

*With technology they can fairly much do what they want when they want, which means that they develop a whole lot of familiarity with it. I have felt that with the use of technology they think they are doing something in the real world. That is a major consideration because it is more and more difficult to go and find a carpenter, say, to give kids meaningful things to do, that real adults do. I think that technology can provide those opportunities. For example go to Dad's office and see the computer on his desk and he does things on the computer and that's just what they are doing too. (CD. pp. 49-51)*

This was further evidence that some homeschooling families made significant use of modern technology. I asked if modern technology was likely to become a significant part of her teaching, or learning approach. I explained that I had noticed that Moira had three computers at home and that all of the children used them very confidently. I also asked if she believed her own computer literacy was adequate. She replied,

*It's pretty good and the children have not quite caught up. I'm still ahead. We're just working through "Hyperstudio". I got it two years ago but they weren't ready for it. We are working through it together. It's a programme that has a huge capacity to do almost anything that you want. In the last couple of weeks I've been reading "Mind Storms". It's about children and computers and powerful ideas. Bridget is particularly interested in art and I think that there are a lot of mathematical applications, particularly with computers. Having a grasp of the maths for computing and graphics could be helpful. (CD. p. 49)*

Moira and her husband had clearly thought about ways of giving their children meaningful things to do and about sharing practical skills. Dory was a strong participant in the planning and the choices of learning approaches. They regularly discussed the children's learning. As Moira explained:

*Dory sits down regularly with each of the children to talk about what they have been doing. He is also very supportive and open to new ideas about education and learning. Although neither of us had heard of unschooling three years ago we are of one mind that it has a lot to offer. We regularly discuss much of the learning theory I have picked up through extensive reading and have concluded that homeschooling has the potential to change education in New Zealand. This is related to our belief in catering for the needs and interests of each child and that learning should be closely linked to the family. For example we have, every two or three weekends, a piano concert where they will sit down and do a recital. I have now found my vocation. (CD. p. 51)*

As a final comment, Moira, in an afterthought very similar to Hera's, added:

*I would like to mention the great support there is among homeschoolers. Our local support group has a great newsletter, motivated parents organizing activities and a good library. I have had great support from others through e-mail networks both in NZ and overseas. I think the Internet has made a big dent in removing some of the isolation that may have been associated with homeschooling in the past. I also think that it also has the potential to totally change the shape of education in the future if those with vested interests in the status quo can be circumvented. (CD. Comment, p. 54)*

The O'Donnells were strong supporters of their children learning to use modern technology. As Moira said "*technology can provide opportunities*". She was also very involved in the local support group and a frequent user of the activities organised for the families. She made extensive use of the local support group to provide extra curriculum learning and opportunities for experiences for their children. She and Dory also made sure their children were exposed to a variety of extra-curricula activities. Moira had been quick to recognise that her teaching style was still evolving. She had moved away from formal or semi-formal learning towards a less structured learning process with greater child input. Individualising programmes, according to the children's needs and approaches to learning, was a strong feature of her approach.

### The Smith Family

This was a family who were very confident in the decisions they had made. They had made homeschooling a total lifestyle. They related their teaching and learning practices to Christian philosophy. As Abel explained:

*We started homeschooling, from a Christian philosophy, and after a year went by there were so many benefits which we hadn't really anticipated that we couldn't get over it. One thing which struck me, as a person, as a father, was that this was the most fulfilling thing I had ever done. (CD. p. 55)*

Susan made it clear that their teaching had evolved when she claimed that:

*We used a curriculum in the early years for a couple of years. Later we were really busy for about six months and used the same curriculum again. We've used mathematics curricula all the way through but we've changed curricula there as well. But everybody who has homeschooled like us realized that it was not just schooling but this was about training. (CD. p. 61)*

The training notion suggested a firm degree of parental control. This control aspect, as they illustrated, was linked particularly to teaching concepts derived from their reading of the Bible. Susan continued and developed the idea of education being derived from practical and applied experiences:

*Our children have had lots and lots of jobs, and none of them have gone looking for jobs. They've started with jobs quite young. Gloria would have been 12 or 13. She asked this lawyer what she'd need to do to learn to*

*become a lawyer. A year later he went out on his own and asked her to join him. So for two to three years, for a couple of hours a day, she was just helping out then when she turned 16 he hired her fulltime and he put her through a legal executive course. By 18 she was a fully-fledged legal executive with \$20,000 plus in the bank. Also this lawyer came back to us to see if there was another homeschooler who would be able to go into his office and work and then he ended up with three homeschoolers in his office. Zachariah has had jobs off and on. He worked for a self-made mechanic all day on Tuesdays. Sometimes they would go over to Dannevirke stripping down a car or they re-piled a house. He learnt about a lot of things he didn't think he wanted to do but he really had enjoyed it. (CD. p. 59)*

I wondered about the idea of catering for individual experiences and of different approaches to learning, and suggested that it seemed to me that Zachariah and their daughters had different approaches to learning. Abel replied:

*They did. Gloria she's very academic. We had her on Carey College Correspondence from about 13 onwards so for three years she was doing six hours a day which was what the programme demanded. When she finished that she wrote a curriculum for each of her siblings. We didn't keep to that very long. Zac couldn't handle that sort of stuff at all. One year was enough for him. Cha doesn't have any academic aspirations but she's a lot more involved in other things than the others. She's likely to become a piano player, an artist, or dancer. She does highland dancing. She is good in a lot of things but there is nothing that she shines in. She is a better artist than most in piano and dance. (CD. p. 60)*

They were also very quick to recognise different approaches to learning. As Susan said, *If it's within the child's learning style then everything is going to be 'cruisey'. (CD. p. 61)*

Clearly the Smiths accepted and catered for different interests as well as different approaches to learning. It was noticeable that they also allowed Zac to learn by error.

Second language learning is also often linked to extra curricula learning. I had noted it had also been encouraged by Carmen and both Hera and Mary. It also appeared that the Smiths were placing a great emphasis on learning more than one second-language, and I

asked if this was a part of their educational beliefs, as was learning outside of the home.

Susan continued:

*Cha has done German for a year. That was lessons outside the home, and Jem took Spanish for a year at home and I've got the Greek alphabet so I've got the beginnings of teaching Greek. I want Cha to help me teach it even though she hasn't done Greek either. She's helping me with the Latin with the little ones because she's been doing that and she's teaching herself. They have all had piano lessons, outside of home, from a piano teacher. Also dancing and art and Josh has had trumpet. (CD. p. 61)*

I wondered why she decided to teach Latin. Susan answered:

*There are a lot of reasons. I'm not sure of the research on this but there is research that says that children who have studied Latin do better than any other student. I'm not sure if it was just bright children who were doing Latin that the tests were based on or whether it was across the board children who were doing Latin that showed that those that do Latin do better in their studies. (CD. p. 61)*

This theme of extra-curricula activity was once again a recurring one with these families. What was also clear was that the Smith parents placed a high value on academic achievement and were very willing to have their older children contribute significantly to the younger one's learning. Susan was very happy to learn from her children or research educational content and style. I asked both Abel and Susan if there was anything that they felt had gone wrong in their homeschooling that they would like to tell me about. Susan responded:

*I'd be more protective of the children I think. Particularly with one of our children. We let them have too much freedom too soon before they were ready. So we would pull them in. Children love that security. We are doing that with the two younger ones. It's keeping them protected, and while you protect them you are training them about what's happening out there and knowing how to meet the temptations and to be strong and not give in to them. It's not shielding them from life but helping them not just cope with life, but to take it by the collar and say, hey I'm here and ready for victory all the way. It's about the whole of life, and it's about everything in a whole*

*life. The books and the curricula that we recommend now are based on this because we understand what it is all about. (CD. p. 60)*

It was very clear that, to the Smiths, control, particularly with the younger children, was a central objective, with the assumption that older ones had learnt from earlier experience in a controlled environment. While training is, to a degree, a natural outcome of all family situations, in the homeschooling situation it can become a central issue, as in the Smith family. They perceived protection and training as hand in hand, and as a major part of their responsibility as homeschooling parents. I suggested that from the sound of things they had not used a fixed curriculum for everything. Did they now use their own selected curricula? Susan replied:

*Yes. We find the children are able to do in two hours of formal studies, at home, what could easily take two weeks to accomplish in a classroom situation. It allows them to pursue subjects to a greater depth and to ask us how it fits into the 'Big Picture' of life. (A. p. 61)*

Susan and Abel saw this as one of the strengths of home education. Susan also made a very strong statement on the importance of adult reading:

*I'd say that the most important thing for any home educator, the very most important thing - there is nothing else that can compare with it - is that the parents read for themselves. (CD. p. 62)*

I suggested that they had given their children a very wide base for their learning. Susan again:

*Yes, as wide as I can. I try and read to the children for two hours a day. I don't look at the clock but I try to read to them a whole heap each day. That covers all kinds of different books which go from biographies to "How to do it" books. Whatever is interesting the boys at the time. (CD. p. 62)*

I asked if they had set out with a school type structure. Abel responded:

*Yes we did. We had like a normal classroom. The thing that got me was that I did the classic thing, set out the desks, cracked the whip and had my desk out the front. They had to come up and go back and every five minutes have a drink of water so finally I figured, "I'll fix you guys" so I grabbed a history textbook, there's nothing more dry than a history textbook, personally I like*

*history, and I thought I'll enjoy myself so said, "Come on you guys sit on my lap and I'll read you a story." I thought they would quickly get bored and want to get back to their desks but what I found was that I had to explain what that meant, and I found myself saying "Hey do you guys know what that means?" An hour and a half later I'm as dry as dust, my legs had gone to sleep and it struck me that these guys wanted me to keep going and their attention span went from zip to at least an hour and a half. A couple of experiences like that and later it suddenly dawned on me that it's a whole new thing, and we all enjoyed it a 100%. What's more, they remembered it. (CD. p. 61)*

Abel concluded with an expression of what he saw was an important contrast between school and home education. He had already made it clear how they have evolved their practices from experience.

*I saw that the school system is for school but when you are at home the tutoring and the mentoring system is the thing. It's a totally different ball game. (CD. p. 62)*

This was an important comment from Abel who saw himself taking a very different standpoint from what he had earlier. Some months after our first meeting he sent me a footnote to our discussion. His comments were really a summary of the family position, and also covered aspects not discussed previously.

*We home educate now for a host of benefits and also other philosophical considerations we hadn't anticipated at first. Our family cohesion and closeness have been enhanced. We are thrilled to be among the only truly independent educators in New Zealand. The children never felt rejected by being dropped off at some institution for most of the day, five days a week, most of the year. We as parents got to see the light of understanding go on in their eyes again and again. They have never asked us, "Why do I have to learn this?" They also have a lot more freedom and flexibility to pursue to a greater depth their own areas of interest. We are convinced that home education is a viable option for virtually any family. (CD. Comments, pp. 65-66)*

Abel and Susan had created most of their own curricula based on their beliefs in the Scriptures and their belief that younger children need more control over their learning.

They also encouraged apprentice-type learning for the older ones, and were actively involved in establishing a good work ethic in their children. It followed that work or a successful career was a central issue for them. Susan supported this concept, and explained:

*Of course doing the chores, the working around the house, is creating a good work ethic. If you don't learn a good work ethic you are very much handicapped in this modern world. (CD. p.57)*

### The Turner Family

Like many of the homeschooling families interviewed, Mary, like Abel Smith, started from a formal approach to learning with regular times for each subject. As she said:

*I am actually quite strict. I want the children to do English and Maths, for an hour each day, although Friday is their day off, that is basically my day off too. But that is when we don't school, but for the other four days I wanted them to do an hour of Maths and an hour of English each day because I think that is important. (CD. p. 68)*

It needs to be noted that having Fridays off meant to Mary that Friday was a day when she did not teach English and Mathematics. It became a day they devoted largely to shared activities with other homeschooling families from the local support group or made independent exploration of the local environment and cultural centres. On the other days, Mary followed the New Zealand Mathematics Curriculum. However, all other curriculum areas were developed by her for the children. Her first language played a major part in her teaching and in family life. As she pointed out:

*We speak my language at home, and when we are teaching we sort of use both languages, whatever comes up easiest. Of course, when you explain English to them, it has to be in English. Currently in counting and spelling we use English. We use the English counting because in my language, when counting people say "one and twenty", instead of "twenty one". Of course the vowels are totally different from the English ones so we have one rule. We count and spell in English. For the rest whatever language comes up. (CD, p. 68)*

The children, like Hera's, were becoming bilingual and from an early age learnt about their traditional culture, which became the central focus of the day. However, Mary did recognise that they also needed to become fluent in English and able to accommodate to the New Zealand culture. Mary continued:

*They are bilingual right from the start. And Claire can actually read, sort of read in my language if she wants to. It probably just makes sense, we are European, so basically, although I am trying to teach them English, I know I make grammatical errors. I know I have an accent so why should I teach my children something that is not 100% correct when my language is perfect. So I teach them my language. They will pick up the English from anywhere else because my language is here and the rest of the world is English as far as they are concerned. But we all decide on the other subjects, or the social science subject we want to do and if we really feel like it. I guess everything is social science. (CD, p. 68)*

She elaborated on the idea of evolving practices from experiences:

*So sometimes we only school for two hours, the English and Maths, and sometimes we have to, because I'm relatively new to homeschooling, find our way. In the beginning it was really structured like, "An hour of this, an hour of that, an hour of social science, an hour of something else". It was really, really strict, but that got looser over the months. Now I sort of think, "As long as they have the English and the Maths we are happy". Because we all like to draw and do Art, we have decided Thursday is our Art day so we do a whole day of Art. Which might also mean I will do Art History. We talk about say what cubism is, and why certain art streams no longer exist, say because of the world war, or other reasons. (CD. p. 69)*

I wondered if the family also made a lot of use of incidental learning from their environment. They responded:

Mary: *I think that what you start to develop, as a homeschooler, is that you suddenly start to see educational opportunities in lots of things. Like when we could walk along the waterfront and I can tell the children to look at the licence plates and add up the numbers, or make verbs and nouns out of the letters of the licence plate or we might go to the beach and then suddenly we start talking about, say, the waves. We went to the beach one day, and there*

*was no wind but the waves were huge, and we were trying to figure out why the waves were so huge and really intense. (CD. p. 69)*

Claire (the oldest daughter) intervened and said:

*They were really huge! The paua doesn't usually come up that high on the beach because they are really deep but we could find heaps and I had a whole ice cream box piled up with them.*

Mary: *So you start to explain more, when the children have a question, and I think that is something you develop being a homeschooler. I know since then my husband has started to explain more instead of saying, "it's green", he is saying, "it's green because..." I actually think, not having a teaching background makes things easier for me because I am not bound by rules. I don't know how to do it, I just do it, and if the children understand it then that's fine but if they don't understand it I try a different way. It really depends on what we feel like doing. We belong to the local Home School Association, and lots of homeschoolers try to plan things on Fridays. We might go to a play, or to the museum or just see a movie or just hang around at home and have friends over. Having friends over is good. (CD. p. 69)*

This clearly means that Mary was responding to the children's reactions and trying to adapt her teaching to suit their needs. I thought back to other families who had mentioned a support group, and wondered about how Mary used her time on Fridays. She continued:

*I started up a philosophy class. You might not be surprised. It didn't attract many homeschoolers, and I thought about that for a while and I realised, of course because they are all Christians, or most of them are Christians, so they might not be ready for that. Anyway, so I got some 'normal' schoolers together and I've got a group of children who do philosophy here. The tutor is very expensive and he costs \$90 for the period that he is here. Because we have quite a group of 11 people, we can afford it. We only do it once a month because it is quite expensive. And the children love it. (CD. p. 74)*

This was a very interesting decision on Mary's part which may demonstrate some advantages of not being a teacher - with a teacher's preconception of philosophy as inappropriate for primary school level children. As discussed already, Moira, was also not a trained teacher and was also clearly able to think outside the square. From another

perspective, it is possible to develop privately organised classes with a purpose which could damage children either psychologically or intellectually. Mary sustained her theme, and continued:

*We also go to lots of places. We just went to an agricultural place. The Wallacefield Centre. They put something under a microscope and showed the children how to use them so you could see what you wanted to see. I thought that it's really good that I can pick and choose what I want. If I want to go to all of them, I will go to all of them. But when children go to school, it's the school that chooses for me. At school they can't go to everything that is on. Also we can go to the museum and other places while everybody is at school. (CD. p. 72)*

Mary believed that there was a great deal of shared learning in the family, and that she could not teach her children something unless she understood what she was teaching. Consequently as a facilitator of resources she spent many evenings on the computer searching for information and material. As she explained:

*I do lots of lesson preparation. I actually really enjoy what I am doing. I have files for the children. Files of things I can teach to the children but I also have files, labelled interesting, read later. (CD. p. 72)*

It was interesting to note that Mary did so much preparation, because she saw herself as a facilitator, except in Language and Mathematics. Facilitating material for specific individuals was a common practice among these homeschooling parents. It was clear that both Turner parents in my study took advantage of modern technology, and were aware of the need to upgrade their skills in this area. Because they were not faced with large numbers of children they were able to cater for individual needs and desires. Mary indicated, once again, that she did some teacher-directed educating when she talked about files of material she had kept with specific purposes in mind. She continued:

*I am really enjoying homeschooling and I think because I am enjoying it, the children must feel that and they are enjoying the homeschooling. Of course we do have days when I think 'why do I do this?' but I think on average we are doing really well. I have started to get more and more relaxed about it. I am more tempted to say, "Ok guys, if today is not a good day because we are all feeling like I don't want to learn - forget it! We've done our Maths, we've done our English, we can forget it."*

*I actually think that, apart from the fact that you have to do English and Maths, for the rest we are pretty well unschooled because the children have a say in what we do now. But the funny thing is that after this meeting I talked with the children and asked them how they wanted to do it. Would you like to just decide what you want to do but they all said, "No, no, no Mum you tell us." I think they liked the structured - no, not the structured - but have somebody tell them now I'd like you to do this or try that. (CD. p. 72)*

It was clear that the Turner's teaching was based on parent-directed learning focused on maintaining the family culture while learning English and local social behaviour. Mary maintained that the family culture and becoming integrated into New Zealand society were central to all learning. She was very active as a facilitator, and made extensive use of the local environment. Her teaching also reflected her interest in the arts and its potential value as a means of learning in the social sciences. Mary explained her belief that "You could use art to tell a whole period of history and life." (CD. p. 68)

### ***Using a Theme Approach***

The approaches of these families to their teaching practices, using a theme design, are discussed in full in Chapter Seven, but the most common themes were:

- Teaching literacy and numeracy.
- High levels of communicative behaviour.
- Individualized approaches to learning.
- Parent/child curricula design.
- Flexible timetables and methods.
- Practical and environmental learning.
- Teaching moral and cultural values.
- Extra-curricula learning.
- Reflect earlier parental experiences.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **HOME IS WHERE WE LEARN**

The discussion which follows affords a more extended examination in the light of my key questions:

- Why do parents choose to homeschool their children?
- How do they go about the practice of homeschooling?

I also intend in this chapter to further explore what is meant by homeschooling, by providing insights into the worlds of the participants in this study. In turn this may allow us to better understand homeschooling, its complex roots and the motives of those who choose to educate their children at home, as well as revealing just what it is that makes New Zealand homeschooling, in some ways, unique. Accordingly the discussion will challenge some areas of existing research whilst confirming others, and offering a set of propositions which may account for the participants' narratives.

My research this far has suggested that homeschooling is far from being a unified movement in New Zealand as some critics, for example Baldwin (1993), would have us believe. The parents' reasons for choosing to homeschool, in this study, were seen to be varied and, indeed, became more complex over time. It also became apparent, during the study, that the mother was, in most cases, the dominant teaching/learning parent, overriding her economic value as an income earner.

There are conflicting views on the purpose of homeschooling as well as conflict concerning the rights of society and the rights of parents in relation to education in New Zealand. Some of these have been noted already. My research into the historical antecedents of homeschooling in New Zealand indicated that these conflicting views have been present from 1877. However, the right of parents to apply for exemption from school attendance had remained unchanged since the 1877 Education Act and appeared likely to continue to do so. The parents in this study, however, all expressed concern that the state could move to change the conditions for exemption and perhaps impose the National Curriculum Framework on them. The views expressed by Ian Revell, Chairman of the 1995 Education and Science Select Committee, and dealt with in some detail in Chapter Four, did provide some justification for their concerns. However, all English-speaking democracies have faced a similar conflict between the

rights of the individual and those of the state, and reached compromises in education broadly similar to those reached in New Zealand.

### **The Reasons for Choosing to Homeschool:**

It was evident that, for these families, no single reason led them to decide to homeschool. The Smith family provides an apt example. Their first reason came from the comments of a health worker who said that, “They would lose their first child to others”. The second reason was their strong Christian belief system and the third, their distrust of educational bureaucracy.

There is clear research-based support for these New Zealand families’ reasons for homeschooling being complex. For example, Mayberry and Knowles (1989), in their conclusions, based on findings from their studies of families in Oregon and Utah, stated:

The results suggest complex motives for operating home schools: motives that are often intertwined with family relationships. All parents, regardless of their orientation, expressed a desire for maintaining or further developing the family unit. (p. 220)

This not to claim universality, because each country and state has its own criteria for granting an exemption from school attendance, and consequently, varying reasons for choosing to homeschool. However Van Galen (1987) generalised from her study of American homeschooling families, declaring that “home schooling is not simply a matter of pedagogical preference but instead could also be viewed as an integral component of the family’s broader lifestyle and value system and a public declaration of those values” (p. 161).

While the families in my study expressed various reasons for their choice to homeschool, some common concerns could be identified. These themes, developed from reflection on and analysis of their individual narratives, are now provided in outline and later discussed in detail, with each major factor considered separately, showing the responses made by each of these families. This provides an overview of each of the major themes. The narratives centred around six themes:

- Taking total control of their children’s education;
- Philosophical and religious beliefs, including morality and lifestyle choices;
- Concepts of family and their definitions of family rights;

- Ideas of protecting childhood;
- Parents' concerns arising from their personal experience;
- Cultural preservation, both indigenous and immigrant.

These themes, arrived at after reflection and analysis, will now be summarised family by family and will also be discussed in detail:

Themes	Family Responses						
	1	2	3/4	5	6	7	8
Control of inputs into children's learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Philosophies, beliefs and lifestyle choices	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Concepts of family rights	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Protecting childhood	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Parent's school experiences	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Cultural preservation	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y

*Table 2. Family's response to questions on why they chose to homeschool.*

#### *Taking Control of Education and the Nature of Child Development:*

As students, and later when we have our own children, we hold strong beliefs about what and how education should be, how to use these beliefs in bringing up our own children, and often in the selection of a school. It was evident that such a process was a prominent factor in choosing to homeschool. According to Knowles (1991), it certainly was a major factor for those parents who decided to homeschool before their children were of school age. All participants in my interviews mentioned concerns, or expressed 'visions', about children's development which influenced their decision to homeschool. Dale and Melinda Abraham had particularly strong views on this, which had developed over time and which were influenced significantly by Dale's university studies. He felt that the central issue in child development was character building followed by concentrating on their academic achievements. Melinda also considered character building as an issue, but included developing independent thinking and learning how to learn as very significant factors. Independence, for both parents, meant not only being able to work and think independently but also being independent from perceived state

indoctrination and the influence of the peer group. Both parents considered the school-based peer group to be largely ignorant of right and wrong. These views led to the parents taking total control of their children's education, particularly with the younger children.

Kay and Peter Carpenter spoke of having travelled extensively overseas. This experience had influenced their belief that learning was a cooperative activity between child and teacher, where the child should be the dominant factor in the learning situation. They also believed that children have a natural drive to learn, given a supportive family situation. This parental support and guidance was more active in the learning of basic skills in language and mathematics. Their personal experiences at school and their observations as teachers had contributed to their view of children as natural learners spoilt by school experiences. This is similar to Rousseau's (1979 translation) views on "natural learning" in *Emile ou l'education*. As Johnston (1999) claimed, of Rousseau's concept:

The real test of the educator is not in telling children what to do but seeing to it that their desires are suitably met by their own actions in a constantly controlled environment (without the child recognizing the human control constantly at work). (p. 10)

The Carpenters also held to a lifestyle based on a shared family life with an underlying philosophy based on what may be described as "New Age" concepts.

Carmen Dunn and Rita Gain held strong views on child development which were associated with Carmen's teaching, family, personal reading, and university studies. Her friend Rita followed Carmen, and held similar views. Like Kay and Peter she and Rita believed that children learn when they are ready, given the basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Their readiness to learn, they held, depended on their individual learning style and adult support as a facilitator. They both considered practical experiences, from a person with a passion for his or her craft, to be an essential learning element. Rita, while supporting Carmen, viewed the opportunity to use their preferred learning style as an essential element.

Hera Kupe expressed strong views on her children's right to learn their own language and culture as well as supporting the view that children's best teachers are their parents. Mary Turner, like Hera, viewed child development as being shaped by cultural factors.

They were both committed to the concept of children being strongly involved in their traditional heritage and developing skills in the language and family structures relevant to their culture.

Moira and Dory O'Donnell, at the time of removing their children from school, believed that child development meant giving appropriate attention to every child and responding to their needs. Their views had also developed from school experiences, and included the belief that the best learning took place in a sharing family situation. They believed that primary education should receive a priority in government funding and that modern technology is underutilised, especially in secondary schools.

Abel and Susan Smith viewed child development as being strongly linked to the Scriptures and a literal interpretation of the Bible. Young children, they believed, could not know what they needed as well as their parents could. Consequently, children needed firm parental control and guidance. They also believed that cooperative learning, among family members, was important.

What was very evident from this testimony was that all of these parents held strong views on education, teaching, and the nature of child development. While diverse these views were in some conflict with the prevailing national system of education, if not in totality, at least in the priorities they prescribed. In effect, it impelled them to take total control of their children's learning.

#### *Philosophical and Religious Beliefs and Morality:*

##### *Philosophical beliefs*

For the purpose of this study, philosophical beliefs were taken to be those beliefs held by the families but not specifically linked to any religious structures. They included notions of family security, humanism, existentialism, or beliefs gathered from a variety of sources from a variety of countries. In some instances they corresponded to those philosophical beliefs described as "New Age". The most clearly identifiable New Age family in my study were the Carpenters. They had a philosophy of trying to do things for themselves, of living in ways that simpler cultures lived and having ideas about an instinctive lifestyle. Educating their children at home was part of this philosophy. Other homeschooling families, however, expressed their beliefs as philosophical and non-

Christian, whilst Hera's involvement in Maori culture carried with it some traditional Maori beliefs.

### *Religious beliefs*

Religious beliefs played a significant part in Melinda and Dale Abraham's choice to homeschool, but not as strongly as was the case with the Smith family. On a continuum of religious beliefs, the Smiths were closest to a fundamentalist position whereas Melinda and Dale, perhaps because of their Salvation Army heritage, tended to fall in the "middle ground" of Christian theology. These two families with strong religious ties (especially the Smiths) objected to the compulsory secularism of the state schools. Two families, the Turners and the O'Donnells, made it clear that they were not religious. Two of the others, while holding to Christian values, did not use these values specifically when choosing to homeschool.

Because the children in the families I studied were taught largely at home, they usually adopted the prevailing family beliefs. This adoption was more likely because the children were less exposed to alternative belief structures either at school or in the peer group. For the Abraham and the Smith families, Christian beliefs were expressed and followed freely. For the Smith family the Scriptures were a central factor in their teaching, as was concern about the secularism in schools and the wider community. In no case were religious beliefs the only reason for choosing to homeschool, but these two families made it clear that their religious beliefs were a significant feature.

### *Morality concerns*

Another belief concerned the need to develop the social and caring skills of the children, in relation to people of all ages. This was very clear in the cases of the Abrahams and the Carpenters who spent time developing these skills in both formal and informal teaching, while the Kupes exposed their children to the strong social and caring skills evident in their culture. Schools were also seen as creating conflicting moral values, not linked necessarily to any religious or philosophical viewpoints. The potentially conflicting values of the schools and the peer group were believed to have undesirable influences on their children, and this posed a challenge to parental values. Consequently the school situation created what the parents perceived as unnecessary anxieties and tensions within the family. While schools reinforced both the government's perceptions

and those of the majority culture, any minority culture's significance was often largely ignored. All of the families in the study expressed concern about pressures on value systems from the school, the school-based peer group, and also concern about the school staff's practices such as the Carpenter's concern about bullying.

The concerns of homeschooling families over the dominance of a particular viewpoint in the culture is to some extent confirmed in the New Zealand situation, by O'Neill, Clark, and Openshaw (2004). They argued that "The official school curriculum has been an integral part of the culture and economic reconstruction of our society" (p. 43). As Hera explained,

*You just have to accept there is a "school culture."* (CD. p. 53).

The claim that there was a school culture for these homeschooling parents incorporated the notion of deprivation, by schools, of children's opportunities for independent or creative ways of thinking. These homeschooling families believed, as Hera clearly claimed, that schools did more than teach the basic skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and sciences but also indoctrinated children into the prevailing dominant culture and beliefs. Stevens (2001), from an American perspective, largely confirmed this when he declared that "Few parts of our biographies are untouched by the institution of schooling" (p. 10), while Van Galen (1987) asserted that "parents choose home schooling to protect their children from the influences of others who hold values and beliefs different from their own" (p. 164).

All of the parents in my study expressed concerns about the undesirable influence of school values and of the school-based peer group. Several parents expressed the belief that the peer group created unnecessary tensions, especially for young children. These tensions were between what the peer group held was morally right and the parents' beliefs. The Smiths, the most strongly religious family interviewed, provided an emphatic view believing that the school, being secular, taught material which was "anti-Christian". These same parents believed that state schools in general should never have existed and that parents were the rightful educators of their children. Other parents were less emphatic but were nevertheless concerned about concepts of competition, extra homework, and the increasing growth of institutions offering additional tuition, at early ages, in basic subjects.

*Concepts of Family and their Definitions of Family Rights:*

The notion that family-based learning should be revived and that the parents, by right, should be their children's teachers is not a new concept. School-based education for all is a relatively new system first created in New Zealand in the early 19th century. For each of the families in my study, family unity meant protection and control of their children's values and beliefs. It also implied family protection of the children from others, teachers, the state and their peers, both value-wise and physically. With this concept homeschooling served to maximise their control over, and their responsibility for, what happened to their children. As Dale maintained,

*We felt very strongly in the family and the family working together. (A.C. p.1)*

Kay and Peter Carpenter believed that homeschooling allowed them to live according to their own concepts of a family and to carry on with their instinctual, intuitive journey. They also believed that teaching their children was a natural task of the family. Kay pointed out that

*It seemed like a natural progression. (A.C. p12)*

Carmen Dunn used her family's teaching experiences and her personal philosophy to facilitate her children becoming the sort of adults she wanted them to be. This meant that she had to accept responsibility for her children's total education. She did not see this as a right but, rather, as a responsibility taken on by her having children. The family emerges as one of the central issues in this study. She claimed,

*by being with me they've got a chance to become uniquely themselves (and therefore part of a unique family). (CD. p. 37)*

The concept of "family" was a complex one in the homeschooling situation. With the exception of some recent literature, it has received comparatively little attention. My research confirmed many of Barratt-Peacock's (1997) contentions regarding the centrality of the family in homeschooling. He argued that the experiences and practices of Australian home educating families could cause them to be considered as "communities of learning practice" (p. 115), with a network of contacts with other groups or communities. This networking extended to support groups of homeschooling families but did not exclude other networks such as sports clubs, the extended family, or religious groups. Barratt-Peacock's conclusion was that "Such families are members of

networks connecting them to other communities of practice situated in fields of adult practice in wider society” (p. 121). This thesis could well apply to the New Zealand homeschooling families studied in this report, although further research would obviously be required to confirm it.

Barratt-Peacock’s (1997) concept, as already discussed, is close to Reiss’s (1981) claim that “We now speak of the *family paradigm* as a central organizer of its shared constructs, sets, expectations and fantasies about its social world” (p. 2, original emphasis). If so then the homeschooling families in my study appeared to support Reiss’s paradigm and to also include the responsibility for the education of their children. Peter, Susan, and Hera all talked of education as being the responsibility of the homeschooling family as well as being a lifestyle choice. Hence the homeschoolers I studied, by consciously keeping their children away from the accepted practice of attending school This constituted an alternative community of learning practice. Wenger (1998) worked from the assumption that “engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are” (p. 1). Wenger also advocated that:

Children must be able to invest themselves in communities of practice in the process of approaching a subject matter. Unlike in a classroom, where everyone is learning the same thing, participants in a community of practice contribute in a variety of independent ways that become material for building an identity. What they learn is what allows them to contribute to the enterprise of the community and to engage with others around that enterprise. (p. 271)

While Barratt-Peacock did not agree totally with Wenger, and he extended the notion to one of a personalised “learning practice”, the point made has some validity. It is apparent that all families, no matter what their structure, work from sets of assumptions. The rigidity of these assumptions vary from family to family because similar assumptions are often interpreted in different ways. Homeschooling families reflected some form of independence from community assumptions by breaching the commonly held view that all children should and do go to school. This was demonstrated by the frequently reported account of homeschooled children being asked by others, usually adults, why they are not at school. Reiss (1981) held that a family is a shared construct, having and explained that:

Thus the concept of shared construct does not ignore the family as a seething cauldron of impulse and affect. But terror, pride, anger, and love – which, in our model, are woven into the concept of shared constructs – are universals. They are both undifferentiated and undifferentiating because, as raw and unadorned motives of human action, they fail to account for why specific families behave in specific ways. A shared construct – like transference – weaves these non-specific affective elements into a more organized conception which is meant to account for action... A shared construct specifies that *this* family behave in *this* way because, collectively, it is convinced that its social environment is (without a doubt) just *this* kind of a world. (p. 382, original emphasis)

Families may hold to the same basic social constructs even though they change as the children grow up, siblings leave home, or events occur such as a parent becoming permanently disabled or perhaps unemployed. Because the children are at home, or in parental care, all day every day, these changes for homeschooling families may be seen as more significant and as calling for more internal change. Family dynamics, therefore, are complex, with parents influencing children and reciprocally children influencing parents. Kay recognised this when she said:

*Many times I'll learn from Joseph and Anna. There's no one way.* (CD. p. 17)

Clearly these dynamics were changing constantly, not only as children developed but also as parents matured. Outside influences such as the extended family, their peers, the various institutions and the ever-changing media also put pressure on the family. These behaviours and relationships were also part of an ongoing process. However, with these homeschooling families, because of the sheer amount of time spent together or with other homeschooling families these interactions were likely to be more frequent in occurrence than families whose children attend school. Peter supported this claim when he declared:

*Their learning is very much a part of our day as well.* (CD. p. 17)

Van Galen (1989) also found “the parents believe that teaching their children at home will build and strengthen their family” (p. 164). Wenger (1998) described the family from a perspective similar to Van Galen when he claimed:

Once learning communities are truly functional and connected to the world in meaningful ways, teaching events can be designed around them as resources to their practices and as opportunities to open up their learning more broadly. (p. 271)

Family unity was again clearly evident in my participating families because household work was shared, with children of all ages participating. As Hera explained:

*you end up getting to, in a home context, where life and learning become intermingled. They are not separated out.* (CD. pp. 57-58).

Albert (2003), who based his beliefs on practices as a homeschooler, claimed, “What we attempt is “family-centered, child-directed learning” a key being that while the “learning” is directed by the child, it is not only for the child but for all of us” (p. 128). The views of Albert echo those of Van Galen (1987), when she talked about strengthening the family. She claimed that in her research, homeschooling enables families to, “play a more active and influential role in their children’s lives” (p.165). I observed that, for the families in my study, chores were for these families a time of informal communication. Moreover, parents told me that these communications contributed to family unity. It was clear then, that the place and roles of the family were a central factor in choosing to homeschool.

#### *Ideas of Protecting Childhood:*

The idea of protecting children, so they may enjoy childhood, is not a new one. As adults we tend to reflect on our own childhood and focus on the “good” times and on the freedoms we had to explore and discover for ourselves. In the families I studied there was a sense that schools deprived children of this right to enjoy and experience childhood. This is explained perhaps by Knowles’ (1991) suggestion that this sense of deprivation arose from homeschooling parents who held “Elaborate visions of an idyllic childhood, one which they, years later, want to replicate for their children” (p. 215). Enjoying childhood appeared to involve notions of free time, elements of discovery learning, and opportunities to investigate particular interests to their logical conclusion. Dale, Kay, and Carmen expressed concern that schools were depriving children of their right to childhood by imposing rigid school hours, rigid timetables, time taken travelling to and from school, and frequently additional hours of homework. These demands meant that, in the parents’ eyes, children had no time to explore their environment and

enjoy the excitement of discovery. The Abrahams, Carpenters, Dunns, Gains and Kupes expressed this notion of exploration very clearly, while the Smiths and Turners encouraged their children to explore and take advantage of their local environment.

Albert (2003), writing as a homeschooling parent in the United Kingdom, asserted that:

Nature has provided each and every child with the raw materials and an ineradicable thrust to undertake the journey of original seeking, and nature has provided each and every parent with the capacity to nurture our children along the way. (p. 253)

Of the families studied, Carmen Dunn best epitomised this view. She believed that learning in a practical way to her, was both a feature and a need of childhood. The example given by her daughter's experiences at the pony club was one of these. Carmen believed that attendance at school was destructive to this process. For Peter and Kay childhood was also a time when empathy, sensitivity and moral responsibility were common features, in contrast to the influences of the peer group. Children, in their minds, should be given the freedom to develop these aspects. They believed, like Carmen, that schools did not allow for this.

Childhood, in Hera's eyes, should have been a time for discovery of their world and a time for taking advantage of the moment, while Mary brought her views on childhood and child development with her from Europe. She believed, like Hera, that children needed to discover a strong base in their hereditary culture. Childhood, in her view, should be protected and a happy family time. This was in conflict with having to be at school from nine o'clock each day. She also expressed the view that children should be inside learning, not outside, but in reality she did not practise this view because she found a wealth of stimulating new experiences, supported by the local homeschooling group, in the local environment.

In Moira O'Donnell's mind, childhood should be strongly family related, as her own early schooling with the Correspondence School had been. Susan and Abel Smith endorsed this view. They saw schools to be in serious conflict with this concept, and believed in the rights of children to develop moral and ethical values the same as those of their parents. Children, they believed, should be protected and unencumbered by conflict of any kind.

Although enjoying the discoveries of childhood is not uniquely a New Zealand value, perhaps our culture did create a disposition to think that children should be able to do so. The right to enjoy childhood was an aspect which had received little attention in the homeschooling literature. It is one meriting further research, to see what parents believe childhood should be like and how these concepts might be achieved within the school culture.

*Parents' Concerns arising from their Personal Experiences*

Among the complex reasons advanced by those families who elected to homeschool their children prior to them attending school, one of the more common was those of parents, or their siblings, who had experienced unsatisfactory situations at school or who had observed similar situations in the schools. For example Peter Carpenter claimed:

*I've got two really bright brothers; both were bullied. One was systematically bullied and he doesn't even talk about it now. He has a huge number of problems. Both self-esteems were knocked and it almost extinguished their love of learning. That was a negative and I saw it myself. (CD. p. 4)*

He had seen his siblings suffer at school from both teachers and peers and, as a teacher, had seen the same type of behaviour repeated in the schools in which he had taught. His partner Kay had also witnessed similar situations while teaching. There was always a possibility that these recollections were prejudiced, because memory often provides an unreliable reconstruction of experience. However, the point remains that these were significant in dictating the future direction of their family.

The O'Donnells and the Turners, both of whom withdrew their children from school, elected to do so because they believed that their views on the needs of their children were being totally ignored by the school staff. Together with Hera, they expressed their concerns about their children's lack of attention from teachers and their children being exposed to what they felt were inappropriate programmes. Mary experienced this when her children were placed in composite classes and she could find no difference between the programmes and the homework delivered to the different classes. Others withdrew their children because they felt they could do a better job than the school. Two spoke of

being supported by fellow teachers in their decisions to homeschool, while yet others spoke of their concerns being confirmed by other parents teaching their children at home already, or by comments in the media. As an explanation, Bennett and Lowden (1995) have suggested that:

These parents are not anti-teacher but anti-school, and paradoxically, their vision of education resonates in many teachers' hearts. Fortunately, these parents are not so directly constrained by the politics of education, the realities of institutionalised education or the need to suffer these to pay the mortgage. (p. 43)

Bennett and Lowden did not spell out what the politics of education might be. While these policy factors may constrain schools it does not follow that parents are free from the constraints of their own beliefs, economic situation, and educational skills. Hera provided a good example of most of these parents' attitudes when she stated:

*One of the interesting things was that Tahi's classroom teacher, a good friend of mine, was actually a big supporter of me.... My teaching colleagues, surprisingly, were most supportive. I was worried that I would isolate myself by being seen as a little "traitor" but that didn't happen. They have been so supportive with accessing resources and helped me with getting out of teaching, in a classroom context. (CD. p. 40)*

Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000) identified particular areas for consideration when researching Australian homeschooling parents' views on how children learn or should be taught. They advocated research into parental involvement in decision making about what should be taught and how it should be carried out. Their desires included examining parental dissatisfaction with what is being taught, dissatisfaction with the lack of individualised learning, and a belief that these parents were able to provide better individualisation. Bearing these concepts in mind, my study confirms the need for research of this nature.

The reasons for these families choosing to homeschool, as noted previously, were complex. All families expressed the opinion that since starting to practice homeschooling they had become aware of many more advantages. For example, most families preferred the notion of the child as discoverer and the adult as facilitator for this discovery. Most parents held the view that children were natural learners. Similar

views have been articulated by Reed (2003). When speaking of her own experiences as a homeschooling parent Reed claimed that:

I could see that my children (and any children I met) were as hungry and thirsty to learn as they were to eat. It seemed obvious, as I watched each child grow, that we are all *naturally* good children...only sometimes we learn early that we don't match someone else's expectations and standards....(p. ix, original emphasis)

However, Reed's use of "naturally" good, rather than natural learners, is perhaps closest to the views of the Carpenters.

One of the more commonly expressed concerns related to the power and influence of the school-based peer group, from which, it was claimed, the children learnt largely negative moral attitudes. For these families the influence of the schoolteachers, with the exception of the Kupes, was also an undesirable factor. Dory O'Donnell felt that his school failed to encourage or cater for his leadership skills while Melinda Abraham regretted not learning how to learn for herself at school. Moira, by contrast, recalled with pleasure her early learning with the Correspondence School. However, it needs to be recognised that Moira's mother was her teacher and that the dinner table was her classroom. All these families had, of necessity, a lifestyle centred on the family or extended family. There were, however, significant variations on this lifestyle. The Smith family's lifestyle, for example, was dominated by their commitment to their religious beliefs and the homeschooling movement, whereas the Kupe's lifestyle was related strongly to the Maori concept of an extended family. The influence of personal experiences has not been as strong in this sample as Knowles' (1991) found in his studies, but as was clear in Table 2 (page 158) it was significant nevertheless.

### *Concerns about Cultural Aspects*

The notion of culture involves the distinctive practices and beliefs of a society, or an identifiable subsection of a society. It carries with it the notion of personal identity. However no culture remains static because it changes in response to experiences, contact with other cultures and the environment. Simple examples of this are the changes in the cultural perceptions of the Treaty of Waitangi, the celebration of St. Patrick's Day by the New Zealand Irish, and the changes in the observance of Easter, as demonstrated by the changes in shopping days. Of those families in my study who

withdrew their children from school, two were concerned about the possible loss of their cultural inheritance. The Kupes' concern about their culture was not only because of language and social values but also included more practical experiences of their own community, a belief in parents as the best teachers, and strongly held views on the rights of children to enjoy their cultural childhood. The Turners mixed concern for their immigrant language and culture with concern about New Zealand schools and teaching practices.

Hera Kupe and Mary Turner both believed that schools did not cater for their heritage, their language, or their cultural perspectives on the world. Hera held the view, as do many contemporary Maori theorists, that Te Reo Maori should be a compulsory language for all New Zealand children. Hera also thought that her children should, in an applied way, learn about their ancestors and from their whanau. From her perspective, tikanga and language could not be separated because each could not be appreciated without significant knowledge of the other. Mary had practiced some teaching of her language at home and saw, in homeschooling, an opportunity to develop these skills with her children. Other aspects of her culture, she believed, could also be reinforced. Her goal was for her children, born in New Zealand, to become versed in New Zealand culture while maintaining their own heritage.

### **Summary of the Families' Reasons for Choosing to Homeschool**

The families in my study exhibited a wide range of reasons for choosing to homeschool, with each family making their decision based on a number of related reasons. These reasons became more complex over time. Five of the eight families - the Abrahams, Carpenters, Dunns, Gains, and Smiths - had decided to homeschool before their children attended school. This meant that their decision was, to some extent, based on something other than their children's experiences at school. The Abrahams made their initial decision, before their oldest child was born, based on personal knowledge of a homeschooling family. In the Smiths' case it was based on strong religious beliefs, concerns about schools, and their concept of family unity. The Carpenters' decision was, in part, influenced by the parent experiences of school, first as children and later as teachers. Joseph's experience of bullying at kindergarten was also a factor. However, the most significant factors were their philosophical view of the world and their consequential lifestyle practices. Carmen Dunn's and Rita Gain's decisions were based

on ideas about how they would like to see their children as adults. The remaining three families made their decision while their child was at primary school. Hera Kupe made her decision to homeschool based on her wish for the children to be fluent in Maori culture, the rights of children to enjoy childhood and the maintenance of the extended family. Mary Turner by comparison, decided to homeschool for the sake of maintaining her European culture, her memories of her schooling in Europe and the attitude of the local New Zealand school principal. Moria and Dory O'Donnell, for their part, made their decision based on the lack of attention that Bridget, their daughter, received at school and the negative attitude she developed to learning. Dory's dissatisfaction with aspects of his schooling and Moira's very pleasant experiences as a Correspondence School child working from home, were also influential.

As we have noted, there was a great deal in common among the families in what they declared were their reasons for homeschooling. However most of these parents had some tertiary education and a surprising proportion held qualifications in caring for people, while some had parents or siblings who were, or had been, teachers.

An analysis of their reasons showed some similarity to the findings of Knowles (1987, p. 13) who, after reviewing a wide spectrum of researchers' opinions about the reasons parents elected to homeschool, concluded that the reasons fell into the following categories:

- A desire for family unity, including a desire to control and to provide for the spiritual needs of the children. (The Smith and Abraham families were examples of this desire to provide for the spiritual needs of their children.)
- A desire for a holistic approach to learning that emphasised direct and experiential learning. (This holistic approach was demonstrated clearly by the Dunns, Gains, Kupes, and O'Donnells.)
- Dissatisfaction with standards of discipline, school socialization and the values perceived in many schools. (This particular dissatisfaction was a theme expressed by most of these homeschooling families.)
- Dissatisfaction with the academic standards, or failure of the school to cater for individual needs. (These failures were articulated by the O'Donnells, Kupes and Turners, all of whom withdrew their children from school.)

The participants in this research, however, added three other factors of significance:

- There was a need to teach literacy and numeracy to their children to enable them to learn more independently.
- There was a sense, clearly expressed by Dale but common to most of the families, that schools deprived children of the right to enjoy and experience childhood.
- There was a belief that schools failed to cater for the learner's culture, of which Hera and Mary are the most obvious examples.

### **Teaching Practices**

To make the teaching and learning approaches adopted by the families easier to recognise, these will now be discussed separately in order to illustrate the responses made to each particular element. The elements were derived from my analysis and reflection on each interview, together with my reflection on these theories as they emerged from later interviews. A very obvious factor was that, although they had much in common, no two families took exactly the same approach to learning and teaching. At the same time, however, many of the elements of each theory were interpreted and presented by each family in a different way.

The reasons for choosing to homeschool also changed over time. This conclusion fits most closely with the ideas of Mayberry et al. (1995) who observed:

Rather, home schooling is a way of organizing the education of one's children that holds particular meaning for parent educators. The significance that parents attribute to their home schooling activities varies from one social context to another, one family to another, and over time within individual families. (p. 100)

This notion of variability between and within families, however, has attracted little attention in the literature. Perhaps the search for homogeneity has served to conceal this aspect to some extent in homeschooling communities.

Again, after reflection and analysis it was evident that the families in my study adopted some common teaching practices, as the table below demonstrates:

Themes	Family Responses						
	1	2	3/4	5	6	7	8
Teaching Literacy and Numeracy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
High levels of conversational learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individualized approaches to learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Parent/child curricula design	y*	Y	Y	Y	Y	y*	y*
Flexible timetables and methods	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Practical and environmental learning	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teaching moral and cultural values	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Extra-curricula learning	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Reflect early parental experiences	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y

[y\* applies to older children only.]

*Table 3. Each family's response to questions on their teaching practices.*

It should be reiterated at this point that ERO required a curriculum, for every subject, from every homeschooling family in New Zealand. Hence a curriculum was a prerequisite for all teaching programmes used by these parents educating their children at home. There was, however, no particular curricula prescribed, so the teaching-parent often adopted or developed her own.

### *Teaching Literacy and Numeracy*

An interesting finding was that all parents believed they needed to teach the basic skills of literacy and numeracy to their children, so that they could function with a degree of independence. From his studies of British homeschooling families, Meighan (1996) reported that:

They have told me about the relaxed atmosphere at home, which encourages them (the children) to be increasingly confident in taking over their own

learning. In the non-hostile home-based education, they tell me, their interest in learning and curiosity and questioning begins to build up again and learning becomes a practical and shared family process regardless of the physical location. (p. 3)

This notion of independence was supported by Thomas's (1995) research into families in the United Kingdom and Australia:

This study challenges the almost universally held view that children of school age need to be formally taught if they are to learn. In school this may be the case but at home they can learn just by learning. (p. 4)

Although Thomas may have found that Australian and British schools were based on the assumption that children could learn only in formal situations, these may not necessarily parallel the New Zealand approach to learning. From my own teaching experience in New Zealand, schoolteachers did not **directly** challenge the concept of children as "natural learners" but they did accept that a formally structured learning approach was required to achieve both competency and equity in an increasingly complex society. The homeschooling families in this study also believed that the acquisition of basic skills in language and mathematics required some formality. They differed from schools, however, in their belief in the least structuring possible to ensure literacy and numeracy and in the provision of opportunities to practice independent learning. In this way homeschooling families thus presented radical challenges to the prevailing views about when learning best took place and the actual purposes of learning.

From observations it was clear that the children rapidly developed the ability to work independently. This applied particularly to the older children of the Smith family and the extent to which children helped each other instead of depending on a parent. Carmen's belief in unschooling underpinned much of her emphasis on independent learning. Developing independence in learning was also a real concern for Melinda because she felt so strongly that school had failed her in this area.

### *High levels of Conversational Learning*

Thomas (2000) pointed out that in the homeschooling families he studied, informal learning occurred in a variety of environments and frequently involved the child in

conversational learning with an adult. Thomas also claimed, of school teachers, that “Teachers do not have the time to enter into sustained dialogues with individual pupils” (p. 131). Albert (2003) has gone further, arguing that “The young teen must thus be given the opportunity to converse with the future, actually many futures, to find the one (or ones) that fit. The lack of these conversations shows up even among academically talented students” (p.227). Clearly, conversational learning had many desirable features. It enables the parent-teacher to immediately reinforce what is correct, offer immediate solutions to problems encountered by the child, suggest alternatives and attempt to ascertain how the children felt about their learning. There are, however, in these one-to-one conversations, some potential drawbacks. Does it, for instance, enable the parent, unchallenged, to prejudice a child’s thinking and may even prevent independent learning or discovery?

As already stated all the families in my study read to, or with, their children on a daily basis. For the children this was done usually in a group situation. The reading usually included group discussion. It was apparent that this participation could stimulate an interest in reading directed towards listening and thinking skills as well as enjoyment. Albert (2003), discussing his own family, claimed that “We could do the one thing we know we can do better than the schools ever can, and that is *listen to them*, and act upon what we hear” (p. 235, original emphasis). For his part Thomas (1994), discussing conversational learning, stated:

It is only through purposeful dialogue that a teacher (parent, mentor, more knowledgeable peer, expert, etc.) can be sure to start from where the learner is, appreciate what is to be learned from the learner’s point of view, monitor progress and understanding, deal with problems as and when they arise, and continually adjust and readjust teaching strategies in line with progress towards mastery, understanding or enlightenment. (p. 131)

The families in my study tended to support and develop these notions of conversational learning. The teaching or facilitating parent emphasised the notion of full-time interaction between him or her and the children. Melinda, for example, made it clear, when she talked of her children having a day off when they did not feel up to learning, that this ‘time out’ was based on her observations and interactions throughout the day, or from previous days. Dale Abraham spoke as follows:

*One of the advantages I see with homeschooling is the seamless nature of it. (A.C. p. 8) while Peter added that in their family, their learning is very much part of our day...that is very much part of learning. (CD. p. 17) Later Carmen and Rita endorsed this viewpoint while Hera explained that she felt, Oh yes that is the only way to go. (CD. p. 42) While Moira explained that The children have always related well to each other... (CD. p. 47) Susan, however, pointed out that Cha. is helping me with the Latin with the little ones. (CD. p. 61)*

### *Catering for Individual Approaches to Learning and Needs*

There has been a huge emphasis in New Zealand schools recently on numeracy and literacy, and these skills are often given high profile in the local media. However it has shaped homeschooling practices as well. In the families I studied and observed, parents were keen to ensure that every child had mastered the basic skills of language and mathematics. They assumed that these skills were a prerequisite to learning in our modern society. However this learning of basic skills was premised, in many of these families, on the notion of “readiness”. It focused on the child’s approach to learning and needs rather than the prevalent age-related learning at school. All the families commenced their teaching of the basic skills within a more formal structure than they adopted later. In these families, this teaching usually took place in the first two teaching hours of each day. Even Carmen and Rita, who made a special point of catering for each child’s style and needs, started usually with a structured programme. Thomas (1994), who studied families in both Greater London and in Tasmania, confirmed this change of approach to learning when he claimed that “families starting out on home-based education, who at first adopted formal methods of learning, found themselves drawn more and more into less formal learning” (p. 3). The families in my study, given the exceptions of parental control of the development of skills in early language and mathematics, reflected this claim. Because they taught the basic skills initially they did not fit neatly into Meighan’s (1996) description of parent activities, based on the study of many United Kingdom homeschooling families “They (the parents) simply respond to the cues provided and give support to the next stage of learning as the child decides to encounter it” (p. 3).

Parents were more likely to approximate Meighan's claim after they had practiced homeschooling for some time. Kay Carpenter, Hera Kupe, Moira O'Donnell and Susan Smith all illustrated this move towards child-directed learning. This pattern echoes Broadhurst's (1999) observation that "The children were cognizant of the control they have over their learning and this appears to be important to them" (p. 6). This appeared to have been true in most of the families interviewed, although Susan expressed regret that they had reduced control over their children's education too soon. Rita explained that she had been a kinaesthetic learner and believed that her son likewise;

*He learned like me, best by a kinaesthetic way. (CD. p. 23)*

Child-centred and child-directed learning is not exclusive of each other. Child-centred learning assumes that each child has individual needs and learning styles which need catering for, but the educator still controls what is to be learned. Child-directed learning is said to occur best when the child decides what he or she wants to learn and the parent provides materials and opportunities for the child to follow these desires. However, with a parent providing material, there is always the possibility that their selection may be biased, or controlled, by the parent's own wishes. With one exception, my families had moved, over time, from a child-centred approach to an approach closer to a child-directed learning style involving a consequent change of role for the parent from learning decider to facilitator. In Jordan's (2003) continuum of educational practices her description of co-construction is close to child-directed learning as used here, whereas her notion of scaffolding is closer to child-centred learning.

All the teaching parents in my study read to their children daily. This practice of reading to children for extended periods is not possible because of structural restraints in today's schools. As far as the homeschooling parents were concerned the material read varied from day to day, ranging from factual to fictional, from historical to current events, but it focused always on the children's interests. The Turner family focused heavily on writings and stories relating to the Arts. Reed (2003) reported on her own teaching, saying:

That was the crux of our home-learning "programme". I read aloud to my children at least twice a day, and for at least two or more hours a day. I read everything - all the best of children's literature, of course; plus poetry, non-fiction, history, mythology. (p. x)

*Curricula Designed Largely by Parents and Children*

Each teaching parent in this study, usually in consultation with his or her partner and children, designed the majority of the children's curricula. This was linked to parents' perception that, by electing to homeschool, they were personally responsible for all of their children's education. Dale made this very clear when he explained that

*You know, the one thing about home schooling is that there are no excuses.* (A.C. p. 1)

Albert (2003), from his own homeschooling experiences, recognised this reality:

Another way of viewing this is to say we hold ourselves accountable. We can't play the blame game. We can't blame schools or teachers, or even the government, as we have rescued our children from their clutches. We can't blame the books or the curriculum; we choose them. (p. 250)

On the basis of their interview-based research in the United Kingdom, Bennett and Lowden (1995), had previously observed:

The curriculum is negotiated, the parent in the role of persuader, and uses reason rather than veto. Such a view contradicts the logic of the 'top down' imposed National Curriculum, which applies only to children of maintained (i.e. state or state supported) schools. Our interviews revealed considerable parental antipathy towards its imposition and an unacknowledged expression of 'parental power'. (p. 41)

In my study many of the teaching parents started using parts of some commercial curricula initially but, as personal confidence improved, either abandoned them or adapted them to fit their own needs. Meighan (1996) has also spoken of the practice of creating curricula in the United Kingdom, claiming:

These families have pointed the way to a more flexible approach to the curriculum by operating with several types, rather than limiting themselves to one approach. An essential part of the approach of the families working in these flexible ways is the regular monitoring and valuation of their curriculum. (p. 3)

It was evident that in these families, the curricula and the practices adopted were related closely to their reasons for choosing to homeschool and their concepts of what education should be.

Two factors may have contributed to these homeschooling families creating their own curricula. The first was that all families tended to make extensive use of the local environment as a teaching and learning framework, hence they focused on what was of interest in that environment at the time. The second was the flexible use of time when a particular topic or subject interested the child for example the Abrahams used their holiday experiences with mining to develop ongoing learning, the Carpenters used the building of their new home to provide similar learning opportunities, while the Turners used art to provide a springboard for extensive studies of history and culture.

### *Flexible Timetables and Teaching Methods*

All families in the study reported that they attempted initially to adhere to the traditional school-type timetable but, as their confidence improved, their timetables became more flexible and more accommodating to their own needs and to those of their children. Families made frequent reference to the speed at which children were able to complete activities. A commonly expressed view was that the children achieved in a morning what usually took a day or more in a school. The Smiths and Abrahams particularly were adamant about the speed at which learning took place. Abel Smith expressed an extreme point of view when he claimed,

*The children are able to do in two hours of formal studies at home what could easily take two weeks to accomplish in a classroom situation. (CD. p. 58)*

Hence it is apparent that the flexibility of timetables and methods was essential in accommodating this rapid rate of learning. This is reflected in Meighan's (1996) declaration that, for United Kingdom homeschooled children:

*They have frequently learned more by coffee-time at home than in a whole day at school, so that the rest of the day is "additional learning". This helps to explain why...they can end up to ten years ahead of their schooled counterparts. (p. 3)*

Meighan's conclusion was supported by the claims of all the families in the study. However, this remains an area which warrants further investigation. For example, this speed of learning may have been because of the extent of the individual attention possible in the home environment, the understanding of the best approach to and the needs of the homeschooled child, or the result of the parent's immediate response to needs, which would clearly reduce downtime. It is possible that many children wasted

considerable learning time at school or that the numbers of children with each school teacher made rapid learning more difficult to achieve. A further consideration could be that, in these homeschooling families, the child usually had a say in what and how he or she were to learn and consequently felt more commitment to the learning the child was exposed to.

All parents in my study taught basic literacy and numeracy skills. These skills were seen as providing the foundation for the development of independence in learning. All the children in these families were reading before they turned seven. As this sample of homeschooling families demonstrates, the parents were very skilled verbally and committed to learning as a lifestyle. However, most parents declared that they would wait for their children's readiness before teaching reading. Overt pressure to start the reading process at five-to-six years old, as happens in some New Zealand schools, was not evident.

Again all parents interviewed made it quite clear that they had moved, over time, towards a more flexible, child-directed approach to learning. Meighan (1996) commented that "In the home-based education I have witnessed the families rather take it for granted that learning styles differ and vary the learning situations accordingly" ( p. 3). It is interesting to note that the previous Education Minister, Steve Maharey (personal communication, April 27, 2006) declared that "Personalising education to better meet the needs of individual students will be a key focus for the government over the next three years". He went on to say that "The Labour-led government is working towards a more flexible, learner-centred system, where teachers get good support to identify the needs of their children". The later New Zealand Curriculum (2007) supported these claims.

In my study parents and children were very open with me about the practices they carried out, their relationships with other homeschooling families, and these aspects of homeschooling they gained most from. What became very clear was that the practices that each family adopted, after gaining some confidence, related closely to their declared reasons for choosing to homeschool and their beliefs about education. The practices they adopted also brought about changes in their curricula, the timetables developed, and the teaching methods employed. At the time of the interviews all

families in my study designed curricula, usually in consultation with the child, which both suited the children's desires and the teaching parent's objectives.

### *Emphasising Practical Experience and Shared Learning*

All families in this study placed an emphasis on the practical aspects of learning. This learning was linked sometimes to an expert but was more often seen as a part of growing up and learning so that children could function in their community or the wider environment. The emphasis varied from family to family. For example, Carmen was of the opinion that the use of experts who loved their vocation was a major contributor to learning. A significant part of her idea was that the children learnt the joy of a particular skill. The Smith family by comparison favoured a wide selection of practical learning for the younger children, usually from a home base. The older Smith children were encouraged to work for an expert to gain knowledge of a particular area and to develop a work ethic. Kay and Peter, whose children were young, put emphasis on helping with chores and the new house as well as the practical learning of ethical concepts. Reed (2003) made it clear that in her family

The children helped with housework, gardening, and work in the wood shop (okay, sometimes they grumbled, but so did I!) and in general they were very aware that they contributed valuably to the necessities and pleasures of our day-to-day lives. (p. vii)

As they have clearly demonstrated, families in my study held a common belief that the best learning environment was the local community rather than the classroom. The emphasis, however, again varied from family to family. Albert (2003), citing Csikszentmihalyi (1991), when talking of commitment in the homeschooling setting, claimed:

Children feel enough commitment from their parents, enough trust that they feel comfortable setting aside any shield or defences and can become unselfconsciously involved in whatever interests them. This is especially important when the child chooses to pursue her own passions, rather than where parents or others perceive her to have the greatest "gifts". (p. 129)

Shared learning was also a common factor to all the families. It was seen as occurring among both children and parents with high levels of equality. For example, sharing for the O'Donnell family meant sharing skills in music, languages, and computing while Moira emphasised the relationship between learning and modern technology. The sharing of new skills or new learning often took place in the weekends so their father could also participate. However, most families shared learning as it arose.

All teaching parents also spent significant time finding and preparing materials which they often learned from and shared with the children. On several occasions children were described as sharing their learning with their parents. Kay was a good example of this when she claimed:

*Many times I learn from Joseph and Anna. It is not one way. (CD. p. 17)*

Moira, Susan, and Abel made similar claims. This shared learning contributed to the obviously relaxed, comfortable, interactions between children and adults, not just close family or siblings but others as well. It appeared that this sharing could overcome age barriers because children were expected to help each other, and as they got older were expected to help with the learning of parents as well. Susan, for example, was learning Latin from her daughter.

All families made extensive use of local facilities, especially libraries, and took the opportunity to visit museums, art galleries, observatories, and other places of interest. They frequently used the local geographical environment as a learning opportunity. to learn from. The Turners went down to the harbour and examined the effect of a storm on the waves and shellfish. The Abrahams visited a local goldmine while on holiday and studied the uses made of gold as well as the negative effects of mining. Susan Smith presented another aspect when she stated that

*Of course doing the chores, the working around the house, is creating a good work ethic. If you don't learn a good work ethic you are very much handicapped in this modern world. (CD. p. 57-58)*

Meighan (1996) was of the opinion that "in computers and science explorations, as well as other learning activities, home-based education assumes that large amounts of first-hand experience are essential to effective learning" (p. 4). However, while all parents made use of computers only one of the eight families provided a personal computer for each child.

*Teaching moral and cultural values*

Morality is defined by David Hume in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (volume 3, 1740.) . He claimed that “All morality depends upon our sentiments; and when any action, or quality of mind, pleases us....(p.245)” All children learn something of their parents’ or caregivers’ moral values and the culture they are brought up in simply by following these adult behaviours or, at times, being penalised for not doing so.

All of the families in this study discussed moral and ethical issues as they arose. These discussions ranged from a strictly Christian focus, through the commonly accepted community value systems, to values based on a wide selection from a variety of cultures. The approach of the Abrahams and Smiths was based on Christian values, whereas the Carpenters had a New Age approach and considered even that children under five years of age could make ethical choices. The Kupes and the Turners linked their moral and ethical teaching to cultural values, whilst the Dunns, Gains and the O’Donnells based their teaching around caring for others and the parent’s concepts of right and wrong. The discussions ranged from daily formalised interactions to those arising from events or conversations as they occurred. Melinda and Hera made it clear to me that they perceived schools as having a “school culture” and as teaching values which created conflicts with their family values.

These homeschooling families were no exception but they added two other factors of some significance. First, these children, by not attending school, were influenced less by the moral values and culture of other children. Second most of these homeschooling parents set out deliberately to establish their values and culture in their children. Dale and Melinda are good examples of the latter because they purposely set out, each morning, to teach moral values under the name of “*food of the spirit*” (AC. 50), while Hera and Mary taught their inherited culture and language on a daily basis. Able and Susan Smith, with their strong Christian outlook, also taught their morality and values, while the Carpenters taught the values they held which were substantially different. For example the Carpenters believed that very young children understand values and that:

*We take the view that children can learn to respond in a kind of an altruistic way. A lot of models of children say that is not possible, children can’t reason, they only understand a whack on the arse, but they can. They can respond to quite high ideals. (CD. p. 17)*

In all of the examples cited some of the parents' teaching was significantly different from the teaching in schools, which tends to follow the values and cultural concepts of the dominant culture.

### *Extra-curricula Learning*

It will be recalled that the commonly held view of these homeschooling parents was that their children learnt more quickly at home than they did at school. In many cases this extra time, as many parents claimed, created opportunities for their children, from relatively young ages, to undertake extra-curricula learning.

Nearly all of the children did some extra-curricula learning, and each family tended to focus some of the additional learning on areas of parental interest. The parents usually provided opportunities for this learning. As already explained the learning extended to the development of skills in second or even third languages, to music, art and craft, and in the cases of the O'Donnells and the Turners, learning about philosophy and logic. All of this occurred at an early age, as Mary pointed out when she said, *I started up a philosophy class. (CD. p. 74)*

With one exception (the Abrahams) all families learned one or more second languages. The language learnt was often one not presented usually as an alternative by secondary schools. Moreover, the teaching was begun usually when the child was at primary school. Learning a musical instrument was also a common practice. Moira explained, *we have, every two or three weekends, a piano concert. (CD. p. 81)*

These learnings, for the participant families, were linked sometimes to an expert as tutor or supervisor. Physical skills were also not neglected, with many children learning swimming. The Turner children practised self-defence while the Smith children attended Boys' and Girls' Brigade. The Carpenters ensured that they attended many extra-curricula activities. Their son, Ben, chose to attend extra-curricular learning at the "*One Day School*" while the Dunn and Gain families focused on learning from artisans. For example Carmen's daughter worked, and learned, at the local stables. This is not to deny that some parents whose children attend school also ensure their children have opportunities for extra-curricula learning, but with these homeschooling families it appeared to be a widespread and accepted practice.

Many of the families' extra curricula activities were carried out during school hours because the children were assumed to be fresher, to have completed their formal learning in the morning, and because the tutor was often able to devote closer attention to their individual needs. Much of it also occurred as incidental, or as family, learning because frequently the teaching parent learnt at the same time. Moira provided an example of parent participation when she joined her children in learning Spanish. This incidental learning is in keeping with families' notions of children's right to experience childhood. As we have seen, one family practiced Maori culture with a particular emphasis on involvement in the extended family, whanau, and the study of traditional Maori ancestors. The concept of the extended family was frequently an element in the families interviewed. However, the Maori concept of family can go far beyond that of the European immigrant who has, of necessity, become separated from other family members.

The Turner family was also concerned, though, that the parents' first language was not catered for in the local school situation. Because of this they undertook to teach this language at home. As I have noted, the above list constitutes only a sample of the many extra-curricula activities these children undertook. Only the Abrahams did not appear to make any commitment to extra learning.

#### *Reflecting Earlier Parental Experiences*

Knowles (1991) was of the opinion that parents' own schooling experience was associated strongly with their choice to home school and the practices they adopted. This claim was clearly supported, and evident, in four of the eight families interviewed. Melinda believed that her schooling had failed to teach her to think independently, hence much of her teaching was directed towards this learning goal. Her daughter Anne made this evident when she asked how to spell a word. She described this learning as involving *Learning to ask questions – why, how, who, when.* (A. C. p. 3)

Both of the Carpenters had had unfortunate child and teacher experiences which led them to believe that their role was as a facilitator of learning rather than as a provider of knowledge. Rita, however, was at odds with Carmen in that she believed that school had failed to cater for her tendency to learn by "kinaesthetic" means. She believed that her son's best learning was by a similar approach: *He learned best by touching and doing.* (CD. p.23)

While Carmen had no concerns about her learning, as had Hera and the Smiths, the O'Donnells both had some worries. Dory felt that school had never given him any opportunities to express his leadership skills, while Moira believed that learning at home, under her mother's teaching with the Correspondence School's guidance, was the most rewarding time of all of her schooling. This view of learning was also compounded by the negative attitudes of the staff at the school her daughter had attended. Mary, while clinging to the notions of learning and teaching she had at school in the country of her birth, also felt that New Zealand schoolteachers had failed to cater for her children and had also failed to listen to her concerns. The Smiths did not express any concerns about their earlier personal experiences.

#### *Further Aspects for Consideration*

There were some further aspects common to the practices these families adopted that should be considered at this juncture. These relate to the actual teaching processes these parents adopted. I have used Jordan's (2003) teaching continuum as a framework for examining them. Jordan proposed a teaching continuum, which she had adapted from a structure proposed by Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1995). Jordan, however, supported by Gardner (1996), argued that they had erred in placing co-constructive interactions closer than scaffolding to the directive end of their scale. She distributed teaching practices according to the degree of teacher control, or direction, in the learning situation. Her model, as illustrated in Figure 2, was used to examine the themes evident in the narratives of these eight families. Jordan had researched children from the early childhood sector and it was clear that the early childhood approach, with its focus on individualised and interactive learning, was an appropriate model for these homeschooling families.

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TEACHING CONTINUM		
NON-DIRECTIVE	MEDIATING	DIRECTIVE
Acknowledge	Facilitate, Support	Scaffold, Demonstrate
Model	Co-construct	Direct

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Figure 2. *Jordan's (2003) teaching continuum.*

Jordan's figure requires some explanation. She saw this continuum as a diagrammatic representation of the focus of the teacher's attention and teaching style. In this diagram the continuum was divided into the three major areas of nondirective, mediating, and directive. Each area was then divided further into the subheadings: acknowledge and model; facilitate, support, and co-construct; and scaffold, demonstrate, and direct. These subheadings will be defined and examined in some depth, in relation to their relevance to the practices of these homeschooling families.

### *Acknowledge*

Bredenkamp and Rosegrant (1995) described acknowledging as "giving attention and positive encouragement to keep a child engaged in an activity" (p. 21). All of these homeschooling parents' practices, at one time or another, fitted the category of acknowledging. For example, most of these parents recognised the decisions made by children about what they wished to learn. However the Smiths, while acknowledging and encouraging the wishes in older children, tended to believe that *with the younger ones, adults know best.* (CD. p. 60)

Carmen acknowledged and encouraged her children to follow their own decisions about what they wanted and how they wanted to learn. For example, Carmen acknowledged Jess's desire *to learn to do handwriting* (CD. p. 27) and acted to assist her.

Kay, Moira, Mary, and Hera were noticeable in that they moved, over time, towards a nondirective approach involving acknowledgement of their children's wishes in relation to learning. All families shared the common view that children are "natural learners", which suggested that they acknowledged and responded positively to their children's interests and approaches to learning.

### *Model*

Modelling meant, according to Bredenkamp and Rosegrant (1995), "displaying for children a skill or desirable way of behaving in the classroom, through actions only or with clues, prompts, or other forms of coaching" (p. 21). Again, all teaching-parents in this study provided a learning model for their families by involving learning in a continuous structure based around all aspects of family life. The Carpenters talked of living and working together while providing a model of their concepts of learning in their everyday activities, which frequently incorporated learning. Dale and Melinda Abraham endeavoured to model and to make learning seamless within family life. In all

cases, simply by choosing to homeschool, the parents demonstrated or modelled their valuing of learning. As Moira said, *I've found my vocation*. (CD. p. 51)

She felt strongly that learning should be linked closely to the family. These parents thus provided a model of what they perceived to be the value and place of learning.

The asking of questions was also used as a form of modelling. For example, Anne talked of the responses she got when she asked Melinda how to spell a word. She claimed that Melinda replied, *you should make an initial attempt by yourself before asking for help*. (A.C. p. 3)

Reading to the children, especially the younger ones, could also be taken as a type of modelling but it really depended on what was going on around the reading itself.

### *Facilitating*

Bredenkamp's and Rosegrant's (1995) definition of facilitating was, "Offering short-term assistance to help a child achieve the next level of functioning (as an adult does in holding the back of a bicycle while a child pedals)" (p. 21). Although this definition is an appropriate one the families in my study claimed that for them researching, or facilitating, material and establishing locations were activities appropriate to their children's needs. All families practiced this latter form of facilitating which they saw as providing materials, resources, and situations where learning could take place. Today, access to information is much easier as most New Zealand families have a computer and Internet is now readily accessible.

There were variations between families concerning the amount of facilitation carried out, the age when children could begin to facilitate for themselves, and when independent learning was encouraged. Carmen saw her major role as a facilitator of opportunities to learn, which included her paying for classes. Her task, she claimed, *was to make sure they have opportunities*. (CD. 27)

Hera talked of [not] *having enough hours in a day to keep up with what I want*. (CD. p. 42)

All the parents in my study declared that they, as facilitators, spent many evenings reading, using computers and developing files to cater for their children's desires or needs. Kay saw her task as,

*"facilitating social experiences and providing material for topics that Joseph wished to learn"* (CD. p. 15).

However, facilitating is obviously not confined to parents who homeschool. Of necessity, classroom teachers spent many hours facilitating and preparing material for their students.

### *Support*

Support entails, as Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1995) claimed, “providing a fixed form of assistance, such as a bicycle’s training wheels, to help a child achieve the next level of functioning” (p. 21). In an educational sense the expectation is that support is available to assist at both a practical and an emotional level.

For the parents in this study supporting their children, particularly in relation to ethical and moral values, was a common factor. All of them saw the school-based peer group as a threat to these values. These school-based peer groups, with their alternative sets of preferred behaviour, created what all parents regarded as confusing sets of values for their children. As Hera explained, *Kids learn a lot of mostly negative social behaviours at school.* (CD. p. 39)

The Abrahams were another example, with Dale describing the peer group as resembling William Golding’s (1954) “*The Lord of the Flies*”. This viewpoint, opposing the school-based peer group, was usually supported by both adults and also by the extended family. Carmen and Kay saw their major task as supporting their children’s interests, provided that they were in harmony with family values and morals.

### *Co-construction*

Jordan (2003) defined co-construction in the following way:

When a teacher was working within a co-constructive model she was likely to have no specific outcome in mind other than that she and the children identified their topics of interest and built on these through interactive dialogue. (p. 244)

It was clear that this was a complex composite of the features of nondirective and mediating aspects of the continuum. Jordan (2003) also considered co-construction as emphasising the child as

A powerful player in his or her own learning. The child as co-structor provokes the image of the child as rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and to other children. (p. 42)

Co-construction thus placed emphasis on teachers and children together studying meanings in favour of merely acquiring facts. Studying, in this case, meant requiring teachers and children to make sense of the world jointly, to interpret and understand activities and observations as they interacted with each other. Jordan (2003) went on to say:

In order to co-construct meaning and understanding, the teacher needs to become aware of what the child thinks and knows and understands, and to engage with the content of this body of knowledge. The child's expertise is acknowledged as being as valid as the teacher's. (p. 43)

However this claimed validity, in a co-construction setting, is a controversial one. The claim is considered further in Chapter Eight.

The sharing of learning, ideas, experiences, and conversation were part of the experiences of all eight families. Moira, for instance, spoke enthusiastically of their family concert and their shared learning of modern technology. Kay by comparison talked about learning from both their children, and Carmen claimed that she was trying constantly to empower her children in those ways. Moira also claimed that [she] *tries to follow what they are interested in*. (CD. p. 49)

To a lesser extent the same was evident with the Abrahams, Kupes, and Turners. It was also evident in the Smith's interactions with, and the degree of independence demonstrated by, their older children. It is worth noting that the new National Curriculum (2007) reinforces this approach to learning by stating that "teachers encourage such thinking when they design tasks and opportunities that require students to critically evaluate the material they use" (p. 34). From these homeschooling families descriptions it can be concluded that they reinforce children's thinking in this way.

### *Scaffolding*

The notion of scaffolding arose largely from the writings of Vygotsky. Jordan (2003) explains scaffolding in the following way:

As means of assisting children's learning scaffolding maintains the adult as the expert in charge of the task and guiding the direction of the activity, usually with a preconceived outcome in mind. (p. 41)

Similarly, Rogoff (1998) argued, “scaffolding focuses on the tutor’s efforts as they relate contingently to the novice’s successes and failures” (p. 699). However, it needs to be noted that in scaffolding the intention of the adult, or teacher, is that the long-term goal is for the child to be able to perform the tasks independently. As Webb (2007, p. 1) claimed:

Effective scaffolding makes two major contributions:

- Makes it easier for the learner to undertake a task successfully....
- Extends what is possible for a learner to perform and thus expands the ZPD [Zone of Proximal Development] (p. 1).

McKenzie (2000) claimed, in his enumeration of eight characteristics of educational scaffolding, that it “provides clear directions; clarifies purposes; keeps students on task; offers assessment to clarify expectations; points students to worthy sources; reduces uncertainty, surprise and disappointment; delivers efficiency and creates momentum” (pp. 156-160). All of these theorists suggest that scaffolding is at least a “temporary” adult support system with significant directive elements.

All families in the study at times demonstrated their use of scaffolding. Hera did so with the purpose of teaching Maori and its associated culture while Mary, when teaching her first language to her children, had two intended outcomes of independence and advanced thinking in that language. Both parents were acting very clearly from a scaffolding model. All teaching parents read extensively to their children and expected questions and discussion to follow, although parental control of outcomes in reading could be very questionable. The Smith family made a particular feature of reading to their children. Either Abel or Susan read to them for at least two hours daily. This reading was interspersed by questions and discussion, and was always across age groups. Moira pointed out that her first objective was to provide the basic skills in literacy and numeracy. These parents clearly had an agenda, in their teaching of basic language and mathematics skills, with long-term goals of achieving independence and advanced thinking in these areas. It was also clear that when these parents taught moral and ethical values they had outcomes in mind.

### *Demonstrating*

Bredenkamp and Rosegrant (1995) defined demonstrating as “actively displaying a behavior or engaging in an activity while children observe the outcome” (p. 21).

Demonstrating can be a valuable tool as it capitalises on the human tendency to imitate. This was clearly evident in many of the families in my study. Both Hera and Mary demonstrated their first language to their children while Carmen and Rita encouraged their children to watch and imitate the activities of local artisans and experts. Moira's husband, Dory, demonstrated the use of the computer to their children while Peter and Kay's children watched and participated in the construction of their new home. In all of these families the parents, with an underlying assumption of learner imitation, demonstrated the chores and lifestyle they had chosen to adopt.

### *Directing*

Bredenkamp and Rosegrant (1995) claimed that directing "provides specific directions for children's behavior within narrowly defined dimensions of error" (p. 21). By using the modifier "narrowly", they allowed for the possibility of moving away from the absolute of directing towards the notion of guidance but, at the same time, a restraint on the variability was accepted. Despite their inclusion of the notion of guidance, I found the category of directing a somewhat misleading one, because it implied complete control and did not fit well with Jordan's definitions of the subtopics; particularly as they all suggested assisting rather than the absolute control implied by the use of directing. A better term might have been the use of the word "guiding". Each aspect she listed implied a desire for an outcome rather than control of activity.

In the families I studied, the most obvious aspect of direction was in the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Carmen (CD. p. 26), Rita (CD. p. 34), and Moira (CD p. 48) strongly believed that children were "natural learners" and that, in today's world, children could not exploit their natural desire to learn without the basic skills of Language and Mathematics. The Abrahams, Smiths, Kupes and Turners saw direction as an expected part of their electing to homeschool their children. Because all families saw no division between learning and their total lifestyle it was obvious that functioning in the family also required some directing by parents and/or older sibling. The notion of "natural learning" will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

These parents also recognised that their teaching and interactions with their children changed over time. The changes were not only between adults and children but also between children. Obviously all children change over time, as do all family members. However, homeschooling appeared to bring this factor into sharper focus. Kay talked of

learning from and with her children while Susan talked of the notion that learning the right approach at the right time led to a “*cruisey*” time. Hera by comparison spoke of parents as the best teachers because of their intimate knowledge, understanding, and lifetime contact with the child as well as their awareness of change or a need for change. This was not to say that the changes were confined to parent-child relationships or the curriculum; rather, all mothers recognised changes in themselves as in all of their children. Van Galen (1987) claimed, when referring to mothers who assume a teaching role at home, that it:

allows them to be traditional mothers while also performing roles that they believe carries [sic] greater prestige. Home schooling has served to re-define their status as women in a society they believed no longer values motherhood. (p. 165)

This notion of the changing role, or status, of the mother was seldom mentioned in the families I interviewed in this research, although it was evident from their social and verbal confidence in interacting with me that no mother saw herself as being of low status. If I was asked to define their attitudes and behaviour I would have to say that every one of them impressed me as being self-assured, very ready to learn, well informed in their areas of expertise, and very lucid in their explanations and narratives. Van Galen (1987) concluded: “They are taking a public stand for the family as an institution while also redefining their roles within their own families” (p.167). I would agree with this claim but would consider that while they were redefining their roles in the family this was not done by any prior determination but rather by the practices they carried out.

In the families I studied the father’s role also changed because constant contact made the bonds between mother and child stronger, and also as result of his being sole provider. Most fathers in my sample shared in the planning of curricula and in some activities with the children. This is not to claim that all these changes were necessarily positive. In fact, some worthwhile research could be carried out into the teaching parent, and his or her partner, on how he or she believed they have changed, or been changed, by educating their children at home.

## Summary of Practices

The families made it clear in their interviews that they had moved over time from a child-centred approach to an approach closer to a child-directed learning style and a changed role from learning decider to facilitator. The common elements, as already presented, were:

- Teaching of literacy and numeracy;
- Using high levels of communicative learning;
- Catering for individual approaches to learning and needs;
- Curricula designed largely by the parents and children;
- Flexible timetables and programmes;
- Emphasis on practical and environmental learning;
- Teaching moral and cultural values;
- Extra-curricula learning, and
- The earlier experiences of parents.

## Propositions

The following propositions, derived from my narrative inquiry and extracts from a grounded theory approach to the studies of eight homeschooling families, are now advanced. To reiterate, the two questions central to my study were:

- Why do parents choose to homeschool their children?
- How do they go about the practice of homeschooling?

Proposition one:

Parents chose to homeschool for complex reasons, and these reasons changed over time. They centred around:

- The parents' concepts of the nature and role of the family.
- Concern about schools and the school culture, with a belief that they could do better.
- Religious or philosophical reasons.
- A belief that schools deprived children of the right to childhood.

Proposition two:

Parents practiced homeschooling consistent with their reasons for choosing homeschooling. These practices change over time. They centred around:

- Curricula designed by children and parents;
- Flexible timetables and teaching methods;
- Catering for individual needs and children's approaches to learning;
- Emphasis on experiential learning;
- High levels of communicative learning; and
- A seamless education linked to extra curricula learning integrated with their lifestyle.

In my introduction to this thesis, I alluded to the lack of research into homeschooling in New Zealand, despite almost one percent of school aged children being taught, by choice, at home, and the apparent conflicts present in society about the rights of the state as opposed to the rights of the individual in relation to the control of formal education. It is also evident, however, from the responses of the families interviewed, that teachers and school principals are now better informed about the rights of parents to apply for exemption for their children from attendance at school. The Ministry of Education now provides a very comprehensive set of material for these parents (see Appendix B). The Ministry and homeschooling support groups, nonetheless, need to work on establishing better working relationships, even though the Education Review Office appears to have become accepted as a review and guidance service.

My review of the literature also made it clear that there was a range of homeschooling practices which varied from country to country and sometimes from state to state. New Zealand homeschoolers, despite many similarities with others in overseas countries, appeared to be unique in the English speaking western world in that they all received an allowance from the Ministry of Education. In New Zealand there are also common nationwide criteria for acceptance and rejection of applications for exemption.

## ; CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

As I have explained already my commitment to this study has been stimulated, in part, by the lack of research into homeschooling in New Zealand. Apart from the survey undertaken by Keslake et al. (1998) much of the existing New Zealand research - perhaps influenced by United States studies - characterised homeschooling in New Zealand as dominated by homogeneous, Christian Fundamentalist families who upheld conservative pedagogical approaches to learning. However, most parents in my study only found out about homeschooling as an existing alternative to sending their children to school through friends or the local media. They were often unaware initially that, given certain conditions, parents were actually able to teach their children at home. Within the teaching profession a similar ignorance was apparent. Indeed I shared this ignorance prior to beginning this study. It is also evident that homeschooling has become a growth area in New Zealand education. My original intention had been to broadly contribute to the currently rather slim volume of literature on homeschooling in New Zealand. However, it soon became evident that the reasons for choosing and adopting homeschooling were, if some overseas findings were valid, likely to be complex and thus eminently worthy of further study. Indeed, that many complexities were also present in the New Zealand situation has been amply demonstrated by my research, while not denying the small sample involved.

As indicated in Chapter One, a central issue that arose from my reading of the existing literature on homeschooling concerned the split between researchers on just how to characterise homeschooling families. In turn this stimulated me to ask questions about the nature and purpose of homeschooling, including the issue of state versus individual rights in relation to education. Accordingly, as indicated previously, I posed two key questions around which this study has revolved:

- Why do some parents choose to homeschool their children?
- How do they go about the practice of homeschooling?

As the research developed, and revealed significant complexity, additional questions arose about the beliefs these parents held about the purpose and practice of education.

My interviews proved even more revealing than I had originally assumed. As detailed in Chapter Seven, significant factors emerged from the families' reasons for homeschooling, their beliefs about education and their teaching practices. It would appear that their reasons for deciding to homeschool were complex and largely unique to each family. This was not to say that there were no factors shared between families. For instance, the families in my sample drew on personal or sibling experiences of school and the school-based peer group. They held philosophical, religious, or cultural views which conflicted with those of the existing school culture, and also believed that their children's needs, learning style and "natural" learning abilities were not being catered for adequately. Furthermore they thought that learning should be part of a total family lifestyle.

The practices adopted by each family were, however, related positively to their reasons for choosing to homeschool and their beliefs in the purpose of education. These families developed their own flexible curricula and timetables, taught their children the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, acted as facilitators, and made significant use of the local environment and the local homeschooling support group.

Having outlined some preliminary findings, it is now appropriate to examine the broader aspects of this study which arose out of Chapters One and Two, and which emerged from the narratives of the families. The literature review in Chapter Two, although based largely on overseas studies, was used to provide a context in which further questions could be posed. The limitations of the study were considered and areas for future research advanced for consideration. This latter point was necessary because I felt that studies of this nature could impact on future policy. I also hoped that my study would stimulate others to research homeschooling in New Zealand.

### **Why Some Parents Choose to Homeschool**

The reasons the families in my study initially chose to homeschool were complex. As families continued with the practice, these became more complex with the passage of time. The reasons given ranged from personal negative experiences of school to wider concerns about philosophical, moral, and ethical values. Wider concerns about teaching practices in schools, the school culture and minority cultural aspects were also evident. Although school experiences were for some parents, such as the Carpenters, largely

negative, others appeared to have enjoyed happy and successful school days, as indicated, for instance, by Moira and Hera. Most parents in my study consulted others and read widely about homeschooling, as Carmen explained, before they chose to homeschool. The predominant concerns for most parents were the importance they attached to the place of the family as the natural centre of learning and a wish to exercise control over perceived negative school experiences, as explained by the Abrahams and the Kupes. An associated and indeed interesting finding was that these homeschooling parents believed that schools deprived children of the right to enjoy childhood. Dale, Rita, and Peter were examples of this point of view.

Another key finding of my study was that the reasons for homeschooling could not be reduced to simple factors such as selective pedagogy or Fundamentalist religion, as claimed by both Baldwin (1993) and McAlevey (1995). This suggested that using only two criteria for explaining the many interacting factors involved in parental decisions to homeschool was an oversimplification. If religion and pedagogy were the only reasons then it would be reasonable to assume that most seriously religious families would teach their children at home, as would most families who disagreed with the current educational philosophy and/or educational practices. As homeschooled children comprise less than one percent of the school aged population, this clearly was not so.

The homeschooling families' reasons for choosing to homeschool were clearly linked to their views on the purpose of education. In this context a somewhat surprising finding of my study was that all families held the belief that children were "natural" learners and that this ability should be facilitated. The teaching parents believed they should also provide materials, resources, and opportunities for this learning to take place, according to the needs of the child. They also believed that education should facilitate children's enjoyment of childhood, be flexible, and be adapted to the child's preferred approach to learning. Many of these families felt that schools failed to do this. That is not to say that the parents did not hold strong views about the so-called basic skills. Hence the facilitation included the parents equipping the children with the basic skills in literacy and numeracy, for they saw these as necessary skills in today's world, enabling them to use their natural ability to learn.

Ironically in some ways, the families in my sample shared at least one contestable belief about the education process with those in the formal school system. One might be

inclined to ask, for instance, if it is held that children are “natural learners” why then is it necessary to teach them to speak English and other languages and to read, write, or spell. Would not children naturally learn to do these activities without being taught? All parents, in some way, also spent some time teaching their children to count so it was reasonable to assume that these homeschooling parents also taught their children to do the same. Moreover, homeschooling families shared with many mainstream, liberal, educators a belief that “natural” learning in children was a spontaneous process. For example, Meighan (1996) talked of “most parents finding that young children are “natural” learners. They are like explorers or research scientists busily gathering information and making meaning out of the world” (p. 3). Clearly there are some problems with this belief. Meighan and other authorities need to re-examine what it was that they meant. Perhaps Meighan meant that children are naturally curious or that children are natural imitators. If homeschooling parents then condemn schools for destroying children’s natural curiosity, they perhaps may have some validity. Most secondary and many primary schools have relatively rigid timetables which, after a set time, usually an hour, require a student to stop studying a subject which may have aroused his or her curiosity and abruptly change to a totally different one. This practice would appear to at least reduce the levels of curiosity in most students.

Perhaps these homeschoolers were using the term “natural” to express their concepts of education in a similar manner to that of Rousseau, in “*Emile*”. For instance, Johnston (1999), citing Rousseau’s “*Emile*” in a lecture presented at Malaspina University in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, clearly espoused Rousseau’s conviction that “we must educate human beings to bring out their natural goodness, independence, self-love and equality ”(p. 10):

Children must be raised in the consciousness of perfect freedom – they must think they are being allowed to do what they want. The task for education is to create situations where they can do this properly....The real test of the educator is not in telling children what to do but seeing to it their [the students] desires are suitably met by their own actions. (p. 10)

In fact the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) has gone some way to accommodating this position by requiring schoolteachers to be “developing programmes of learning suited to students’ needs and interests” (p. 38). This could be taken to mean allowing students time to complete their research in their chosen study and thereby satisfy their natural curiosity.

Perhaps the most important thing that emerged, from both the narratives and the literature review, centred on the central question of whether homeschooling defined or redefined the family. In particular, Barratt-Peacock's (1997) notion of homeschooling as a "community of learning practice" was confirmed strongly by this study. To reintroduce the argument briefly, Barratt-Peacock (ibid) claimed that homeschooling families had developed an alternative form of secondary socialisation to that of schools in a post-industrial society:

That alternative is a focus on the family as a community of learning practice in which children are useful and valued legitimate members playing an active and powerful role...by which elements of culture and explanatory systems are transmitted....Such families are members of networks connecting them to other communities of practice situated in fields of adult practice in wider society. (p. 121)

All families in my study, either formally or informally, brought their children up with the concept of learning as a natural part of family life. Most parents did this informally as the situation arose in interactive discussion or, as Thomas (1994) described, by "communicative learning". Some used a Christian base and taught this as part of the daily programme, but other families taught their children ethics and morals from a more broadly based perspective.

Several families claimed that one of their major purposes was to bring up their children as independent thinkers and learners. The notion of independence, advanced by Melinda Abraham and later expressed by others, was interesting as it implied a right to choose. However, by restricting teaching to one adult, over a number of years, it could be argued that exposure to choice could be limited by homeschooling. Most primary schools change teachers, for a specific group of children, at least annually, whilst at secondary school teachers are usually changed from period to period. Not only could this practice provide the potential for greater choice but also the opportunity for greater exposure to others' beliefs, lifestyles, and priorities. Because most New Zealand schools have age-grouped classes, it is likely that each child would, at school, be exposed to a large age-related peer group. As most humans are inclined to join a group, it seems likely that these children would, in future, want to join the peer group most like themselves in age and experience. Being part of a peer group means that the child is exposed to the views and behaviours of those peers. Ironically, this presented a

significant dilemma to homeschooling parents, given that it was precisely the school-based peer group that was a concern for nearly all of the homeschooling parents in my study. If the object was indeed independence then perhaps exposure to others is a means of achieving this. However, it was entirely possible for homeschooling parents to effect exposure to a range of others and to many alternative viewpoints. Indeed, some of these parents opted to employ tutors or whanau and joined groups of other homeschoolers. Nonetheless, the potential for social closure needs to be guarded against and is to some extent recognised by homeschooling families. For example, the Kupe family spent a great deal of time having their children experience life, with emphasis on developing their understanding of their Maori culture and remaining in frequent contact with their whanau.

I would argue, however, that for these families, a central issue was a desire for control. In the homeschooling context this involved the control by parents of the moral, ethical, cultural development and learning, especially for the younger children. For example, all parents in my sample expressed concern about the influence of the school-based peer group, which Dale Abraham in particular saw as a malign influence. One obvious way to have avoided such peer group pressure was to limit their children's contact with others and to teach them at home.

While their reasons for choosing control varied, in some cases this also involved concern about the influence of state secular education as opposed to their own religious beliefs. Significantly, perhaps, the Smiths believed they would "*lose their children*" to other agencies, particularly nonreligious ones. Others, for example the Abrahams, acknowledged that homeschooling gave them exclusive control over and total responsibility for their children. Others believed, as did the Carpenters, that from their personal experiences, schools and schoolteachers harmed children in both their thinking and their movements towards independence. Meighan (1996) expressed the view that "the habit of peer-dependency and the "tyranny of the peer group" might be reversed by home-based education" (p. 2). A number of parents in my study held that schools failed to properly cater for their children's needs and learning styles, believing that homeschooling could compensate for this. Homeschool facilitation, however, which all teacher-parents claimed to do, also meant that parents retained the capacity to control what their children were exposed to. This especially was so because in New Zealand, homeschooling parents tended to design their own curricula. Designing one's own

curricula does confer power over what one's children learn and how this learning may be presented. Hence Mayberry et al. (1995) stated that "home schooling is a way of organizing the education of one's children that holds particular meaning for parent educators" (p. 100).

Another very significant and unexpected finding was the change that occurred, over time, in homeschooling parents' ideas and practices relating to "family" concepts. For example, parents reported that their family unity strengthened as a result of homeschooling. In the New Zealand context, homeschooling families may have a more intense interpersonal relationship than do families whose children attend school. If this is so, then it is in keeping with Van Galen's (1987) findings. The discovery of these reported changes, in a New Zealand context, was made possible by the approach taken in this research. There is room, however, for a much more ambitious and larger scale research project which would examine homeschooling family life as it is lived. Dr. Judith Loveridge (personal correspondence, July 2005) claimed, for instance, that:

A temporal dimension is inherent in narrative research and it adds to understanding life as lived, an aspect that is not apparent in the 'snapshot' that is delivered through qualitative and quantitative approaches that do not chart/track change over time.

### **How Parents go about the Practice of Homeschooling**

A central focus of my study was the actual practice of homeschooling in New Zealand. In this respect the most significant features of these homeschooling families' practices were the flexibility of learning and the diversity of the practices adopted. Again, these practices became more flexible and diverse with the passage of time. This flexibility meant regular adaptation of curricula and flexible timetables which allowed children, when ready, to pursue an interest to satisfaction or completion. This was very different from the school situation which is controlled largely by relatively rigid timetables and the requirements of the curriculum. Meighan and Meighan (1991) claimed a key difference between homeschooling and schools was that "schools tend to focus on *how to be taught*, whereas homes tend to teach *how to learn*" (p. 2, original emphasis). Incidentally it is interesting to note that, sixteen years later, the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) is now focused on schools teaching from the standpoint of "learning to learn" (p.11). Perhaps the Ministry of Education is learning from the homeschooling

families, or perhaps this merely reflects a changing view of the multiple tasks of education in the 21st century. The latter seems more likely because the 2007 Curriculum document also encourages “all students to reflect on their own learning processes and to learn how to learn” (p. 9).

The widely varying practices adopted by the homeschooling families in my study were also very significant. Each facilitating-parent interpreted material to suit the approach he or she anticipated would elicit the best response from a particular child. Catering for individual needs, both of the moment and the longer term, was very evident and perhaps enhanced due to the intimate knowledge each parent had of the child. However, although the notion of facilitated learning, as adopted by these families, could be a valuable means of catering for individual needs, it could also be potentially a device for the indoctrination of the child. Defined as “to make someone accept a system of thought uncritically” (the Reed dictionary of New Zealand english, p. 582), This is especially so when the facilitator selects information which conveys a particular point of view or rejects alternative perspectives. Schools and teachers can be equally selective but they could, to some degree, be countered by the children’s parents presenting alternative viewpoints or registering their complaints with teachers or the Board of Trustees. It could be argued that, today, part of the task of ERO should be to ensure homeschooled children receive a balanced education. However, there is no evidence that such educational supervision actually exists.

Diversity was also present in the approaches of families to the teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, even though the teaching of these skills was confined usually to the morning. Every family spoke of being aware of, and catering for, the different approaches to learning that their children exhibited. It was also evident that their teaching practices related closely to both their reasons for choosing to homeschool and their beliefs about the purpose of education.

In most of the families, once the child had achieved mastery of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy there was a significant degree of negotiation between parent and child. This negotiation varied between discussion on how these curricula topics might be achieved, depending upon the age of the child and the degree of accommodation allowed by the parent. One parent adopted an un-schooling approach with consequently very high levels of child negotiation, while another, with strong links to the Scriptures

and literal interpretation of the Bible, was more directive in approach and consequently less open to negotiation. This latter family appeared to be more appropriate to the “typical” homeschooling depicted in the studies of Baldwin (1993) and McAlevey (1995).

As I have outlined already, in all the families I studied a movement towards flexibility and child-directed, co-constructed, learning, as Jordan (2003) elaborated, was evident. Again, as already discussed, Jordan (2003) claimed that co-construction meant that “the child’s expertise is acknowledged as being as valid as the teacher’s” (p. 43). This appears to imply that teacher training and expertise developed from life experience should be ignored. Perhaps Jordan’s intention was that the child’s impressions be acknowledged as important and should not be corrected immediately by the teacher. This was a factor that underpinned New Zealand’s controversial whole language approach to reading.

A further feature of the homeschooling families I studied is that most of any formal learning, for example basic literacy and numeracy, was completed usually by mid morning, with informal learning continuing throughout the remainder of the day. To these families all other learning was seen as a continuous process, not confined to ‘school hours’ or to any particular timetable. There were parallels here with several alternative educational philosophies, especially Rudolf Steiner, though there was no real evidence available that the families I studied were particularly familiar with these philosophies. Rather, much of it was built around the family’s chosen lifestyle.

Indeed, it was a characteristic of all the programmes I saw in action that parents largely designed their own curricula which allowed them to be adapted to children’s readiness and interests. This was especially noticeable for the older children, who were allowed a great deal of freedom as to approach, time, and presentation. Individual abilities were also encouraged, with parents going to considerable effort to stimulate interest in aspects of education that fitted with their understanding of each child. There was no indication, in the sample interviewed, of the adoption of a common curriculum, but most families reported that when they first began to homeschool they did rely occasionally on parts of some commercial programmes. As their confidence increased homeschooling parents abandoned, or made significant adaptation to, any external curricula that they may have adopted previously. These adaptations were in turn also

usually abandoned as they developed their own curricula. This finding contradicts the views of Baldwin (1993) and McAlevey (1995) who claimed that parents merely adopted virtually unmodified commercially designed programmes. Meighan's (1996) earlier claim of parent-created curricula and Williamson's (2002) explanation of similar situations in New Zealand that, for much of the time, curricula were parent/child-created were therefore both largely confirmed. There was also strong evidence that these personal programmes were focused to accommodate the needs and abilities of each child.

In my sample, families also indicated that flexibility of curricula and timetables was central to their teaching practices. It varied, however, between and within families, with the least flexibility linked to the basic teaching of literacy and numeracy. Evidence of flexibility was clearly demonstrated when the families took advantage of events, experiences, or unanticipated opportunities for learning. When these situations occurred, the parent's intimate knowledge of the child enabled personalised programmes and timetable adaptations to be made. Thomas (1994b, 1998) and Meighan (1996, 1997) also confirmed the existence of these ideas regarding flexibility and catering for individual needs, as did Ray (2002) in his overview of homeschooling.

Timetables, as I have already indicated in Chapter Six, were very flexible. Parents believed that homeschooled children learnt much more quickly than they would have at school. Consequently, most afternoon programmes were child-directed or focused on extra-curricula activities with timetables adapted to accommodate such activities. It was interesting to note that for younger children, the more formal teaching was usually carried out early in the day. In this they were not dissimilar to the commonly accepted school timetabling. Homeschooling parents may, as most schools do, subscribe to the view that children and teachers were fresher in the morning.

Another quite surprising outcome from my research was that all parents agreed that they learnt from their children. This is not to say that parents whose children attend school never learn from their children, but the very nature of the homeschool situation means that the possibility of shared learning occurred more frequently. All teaching parents also indicated that they, to varying degrees, took on the role of facilitator. Each of them found that conveying the results of their facilitating efforts to their children was a rewarding learning activity.

## **State versus Individual Rights**

My study touched inevitably upon issues of state versus individual rights in relation to education. The state imposes certain conditions on homeschooling parents but the existing law is flexible enough to allow the state to change these conditions as it sees fit. For example, the intending homeschoolers must satisfy the state authority that, in areas such as curriculum and timetabling, they intend educating their child to the child's ability before being granted a certificate of exemption from school attendance.

Homeschooling parents also have to accept regular inspection by Ministry of Education officials under the umbrella of the Education Review Office. Any change in Ministerial policy does not require prior consultation with homeschooling families. It is therefore understandable that homeschooling parents believed that they needed to protect their individual rights to educate their children. These potentially conflicting views, on the rights of the individual and the state, were evident in debates on the 1877 Education Bill and were also evident from the research cited in the literature review. On one side there were the claims of Revell (1995), Callan (1997), Apple (2000), and Reich (2002). On the otherside were Mayberry et al. (1995), Charles (2000), Werles (2001), and Glanzer (2008). In essence, the debate comes down to a conflict between the rights of the state as opposed to the rights of the individual. Those in favour of the state's rights and state schooling base their claims around concepts of integration, while those opposed to the rights of the state favour the notion of an individual's right to educate his or her children. Perhaps the very concept of homeschooling as a movement contributes to this conflict, especially if the homeschooling participants are perceived as homogeneous. Any apparently new social or educational practice tends to polarise opinions. From the results of this study, however, it would be difficult to establish that the desire to homeschool, as the single commonality, was sufficient to identify homeschooling as a "unique movement". Davis (2005), based on her extensive experience of homeschooling in the United States and after talking to many support groups for homeschooling, stated:

Many of these organizations (especially the support group types) are very loosely organized, and participation can be erratic. The suggestion that these are part of an "elaborate social movement" (Stevens, 2001), does not square with my own observations....Homeschoolers often have little in common with one another other than a commitment to providing an educational alternative to the public school for their children. (p. 2)

It would seem unlikely that merely taking up a legal right, available since 1877, constitutes a movement. My own experience with New Zealand homeschooling families, supported by an examination of the articles of two homeschooling support groups, tends to endorse Davis's claim. Leaving aside the general commitment to the concept of children as "natural" learners, the desire for them to ensure future success for their children, and a certain scepticism about the State schools being able to achieve these aims, there was no other factor common to the families interviewed except for the commitment to the teaching of the basic skills in literacy and numeracy. However, the teaching of such skills is also an expectation of all state schools.

Nonetheless, there was a commonly held concern in the families I studied that the state might endeavour to impose what they saw as unacceptable conditions on them as homeschoolers. For example, the proposal by the Ministry of Education, in 2004, to review the criteria on which certificates of exemption would, henceforth, be granted, and the consequent arousal of high levels of concern and suspicion by homeschoolers over the proposal, was an indicator of the potentially poor relations between the state and the homeschoolers. A common concern about the motives of the Ministry of Education, again, however, is not sufficient to define homeschooling as a movement.

In the United States, Apple (2000) expressed the concern that home education is an antisocial, conservative, movement of largely middle-class whites who favoured the 'traditional' cultural and religious values. By withdrawal of their children, he argued, they were challenging notions of a progressive, integrated society without racial and social differentiation. This does not seem a particularly valid conclusion in the New Zealand situation because, in my study, the families included a mixture of Maori, Pakeha, and recent immigrants. Interaction within the local support group was certainly not a simple reflection of the notion of a white middle-class culture or of any entrenched opposition to an integrated society. The support groups I contacted, as discussed in Chapter Four, were open and a mix of many beginning and experienced parents. The children interacted with the full range of other families during the support group organised learning experiences. Such support group structures appear to be a uniquely Australasian phenomenon, in contrast to the American situation where support groups are organised reportedly according to specific beliefs or social structures. In all areas, with the exception of basic literacy and numeracy skills, the children had a very significant say in what they learnt, the way they learnt, and the contacts they made

during the learning, which is certainly not antiprogressive nor anti-integrated. There was also clear evidence of a range of ideas from conservative to progressive within and among families. The Carpenters were an example of this range with their emphasis on family and family values. They built their own unique home, which clearly established their own lifestyle, and at the same time provided computer skills for their children. There were also behaviours apparent which, while extrapolated from traditional points of view on social and political ideas, also included those values more in keeping with liberalism. This was demonstrated by the Kupes and Turners who wanted their children to retain their traditional culture and values, whilst mixing with a radical and socially diverse group who exhibited a mixture of alternative of opinions and lifestyles. Again, this span of ideas and values was in contrast to claims of value rigidity identified in much of the American literature by people such as Callan (1997) and Stevens (2001).

McAlevey (1995) claimed the belief that the family rather than the state should be responsible for children's education was a conservative one. On further consideration, however, it follows that, because state controlled education had been around in New Zealand for 130 years, then this was long enough for state control to be the accepted practice. In that respect, school attendance could be perceived as a conservative stance. However, it might be argued that homeschooling families, by taking total responsibility for their children, are the ones acting adventurously. This would support Mayberry et al.'s (1995) claim that homeschooling "exemplifies the principles of individualism and self-reliance....The individualism that is a core feature of the homeschooling movement however, does not deny the home-educating parents' strong sense of family and community" (p. 102).

All this confirmed that, for the parents in my study, the concept of family was a central one. All of these parents mentioned the 'family' or 'family unity' as either a reason for choosing to homeschool or, in the Smiths' case, that education is the right of the family and the state should have no place in children's learning. Hera Kupe believed that parents are the best teachers of their children and that her Maori culture placed great value on family and the whanau (extended family). Carmen and Rita held such strong views about their children growing to become the adults they desired them to be that a focus on homeschooling, hence the family, was the only possibility. The frequently expressed view of learning and education being a "seamless" process also reinforced this family unity theory. Barratt-Peacock's (1997) concept of the homeschooling family

as a community of learning practice (p. 115) best epitomises this notion of the significance of the family. My findings concerning family, or family unity, were also supported by Van Galen (1987) who reported that homeschoolers “are taking a public stand for the family as an institution while also redefining their roles in their own families” (p. 167). It is also supported by Mayberry and Knowles (1989) who have argued that “these parents see teaching at home as an essential element in developing closer family relationships” (p. 214).

### **Some Commonalities**

Critical to this research has been the narratives, freely shared between the participants and myself as the researcher. This has enabled me to address the questions proposed initially. Although the sample was too small to make any meaningful generalisations about homeschooling families in New Zealand, there are obviously some correlates. For example, all homeschooling families take advantage of legal right to express their stand for individual rights, as opposed to the right of the state, and thus to educate their children at home, and consequently held certificates of exemption from school attendance for their children. The homeschooling families I worked with, on average, consisted of three children, were single-income families, were members of the local homeschooling support group, and the teaching parent was the children’s mother. Each family expected to be visited at least once every three years by the Education Review Office (ERO) and received a small allowance from the state for each homeschooled child. Despite these common characteristics, however, their reasons for choosing to homeschool, as we have seen, were complex and individualised.

Broadly speaking, reasons for homeschooling were based on parental experiences, concern about schools and school culture, and notions of the rights of the child to childhood. Families also shared a concern for the maintenance of their own culture. Over time parents discovered, from their experiences and their involvement with the network of homeschooling families, many additional reasons for choosing to continue with homeschooling.

The practices they adopted related closely to their reasons for choosing to homeschool, and were shaped to meet the perceived needs of their children. These perceptions, however, may not be quite in harmony with the concept of children’s rights as described

by Professor Anne Smith (1998, 2000) and advocated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Practices also changed over time as the teaching parent became more confident in herself and in her teaching. The curricula and timetable were flexible and the teaching parents, in consultation with the children, adopted a largely facilitative role. The exception was that the teaching parent ensured that the basic skills of literacy and numeracy were acquired by each child. There was an expectation that learning would be more rapid than in a school situation, enabling extra-curricula learning and practical, environmental, experiences. Practices also allowed for child-directed learning within a total family lifestyle.

### **Emergent Research Areas**

As stated earlier, this research was necessarily a small scale introductory study of homeschooling in New Zealand in the 21st century. There remains a very obvious need to extend future research to the wider homeschooling community. When reviewing the interview comments and responses I received, for instance, it became obvious that most parents had a much better-than-average command of the English language, perhaps because most held tertiary qualifications with five holding postgraduate degrees. Arguably, it may have been that those parents who volunteered to be participants in this research were those who were most confident in their homeschooling and confident in their ability to convey their viewpoint to an interviewer. The question could therefore be posed, in a later and larger study, as to whether this sample was indeed representative of all homeschooling families. Identification of the qualifications of all homeschooling parents is therefore an important prerequisite to any future research.

Future studies might also highlight some of the problems of, and possible reasons for, any changes in government policy that the recent upsurge of homeschooling may have provoked. However, the Ministry of Education needs to recognise that there is no one group of homeschoolers who can speak for all. Consequently, the acceptance of any response, for example, to proffered state-funded support needs to be sought widely. Research into government, or into the stated practices of overseas countries as a consequence of the increasing numbers of homeschooling families, may also be potential research areas.

While this research was not intended primarily for an advocacy role, the question of support for homeschooling families arose inevitably from the interview situations. The vast majority of families indicated that their desire for support in their practice of homeschooling was primarily about the wish for free access to all resource material published by the Ministry of Education, and supplied free to schools. Homeschoolers recognise that a copy of this material for each family is unrealistic but they often suggested to me that both their local support group and the National Library Service might be permitted to lend the material to individual families.

The second most desired change identified by the families in this study was for the state to allow children occasional access to specialised teachers or school facilities such as science rooms or art rooms and to provide the opportunity for homeschooled children to join in cultural activities. Only one family was adamantly opposed to these suggestions and wished to have no involvement with schools or any Ministry-produced material. It was surprising that no family placed increased financial support as a priority. This may have been related to their concern that, by accepting more funding, they might open themselves to greater Ministry of Education involvement. Official suspicions notwithstanding, most homeschooling families were not “anti-Ministry”. This, however, remains an important research area which may result in greater understanding between homeschoolers and the Ministry.

There have been no studies specific to the role of women in the New Zealand homeschooling environment. Van Galen (1987), in the United States, declared that “homeschooling was ... an affirmation of the dignity of motherhood for several women” (p. 165). She also stated that another mother “felt that her status in the family had been enhanced when she assumed her role as teacher” (p. 165). McDowell and Ray (2000) have concluded that, “The element of social integration allowed the home schooling mother-teacher is an extraordinarily empowering one” (p.5). However, in New Zealand we have no clear idea at present of how women feel about the role of teacher-parent, or of how this role has affected her or the rest of her family.

Surprisingly, there has been little published research into how the now-adult children of homeschooling perceived their own homeschooling education, or of how they would modify the practices of their parents if they decided to homeschool their own children. There have also been no longitudinal studies of New Zealand homeschooling, such as

Wyatt (2008), who observed homeschooling in Kansas. Wyatt's research indicated that the importance of strong family relationships, concern about the social world their children might be exposed to at school, and a wish for greater autonomy and independence for all, were central themes. I would also highlight here the plea of Lowe and Thomas (2002) that "The real test of home education is a simple one. What happens afterwards?" (p. 150).

This sample of eight families cannot, therefore, be taken as fully representative of New Zealand homeschooling. For example, no families in the South Island have been studied recently. There is also an opportunity for cross-cultural studies of homeschooling in New Zealand. This has become especially relevant with our increasing diversity of cultural representation and parental cultural backgrounds. In the future there is a probability that each parent may have come from a different heritage. The notion of homeschooling across cultures could also be extended to comparisons between the reasons for and the practices of homeschooling in different countries, and relating these findings back to the New Zealand situation.

### **Recommendations for Future Policy Development**

Because of the variety and complexity of practices adopted by these homeschooling families, and in keeping with the findings of Mayberry et al. (1995), the Ministry of Education needs to be aware that any action they may take in relation to homeschooling is likely to provoke a diversity of reactions. As stated already, no single support group or association of homeschoolers can be taken to represent the whole. However, of considerable concern to all families in this research was the existence of the 1993 national curriculum, abandoned since 2007 in favour of a new national curriculum. Families believed that the right to create their own curricula was a central part of homeschooling. Ministry of Education curricula and timetables were, to them, too inflexible and too focused on the majority culture.

Some homeschooling researchers have articulated the possibility of new models for homeschooling. Meighan (1997) in the United Kingdom and Mayberry (1993) in the United States both advocated flexible schooling, allowing homeschoolers, on a flexible basis, to attend a school catering for independent learning and with a variety of curricula, with teachers and parents as equals. While applied research could be valuable

in this area, however, it may not be the answer to all conflicts between the state and individual rights in relation to education. For example, Moira O'Donnell recommended that:

Primary schools should focus on developing language, mathematics and independent learning so that secondary schools can better accommodate to children's interests and allow students to carry out more personal work more independently with flexible hours. (CD. p. 50)

The homeschooling phenomenon illustrates that no one education system can cater for all children and, just as schools do not cater successfully for all, it would also hold that homeschooling does not cater for all children's needs. Flexi-schooling and the O'Donnell approach could also suffer from the same problem. Variety is clearly the essence of any good education system because it allows different models and modes to emerge and requires self-reflection by the current systems.

As a consequence I would recommend that principals and teachers, of state registered schools, be encouraged to adopt a more open attitude towards homeschooling parents and allow their children to join school sports teams and class trips. I would also suggest that parents be encouraged to join staff in any teacher development programmes; to make use of teacher skills and school facilities, when these facilities and skills are not required for school purposes. Perhaps the Ministry of Education could encourage school participation in the above by offering a small allowance for each homeschooling family who take advantage of teacher skills, knowledge, and opportunities to use school facilities.

The structure and methods adopted by the current Education Review Office unit, tasked with reviewing homeschooling families, appeared to work fairly well, given the limitations I have identified. It appears to be accepted by the homeschooling parents with whom I have had contact. The centralised process of assessment for the granting of certificates of exemption appeared to be providing consistency and was generally well received by homeschooling practitioners and applicants. However, there was a perceived need by ERO for ERO to enquire into the opportunities parents provided for independent thinking and their children's learning about the cultural diversity existing in New Zealand society.

In my study I became very aware that choosing to homeschool was not an easy option and that it needed some very serious consideration before parents elected to do so. Parents considering doing so could read Lisa Rivero's (2008) recently published *The Homeschooling Option: How to Decide When it's Right for Your Family*. This addresses many of the questions families are likely to have to consider. Some of the questions addressed in the publication are those about socialisation, curriculum and resources, along with any special needs which may need attention. However, it has been written with an American focus and some aspects do not readily apply to New Zealand.

### **Looking Ahead**

I have enjoyed being involved with the homeschoolers who agreed to participate with me in this study. I have come to believe that homeschooling, or aspects of homeschooling practices, can offer a viable alternative to attendance and practices at school. Broadhurst (1999), after investigating young Australian children's perceptions of homeschooling, suggested:

Current research evidence suggests that homeschooling can be a viable educational alternative.... Homeschooling can incorporate teaching strategies that have long been held to be educationally effective – vertical age grouping, one-on-one tutoring, peer tutoring, supportive child-adult relationships, child-centred and initiated learning. (p. 1)

If the Ministry of Education considered relaxing timetable expectations, as homeschoolers do, considered greater flexibility in the curriculum, and allowed teachers to accommodate to the interests of children, it could then facilitate opportunities to follow children's interests to fruition. This was indeed implied in the new National Curriculum (2007), but it needed to be reinforced and internalised by both principals and teachers. This, of course, would put greater pressure on teachers and necessitate a new approach to assessment. I suspect it would also, however, create greater professional satisfaction. While the structure of schools may make flexibility more difficult to adopt, they are capable of accommodating these changes. I am aware that some teachers have always taught this way. Durie (2006), in a forward-looking symposium on the nature of New Zealand secondary schools, suggested that:

By aggregating the implications arising from a system that places students at the centre, a system that values inspirational teachers, relates easily to the

wider social environment, connects with communities, and embraces technologies wisely, it will be possible to gain a sense of how schooling might play a more positive role for all students, their families, communities and the nation as a whole. (p. 6)

It would appear that while much of what Professor Durie advocated has been foreshadowed by the new National Curriculum, he could also be seen as inadvertently endorsing many of the practices adopted by some of these homeschooling families.

### **Summary**

As claimed by Nolan and Nolan (1992) and Kerslake et al. (1998), homeschooling families are a diverse group. However, as my interviews progressed, and after reflection on the interviews, every family in my study also demonstrated uniqueness as they devised and developed their own individualised curricula, timetables, and teaching style. There were also a diversity of reasons for choosing to homeschool, from personal or sibling experiences at school, as the Carpenters related, to demonstrated beliefs by teaching according to the “Scriptures” as the Smith family did and other families who held strong desires to maintain their cultural identity. Codd (1981) recognised this diversity when he stated that “the social and cultural factors that impinge on the classroom from the wider community outside the school gates have historically been especially strong in New Zealand” (p. 52). Furthermore, as elaborated in this thesis, the families in my study also held diverse views on the nature of education, the role of schools and the practices they adopted, with parents frequently adopting a facilitatory position. However, a consistent variation on this facilitatory role was apparent when the need for the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills arose. Moreover, some broad commonalities became clear because these families often implemented a child-centred pedagogy, whereby children and parents were viewed as both teachers and learners.

My study, however, raised issues that went beyond just homeschooling families to embrace a broad sweep of children’s learning today. A significant issue was that these parents enthusiastically, and arguably uncritically, embraced the notion of co-constructive learning. However, this notion of co-constructive learning is also a common viewpoint of many preschool and primary school teachers and a few academics, some of whom train teachers. Clark (2004), while reviewing the National

Curriculum, subsequently revised further in 2007, pointed out that “learning is not an individual matter at all. Much, if not most, of our learning, and a great deal of our knowledge is conceptual understanding” (p. 167). He went on to note that “concepts, by their very nature, are not acquired *a priori* (prior to experience) but are learned, and they are learned, early by denotation (pointing), later through discourse”(p. 167, original emphasis). Later Clark explained: “It is highly implausible to suggest that children, drawing on their meagre conceptual resources, could possibly make sense of their experiences in any systematic scientific way” (p. 168). It may well be, as Clark maintains, that by adopting a co-construction approach homeschooling parents are perhaps adopting ultimately an unrealistic teaching/learning process.

Going beyond my two initial questions, as set out in Chapter One, the homeschooling phenomenon also raised important concerns about the complex relationship between individual, family, and state rights in education. Some researchers, as described in Chapter Two, maintained that the state’s rights must supersede those of the individual and family because of the need to integrate a multicultural society and to ensure that all children are equipped to take a full part in a democratic society (Callan (1997, Reich 2002). Others, however, claimed that the individual parent had the right to educate her or his family in the style felt appropriate, freed from the cultural indoctrination of the state system. Unfortunately, neither group seems to have considered that homeschooling parents may not be ensuring that families establish their children’s rights, as New Zealand agreed to under the provisions of the 1989 “*United Nations Commission on Children’s Rights*” articles 28 and 29. As Clark (2000) rightly concluded, “Such rights as children possess are no less deserving of protection than those of their parents. Parents, perhaps more than anyone else, have a duty to ensure that their children’s rights are promoted rather than transgressed” (p. 18).

All this is not to say that this conflict between the state and individual rights is a new phenomenon. My historical chapter has illustrated that it was indeed present in the first Education Act (1877) and has continued to this day. For example, a similar conflict was very evident in Anderson’s (1944) pamphlet which attracted a high degree of public sympathy at times when he claimed “The master of them that know, new style, is not Aristotle, but the Director of Education” (p. 14). He also charged that the state’s movement towards educational reform was based on a “flawed psychological assumption about the learning process” (p. 5). In another example from this earlier post-

war era, Dorothy Loughnan (1944), in a report critical of state post-primary education, claimed that running schools on democratic lines was dangerous because “school children are not citizens. Just *because* they are children and come to school to learn, the environment has to be authoritarian” (p. 12). These ideas, although written more than 60 years ago, arguably support the proposition that home schooling can be a viable alternative to state education, in the same way as are private schools, Roman Catholic, and Kohanga Reo.

It appears appropriate to conclude with a statement of Professor Kuzman of Indiana University. In an interview in late 2008, he commented that a high number of homeschoolers in the United States may have been an indication that it was time to reconsider definitions. He stated:

I think that one of the things that it's doing is to raise some fundamental questions about what we mean by public education and what counts as schooling vs. being educated at home in a variety of ways.... So I think the rise of school choice more generally and the home school sector in particular, are questioning all sorts of delivery models for what we mean by education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (p. 2)

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## Appendix A1

### Key questions.

#### **1. Please share with me the story of how/why you decided to homeschool your child/ren.**

##### **Prompts:**

- Are there any political, cultural or religious beliefs which influenced your choice to homeschool?
- Can you tell me how the education system influenced your decision to homeschool?
- Did you think about your own schooling experiences?
- Were any of your friends or acquaintances involved in homeschooling?
- To what extent was providing for children's personal needs a factor in your choice to homeschool?
- Did .....(learner's name/s) have a big part in your decision?
- Did you have any concerns about your decision?

#### **2. Please share with me your stories about how you go about teaching .....(child/ren's name/s.)**

##### **Prompts:**

- Where does, or did, the teaching of .....(child/ren's name/s) take place?
- Please explain to me how you decide what.....(child/ren's name/s) should learn and when to teach it.
- What are the specific things you do, or strategies you use, as you teach?
- Tell me some of the ways you have both contributed to the teaching.
- What subjects are most important to you?
- How is the decision about what and when to learn arrived at?
- What resources do you mostly use?
- Which groups, if any do you have contact with?
- Do you have significant contact with other homeschooling families?

**Please share with me how you might be efficiently supported in teaching your learner/s at home.**

**Prompts:**

- Have costs been a problem?
- Has access to education facilities been a problem?
- What sort of advice, or guidance, would you have liked?
- What equipment or materials would you like to have had?

Note: The prompts are for the researcher alone and used only when the stories falter or if an area may have been overlooked.

## Appendix A2

### Information sheet to support Groups.

March 27, 2002

Dear parents,

I am a retired teacher and became interested in homeschooling when I discovered that many teachers and principals had little or no knowledge of the right to exemption from attendance at school. I had also assisted several families in applying for permission to homeschool.

I am currently studying at Massey University and doing research into homeschooling in New Zealand for my Doctorate in Education. The topics of my research are, “Why do these parents choose to homeschool their children and how do they go about the practice of homeschooling these children?”

The ideas, practices and experiences of parents and children who are homeschooling in New Zealand.” I would like to be able to discuss this topic with homeschooling families in their own settings and at times suitable to them.

As noted above I would like to focus on why you decided to homeschool your child/ren. I am also very interested in how you teach your child/ren, your experiences of homeschooling and how you could be effectively supported in teaching your children at home.

The study is not funded or sponsored by any organization or department nor do I have any affiliation with any group or society which may prejudice my research findings. I enclose an information sheet outlining what the study is about in more detail.

The research is being supervised by Dr. Judith Loveridge and Dr. Roger Openshaw at Massey University. They are happy to discuss any concerns you may have and can be contacted at Massey University, Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North or by phone at (06) 356 9099.

My postal address is 119 Te Awe Awe Street, Palmerston North. My phone number is (06) 353 2029. My E-mail is [lroache@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lroache@xtra.co.nz) You are welcome to contact me at any time.

Homeschooling in New Zealand has been paid very little attention and seldom researched even though it is a rapidly growing education alternative. My goal is to

enhance public knowledge of homeschooling and perhaps effect changes in policy and practice in New Zealand education. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality but this cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Any information you would provide would be on the understanding that it will be confidential to the researcher and you would not be able to be identified in any report or publication that is prepared from the study. You would also have the opportunity to review and comment on all material provided by you.

After you have had an opportunity to discuss my request I would appreciate a reply, on the enclosed 'Expression of Interest' forms suggesting some dates I could communicate with your family.

Sincerely,

Leo Roache.

## Appendix A3

Information sheet for parents.

### 1. Who am I?

**I am a retired teacher and became interested in homeschooling when I discovered that most teachers and principals had little or no knowledge of the right to exemption from attendance at school. I had also assisted several families in applying for permission to homeschool. I am currently studying at Massey University and doing research into homeschooling in New Zealand for my Doctorate in Education.**

### 2. What is the study about?

The goal of the research is to interview parents and children about their homeschooling ideas and practices. The subject has not been researched very much in New Zealand yet homeschooling is a significant and a growing alternative form of education. I would like to discover:

- The ideas and experiences which led you to choose to homeschool your school-aged child/ren.
- Your experiences of homeschooling.
- How you teach your school-aged children.
- Ways in which you feel you could be effectively supported in your homeschooling.

I am really interested in your ideas, practices and experiences as a family, including your school-aged children, involving homeschooling. **I have no intention of doing any testing or other assessment of the children.** If the child wished to share their experiences and views about homeschooling they would not be interviewed in isolation from their parents. If your child does not want to be part of the research this will be respected and only consenting adults interviewed.

**The study is not funded or sponsored by any organization or department nor do I have any affiliation with any group or society which may prejudice my research findings**

**The research is being supervised by Dr. Judith Loveridge and Dr. Roger Openshaw at Massey University. They are happy to discuss any concerns you may have and can be contacted at Massey University, Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North or by phone at (06) 356 9099.**

A simplified Information Sheet is included for your child/ren and you might like to explain the project fully to them.

### **3. What will you have to do?**

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview of about one hour. This interview would take place at a time and place convenient to you and will be tape-recorded. The interview will ask you about why you chose to homeschool, how you go about it, your experiences while homeschooling and how you could be supported in your homeschooling. The researcher may ask for a second interview if there is a need for clarification of some points and you may ask for a second interview if you wish to add to or clarify the information already provided.

### **4. The participants' rights.**

If you take part in the study you have the right to:

- Withdraw from the study at any time and to refuse to answer any particular question.
- Ask any further questions about the study, which occur to you during your participation.
- Provide information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher, except where legal requirements compel disclosure, and that you will not be able to be identified in any reports that are prepared from the study.
- Examine and amend the transcript of the interviews, and to indicate any part of the transcript that you do not wish to be used.
- Whoever makes transcriptions will be required to sign a "Transcriber's Agreement" which subjects them to the same conditions of confidentiality and secure storage of data as if they were the researcher.
- Be given access to a report of the findings from the study when it is completed and published.
- Determine the disposal of interview tapes, transcripts of interviews, and personal documents made available to the researcher. It should be noted that Massey University requires data used in research be kept in a secure situation for five years.

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North Protocol 01/132. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research please contact Professor Rumball.**

**Appendix A4**

Information sheet for children.

My name is Leo Roache. I would like to come and share with you and your family stories about your homeschooling.

I will not ask you to do any tests.

Please talk about this with your parents.

If you and they agree to share some of your stories with me please read and sign the consent form.

Thank you for reading and thinking about this.

Leo Roache.

**Appendix A5**

## Expression of Interest.

Dear Leo,

Our family is interested in speaking to you about your research proposal concerning 'Homeschooling in New Zealand'.

You can contact us by phone at \_\_\_\_\_.

You can contact us by e-mail at \_\_\_\_\_.

A good time for us would be \_\_\_\_\_.

The best days would be \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Please send your reply to: Leo Roache

119 Te Awe Awe Street

Palmerston North.

Or phone (06) 353 2029 or e-mail [lroache@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lroache@xtra.co.nz)

## Appendix A6

**Parent's consent form.**

**[A separate consent form is required from each adult participant]**

I .....have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.

*(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).*

I agree to the interview being recorded on tape.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to my child or children being invited to join the interview.

I .....agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signed:** .....

**Name:** .....**Date:**.....

**Appendix A7**

Children's consent form.

I..... would like to join my parents and Leo  
Roache in talking about learning at home.

I do not have to say anything that I would sooner not say.

If my parents agree I can leave whenever I wish to.

Signed .....

Date .....

**Appendix A8**

Confidentiality Agreement.

- I.....agree to maintain and by my actions ensure the confidentiality of all material provided to me by Leo E Roache, or his delegate, in relation to the research topic, “Why do these parents choose to homeschool their children and how do they go about the practice of homeschooling these children?”

I..... undertake to ensure confidentiality by

- Keeping all audiotapes in a lockable, secure location.
- Keeping all transcripts of audiotapes in a lockable, secure location.
- Destroying, by shredding, all drafts, photocopies and notes relating to the transcripts.
- Ensuring all copies of audiotapes are destroyed.
- Ensuring all material stored on disc or hard-drive is protected and erased after the contract is completed.
- Maintaining professional confidentiality verbally or by any other action.

Signature.....

Name.....

Date.....

## **Appendix B: Ministry of Education Application for Exemption form and other supportive material.**

### **Appendix B1**

Information letter to parents.

Dear Parent/Caregiver

Kia ora. Nga mihi nui ki a koe.

**Thank you for your request for information about homeschooling your child. I enclose an application form for your use should you decide to apply.**

#### **The Education Act 1989**

**In New Zealand it is the right of all children to have an education. Sections 20 and 25 of the Education Act 1989 state that children between the ages of 6 and 16 must at all times be enrolled at and attending a registered school whenever it is open.**

However, as parents/guardians, you have the right to apply for a certificate of exemption from enrolment at a registered school for your child under section 21 of the same Act. The Ministry of Education has the responsibility to ensure your child's right to an education is preserved.

Please remember that until this certificate is issued your child, if aged over 6 years and under 16 years, must be enrolled at and attending a registered school.

#### **Certificate of Exemption**

When your application and information statement have been received by the Ministry of Education, the Manager will decide if the application shows that the child will be taught **“at least as regularly and well”** as in a registered school. If the Ministry office needs further information they may write to you, telephone you or ask to see you. It is important further information they may write to you, telephone you or ask to see you. It is important to understand that asking for additional information is common practice in assessing applications for exemption, and should not be interpreted as being declined.

On approval of your application you will receive a certificate of exemption and you may begin homeschooling your child.

If you are declined a certificate of exemption you will receive a letter explaining the reason for the decision. You have the right to appeal this decision. To appeal you should write to the Secretary for Education who, after considering a report on the matter from the Chief Review Officer of the Education Review Office, will confirm the decision or grant a certificate. The Secretary's decision is final.

### **Change of Circumstances**

You should write to the Ministry of Education if circumstances change after a certificate of exemption has been issued. You should write if you have a local change of address or if you move to another part of the country. You should also write if you decide to enroll your child at school, as your certificate of exemption will lapse at this point and will need to be returned to the Ministry of Education with your letter.

### **Homeschooling Supervision Allowance and Statutory Declarations**

The homeschooling supervision allowance is paid in January and July each year, and covers the preceding six months. The first payment for a child new to homeschooling will cover the period since the date of the issue of the certificate of exemption. Payment is subject to confirmation that you continue to meet the requirements under which the certificate of exemption was given. This confirmation is by way of a statutory declaration to be provided twice each year.

**Even if you do not wish to receive the supervision allowance you must complete a statutory declaration twice each year. This assures the Ministry that homeschooling is continuing.**

The statutory declaration needs to be signed by a person authorised to do this by the Oaths and Declarations Act 1957. On the statutory declaration there is a list of authorised people.

The annual amounts paid are:

First child	\$743	Second child	\$632
Third Child	\$521	Subsequent children	\$372

If you do not return the statutory declaration by the date specified, you will receive a reminder. If the Ministry has not received the statutory declaration by the amended date

your child's certificate of exemption will be automatically revoked. Being aware of these time frames will help you manage the process if you are away on holiday.

### **The Education Review Office**

*The Education Review Office (ERO) monitors schooling in New Zealand including home schooling programmes. Before visiting you, an ERO staff member will contact you to provide information about the visit and arrange an appropriate time. Please note that to assist the ERO to perform its role, the Ministry will provide the ERO with a copy of your application. You are not required to provide the ERO with a separate copy.*

*You may like to contact one of your local support groups for more information about how to prepare for an ERO review. If the ERO report indicates concerns, you will be asked to provide written information to the local Ministry office to show how you are addressing this.*

*The Ministry of Education may request the ERO to visit again or the ERO may have already indicated that they will make another visit. This is to give you a chance to make the required adjustments to your programme. If you cannot satisfy the ERO and the Ministry of Education regarding their concerns, your certificate of exemption may be revoked.*

### **Healthcare Services**

**Your child is entitled to the same health services as children attending registered schools, such as health nurse, dental, hearing and vision services. Queries regarding health services (e.g. access to dental nurses) should be directed to local health providers. The Ministry of Education is not able to advise on healthcare services and it is important that parents seek information where it might be reliably found.**

### **Special Needs**

If your child has special needs they may be entitled to additional resources. There is no requirement to apply for, or access, resources, to meet special educational needs. You may or may not choose to seek support, for example, you may wish to contact the Ministry of Education, Group Special Education (GSE).

**Finally**

Home schooling can be satisfying and rewarding. It is also a tremendous commitment for you as a parent. If you need more information before making an application, please contact staff at this office.

Yours sincerely

(name)

(job title)

## Appendix B2

### Making an application

*Before deciding to apply, there are a number of things you should consider.*

**3.2.1** The Education Act 1989 says that the Secretary for Education must be *satisfied* that your child *will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school*. This is to protect the rights of your child to an education. The information you provide with your application (Application Appendix A) should be detailed enough to satisfy this requirement. To help you in your application, you will find enclosed (Application Appendix B) an explanation of the Ministry's interpretation of the key words "at least as regularly and well as in a registered school", referred to above.

**3.2.2** **If you decide to go ahead with an application, please complete the personal details required on the enclosed form. Attached as Application Appendix C are some notes to help you to complete the question on ethnicity. In support of your application please provide the information, which is outlined below. The information is needed to assist the Ministry of Education to make an informed decision about issuing a certificate of exemption from enrolment.**

A checklist is also included for your convenience (Application Appendix D).

### **3.2.3 Broad Curriculum Areas**

**3.2.3.1 Special Education Needs** - If enrolled in a registered school, would your child be likely to need special education, for example in a special class or clinic or by a special service? If yes, how do you plan to meet your child's special educational needs? This is an existing requirement of the Education Act Section 21 (1)(b)(ii). If your child is verified on one of the Ongoing Reviewable Resourcing Schemes this will be necessary.

**3.2.3.2 Knowledge and understanding** - Describe your **knowledge and understanding** of the broad curriculum areas you intend to cover as you educate your child.

**3.2.3.3 Curriculum** - Describe your **curriculum or programme**. Detail what you intend to cover with your child in different areas of your stated curriculum.

The National Curriculum Framework may serve as a guide but use of this is not compulsory. It lists seven essential learning areas and eight groupings of essential skills. These are listed below for your information should you wish to use the National Curriculum Framework as a guide.

If your application for exemption is approved, you will be eligible to receive New Zealand Curriculum documents free of charge on production of a copy of your exemption to Learning Media Ltd.

To assist with your application you may wish to borrow a set of Curriculum documents from the National Library. They are also available on the Ministry's tki website [www.tki.org.nz](http://www.tki.org.nz)

## The National Curriculum

### **National Curriculum Framework**

#### **Essential Learning Areas**

Language and Languages

Mathematics

Science

Technology

Social Sciences

The Arts

Health and Well-Being (Hauora)

### **National Curriculum Framework**

#### **Essential Skills**

Communication skills

Numeracy skills

Information skills

Problem-solving skills

Self-management and competitive skills

Social and co-operative skills

Physical skills

Work and study skills

Many Year 11 -13 students may wish to take NCEA subjects. If so, you will need to contact the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

Whatever source of curriculum you select, you should be specific about the skills you want your child to learn and you should be clear about matching the learning needs of your child to your programme.

### **3.2.4 Topic Plan**

To help the Ministry understand how your curriculum vision translates into practical terms, we ask you to include a description of how you would approach the teaching of one topic of your choosing.

**We are looking for the following elements in your statement:**

#### **The Topic Title**

- The Aim** - what you are going to teach your child.
- Resources** - what materials you would use to teach the topic.
- Method** - what steps would you take to communicate/teach the material to your child. Please be as clear as possible.
- Evaluation** - how you will test/measure the effectiveness of your teaching.

### **3.2.5 Resources and Reference Material** (There is no need to list the titles of books)

Please provide a comprehensive list of all resources and reference material available to you. Also list the type of material you may intend to include in the future. Do not list the titles of every publication.

### **3.2.6 Environment**

State how you will use the **environment** and your **community** to extend and enrich your child's education. Please include in this a description of any educational visits you hope to make.

### **3.2.7 Social Contact**

Describe how you intend to provide for your child's need for **social contact** with other children.

### **3.2.8 Assessment and Evaluation**

Explain how you are going to **assess and evaluate** the progress your child is making. Remember, you will need to have some record of this over the years. e.g. If your child wants to enter an apprenticeship, this will be needed.

### **3.2.9 Regularity**

The legislation requires a commitment to **regularity**. In explaining your routines, show how you will meet the requirement that your child will be taught **at least as regularly** as in a registered school. Some parents provide a timetable to meet this request, some describe their integrated approach. You may like to include one of the following.

- Timetable or
- Integrated curriculum description or
- Description of typical routines used.

### **3.2.10 Other Information**

Please make any other comments you consider relevant.

### **3.2.11 Advice and guidance**

Many groups and organisations of homeschoolers operate throughout New Zealand. They are able to provide assistance and support to homeschooling parents in many ways. To find out about such groups, the World Wide Web (using search words such as *homeschooling nz* or *home educating*) or your local telephone book are likely to provide contact details. The Ministry of Education local offices also have a list of local groups.

Ministry of Education staff can provide advice and guidance. You may wish to contact a member of the Student Support team in an office near you.

### **Local Offices and Telephone Numbers**

Whangarei (09) 430 4910

Auckland (09) 374 5400

Hamilton (07) 858 7130

Rotorua (07) 349 7399

Napier (06) 833 6730

Wanganui (06) 349 6300

Lower Hutt (04) 463 8699

Nelson (03) 546 3470

Christchurch(03) 364 3330

Dunedin (03) 471 5200

### Appendix B3

#### Application for Exemption from Enrolment at a Registered School.

(A separate application together with supporting documentation specifically catering for your child is required for each student.)

Please DO NOT send this information by FAX

**NB: To give proof of identity, a copy of the child's birth certificate must accompany this form**

#### **NAME OF CHILD**

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

male/female

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Present Year Level \_\_\_\_\_

Present School \_\_\_\_\_

Planned date to begin homeschooling \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic identity (for statistical records only) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **FULL NAME OF PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)**

Mr/Mrs/Ms First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mr/Mrs/Ms First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No.(home) \_\_\_\_\_(Business) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mobile) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Address if different from above  
\_\_\_\_\_

I have received help in compiling this application. YES/NO

I intend to delegate some teaching responsibility. YES/NO

(If YES to either or both of the above, please state briefly the nature of the assistance and/or delegation.)

**NAMES OF OTHER CHILDREN IN THE HOME WHO HAVE A  
CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION**

Names _____	Date Certificate Issued _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Signature(s) of Parent(s)/Guardian(s)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If making application as guardians, state relationship to child.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Proof of Guardianship is required.)

*Please return this form and the information statement to the Ministry of Education,  
at [name] office, [address].*

## Appendix B4

At least as regularly and well

The only legal statement about what is required of homeschooling parents is that contained in Section 21 (1) (b) of the Education Act 1989, i.e. the child must be “**taught** at least as **regularly** and **well** as in a registered school”. The Ministry is required to be “satisfied” of this before issuing a certificate of exemption from enrolment in a registered school.

The following is intended to help you to understand how the Ministry of Education interprets the wording of the Act.

- The homeschooling situation can provide an opportunity for a more flexible approach to organisation than that which is likely to operate in the average school. Nevertheless, the Act requires you to teach your children “at least as **regularly** .... as in a registered school.” Homeschooling applications should, therefore, provide evidence of a commitment to certain **routines** appropriate to the maturity level and abilities of the child and should outline these. This is because the Ministry is concerned to know that regularity extends to the treatment of elements within your stated curriculum. It would be helpful to provide a specific timetable for a typical week, or you may describe your organisational routines in sufficient detail to enable the Ministry to assess the regularity of your programme. However, unsupported statements such as “John will let us know what he wants to study” are not acceptable.
- Section 35A of the Act (which deals with the registration of private schools) says that one of the elements necessary to ensure registration is the existence of a suitable curriculum. To indicate that you will teach your child “at least as **well** as in a registered school” you must, therefore, communicate to the Ministry something of your curriculum vision. Your statement should be more than an overview - it should give some indication of issues that will be addressed in different areas of your stated curriculum. Some people will want to use a commercially prepared course of some kind. There is no problem with this but it is likely to be insufficient if your application simply says, “We will be following such and such a course.” You will need to show that you at least know where the course is taking you. It is not possible, of course, for the Ministry to judge the quality of your teaching in advance,

but Ministry officers will look for some evidence of the **planning** and **balance** that we would expect to be a feature of curriculum organisation in any registered school.

## Appendix B5

Ethnic Identity – Notes for Parents.

**Like all Government Departments, the Ministry of Education collects information related to ethnicity for statistical purposes. In collecting information we are required to comply with the Statistics New Zealand standard classification of ethnicity. The codes for the items in the standard classification are shown below.**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	
EUR	NZ European/European/Pakeha	
NZM	New Zealand Maori	Iwi:
SAM	Samoan	
COO	Cook Island Maori	
TON	Tongan	
NIU	Niuean	
TOK	Tokelauan	
FIJ	Fijian	
OPI	Other Pacific Island	
CHI	Chinese	
IND	Indian	
OAS	Other Asian	
OGR	Other Groups	

**When completing the question on the application form, please use the appropriate code to show the ethnic group with which your child identifies. (If your child identifies with more than one group please put the main group first). *This information will not be published in a form that could identify the individual concerned.***

## **Appendix B6**

### **Checklist for Homeschooling Application.**

Please feel free to use this checklist when completing your application to make sure that all the necessary elements of your application have been included.

**Child's special education needs have been described (if relevant)**

**Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the broad curriculum**

**Curriculum coverage for the first year has been described**

**Plan**

**Resources**

**Use of environment and community resources**

**Social contact**

**Assessment and evaluation of progress**

**Regularity**

**Application form completed**

**Copy of Birth Certificate**

Principal notified, as a matter of courtesy, of your intention to homeschool (in the case of children currently enrolled in a school)

## Appendix B7

Frequently Asked Questions. **To be included with every parent application pack**

### **B7.1 My child has special needs. If I home educate, what special education resources am I entitled to?**

Children who are taught at home are entitled to many of the same special education resources as other special needs students.

If children are demonstrating significant difficulties they can access assessment screening and programmes through the Ministry of Education Group Special Education (GSE).

This includes access to:

- speech and language, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy assessments;
- support for moderate physical disabilities; and
- advice and guidance from specialist advisers or psychologists.

To access these resources, students need to meet the same criteria as any other students.

For students with high and complex needs please refer to question 3E.2 below.

Application forms and referral information can be obtained through contacting the local office of the Ministry of Education and asking to speak to the Group Special Education Service Manager.

### **B7.2 I have a child who has special needs and is ORRS verified. Can you please tell me what resources my child is entitled to receive now that we are home educating?**

Children who have been verified through the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (ORRS) are entitled to specialist support as stated above.

This specialist support is delivered by GSE and includes access to Resource Teachers: Vision Impaired, and Itinerant Teachers of Deaf and Hearing Impaired.

The delivery of these services is directed via an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Children who are homeschooled are not entitled to school-based services such as additional specialist teachers or teacher aide time.

**B7.3 My child is very unhappy at school and is being bullied. I am keeping my children at home and am thinking about homeschooling, but I don't know how to get correspondence school work. What are my options?**

**This question has several components.**

- ***Unhappy children***

Have you spoken to the classroom teacher and principal about your concerns? All children have the right to be safe and happy at school.

This right is outlined in *National Achievement Guideline 5 (NAG 5)* for schools which states that:

*Each Board of Trustees is also required to:*

*(i) provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students;*

*(ii) comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees.*

If you feel your concerns are not being listened to, please ring the local Ministry of Education office and ask to speak to a member of the Student Support Team.

- ***Homeschooling***

**There are many families around New Zealand who successfully educate their children at home. You can ring a local “Homeschooling” contact person (an internet search using keywords *homeschooling New Zealand* will show several contact options) or the Ministry’s Student Support Team at the MOE, to discuss what this involves.**

- *The Correspondence School*

**To enrol at The Correspondence School (TCS) you need to meet certain criteria (such as living a long way from a local school).**

You can, however, buy learning resources from TCS as part of a homeschooling programme. If you choose to purchase TCS resources, you will need to first apply for and be granted an exemption to homeschool. You remain totally responsible for your child’s programme.

- *School attendance*

All children in NZ between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend a registered school.

**To remove your children from school to educate them at home you need to first apply for an exemption from a registered school.**

You can apply for an exemption by applying to the Ministry. This means that you will be responsible for providing, supervising and monitoring the learning programmes for your child.

You must continue to send your child to school until you receive the certificate of exemption that allows you to educate your child at home.

**B7.4 I have tried and tried to get help for my child at the local school but he/she is getting further and further behind academically. I am thinking about applying to homeschool so that I can address their learning needs. What support will I get so that I can help my child?**

**The Ministry of Education employs staff to help families get the appropriate level of support for children at school. If you would like to keep your children at school and have their learning problems addressed appropriately, please contact the local Ministry office to discuss what help is available.**

**There are also a number of homeschooling groups around the country that are made up of enthusiastic people who educate their children at home. Contact people can give you information about group activities and outings, social events and learning activities. Joining a local home educators group is one way to receive support and encouragement when homeschooling.**

**B7.5 My family has just arrived in the country and we are applying for residency. We would like to homeschool in New Zealand, but we are unsure if we need to apply for an exemption for our children.**

In this situation you will first need to determine if your children have '*domestic student status*'.

*If they do* and they are between the ages of 6 and 16 years of age, then they must attend a registered school unless they have an exemption.

*If your children do not* have domestic student status then they will qualify as foreign students, and you do not have to apply to homeschool them as foreign students in New Zealand are not required to enrol or attend a school.

To determine if your child or children are foreign or domestic students, please read the following:

#### **B7.6 What's the Difference between a Foreign and Domestic Student?**

Under the Education Act 1989 a foreign student is anyone who does not fall into the category of domestic student.

A domestic student is:

- a NZ citizen (this includes students from Tokelau, the Cook Islands and Niue);
- the holder of a residence permit (under the Immigration Act 1987) who satisfies the criteria (if any) prescribed by regulations made under the Education Act. Note that at the time this notice was published no such regulations had been made and so currently all students who hold residence permits will be domestic students. Schools will be notified of any changes to this category;
- a diplomat and/or consular official - ie. someone who is exempt from the requirement to hold a residence permit under section 11(1) of the Immigration Act. (Note that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides a letter of confirmation naming these students);
- an Australian citizen – i.e. someone who is exempt from the requirement to hold a residence permit under section 12 of the Immigration Act; and
- someone who falls under a category notified by the Minister of Education in the NZ Gazette.

These categories are:

1. a student who is the dependent child of any person who is in NZ to study under an exchange programme approved by the NZ Government;
2. a student who is the dependent child of any person who is the holder of an unexpired work permit granted in accordance with the Immigration Act;
3. a student who was enrolled at a registered school in NZ before 1 January 1989 and who has been continuously enrolled at 1 or more registered schools in NZ since that date and who meets the requirements of the Immigration Act for undertaking a course of study or training in NZ;
4. a student who is the dependent child of a diplomat and/or consular official – ie. a student who is the dependent child of any person who during the current calendar year last ceased to be exempt under section 11 (1) of the Immigration Act, from the requirement to hold a permit under the Act;<sup>1</sup>
5. a student who is the dependent child of any person who is the holder of a Commonwealth Scholarship;
6. a student who has made, or is the dependent child of any person who has made, a claim to be recognised as a refugee in accordance with Part VI of the Immigration Act; and
7. a student who has entered NZ for the purposes of adoption, and

- a. whose adoption application before the NZ Family Court (where the Final Order will entitle that child to education as a domestic student) is supported by the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services and who has a letter from that Department confirming the support, or
- b. who is the subject of an Interim Order of Adoption granted by the NZ Family Court under the Adoption Act (where the Final Order will entitle that child to education as a domestic student).

(Source: Education Circular\_20 March 2003, Ministry of Education)

**B7.7 I have recently adopted a child from another country. I would like to homeschool my child so I can cater for his/her individual needs. As the adoption process takes a long time before it is legalised, can you tell me if I need to apply for an exemption to homeschool ?**

**Please refer to the above question/answer: Part 7a and b.**

**B7.8 I am unsure about the difference between homeschooling and The Correspondence School (TCS).**

There are two ways a child can enrol at The Correspondence School (TCS). The first way is as an *eligible student*, where they do not have to pay fees and go on the TCS roll. To work out if your child may be eligible for TCS please ring TCS on 0800 65 99 88.

The second way is as a *fee-paying student*. If you would like to look at this as an option you still need to apply for an exemption to homeschool and explain in your application that you will be purchasing TCS resources for your homeschooling programme.

The cost of each subject through TCS depends on whether your child is at primary or secondary school. Please ring TCS on 0800 65 99 88 for more information.

If you are applying to use TCS for your homeschooling curriculum materials, please note that the Ministry of Education still requires you to complete the full application including what you will be teaching your child in the different subject areas. This is because we need to be satisfied under section 21 of the Education Act that you can

“teach your child at least as regularly and well as in a registered school”. You remain responsible for your child’s programme.

**B7.9 How do I know the competency of the Ministry of Education receiving the application?**

Ministry of Education staff are appointed through a comprehensive appointment process and are only appointed when they have been deemed to be competent to undertake work of this nature.

**B7.10 If I enrol my child in a school and my certificate of exemption lapses, will I need to re-apply?**

If you wish to return your child to homeschooling within one term, you do not need to reapply but you must have this recorded for the statutory declaration. A request for the certificate to be re-issued needs to be organised through your local Ministry Office. If the time involves more than one term, contact your local office for advice as each situation is different.

*If you would like any other information please do not hesitate to ring your local Ministry of Education Office.*

## Appendix C: Transcription, and control factors

### Appendix C 1

#### Transcript of revised original interview of one of the eight participant families.

#### The Abrahams.

- Leo I'm sorry that the taping last time did not succeed... it was my fault, I thought it was working I'd checked it, but it wasn't. It is so nice of you to have me back to do this thing again. I remember quite a lot of what was said, but I wasn't prepared to work from memory. If you remember I started off asking how and you added the idea of why you chose to home school. Do you feel like talking ...
- Dale Um... if you were talking about 'how', I think...
- Mel. It started when Ann was born wasn't it. With our GP being a homeschooler so that was what was kind of perceived into our heads as an option I suppose.
- Dale (agrees) An option and we respected him and his family. We knew him and his family and so we saw that if our kids could turn out like that it we'd be pretty happy.
- Mel. I don't know whether we knew any children at that stage did we?
- Dale What's that?
- Mel. We hadn't met the children honey. We had only met A..
- Dale Yes, but subsequently as we...(Mel.)Tina could you go and sit on your bed now please or be quiet.
- Leo Did you have some ideas in your mind anyhow?
- Mel. Before that? Before that – no.
- Leo Before Ann was born? Well we um? You sort of assumed that
- Mel. Well that's what everyone in society assumes that the way to educate your children is to send them to school, because that's what they did to us and that's what you do.

Dale Yes, and I think that's what you were saying before, that you are often just not aware of the options, and so this made us aware of the options. That week made us aware of a number of our principles which we were wanting to live our lives by and the goals we saw for our family and the relations within our family.

Mel. Yes, that family thing is very important. We needed to get ..you need to do most or the talking today hon. I be in every now and again.

Leo ... I think that comes in very strongly in everything you've said, that is the importance of your family, to you two. I'm not trying to say that other people's families are not important.

Mel. No, neither are we.

Leo ... but their, would it be unfair to suggest, they are central to your existences?

Dale Yeah – we felt very strongly in the family and the family working together and in spending time with our children, we feel that the raising of our children in the broadest possible sense is the responsibility of the parents. And that the best way we could do that was to have maximum input and control and that the home schooling gave us that. That gave us the full control of what happened to our kids, pretty much 24 hours a day, and it gave us maximum input and support and encouragement of our children.

You know, the one thing about home schooling is that there are no excuses – like you can't say "my kid's doing badly because of peer pressure of school, or my kid can't do anything because they didn't get a job three years ago – there are no excuses." That puts a huge responsibility on you, particularly on my wife as a teacher, absolutely. So I think originally we viewed home schooling as being different at times, and originally I saw it as being a really good educational opportunity as I had done some, looking at more modern, learning, teaching theories about child centres, about using different learning styles all that sort of stuff.

Mel. You did a Certificate in Adult Teaching didn't you?

Dale Yes, back in the early 90's and through the CIT in Wellington. And some of the stuff coming up was really good, but I saw it as being impossible for schools to achieve that because of their limited resources.

Mel. And their numbers.

Dale Teacher – student ratio. So I saw homeschooling as providing us with the opportunity to achieve that [ low student teacher ratio]. Subsequently, I have changed and I see home schooling as being much more an overall learning experience...

Leo Right – I remember last time we were talking, you mentioned, Dale, that you thought the role of the primary school as sort of ... as working with knowledge too much and instead of developing minds. Do you remember mentioning that?

Dale Yeah. I remember that (inaudible – 2 people talking at once)... Yes, there is that, but I think it was more than that there is the whole social development thing. There is the character of the child, and it's interesting, because – you have heard about the situation. There was this conference in the States, and one night they had a panel of home schooling experts up the stage and they were asked questions, and one of the questions was - “What would you do differently if you were to home school your children again.” And their answer was “We would focus much more on attitude.”

Leo Yeah.

Dale I see now that home schooling is much more of an opportunity to develop attitude and personality characteristics. From those will flow successful education success in occupation, but it gives us the opportunity to develop those characteristics which traditional education has conceptualised as a by-product of education. I think that what I see home schooling to be now is that you produce the personality characteristics and everything else will fall into place. And so while we do do the traditional educational things, the focuses are on having the children develop the appropriate attitude. So my views have changed, and they have changed on other dimensions as well, ... see originally I had thought home schooling up to about 10.

Leo Yeah – you mentioned that last time.

Dale ... and M was very keen to home school all the way through. Well, I have subsequently changed my mind, and I would be really happy to support the children all the way through now.

Leo Because of your recent readings, or you've just seen the progress being made?

- Dale Because I enjoy the experience, plus I enjoy seeing my children at home and I see that personality wise/characteristics wise, they are doing very, very well. I think that while educationally that will be more of a challenge [ Mel. “for us you mean”]to us, I think...
- Leo At secondary level?
- Dale At secondary level will be more of a challenge, I think that through that they develop more personality, they will also develop more of the characteristics which allow them to succeed in life, even more so because they will have to become self-children and stuff like that.
- Ann I go to a netball practice at Cornerstone Christian School on Fridays but when I went to sleep that night, I wanted to go school because it was fun, and we had all been together and we were all these sorts of friends. Because we were all friends, but at home I had my sisters but I don't have my friends so...
- Mel. That is one of the things you find hard, isn't it?
- Ann. Yeah.
- Mel. ... but then we also talk about that; about friends at school who aren't always friendly, that all the children at school aren't always nice. But we do make an effort for the girls to see friends. A had a friend around on Saturday afternoon, and you often go – you either have a friend here or you go to see a friend, at least once a week. If not more?
- Ann. Yeah (approval)
- Mel. You go to Guides or have friends here, or at Sunday School.
- Dale It is a bit different in that you (to child) will spend more time with family, than with your friends. You know there's a thing about school that parents often complain that their children always do what their peers tell them to do – peer pressure. The argument from the home schooling perspective is that if you put children with their peers, from the age that they are three, they spend half their waking hours with their peers. Of course when they become teenagers, they are going to do what their peers tell them, because it's the contrast of vertical relationships versus horizontal relationships. The family being the vertical relationship, and the peers being the horizontal relationship. If you are encouraging the horizontal relationships, and telling the children all the time

that they are what's important...

Mel. And if that is who they are spending all their time with.

Dale Then the horizontal relationships might be what's wrong.

Mel. The vertical...

Dale The vertical might be what's wrong. So, we talked last time also about the Ws, about meeting the Ws so that when hell was about to fall in half, we met another family who home schooled. And we spent time with them, on our days off - and they home schooled and we really liked their lifestyle.

Mel. Yes. We were encouraged by that weren't we?

Dale Yes.

Leo Yes, I have recently been reading about teenage homeschooling. I have been trying to find out about the University Levels, attitudes to home schools, and what seems to come through from overseas research anyhow, is that they find the home schooling students are much more independent, and able to work independently than us. That's a poor generalisation, but that's the sort of thing.

Dale They have to. Take 6<sup>th</sup> Form Chemistry. Well I did 6<sup>th</sup> Form Chemistry [MA: I did 6<sup>th</sup> form Chemistry] but that was in 1981, and if she wants to do 6<sup>th</sup> Form Chemistry, she will need to work through it herself. Now we will provide as many resources as we can, and so when she succeeds at 6<sup>th</sup> Form Chemistry, she will have developed fantastic skills. And so when she goes onto University she will have the skills to achieve.

Mel. When I left school, I didn't have the skills, I wasn't a self-learner at all. I found school quite easy, I just had to listen, and when I started back in the exams, I had never learnt to work or when I left school I didn't know how to write an essay. I was always failing in my French, my History essays, but I never learnt how to do it properly.

Leo So you were never really challenged at school you are saying?

Mel. Yes, but I also didn't learn how to learn for myself.

Leo So that goes back to Dale's idea of developing the mind, as much as anything and the personalities sort of stance?

Dale Yes, and we talked last time about how I had been concerned. I am much more

the one who is concerned than Mel. who is more concern about whether she and the other girls are keeping up with their peers than what they were learning educationally. Whereas Mel is much more relaxed on that than I am.

Mel. You're relaxed now though.

Dale I've become much more relaxed about it.

Mel. I think it's because you have seen that they are easily keeping up with their peers.

Dale And also its this whole thing, I'm starting to feel much more about the character building aspects of it, and the relationship building aspects of it and recognising more of that knowledge, traditional academic knowledge stuff, is held as much more important universally than at primary school, which was much more concerned with the development of the mind.

Leo Yes, I remember that phase, that was a lovely phase for that...

Mel. Learning to ask the questions – why, how, who, when ...

Dale You know that whole thing of asking of who and when questions, rather than the how and the why. They need to develop minds just looking at why and how, not anyone to tell you who did it on what date.

Leo I notice Mel. that you focus particularly in that period too, don't you? Getting them to think about...

Mel. I encourage it, yes.

Ann. Ask her [Melinda] "how do you spell this word?" – she won't answer it for us. She says "you bring me, how you think you spell the word, or some of some word, and I'll correct it".

Leo Great, that's wonderful! Your Mum is an outstanding teacher because there are not a lot of teacher's who do that, but it really is something that teachers should be doing.

Dale It's much easier just to give it to them.

Leo Yes, and do you feel better about that, or would you like Mum to be telling you the answers?

Ann. I think I'd like Mum to be telling me the answers.

Mel. That's because it was the easiest eh? [ family laughs] But which way do you learn most?

Ann. I'm not telling you that.

Leo I did notice that in your history studies, in your ancient history studies your spelling is extremely good – spot on!

Mel. We don't do spelling as a subject, but I feel that if they read..

Leo I agree, but I just happened to see your ...

Mel. (interruption) – she's got a sore tummy so she is still...

Dale Thinking about the 'why' question a bit more, just thinking about how our religious faith...

Mel. We didn't talk about that last time.

Leo No, you didn't talk about that last time...

Dale Why our religious faith influences our decision. Non-Christians homeschool, and I think they mainly do it because of educational reasons, but that is only a sense that I have.

Leo I think, there is certainly a lot of American evidence which suggest that those pedagogical reasons, are mostly based around educational problems...

Mel. There is also that whole thing of the state not telling your child what the state doesn't want them to know. I think that is one of the theories that are out there as well.

Dale I think the difference - see everybody has values, and they have those values that they will believe and they want their children to live by. I think the difference, as a Christian parent, is that we believe that the importance of those values and beliefs have much bigger consequences, and so for us its much more important that they achieve those, or they hold those values. I'm just trying to thinking about "why as a Christian it's important", why the majority of homeschoolers are Christian.

Say, if you were a non-Christian, I am only supposing here, if your child chooses not to live up to your values - say if you got married, and your child chooses not to, and decides to stay with her partner. It is not as big-an- issue, as it is for a Christian because we believe that those choices have much bigger

consequences, and I suppose that's may be the reason why we choose to, you know. For us it is so important.

Leo Yes, by home schooling you are exposing your children to a much more consistent set of values. Am I right?

Mel. Home schooling, as parents we are important people in our children's lives, rather than the teacher, who they would be spending 8 hours a day with at the school. So they learn from us, our values, rather than learning from the teacher. the teacher's values, or their peers values. Another reason is [D "Its like Bandura's model"] safety as well – is the emotional safety. I think...

Leo You said emotional safety. Do you mean being pulled in all sorts of different directions or being scared?

Mel. More like being hurt in some way, without anyone there to help or comfort or protect them. Whereas at home we can choose, at what age we want them to go off on their own to their peers and do things. So we can say "Ok T, your 10 and you can go off to Guides by yourself without us there". Whereas before then, as we talked about it last time, at Gym. or at Brownies, or at some of the places where the girls go, but the other community places, I would be there with them. If there was a problem, they knew that I was there backing them up or, that I could come and help, or I could give them an idea of how to cope with the situation that they were in.

Dale I use the analogy of "Lord of the Flies" I think often that of the schools, not because teachers do a poor job but because they are out numbered. The school situation is very much like Lord of the Flies where everybody is learning from people who don't know - so you follow what the others in the school are doing.

Mel. (interruption) "Honey," we are actually talking so you're being rude. Ok? You can show us after.

Dale People learn and follow and learn from what other children are doing, and those other children don't know what's right, and so their learning those ways of coping and dealing with problems which you then have to try and re-teach them not to do.

Mel. You can get badly bullied and hurt at school, and that stuff doesn't get dealt with until you come home at 3, until you come home at about 3.00 o'clock, and

then you've often forgotten why you are hurting or, sorry I'm not quite sure I've put that well but that's kind of like what I was thinking about.

Leo Do you teach the children these ideas, or do you just expose them to the family situation and sort of let these things come in like that? Do you know what I mean?

Mel. We don't sit down at a table and say, generally if there is a kind of situation, "this is how to respond", we more do it when that's happening.

Dale We have done some work on "the food of the spirit", where we have gone through specific things [Mel "being loving, kind, patient, peaceful to people"], and gone through your morning sessions, and talked through what those mean, and done some activities based on these.

Mel. Yes we have, self-control. We do some... we do do specific teaching. That's more character stuff than anything.

Mel. ... but that's. D that's part of...

Dale It is that whole idea that, say when somebody pushes into the line, they can come over to you and talk about that, and deal with the situation. Not learn from other people, about how to deal with it. So you learn adult ways of doing things at the time, rather than having to re-learn later on.

Ann. I've also found that if Mum's there and I'm loosing it I've gone back to what Mum has said and I'm still losing I'll go back and tell Mum and Mum will go. [Mel. I'll fight for you – we'll fight with them (laughing)...]

Dale That's important too. Because its also learn that "right" comes through... that kids and I know that my Ph. D. is about a sense of control, and I think that's important, a sense of control ... concepts of a sense of coherence. But things make sense and things come through in the end.

Mel. Yeah we do, we do sit down at the table and teach character stuff, but the rest of it mainly happens during the day - when either I have said something that is not how effective behaviour happening, or in situations ...

Leo So, I don't know whether I am jumping too far out on this one or not, but sounds to me as if there is a sort of, almost an apprenticeship going on with your children or something like that, well that's what I'm saying.

Dale Yes

- Leo An apprenticeship, you have some people you respect, and who have the skills you don't have – that sort of thing. It is sounding more to me like that sort of thing.
- Dale It has been a traditional way through the centuries, and then carried through employment – traditionally the daughter would work with the mother and then get married and go on. As in different societies they looked at different parts of the family, and this is really carrying on that principle.
- Leo It is a much broader based apprenticeship isn't it? You're visualising it as a sort of apprenticeship for life or lifestyle.
- Mel. Yes, life skills. Yes, that is the way I look at it.
- Leo It just occurred to me while you were talking, I thought, "Oh, that seems to be getting to the Rogoff or Vygotsky view of things." of apprenticeship.
- And tell us about some of the things you do when you are working with the children. Share those with us – some of the fun things you had happen, or have done.
- Mel. We like going on trips, don't we.
- Ann. Yes
- Mel. When we go on holidays, it seems to become a, some days might be concentrated on school. Like when we went to the South Island, we went to the gold mine, so that's all just learning you know.
- Ann. When we went up north.
- Mel. Ok, lets talk about – we went to Martha mines, earlier on this year and we went on a tour. That was good - it was more recent. When we came home, while we were up there I had said to the girls, "I'm allowing you to do this and this", and when we came home they had different projects they needed to do. L had an assignment and she needed to, in poster form present "What happened to gold, or being made into a ring", and I arranged for us to go to a jeweller, and he showed how you got a lump of silver (work with silver and gold being the same), and he made it into a ring. And he just gave the ring to the girls!
- Leo Oh, wow!
- Ann. I'll go get it.

- Mel. And A had an assignment. She had to find on the internet and through newspaper articles the arguments. So we went on this tour, and it was very promising, and we wanted her to see there were other points of view, and she needs to find that, we don't want mining happening here.
- Leo Exactly, the destruction to the landscape.
- Mel. Yes, so it was to her advantage - that was her assignment, that's what she needed to do. So kind-of like how we sometime learn.
- Leo Your teaching, in fact is not sort of basically from 9 to 3, but it occurs while you are on holiday – in the evening – in the early morning – or anytime. Is that fair?
- Mel. That's true. Our real structured teaching starts at 9.00am, everyone sits down at the table at 9.00am and we have family devotions, and at the moment, that's fitting in with our unit studies, because...
- Leo Because you were looking at the Christian's in Rome when I was here the other day.
- Mel. Well, we were doing the whole world really. From 30A.D. onwards, kind of like working through the ages, but based in Rome. And so we've been reading... through "Acts", which were the story of the early Christian Church, and from there what we will be looking at tomorrow, is Rome burning and Nero having to find a scapegoat so he has to blame the Christians. (child singing).
- So we sit down in the morning and do some family devotions, and everyday we do Maths. They do a page of maths everyday.
- Leo Do they do it at the same time, or does it vary depending on how things are going and that sort of thing?
- Mel. It does vary, because some morning we might go out say to the Doctor's, and they come home and do the maths...
- Mel. It seems to be, well we find that in our family we need a little bit of structure and for us it's sitting down at 9.00am and doing what we can then. But the older girls are really good now, because they know what they have to get done

in the day, and they will try and get it done in a day. We try and get it done by lunch-time, don't we A?

Ann. Yes, also I'm pretty good at having my page of maths done by the time we have to go up at table.

Leo You are one of those – brilliant! I have to confess I like doing that too. Last we talked time you didn't mention the internet, do they use it very frequently?

Mel. No, our computer is dead and buried really. The grandparents have got a computer,

Dale But we don't use it a lot, because...

Mel. I actually find it a real time waster.

Dale Yes, it can take a long time. It takes a long time to find good information.

Leo It does. You can lose hours.

Dale And it is surprising what you can't find, because Ann was trying to do that activity on the internet and we couldn't find the site - which I'm sure there must have been one there.

Ann. There was a site there, there was a site but it wouldn't open.

Dale That's right.

Mel. So we went to the library, and had a look in the newspapers at the library, and I brought a couple of newspapers home. We just used those really, didn't we A for that? And the girls, they used to play quite a lot of computer games and we would only buy computer games that had an educational base to them, so it might be a who done it – like “Carmen Santiago, where in the world?” or “where in time.” Learning history, or...

Ann. Or there's a typing of game where you learn typing at the same time as playing games.

Leo Oh right! I could do with using that actually, my typing is atrociously bad – two fingers and that's not good!

Ann. Yeah that's why we've used the game a few times.

Mel. So we don't use the computer as much now, but I don't really see it as essential, but...

- Leo Oh no, I was just curious because you hadn't mentioned it last time and I was just curious.
- Mel. The girls know how to use one, and how to go on to the net. Last time you asked us about the resources that we used. So from Maths we were using the New Zealand curriculum Maths Plus. We have also bought the English curriculum.
- Leo Yes, you told me you used that occasionally.
- Mel. Only when I've had run of ideas to do— when there's not really anything to do. There is not writing I want them to do in regards to the unit that we were working on.
- Dale Yes, we choose to use our own bits and pieces. We made a conscious decision not to use set programmes because ...
- Leo I'm glad you mentioned that because you did talk about that last time.
- Dale I have a feeling about set programmes, in that they work for some people, but we have met a number of people for whom they hasn't worked and that becomes a burden to them and they could never keep up with it. They are always feeling bad about the fact they are running behind.
- Mel. There are a couple of reasons it might not work, because you might have a programme, and it might work really well for one child and not the next, and it really puts pressure on that child who has a totally different learning style. And the other thing is that some of them say "you need to do this within the week", and if you have got everyone sick in the week, and you are trying to do it, or even if the grandparents come to visit or...
- Leo Or if you have got other activities on, or you want to follow up on something else.
- Mel. Like A is working really hard at the moment towards a speech competition, and she's working really hard on her General's Award for Guides. So a lot of that and with swimming as well... So the pressure that you have to complete the weeks project for the curriculum can just totally burn some mothers out.
- Dale I don't know whether this is a romantic view of the child hood, but we hear of stories of 10 - 11 year olds who have got 1 – 2 hours of homework every night. They have had like 5 or 6 hours of school and they come home, and spend an

hour or two doing homework. I don't know whether it is romanticised view, but I don't think childhood should be like that.

Leo No, I agree with you. My personal view is that completely and that also it is a good effective way to put a child off schoolwork because it is almost it's as if they are being punished by coming home and having to do an hour of homework.

Mel. Learning loses its enjoyment doesn't it.

Dale So if you choose, that if you choose the bits that they learn carefully so that you are getting... I suppose the analogy is rugby practise, where you could either have a 3 hour session which is sloppy, or you could have a 1 hour session which is totally focussed. When everybody is totally focussed and you do a number of short drills very, very quickly to a very high standard. And the one-hour practice is going to be a whole lot better than the 3-hour practice for results. I think if you choose your activities carefully. They can learn a lot of the stuff without it actually seeming like school, because you can learn a lot of stuff like persistence without it being associated with school work.

Leo Exactly. You just very briefly mentioned changing the programme to suit different personalities, did you have to do that a lot? The two older girls I notice are quite different personalities from my perception of them both, and so you've adapted their programmes to fit?

Dale Yes they are.

Mel. Kind of what the expectations are and maybe what you concentrate on. I suppose for one of them when they were little, there was concentration going on about being tidy because it wasn't part of her natural way of being.

Dale We also have a child who gets quite difficult to work out, and she gets down because she feels she has too much to do. We have to carefully monitor her work so she has enough to, she needs enough room to work out. She needs to develop the ability to get over hurdles. Those hurdles have to be at the right height for her advance, so that they don't seem to slow her down when she is hating school.

Mel. Hating learning.

Dale Hating learning and homeschooling allows us to do that. I don't know about

the school setting. I don't know whether they would be as flexible in doing that. I don't see how they could....

Leo Within my experience they can't be, because if you've got 30 children in the classroom and you're one teacher, and you only see them for that very limited period of time, there is no way you can, no matter what people say, it is literally an impossibility.

Mel. Dale's sister has got new entrants, hasn't she, and she's got 3 or 4 boys who came in this year, and they none of them are ready. None of them know how to hold a pencil or have any interest in learning to read and write. But she can't help them, as much as they need to be helped, because she has got to teach the other 15 as well.

Dale So the aspect of it is that's the number or ratio.

Leo You've got family friends that you visit, that you share homeschooling with. Do you feel that you share with other homeschooling families a lot or not a lot?

Dale We don't do a lot of sharing as far as daily learning activities go, we do more sharing with activities like.. so the girls are in swimming today which is run by "Baselink".

Mel. So they go to swimming with the other home schoolers, and I'm stuck with the parents, and we natter even about family or about schooling... children.

Dale Just going back to the thing with one of the advantages I see with home schooling is the seamless nature of it of. Mel knows during the day when a child is struggling, she knows that child so well, she also notices what happened in the morning, what happened the night before. She knows their personalities too so that, that seamless nature of the education, the whole existence allows for a better learning environment.

Leo Well that whole existence?

Dale That's right, allows for a better learning experience.

Mel. Or when a child is feeling off colour.

Dale And can say, "Hey, it's a bad day today, she can go read a book". Even if the teacher was to say to the child, "you are having a bad day, you can sit in the corner and read a book for the day". There would be an uproar, from the other kids who also want to and sit in the corner and read a book.

- Leo Well not from the other kids, but from the other teachers as well, which always used to get up my nose ...
- Mel. One part is you get your birthday off, don't you?
- Ann. Yes.
- Leo Cripes, that's wonderful isn't it?
- Mel. We have school holidays and birthdays.
- Ann. It's not only for the birthday girl, it's for the whole family.
- Leo Oh, everybody has the day off. I would strongly recommend that, especially on your birthday.
- Dale But there are groups, families who work together. The "ACE" people get together, and ...
- Mel. The Reformed Church home schooling families, they have a Wednesday morning where they do Science or History.
- Dale The Bob Jones people get together, is it Bob Jones?
- Mel. No, the "ATI" people get together.
- Dale The "ATI" people get together.
- Mel. Well for me, I chose to teach my children at home because that's what I wanted to do. We did do crafts together sometimes. I haven't had very good health, so we maybe haven't done as much as other home schooling families. In the last couple of years as what we could have.
- Dale We treat it as a smorgasbord. We take what we want and leave the rest.
- Leo [ Aside to Tina] Would you show me those after we have finished? You must get very exhausted at times, with three school-aged children and one pre-schooler. I would think you do. Last time you mentioned that Dale came in and relieved you from time to time, or took over the family while you had a bit of a break and things, is that?
- Mel. I have my time! I have a beautiful time for 2 hours a week. Dale comes home an hour early and I go off and I just go and do whatever I want to do. I try not and make a job, but we have found that it is really important for me, and I have had a talk to other home schooling mums as it's the same for them too, because

you have not got any space.

Leo You mean personal space?

Mel. Yes.

Leo Yes, I remember my wife used to say that she couldn't even go to the toilet by herself.

Mel. Yes, this one here is a pretty funny wee thing, but it's not that bad. But we have found that really important.

Dale And the other thing that happens is, because I am home 2 or 3 days a week there's this huge benefit that I can come in and see what the girls are doing and the girls can come in and show me. But also on occasions Mel will go out by herself, or go out with one girl.

Mel. We sometimes leave the older two girls if they are working, and I'll take the two younger ones.

Dale We go to town a lot. Last week we took one of them off to town and left three of them at home. I just work away in my office and they come out and see me. And one of the things you will probably find is that a much higher percentage of homeschoolers, home school families – the husband works from home. Because it's that whole lifestyle, and that flexibility of being able to be involved and to be around.

Leo But if you didn't have that opportunity to work with the children either in the educational learning sense, would you feel a little shut out or that sort of thing? I mean, not deliberately?

Dale Yes, it's um...

Mel. It's just how you choose to be, it's where you want to be isn't it.

Dale What do you mean?

Mel. You choose to be home.

Dale When I can, but there are times when I can't.

Mel. No, in two years time you are not going to have very much time.

Dale No, and it's a shame but you need to make the most of what you've got.

Ann. Also in two years, I won't be at home as much.

Mel. Oh, you're hopeful!

Dale Where are you going to be?

Ann. In town.

Dale You will be doing more schoolwork in two years time. But you will be able to get out a lot more and go around and see friends, but you will have more schoolwork in two years time so you will spend more of your day schooling.

Ann. Yes but I will also be doing things like Chemistry and that sort of thing.

Dale Yes, you will be starting to do that sort of stuff. It will be great.

Leo Is that going to present a challenge to you?

Mel. No. Well one of the things about home schooling is, one of the practical things is you only need to be one step ahead of your child. You don't need a BA in Chemistry to teach 5<sup>th</sup> Form Chemistry and science. We are both science, maths types, but I am really enjoying the arts now.

Dale The other thing, like before, we were actually teaching our children to learn, and so they will teach themselves Chemistry. We will buy the appropriate books and they will read through them and there will be times when we will both have to sit down and nut it out, but...

Mel. But we have also maybe be able to find a friend who is..., like Paul is a Chemistry teacher so we are very happy to call friends and family to help.

Dale That's, one of the things we talked about last time is that whole calling on other people, and I've talked about how particularly early on I was concerned with how the kids were keeping up to date with their peers. We felt lucky because being middle to higher socio-economic, have a number of teachers in the family and with us then R could come up from W for the day so we should come up trumps at the end of the day. You know, we'd be sitting down with M reading a book, I'd say to him "How do you think she's going?" and he would give us feedback. I found that to be a really supportive sort of thing, and because of the friends that we have, we have a lot of resources like that to draw on. I don't know whether other people would find that so easy. Some people wouldn't. A lot of people wouldn't.

Leo But am I right in getting the impression that both of you are feeling much more

comfortable about the girls' achievements?

- Mel. D was very worried in the beginning that they kept up with their peers, but he isn't so worried now. I think it's because of experience, because he's seen that it works at home. That they are learning.
- Dale You hear stories. You hear anecdotal stories. You see results of research from overseas. Our girls did two years worth of maths last year in one year. You know, we have things like that happen while I'm sure that there are some aspects that they would do better on if they were at school, I'm so happy with the character development, relationship development stuff which they've gained. In the end, I think if you were to put the effort in, home schooling could be a huge advantage academically to your children. But, for me I would be happy for my children to come out normal academically, and [Mel. average you mean] [Leo I see what you mean] for their potential, but character wise so much better.
- Leo I agree with you Mel, I have given up on that word 'normal' - I have thrown it out. Do you both have to go without to achieve this home schooling programme, ... economically?
- Mel. Yes I suppose so. Its funny but we don't see it like that.
- Leo It has never been a problem with you?
- Mel. No, we are the type of people who together we have made this choice, and so you live with the choice and we don't keep looking back. We wouldn't want anything different.
- Dale It's just so important to us that money doesn't enter. Our kids are just much, much more important to us than money. More important to us than possessions and if we had to live in a cardboard box to bring our kids up well that would be fine.
- Mel. They have slept in cardboard boxes when doing the 40-hour famine.
- Ann. We all had warm sleeping bags, and teddies and...
- Dale We don't even really think about it. It's not , "I wonder if M could go out to work next year?". It would be nice to have the extra income but it's not even considered.
- Leo That's good. I need to ask you that because I wanted to get a better picture.

- Dale It's a funny one.
- Leo So, if it was possible to get more resources, you wouldn't be too greatly fussed about it anyhow.
- Dale We would love extra resources. The money that the government gives us for home schooling our children is fantastic. We are grateful for it, but the whole thing of "if strings could become tied to that", and we had to sacrifice some of the important aspects of home schooling...
- Leo You would turn it down.
- Dale Absolutely. It's only one thousand bucks, it's nothing.
- Mel. We get \$1400.
- Dale The opportunity gained from Melinda not working, is worth far more. So that's just nothing, and so we would be happy to do a number of things, but not anything that contravenes that which we see as being important.
- Leo Yes, I think that comes through very, very strongly indeed, the strong family thing as the idea of importance.
- Dale I think we talked last time, around the whole aspect of availability of resources from traditional educational facilities and where not at stage of that. I think I said last time we might feel differently when we get to secondary school. It would be really nice if a school were to make available a Chemistry classroom, to a group of local home-schoolers to come in and use for a period a week.
- Mel. They do that thought, the homeschoolers do that. They use the labs, down in Wellington and they go down on the bus.
- Dale I agree but I considered a local school, like if Girl's High was to say like "Hey, there is this period once a week, when our Chemistry lab isn't being used, the homeschoolers can come in and use it, and we have got a teacher who would be happy, or if you can find a teacher like if... were to come in."
- Leo Or you could find a teacher you could come talk to you about it while the children were in the lab.
- Dale That's right.
- Mel. And just give a donation to the resources.

Leo No, no, no not at all.

Dale The reality is, those resources have been paid for by our taxes. If that was available, that would be fantastic, but we haven't got to the stage of being in need of that. Apparently in other places, like in the States (some of the States in America), that's available.

Leo Yes, I have just got an article off the web about that. I will copy it and drop it into you or send it out to Massey. It is saying more or less the same sort of thing, but again the thing I liked about it is that its home parents who are in control and the teachers are there to talk to the parents if they want, or they can go use the library or the other resources. Not that I think you will want to follow it up, but there are changes happening overseas and generally more and more recognition of the place of homeschooling and that sort of thing.

Dale There are things like the voucher system. The voucher system would be fantastic for home schooling, because we would potentially get the whole value, to use as we want. And we would use it for everyday living and we could get together and buy a period in a school. I'm actually anti the voucher system, because I think its used wrongly.

Leo I'm basically against the one used in the States - it was a disaster.

Dale It would be very bad in lower socio-economic situations and so while it would help us, I'm basically anti the system because I don't think it would be good for New Zealand society.

Leo I would agree with you on that, but in a personal one, for somebody who could handle it properly, it could be very valuable.

Dale It would be great.

Mel. I think if there wasn't such an anti-feeling amongst teachers towards home schooling, it would be easier for homeschoolers to share resources or talk to them.

Dale I don't know how much of an anti-feeling there is but, all we had is anecdotal stuff.

Mel. And the newspaper stuff though, you know like that Auckland sports thing?

Leo Oh yes, where the school got kicked out of a competition because of one

homeschool student in the team.

Dale The Auckland School Sports are run by the Head Masters' Association, and there was this basketball team with one homeschooler in it. The coach was the parent of the home- schooler and they got kicked out of the competition.

Mel. They were winning. They were going to be winning and they weren't allowed to continue.

Dale But, I think it's a part of human nature, that when people do something which is different from something which you identify with strongly, they see that as getting at you. And so as we are choosing to do something different from what teachers see as their strong identity by saying 'We don't want to send our children to school', and they see that as personal, and they are threatened by it. You can't complain about that as I see it as perfectly natural human thing to do.

Leo I would think that's true but you can still be hurt by the fact that teachers can be so narrow in their perception.

Mel. It doesn't make life easier that's all.

Dale But at the same time, I think that we all respond to that in some way following our set principles.

## Appendix C2.

### Case by case progression of “control “ theme

The “control” theme, after analysis and reflections, emerged family by family. What follows is a reference by each family, in order of interview, which either directly or by implication, revealed a desire to “control”.

- (a) Dale Abraham clearly stated that they had taken control of their children’s education and also accepted full responsibility for its consequence.
- (b) Both Carpenters argued, from their own experience, that school would be bad for Ben, he had already been bullied at preschool, and consequently they both decided to take control, which they now have done with all three of their children.
- (c) Hera Kupe decided to take back control of her children’s learning and to focus her teaching on her whanau’s initial culture.
- (d) Carmen and Rita had both decided on what they wanted their children to become, as adults, believing that schools could not achieve this. As a consequence total control of their children’s development was their only choice.
- (e) The Smiths were told that they could expect to lose their first child, and by inference, all future children to others. Their reaction to this was to take the stance that the family was the only group with the right to educate their children.
- (f) Moira O’Donnell’s choice to take total control of their children’s education was caused by teacher neglect and the unwillingness of school staff to listen to her opinions and her happy early experiences of being taught at home by her mother, under the guidance of the Correspondence School.
- (g) Mary Turner decided to withdraw her children from school because, like Moira, she was ignored by the local school and believed the school system to be inadequate. She, like Hera, wanted to ensure her culture survived in her children.

**Appendix D.****GLOSSARY**

- ACE:** Accelerated Christian Education. This is a total teaching/learning programme which is available for all primary and secondary level teaching. The programme originated in the United States, and provides a full curriculum with a strong Christian bias. There are regular assessments prescribed. The main family educator has to undergo some training with ACE before being able to access the programme.
- Curriculum:** A prescribed syllabus in each subject area and the content to be taught at each level. The New Zealand Curriculum is the official curriculum for teaching, learning, and assessment in New Zealand registered schools. It is designed to provide for consistency in classroom programmes throughout the country. Homeschooling parents may design their own, however, or they may use a commercial one. In some cases the parents adapt existing syllabuses to suit their needs. This then becomes “their” curriculum.
- Equity:** In education, this is the right of access by all to a fair education, over the whole compulsory education spectrum. It should cater for the learner’s needs and abilities.
- ERO:** The Education Review Office (ERO) was established by the Education Act (1989) and was tasked with reviewing the progress of children’s education in state registered schools, and those whose parents had chosen to homeschool their children. ERO took the place of School Inspectors who had played a central place in education since 1877. One separate ERO section now has responsibility for reviewing and advising homeschooling families.

- Homeschooling:** This refers to those parents who gained exemption, under Part 3, Section 21 of the Education Act (1989), for their school-aged children from attending school, and are thus able to teach their children at home. The education may be done by either parent, or both, or by a tutor engaged specifically to teach the children. Because of the diversity of philosophy, instruction and learning styles adopted by parents who have obtained exemption from attendance at school for their children, the term ‘homeschooling’ is not always appropriate. Some groups object to the term’s connotation of another type of schooling at home. This connotation does not reflect their views of learning. There are a number of terms adopted by homeschoolers to describe their practices. The most common among these, and distributed through all English speaking countries, are “homeschooling”, “home schooling” as two words, “home education”, “education elsewhere” and “unschooling”. Homeschooling is the term most commonly used in New Zealand. It is also used by many support groups so, for the sake of generally accepted terminology, it is used in this research. The compound version “homeschooling” is preferred as it is flexible enough to take on noun, verb, and adjectival forms without an overabundance of hyphens.
- Kaiako:** Teachers.
- Kohanga Reo:** A “language nursery” where Maori preschool children can learn and enjoy their language and culture.
- Kura:** An abbreviation for Kura Kaupapa. This is a school where Maori language (Te Reo) is the first language.
- Level:** The difficulty of the material, prescribed in the curriculum. The word derives from the concept of the curriculum being a spiral and the learner meeting the content of each syllabus at a more difficult, or advanced level, as they progress up the spiral. It can also be used to identify the difficulty of specific aspects

such as reading material and music. It is not necessarily linked to class or age.

NCES:	The National Center for Educational Statistics, Washington, United States of America.
National Curriculum	The set of prescribed syllabuses by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand, for all state and state registered schools. It prescribes the content framework to be taught at each level in each subject. Levels are not linked to class or age group but are linked to student achievement.
New Age:	The New Age Movement (NAM) cannot be defined as a singular religion, but it is just what it is claimed to be, a movement. It is essentially a collection of eastern-influenced metaphysical ideologies, a veritable hodge-podge of theologies and philosophies that are bound together by “universal tolerance” and moral relativism. New Age is the natural progression of humanism. It teaches that humans have evolved biologically, and must now evolve spiritually.
NZEI:	New Zealand Educational Institute.
NZCER:	New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
NZPD:	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.
One Day School:	A programme for gifted children run in small groups one day a week at a school and open to all gifted children.
Pakeha:	A New Zealand-born, non-Maori, usually white, person .

- Parent:** Used throughout the study and is taken to include caregivers, whanau and relatives acting in the homeschool situation as if they were parents.
- Pedagogy:** In this thesis it is used in the sense Davies (1994) defined the term. Davis states that, “Pedagogy involves a vision (theory, set of beliefs) about society, human nature, knowledge and production, in relation to educational ends, with terms and rules inserted as to the practical and mundane means of their realization” (p. 23).
- The Picot Report:** Is a 1988 Ministry of Education report, named after the Chairman of the taskforce set up to report on the administration of education.
- Rawleigh:** Franchised house-to-house system in which the dealer sold a variety of household goods. These goods were mostly medicines, ointments and cleansing materials.
- SPELD:** An organization designed to help children and adults with specific educational learning difficulties. The format for the organization was imported from the United States into New Zealand in 1974. Specific learning difficulty was recognized in the United States Education for All Children Act 1975. The Act declared that specific learning difficulty applied to those children who have a disorder in one or more psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. The SPELD tutors are volunteers and are given extensive training before being permitted to work, usually from home. There is regular supervision.
- Tertiary:** Tertiary education is defined by The Tertiary Education Commission (2005) as, “Any employment training for 16-60 years of age” (p. 2) This definition clearly includes apprenticeship training.

- Tikanga:** Maori customs and social conventions.
- Total immersion:** The state may, if requested by the local community, provide bilingual units, most frequently in Maori and English, to any state registered school at any level: primary, intermediate or secondary.
- Un-schooling:** First used, in this context, by John Holt (1964) in his book *How Children Fail*. Un-schooling to Holt meant not sending children to school. It has been expanded and changed since then to encompass a wide variety of homeschooling styles. However, unschoolers appear to have a central philosophy of child-directed learning in a home setting. The parent acts as a facilitator, and not a teacher. Homeschooling families may un-school to varying degrees. Un-schooling families do not set up miniature classrooms, with time set aside for studying, a parent playing the role of teacher, formal lesson plans and imposed curricula. Beyond that they differ in how much order they try to impose on the learning process. Radical un-schoolers impose little or no structure, though books and such are available to act as guides. Others allow children to learn what they wish, but provide strong organizational assistance to help the children reach their goals.
- Whanau:** The extended family, which includes grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins, second cousins, nephews and nieces. It does not have to be exclusive to relatives. It would broadly relate to the nature of kin.
- Whariki:** A mat of woven threads. Used to identify the New Zealand National Early Childhood Curriculum document. Commonly used in early childhood terminology to indicate interwoven threads of input usually from different sources.

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