## ***The Growing Home-education Movement***

In today’s session, I want to discuss this amazing phenomenon of the growing Home-education movement that I’ve been researching for the last three decades. We will take a look at some education statistics, and the reasons why it is that so many parents are taking the job back into their own hands, when it would be so much more convenient to send their children off to school. A written script with bibliography of research sources is available backing up all the statistics, quotes and trends mentioned in today’s session and the conclusions I’ve come to.

Back in the 1990’s, education departments in every State of Australia were coming to the realisation that home-education is not only a valid educational option, but also constitutes a growing public movement to be reckoned with.

In 1994, Dr John Peacock estimated from his research that there were probably about 10,000 home-education students in Australia (Latrobe University, 1994). In 1997, Roger Hunter, from his research, suspected that the figure could be up to 20,000 students (Griffith University, 1997). Terry Harding (A.C.A. 1996) put the figure as high as 40,000; and in the following decades Terry had noticed a growth rate of about 10% per year. Of course, it is difficult to accurately know how many home-education students there are in Australia at present, as there has been no central data point that could include all the home-education statistics. However, in 2003, the Qld Education Department admitted that the difference between the number of school age children in Queensland, compared to the number of children enrolled in school, was about 11,000. So, just in Queensland, at that time, there were about 11,000 children not accounted for.

Recent statistics from the Qld Education Department showed gradual growth in numbers of ‘registered’ home-education students up to 2019, and then parabolic growth from 2020 and beyond.

What we do know for certain, is that home-education has been spreading rapidly through a network of friendships in informal support groups in virtually every region in Australia. As each home-education family is watched by friends and relatives (who are often sceptical at first), they typically see the positive changes and successes of the children. Thus, more and more families are deciding to also take up home-education. Because home-education now has such a good track record as a viable educational option, the movement has enjoyed massive increases over the last four decades. Independent researchers give varying calculations for the current rate of increase (in Australia), estimating about 10% per year until 2019, but almost doubling each year from 2020 and beyond. Of course, every so often the government tries to clamp down and put more regulations and penalties on parents who don’t wish to join their party or tow the party line. This has a temporary effect on numbers; but somehow the numbers of parents opting out of the system, keeps on growing again. Regardless of exactly how many homeschoolers there are, all the available research indicates that the growth of the home-education movement is outstripping the yearly increase in the Australian population.

## ***Why Would Anyone Choose to Educate Children at Home?***

So, why is it then, that so many parents are taking the job back into their own hands, when it would be so much more convenient to send their children off to school? Early in 1995, I determined to ask home-education parents to identify the crucial issues that they had to grapple with:

• their reasons for home-education;

• any areas of concern they had; and

• specific support services they required.

I conducted an initial survey of home-education families to find out these concerns and issues (McNeice, 1995). Since that time, I have now personally interviewed over 3000 home-education families about issues of relevance to them (McNeice, 1995-2017).

***Back to Basics***

Nearly all the parents interviewed had strong feelings about the need for a return to teaching the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. As mentioned in the Wiltshire Report, many of the parents I interviewed expressed concerns that schoolteachers are being expected to teach so many peripheral issues that the basics are suffering (McNeice, 1995; Wiltshire, 1994). Dr Kevin Donnelly recently voiced similar concerns about political agendas in school education (Donnelly, 2016).

Official Statistics reveal that over the last sixty years, the adult literacy rate has actually declined, not improved as was predicted (Tully, 1993, for Australia; and Ballmann, 1991, chapter 3 for American statistics showing a similar trend; plus, OECD PISA results from 2000 to 2015; Gonski Review, 2017 ).

For all our expertise and technology, we were losing the literacy/numeracy battle back in the 1970s to ‘90s, (Freestun, 1996; Smith, 1995; Sullivan, 1996) and the recent OECD PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) results are showing that Australian standards are still on a downward spiral.

*“The historic Gonski Review Report identified several highly concerning trends in the educational outcomes of Australian students. It found that over the past decade, the performance of Australian students had declined at all levels of achievement compared to international benchmarks.”* (Australian Parliament, 2018)

You may well ask yourself...why? How is this possible when we are pouring squillions of dollars into our education system?

Wayne Smith, in his comprehensive report on Queensland schooling, noted that:

*"If it's politically correct, the schools are expected to propagate it - multiculturalism, gender equity, sex education, driver education, environmental education, everything, it seems, but education”*(Smith, 1995).

A former Queensland Education Minister, Mr. Hamill, also commented along similar lines:

*"There is a danger that every well-intentioned program gets lumbered on the schools so that teachers find themselves caught up in doing all these important but secondary elements of the school curriculum and are diverted away from the core elements"*

He went on to say that:

*"...when the core* *is being eroded because there is insufficient time to concentrate on the essentials...I don't like using the term 'the three Rs'...you run the risk of tossing the baby out with the bath water*”(Smith, 1995).

The whole so-called ‘Safe Schools Program’ that was being forced on schools since 2014 shows that the bureaucratic mentality has not changed at all. Now - It is not being suggested here that blame for any such failure of the educational system should be put onto the schoolteachers. I have known many teachers who are highly committed and dedicated to helping their students. However, the teachers are simply faced with an enormously difficult task that is often hindered by the sheer size of their classes, and sometimes by the requirements of the curriculum and administrative structures or conditions under which they must work (Moore, 1991 ‘Home Grown Kids’ video).

Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore, in their discussion paper, ‘When Education Becomes Abuse: A Different Look at the Mental Health of Children’, has this to say:

*“Research provides a link from past to present and provides a moving perspective on children today. Persuasive reasons exist for declining literacy, academic failures, widespread delinquency and rampant peer dependency. All four act in concert to deny our goal of happy, confident children who are healthy in body, mind and spirit. Whether or not we can be conclusive about causes, America’s decline in literacy from the estimated 90 percentiles in the last century to the 50 percentiles today parallels the parental scramble to institutionalise children at ever younger ages”* (Moore, Dr. R. & D., 1986, ‘Journal of School Health’).

Nearly four decades later, and we still haven’t learnt. Recent PISA Testing results from the OECD show the official education policies and strategies in Australia, the UK and the US are still resulting in a decline of academic standards.

*Values:*

Another concern expressed by many of the home-education families who were surveyed (McNeice, 1995-2017), was that the values and Christian beliefs of the family were not being supported by their children's school-teachers. Many were concerned that the hidden values in the curriculum conflicted with the parent's beliefs. One of these parents, reported that a teacher had openly mocked the Christian beliefs of his child, claiming that *"everyone knows there is no God"*, and *"people who rely on religion tend to be narrow minded"*. The inference here was that the child’s parents must be narrow minded to hold Christian beliefs. A question arises regarding the right of the teacher to rebuff a family's cultural, religious, or philosophical belief simply because this conflicts with the ‘atheist-humanist world-view’. Many others interviewed, over the last three decades, also referred to examples of a subtle or a blatant undermining of parental values, beliefs and authority. Particularly since the introduction of the so called ‘Safe Schools’ program in Victoria in 2010, and then nation-wide in 2013, various programs with political agendas that go against traditional family values have been creeping into State schools and many independent schools. Growing numbers of parents are concerned about this trend, and they wish to provide an alternative education for their children that respects their own family values and culture.

*Family Life:*

Many of the parents voiced a concern about the deterioration in the quality of family life and culture in our society. A common belief was that this deterioration has its roots in the trend for schools to take over many of the tasks that have traditionally been the responsibility of parents. Such tasks included human relationships and sex education, values clarification, and the transfer of culture. To be fair, one cannot blame schools for this trend. It would seem to be more a trend within the wider community, to expect schoolteachers to take over these parenting roles. However, many parents are no longer happy to just 'leave it to the experts'. The attitude of many of the parents who were interviewed, is that of asserting their right to take back control of, and responsibility for, these parenting roles.

In recent years, there has also been an emphasis within the education system, to teach children about the ‘rights of the child’. In society at large, this has also had the effect of undermining parental authority, contributing to a destabilisation of the relationship between parent and child. For those parents who come from a Christian perspective that ‘children should obey their parents’ (Ephesians 6:1), this has been especially taxing. At Homeward Education Support, we believe, as a rule of thumb, that when teach about ‘rights’, you must also teach that with these rights comes ‘responsibilities’. There is an inherent danger in giving children automatic rights. As growing up is an ongoing process, so too, in the day-to-day activities of life, the mantle of authority should be progressively passed from parent to child in keeping with their maturity to cope with the level of responsibility required of them.

So – in summary – we looked at this rapidly growing movement of parents opting for an alternative to the normal schooling system; and we asked the question: “Why is it that so many parents are taking the job back into their own hands, when it would be so much more convenient to send their children off to school?”

We saw a plethora of statistics showing the normal school system is in serious trouble; and surveys showed parents are greatly concerned about three areas:

* Falling academic standards
* An attack on their family values and beliefs, plus
* A deterioration in family life
* (and I forgot to mention the number of parents reporting their child had been bullied)

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In this article, I have primarily focused on the negative reasons for the growth of homeschooling. This is a kind of ‘freedom from’ the negatives of the school system; but what I love to talk about even more is not “freedom from” but about having “freedom to”. Check out my video on “A Liberal Education for All” for more of the positive reasons to educate your own children. My wife Karen and I have so enjoyed this amazing adventure, living and learning with our five children (plus a few others who have lived with us for a time); and we are now enjoying our 19 grandchildren (some of whom are also being educated at home).

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Between Jan. 1995 and June 2017, we had then spoken with over 3000 families, confirming our initial statistics and the great need for home-schooling support services.
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