**Homeschooling: an idea come of age.**By Bruce McNeice –   
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Children being educated at home, on outback properties, is a well-known part of Australian culture. However, a growing number of families are choosing to educate their own children, not as a last option, but as their first choice. They do this in spite of the enormous cost in time and personal freedom, including the loss of a second wage? To understand why people 'homeschool', a survey of over 2000 parents revealed the following most common reasons for parents taking up home-based education.

* Falling academic standards,
* An individually differentiated programme for children with learning difficulties
* The undermining of the parental values, beliefs, and/or authority.
* A concern about the deterioration in the quality of family life and culture in our society.

These families have not gone into homeschooling flippantly. Many reported that they had struggled long and hard to find a way to keep their children at school, before resigning themselves to the necessary sacrifice.

In this article, we will review the key people and events that influenced the development of homeschooling internationally and in Australia.

In the late 1800s, the captains of industry funded the move to compulsory schooling for all, based on the “Prussian model” (Gatto, 2006, p.126). In the guise of a desire for ‘moral training’, they aimed to produce a population of compliant factory workers who could be easily controlled by the State for the benefit of the ‘economy’ (Toffler, 1980, p. 43).

In the late 1800's, British educator Charlotte Mason, spoke out against the influence of Prussian educational philosopher Herbart who said “children should be cut to fit” (Mason, 1918; Gatto, 2006, p. 127). Mason started a network of private schools (including a few in Australia), and assisted tutors and governesses who were educating children at home. She wrote a book called ‘Home Education’ in 1886. From 1890 she published a regular newsletter, ‘The Parents’ Review’, and so Charlotte Mason could be called the first ‘Homeschool Consultant’ (Redeemer University College, n.d.; Living Books, n.d.).

In 1887 Mason established the Parents’ National Education Union (PNEU), as a organisation for training both teachers and home-educating parents, nannies and governesses. Mason’s philosophies had a significant influence on many British schools and further abroad in the mid 1900s; however her methods eventually faded from popularity with authorities because of their Christian emphasis.

In Australia, with the advent of radio, education departments began experimenting with delivering ‘master classes’ (a special topic class delivered by an expert) via radio. One example of this was the ‘Let’s Sing’ radio programme, beamed into all Australian public primary schools from 1950 to 1990. In 1951 the world’s first ‘School of the Air’ opened at the Flying Doctor Service in Alice Springs to provide an entire school programme for isolated children on outback properties (Advertiser, 1951).

The 1960’s counterculture movement resulted in many people beginning to question every area of culture that was based on institutional traditions. John Holt, a school teacher began to seriously assess the effectiveness of his own teaching and that of his colleagues. The book ‘How Children Fail’ (1964), ‘initiated an international debate on educational reform’. Through the late 1970s-1980s Holt became a leading spokesman for the ‘contemporary homeschooling movement’ which involved parents themselves taking on the full responsibility for educating their own children, ‘by choice’, as distinct from the ‘correspondence’ courses and ‘school of the air’ which people did out of necessity (Holt, 1982).

During the 1980s, a number of private schools developed curricular resources that could be used by homeschoolers. These workbooks and textbooks usually taught content directly to the student so the parent could confidently educate at home without having to be an expert in every subject. In Australia, homeschooling support services such as Light Education Ministries and Australian Christian Academy arose to train parents how to use these resources.

At the same time in the USA (between 1981 and 1994) Dr. Raymond Moore wrote a number of books with hints and tips on home-based education, relaying stories of what homeschoolers were doing and achieving, and also exposing the persecution they often faced. Holt and Moore offered legal aid, appearing in court in defence of homeschoolers.

During the 1980s-1990s, most homeschoolers were, what might be termed, ‘conscientious objectors’. Even if registered options were available, the majority of homeschoolers were wary of the potential for over-regulation. They had, after all, left ‘the system’ either because something was not working for their children, or they wanted a different philosophy and culture for their family.

Over the ensuing decades the numbers of families choosing to homeschool rose by 10% per year (Harding, 1995; McNeice, 2014). During this time, there were various government reviews of homeschooling in all States of Australia, which affected legislation. In Queensland, an extensive review was conducted during 2003. Public meetings were held with hundreds of homeschool families around the State. Parents' views were surveyed at public meetings, and hundreds of homeschool parents, students and other stakeholders presented submissions addressing issues. This was combined with an international study of academic research on home-based education. Results were published in the Qld Education Department's ‘Homeschool Review Report’ in October, 2003. The report totally debunked and laid to rest three uninformed myths regarding concerns about homeschooling.

i) Socialisation: The studies found that “homeschooled children are as well socialised as students educated in traditional schools”.  
ii) Quality of Education: Research showed significantly higher academic results among homeschoolers. In summary, they found “there is no research evidence to suggest that homeschooled children perform in ways that are educationally inferior to their peers in school”…and they found that “children whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to achieve academically”.

iii) Child Abuse: There was a concern that isolated homeschooled children could be more at risk of child abuse than their schooled peers. This myth also was statistically shown to be false.  
(Qld Education Department, 2003, p. 6)

The contemporary homeschooling movement has been both a reaction to unsatisfactory conditions, and an ideologically motivated search for a rich learning environment. Ultimately, it has been about parents exercising their right to ensure a better educational and moral learning environment for their children.

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