

‘More than One Way to Learn’: Home Educated Students’ Transitions Between Home and School

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DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published by another person, except where due reference is made into the text of the work. Ethics approval for this research has been received from the Monash University Standing Committee on ethics in Research on Humans, approval number: 2002/506

Signed: Date:

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ABSTRACT

Home schooling is a growing phenomenon in many countries throughout the world. Despite this, little attention has been paid to the relationship between home schooling and mainstream educational institutions. In this study, parents and home educated children who had moved into and/or out of mainstream educational institutions, and educational professionals who had been involved in such transitions were interviewed. This data was analysed using perspectives from historical sociocultural, critical and identity theories.

Participant groups discussed common experiences from different perspectives. Students fell into four ability groups – gifted, advanced learners, average and students with learning and/or health difficulties. Less than a quarter of the students interviewed in this study were identified as average students.

Parents fell into two groups – those who moved children out of mainstream institutions and those who moved children from home education into mainstream institutions. Professionals, both administrators and teachers, described mostly positive academic and social transition experiences of home educated students. Children who had moved out of mainstream institutions in primary school frequently described their frustration with institutional practices they felt discriminated them from their peers. Students who entered or returned to secondary school appreciated access to expert knowledge, peer mediation, inclusive professionals and socialisation experiences with peers.

Themes arising from the data included learning opportunities at home and in mainstream educational institutions, student autonomy, the development of student identity in the culturally different environments of home and mainstream educational institutions, socialisation, professional practices and institutional structures. Recommendations for future practice and policy direction, and areas for further research were identified. In conclusion, home educated students are moving into and out of mainstream educational institutions and benefiting academically, socially and through personal development from their transition experiences in both directions.

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Abbreviations

ACA – Australian Christian Academy

ACT – Australian Capital Territory

ACE – Australia Christian Education

ADHD - Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

AYCE – Access Yarralea Community Education*

CSF – Curriculum Standard Frameworks

DECV – Distance Education by Correspondence, Victoria

DEST – Department and Education, Science and Training, Commonwealth

NSW – New South Wales

NT – Northern Territory

OBOS – New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies

QLD – Queensland

SA – South Australia

TAFE - College of Technical And Further Education

TAS - Tasmania

TER – Tertiary Entrance Ranking

VCE – Victorian Certificate of Education

VELs – Victorian Essential Learning Standards

VIC – Victoria

WA – Western Australia

MY STORY

I have included my own story at the start of my thesis because my past experiences are an important part of who I am as a researcher. It is my intention that this story should act both as an introduction of myself to the reader and as a frame within which to position the text that follows.

I was born into a Seventh-day Adventist family in Australia and at the age of six moved to live in Fiji and later Western Samoa, as the child of missionary parents until the age of seventeen. For the first three and a half years, in Fiji, I attended a small community government, one room, two teacher, multigrade (prep to grade eight) school for expatriate children that used the New Zealand curriculum. I remember that I might not have learnt my times tables very well, but I did achieve the skill of neat printing and then proudly progressed to adult running writing.

During each of our two furloughs we attended Australian schools for short periods of time. When we moved to Western Samoa, I did correspondence lessons from both the Victorian and New South Wales government distant education programs. On starting Victorian Distance Education, I was forced to change my ‘far too difficult adult writing’ to learn what I perceived to be a half-baked running writing that was neither printing nor ‘adult’ running writing. My new found adult writing skills were devalued and scorned by some ‘nebulous’ authority who did not even bother to find out what I could do and who proved difficult to negotiate with just because ‘they’ felt that consistency was important. I did not understand what I needed to be consistent with and yet I was still able to achieve well in all my other studies. We eventually returned to Australia so that my brother and I could finish our high school education in an Australian school.

While growing up, my father often explained, both to us as children, and to wider audiences in many public speaking engagements, that as humans, we were responsible for the choices that we made and that there were always consequences to every choice. He did his best to ensure that we understood the power and effectiveness of our choices and their consequences.

By the age of thirteen or fourteen I had read two books by E. G. White (an early church founder), ‘Education’ and ‘Fundamentals of Education’ in which she described holistic educational principles. She emphasised the importance of children learning practical skills, developing and being challenged through collaborative engagements spiritually, mentally and physically in a holistic manner through the family and then through their

formal education. She argued that it was very important to work with the will of a child and help him or her to learn to direct his/her own will without breaking their spirit. Each child was precious and a unique and an important individual regardless of their strengths and weaknesses. I learnt that a significant and fundamental teaching of my church was the complex 'wholeness' of our humanness.

In the Islands, I experienced warm acceptance, friendships, inclusion and other cultures, in an inclusive way. I also experienced, on rare occasions, violent racism when children from distant villages would chase us, yelling abuse and throwing stones at us just because we were 'white'. When I returned to Australia, we moved to an Adventist community where our church beliefs were widely known. In this community I found that there were broad minded and accepting adults but I also experienced discriminatory exclusion, misunderstanding, racism towards my island friends, and bigotry from many of the local young people. The religion was on all appearances the same, but the expressions of it were completely different in different parts of the world.

Having had the opportunity to experience the idiosyncrasies of other cultures and witness the effect of imposed culture, I developed a personally experienced understanding of culture that I could not have come to understand in any other way. I also experienced ten transitions between different schools and forms of formal education. All of these transitions provided me with broad and pertinent personally experienced understandings of transition.

As a young secondary school teacher I experienced inner conflict with the ideals of teaching willing and involved students with the reality of disengaged and unwilling students and the need to be an authority figure to control classrooms in an attempt to force learning. I was puzzled by the number of students who entered secondary school with very poor reading and writing skills and with no interest in formal learning. It was also puzzling to watch some of these struggling students achieve very successful careers after they left school.

After teaching in secondary schools for six years I left to raise a family. When my oldest son was four and a half, we sent him to the local state run kindergarten to socialise with local children. At the end of that year, his teacher informed us that he, a very quiet child, was not ready to attend school and that he was unable to continue at the kindergarten because of the lack of government funding, even though he had only attended part-time. Both my husband and I had also concluded that school was not 'right' for our son just then. At that time, Dr Raymond Moore (a key American proponent of home education and also a Seventh-day Adventist) visited Melbourne to

speak to broad community interest groups about home education. We heard about his visit and my husband went to hear what he had to say, (I at was home with a new baby). He returned and enthusiastically announced that we would home school our son. He went to work and I home educated our children.

Our children were encouraged to make the decision to enter school when they felt ready. Our oldest son decided to attend from Year 7 and, in spite of being shy, worked hard and teachers were happy with his progress. As he was about to enter Year 10 he chastised me soundly for allowing his siblings to attend part-time. With only three days till school started he then announced that he too wanted to attend school part-time that year. In the hours spent at home he pursued his own study of horticulture. With the use of appropriate texts and soil testing kits, he read and developed horticultural practices from which we all benefited. He then chose to attend the last two years of secondary school as a full time student. All three of our other children attended secondary school ‘part-time’ and have commented more than once, that they appreciated the ability to make decisions about what they learnt at school and what they pursued at home.

My children’s experiences are not included in my study. As a principal’s daughter I learnt by hard personal experience that living in the shadow of a parent’s career contributed to significant grief and discrimination that I was not prepared to inflict on my own children.

When I made the decision to return to post graduate study, I was conscious of the stigma which surrounded home education, but I have appreciated the respect of university supervisors and colleagues for my decision to explore the topic. The intersection of home educated students with mainstream education has specific personal relevance.

At one of the in-service courses for post-graduate students I was challenged when another student demanded of my supervisor and others, that everyone writing a thesis must inform their readers of their world view. I felt that the description of Seventh-day Adventist did not describe my world view. My pre-adult experiences had taught me that there are different ways of viewing the world through a ‘Seventh-day Adventist’ lens. After much contemplation and with the background stories of my life, I decided my world view was quite simple.

My world view revolved firstly around my father’s pet topic of us living by our choices and experiencing the consequences of those choices. It was also about relationships with other people, myself, and the world (physically, environmentally, politically, economically, culturally, and philosophically). These concepts were intimately

intertwined. I reduced this to a simple formula that I have found useful when exploring theoretical frameworks within which to locate my study.

RELATIONSHIP + CHOICE + WISDOM + SELFLESSNESS
TIME CONSEQUENCES ACCOUNTABILITY

I understand this to mean that we function best when we think relationally, autonomously, accountably and selflessly on the basis of understanding cause/effect.

Chapter 1: Research Question and Setting

Home schooling, or home education as many Victorian home educators prefer to have their practice of educating students at home called, is well established in Victoria and Australia as evidenced by the existence of many state home education networks. The first doctoral thesis on Australian home education (Barratt-Peacock 1997) was completed at a Victorian university. A large proportion of known postgraduate studies in Australia on home education have also been completed in Victorian universities (Brosnan 1991, Habibullah 2004, Jackson 1999, Krivanek 1988, Lampe 1988, Thornton Smith 1989, Trevaskis 2005). While there is a small but growing body of research work on Australian home education practices, little is known about the ways in which these home educated students interact with the dominant forms and institutions of education found in Australia in general, and Victoria in particular.

The Australian media (Barlow 2002, Carew 2002, Clark & Barraclough 1999, Job 1999, Jones 1991, Mitchell 2006, Mornington Peninsula Leader 2002, Williams & Thomas 1996, Whitfield 2004 (a, b)) frequently ask questions about the adequacy of academic and social opportunities for home educated students. Anecdotally, professional educators at the school level can be overheard remarking about the problems created by home education. One comment recently overheard by a state primary school principal was that ‘home schooled children don’t understand the basics, like standing in line.’ In contrast, the home education network journals describe the success of home educated students’ entrance into post compulsory school institutions such as Colleges of Technical And Further Education (TAFEs) and universities. However, the interactions of home educated students with mainstream education at any level is only known anecdotally or through assumptions by professional educators and the broader community

1.1 Purpose of Research

It is a matter of social justice that all members of society be treated respectfully and are given the opportunity to be more clearly understood by the broader community (Delpit 1988, Smith 1990). This research project investigates transitions home educated students made with mainstream institutions and seeks to understand the reasons these transitions occurred. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of home education practice, provide insight into student experiences of home education and the impact that contact with mainstream educational institutions has on these students. To contextualise student views and experiences, the views and experiences

of home educating parents and professionals are included. It is hoped this research is able to provide professional educators and policy makers with a more informed basis on which to make decisions and policies about both home education and home educator interactions with mainstream institutions. It is also hoped that this research will provide home educators with a clearer understanding of their own practices and enable parents and students to make more informed decisions about educational pathways, especially when they intersect with mainstream institutions.

Student voice is the primary focus of the study because each individual has privileged knowledge of themselves. This allows deeper issues of power to be discovered and addressed (Delpit, 1988). While there is research on home educating parents' reasons and experiences home educating children, little is known about parent views and experiences moving children between home education and mainstream institutions. Professional and institutional misunderstanding of student motives are known to add to the struggle of students who may be already alienated (Hedegaard 2005). In this study, professional views and experiences help to provide a picture of home educated student interactions from the professionals' perspective as this is another unresearched area of Australian home education. This study seeks three perspectives based on guided interviews with parents, professionals and students. A qualitative interpretation based on grounded theory principles and then overlaid with theoretical perspectives drawn from sociocultural theory, critical theory and identity theory is used.

There are a number of subsidiary questions that follow from this research topic. Are there features of the transition experience that would be better handled by all parties if more information were available about these types of student transitions? Might this study provide insight into profitable ways to encourage communication and collaboration between home educators and mainstream institutions? Could a study of home educated student transitions with mainstream institutions provide some direction to other educational concerns such as low student achievement, as currently displayed by many mid-secondary school students, and suggest different ways to handle the learning differences of students who do not fit the average?

At the moment we know the general reasons for Australian parents choosing to home educate students but there is no research about the reasons if, why and when they enter their home educated students into mainstream institutions. Do home educating parents change their opinion about the educational pathway options of their children and if so, why? Do students have views about their experiences in both home education and mainstream education that might provide professionals with some worthwhile and different insights? Professionals have opinions about education in general and home

education. Are these opinions based on an understanding of what home education is about and as experienced by parents and students or are their opinions based on folk and community wisdom?

Is it possible that a home education perspective on education could provide professionals with insight into a variety of educational topics not achievable through mainstream education? Could home educators gain valuable understandings from professionals or perhaps students to contribute to current practice?

1.2 A Brief History

Home education was common in Victoria during the 1800s (Amies 1986) before compulsory schooling was introduced in 1872. During the 1970s, the first research on current home education practice in Australia was completed describing an alternative education program in New South Wales (Ennis 1978). Other research indicated Australian interest in alternative home education philosophies at that time (Krivanek 1988, Lampe 1988, Lipscombe 1980). Christian use of home education was documented in the late 1980s (Hunter 1989, 1990, 1994). Since that time, a body of research and academic literature has accumulated on Australian home education. The most significant names in Australian home education research have been Barratt-Peacock (1997) and Thomas (1998). There have also been a number of Government reviews of home education in various states (Carrick & Committee of Review of N. S. W. Schools 1989, Education Queensland 2003, Jacob, Barratt-Peacock, Carins, Holderness-Roddam, Home, & Shipway 1991, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies 2001, 2004). The available research describes the demographics and practices of home education and indicates that Australian home education is active, successful and growing. To date, although research indicates students are moving between home education and mainstream institutions (Carins 2002, Harding 1997, McColl 2005, Patrick 1999, Thomas 1998), there has been little research in Australia that has examined the process and movement of home educated students between mainstream institutions and home education (Jackson 2007).

1.2.1 Current Legal Status

Home education is legal in all states and territories of Australia, but the regulations vary between legislatures (Jackson 1999, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004). In Victoria, where this research project is based, the legislation relating to home education was minimal until the legislation was changed in 2007 (Education and Training Reform Act (Vic), No. 24, 2007). In the time period in which interviews were collected for this study,

the legislation relating to home education was based on legislation established in 1958 requiring all students to attend school or be educated 'otherwise' (Community Welfare Services Act (Vic) 1970, Education Act (Vic) 1958). This legislation reflected British legislation (Jackson 1999) using similar terminology. During the early 1990s, the Victorian Department of Education and Training unsuccessfully took legal action against home educators and subsequently there was a growing consciousness among home educators that the Victorian Department of Education and Training had no regulatory control over home education (Jackson 1999). This sets the legal context for this research project. In 2006, the Victorian Government introduced new legislation broadly addressing educational needs for the community and included, without proactive home educator consultation, a section relating to home schooling.

1.2.2 Legislative and Regulatory Change – 2006

The legal changes to the practice and management of home education in 2006 introduced mandatory registration of home education. However, this demand has only required minimal registration in which parents sign a statutory declaration indicating they are providing their children with the requirements of the eight Key Learning Areas (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (a) 2008) required of mainstream institutions prior to the new requirements that schools provide Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (b) 2008). Because the interview data was collected prior to the introduction of this legislation, the impact of this new legislation on the data provided in this study is not applicable to the findings.

1.3 The Problem of Sample

Australian research has described the types of families engaged in home education, their reasons for home educating children and the types of programs used by these families. However, in spite of home education being legal in every state and territory of Australia, numbers of home educators were not available. It is known in some states that there is high non-compliance to registration (Education Queensland 2003, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004), but in Victoria, home educators were not legally required to register with the Victorian Department of Education and Training as home schoolers until recent changes to legislation in 2006. This meant that accurate figures identifying the home educating population in Victoria were non-existent. Attempts to identify this population, through home education networks, were also not feasible because families were often registered with more than one network while others are registered with none.

Because of the lack of Victorian home education population figures, it is impossible to accurately describe the demographic features of this population. The research focus of this study looks at the views and experiences of parents who move children between institutions, professionals involved in the transitions of home educated students in their institutions and home educated students who make the transitions between home and mainstream institutions. The hidden nature of the Australian, and more particularly the Victorian home educating community, means it is not possible to ensure that the views of these participants accurately portray the views of all home educating parents and students who have made these types of transitions or of all professionals who have worked with transitioning home educated students.

1.4 Definitions

‘Home schooling’ may be defined in a number of ways. However, for the purposes of this study, home education is best defined as education provided by parents, who use a home base to organise their children’s learning. The Australian Bureau of statistics has defined home education in the following terms:

Home education occurs when parents choose to assume responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating their children’s learning program from a home base (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996).

The definition used in this research is that provided in the Australian Capital Territory’s (ACT) policy guide on home education and states:

2.1 Home schooling occurs when parents/guardians/caregivers choose to educate their children from a home base. Parents/guardians/caregivers take on full responsibility for planning, implementing, conducting and evaluating their children’s learning program (Education and Community Services 2001).

This definition includes the use of tutors and specialist classes organised by parents but excludes government provision of curriculum through distant learning facilities such as those provided by Distance Education by Correspondence, Victoria (DECV). However, in this study, there were families who used DECV for periods of time but who changed to more parent organised programs over time or who supplemented DECV programs with parent organised activities, as is the case for one family in this project. In this study one other privately supplied correspondence course, Australian Christian Education (ACE) which is provided through the Australian Christian Academy (ACA) and targeted to home educating families, is treated as part of home education programs. Families using this program identified themselves as home educators and felt it provided

them with prepared programs useful to novice parents unsure of starting their own home education programs.

In this study, home education is contrasted to mainstream education. Mainstream education is here defined as education typically provided by institutions of the dominant culture. These institutions include all primary and secondary schools whether state or private, post compulsory institutions publicly and privately funded, and DECV, as it is a government funded organisation using curriculum determined by government policy.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This chapter has identified the research question, provided definitions of key terms and indicated the Victorian and Australian home education context of the research project.

Chapter Two explores home education and transition literature. While overseas research on the transitions of home educated students with mainstream institutions are identified and patterns explored, this project is specifically set within the Australian home education research literature. Australian research literature on transitions into and between mainstream institutions is examined to identify aspects common to mainstream student transitions within the Australian mainstream educational context.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical methodologies used as lenses to understand the findings from different perspectives. While the initial analysis uses grounded theory traditions, sociocultural theory is used as the overarching theory because it establishes the need to contextualise our understanding in broader social and cultural contexts. Critical theory is used to identify areas of social tension and power. Identity theory seeks to understand the ways in which these students seek to make meaning of their experiences.

Chapter Four describes the particular methods used in this study to collect, code and analyse the data. Guided interview questions were used and then coded according to themes arising from the data.

Chapter Five examines the parent perspective of home educated student transitions into and out of mainstream institutions, identifying parent reasons for entering and removing students from mainstream institutions. Parents' views of general educational terms and practices are also sought.

Chapter Six examines the professional perspective of home educated student transitions

into and out of mainstream institutions. Professional observations of the transition process, student abilities, and complications of these moves are described. Professional views of general educational terms are explored.

Chapter Seven examines the home educated student perspective of transitions into and out of mainstream institutions. Student reactions, both positive and negative, to home education and mainstream institutions and their experiences of transitions between the two systems are examined.

Chapter Eight further explores the particular themes raised by student interviews and the meaning students gave to these themes. These themes included student autonomy, student learning, socialising, student identity, and structures of mainstream institutions.

Chapter Nine analyses the data results from each of the three participant groups – parents, professionals and students and identifies common threads and areas of discrepancies in the views expressed by each participant group. Connections are also made to the overseas and Australian home education research literature and Australian transition literature.

Chapter Ten overlays the questions raised by sociocultural theory, critical theory and identity theory and explores the questions raised by the focus of these theories to identify qualities, and possible interpretations of the data collected in this study.

Chapter Eleven summarises the main findings from parent, professional and student perspectives of transition experiences between home education and mainstream institutions. Areas for further research and implications for parent practice of home education, student transitions, professional practice and possible policy directions are identified.

CHAPTER 2: World and Australian Home Education and Australian Transition Literature

Two bodies of research literature informed this study, that of home education and that of transition. Because this research was set in Victoria, Australia, discussion of literature on both home education and transition was based on available Australian research literatures. However, the body of available research on home education in the Australian context was somewhat limited, and a broad overview of worldwide research was also included. Home education research describing student transitions with mainstream institutions was nonexistent in Australia. As a result, overseas home education literature dealing with student transitions with mainstream institutions was examined. Australian mainstream transition literature complemented the home education literature to explore the characteristics of various mainstream transition experiences into and between Australian mainstream institutions.

2.1 Home Education Research Literature

2.1.1 Overseas Themes in Home Education Research Literature

World research into home education has grown from the 1970s and mostly originated from the United States of America. A small but growing body of research literature came from countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. The focus of this research changed over time but general topics included studies of parent views and characteristics, education professional views and attitudes towards home education; social characteristics, academic achievement, self-concepts, views and experiences of students; legal matters relating to home education; pedagogy and learning styles of home educators, and demographic information about home educating families.

Demography

The known overseas demographic details of home educators indicated these families typically had two parents (Burns 1993, Fegley 1993, Patterson 1996), more than the average number of children (Breshears 1996, Fegley 1993), one income (Breshears 1993, Ruff 1999) and the mother acted as the primary educator (Breshears 1996, Fegley

1993, Hetzel 1998). These families practiced home education through a variety of curriculum approaches, from structured externally provided curriculum (Prince 1995, Taylor 1993) to the more commonly practiced eclectic programs (Ruff 1999, Strange 1994, Taylor 1993, Treat 1990) and natural learner approaches (Beaven 1990, Prince 1995). The practice of home education characteristically moved to less formal methods over time (Avner 1992, Holinger 1999, Parker 1992). Parent reasons for choosing to educate children at home fell into two categories. Parents felt they were forced out of mainstream institutions by negative experiences they had with mainstream institutions and pulled into home education by the positive experiences and qualities home education offered (Hetzel 1998, Weinig 1993). The reported negative features of mainstream institutions included conflicts with family values, concern about the lack of religious environment, disagreement with curriculum, poor teaching practice, large class sizes, underachievement, negative peer pressure, and the safety of children. The pull factors of home education included parents feeling they held responsibility for their children's education (England 1998), and that children became highly motivated by home education (Stoppler 1998). These were categorized into 'religious/moral', 'instructional/curricula' or 'social/emotional' categories (Hetzel 1998) or pedagogical, ideological (Romanowski 2001) and sociological (Tator 2002) reasons. Educationally, parents thought home education was the best method of education (Burns 1993, Breshears 1996, Williams, K. 1990), that it provided academic advantages (Laudermilk 1994, Parker 1992, Weinig 1993), pedagogical methods such as one-on-one instruction, custom made education (Hetzel 1998), more and better use of time, flexible curriculum (Clendening 1996, Johnson-Silvey 1999, Talyor, 1993, Waters 1998), and critical thinking skills (Rice 1999). Parents also thought the socialisation experienced at home was healthier (Burns 1993, Parker 1992). Parents felt satisfied with their home programs and enjoyed family closeness (Breshears 1996, Gray 1992 Hainlen 1995, Phillips 1998). One study noted that parents often researched home education before undertaking their own home education programs (Cappello 1995). In the United States, many studies found that Christianity was common in the home educating community (Babbitt 1991, Breshears 1996, Burns 1993, Schalinske 1999). There was also a recognition that while many families did want Christian values in the curriculum (Prince 1995) their beliefs were not the primary reason for home educating their children.

Academic and Social Achievement

While there has been discussion about the accuracy and meaning of research results examining the impact of home education on students because of the difficulties locating representative populations of home educated students (Apple 2001, 2004, 2005, Reich 2002, 2005) the available research has consistently found these students achieved

well academically (England 1998, Fash 1994, Holder 2001, Johnson-Silvey 1999, Rothermel 2004, Rudner 1999) were socially well-adjusted (Breshears 1996, Fash 1994, Holder 2001, Lee 1994,) and had good or high self-esteem (Hill 1995, Holder 2001, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Lee 1994, Sheffer 1995, Taylor 1986, Taylor 2001). Students had varying degrees of autonomy and often had the ability to work independently depending on parent approaches to their programs (Batterbee 1993, Hill 1995, Moss 1995, Rice 1999, Williams, L. 1990).

Professional Attitudes and Experiences

The attitudes and experiences of educational professionals towards home education and home educating families (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995) generally indicated a difference between administrators of education at the state or district level to the more positive reports given by principals and teachers who were directly involved with home educated students (O’Laughlin 1998). Teachers sometimes felt guilty and partially to blame because of the increase in home schooling (Sherrer 1991). College administrators expressed a variety of views (Jenkins 1990, Prue 1997) but students in these institutions seem to perform well (Jenkins 1990). Administrators were more likely to consider home education as a negative practice (Cappello 1995, Howell 1996, Peavie 1999). Reasons for this disquiet included variability of instruction, lack of parent qualifications, and concern that special needs children were not being appropriately catered for (DeRoche 1993). Administrators were not active in promoting collaboration and access to services (Marlow 1992, Peavie 1999). Other concerns professionals held about home education included fears about the socialisation opportunities of students and a concern for the development of student self-esteem (Lee 1994). A number of researchers recommended that professionals, particularly administrators, should be more informed about home education and that there be better communication between administrators and parents (Adams 1992, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, Marlow 1995, Patrick 1998, Peavie 1999, Sherrer 1991). Parents were most concerned that parental autonomy be respected while administrators called for accountability (Adams 1992). It would appear that there has been a growing acceptance by professionals and a move to more collaborative practices in countries where home education was a growing phenomena although much is still unknown about home education practices and numbers (Adams 1992, Hainlin 1995, Howell 1996, Lowden 1994, Petrie 1992, Schalinske 1999).

2.1.2 Home Educated Student Transitions with Mainstream Institutions

There was a small but growing interest in the transition movements of students between

home education and mainstream institutions. Most of this research literature came from the United States although one research project was conducted in Great Britain. Most of this literature focused on home educated student transitions with post compulsory school mainstream institutions or the work force (Goymer 2001, Gray 1998, Holder 2001, Jenkins 1990, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Prue 1997). These studies found that most home educated students adjusted academically and socially to post compulsory mainstream institutions and the work force as well as, if not better than, their mainstream educated peers. There was a perceived need for greater communication and understanding by professionals of home educated students and recognition of the need to provide appropriate orientation and support features for them (Lattibeaudiere 2000).

Relationship Between Parents and Professionals

Parents had a variety of attitudes towards collaboration with mainstream officials (Hanna 1996, Long 1998, Peavie 1999). There were studies indicating the existence of some home school and public school partnerships (Adams 1992, Howell 1996) and there were some parents wanting this cooperation (Breshears 1996, Fegley 1993, Golding 1995, Hainlin 1995, Marlow 1992, Williams, K. 1990). Other studies found that parents expressed low confidence in mainstream institutions and planned to educate children for longer rather than shorter periods of time (Burns 1993, Rice 1999, Williams, K. 1990). One study (Fegley 1993) found some parents thought they might send students to school at some stage but these parents were concerned about the ways in which this might impact on their input into the education of their children.

A number of studies also looked at different aspects of the interactions between home educated families and mainstream institutions (Adams 1992, Davis 2000, Fairchild 2002, Golding 1995, Goymer 2001, Hanna 1996, Krout 2001, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Marlow 1992, Snyder 2005, Stoppler 1998). The focus of four of these studies was concerned with mainstream professional perspectives of home education practice and their transition into mainstream institutions. The findings indicated that education administrators such as superintendents were generally less favourable towards home educators than were principals and teachers who worked directly with home educated students. The more distantly removed administrators were concerned about student socialisation and the inconsistencies of home educator curriculum (Luebke 1999, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995). Principals and teachers held general views about the possible problems created by home education for students both academically and socially but described positive experiences when discussing specific students with whom they had worked. One study (Davis 2000) found professionals felt home educated students exhibited particular academic weaknesses in organizational and

study skills, ability to communicate ideas, and performance of a variety of academic tasks although these students were recognised as independent learners with the ability to complete homework. There were also perceived specific social weaknesses and these included interactions with adults, involvement in extracurricular and community activities while social strengths were politeness and respectfulness to both adults and peers.

Home Educated Student Experiences Entering Mainstream Institutions

Five overseas studies (Goymer 2001, Krout 2001, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Snyder 2005, Stoppler 1998) researched the movements and experiences of students between home education and mainstream institutions such as compulsory school institutions, colleges, tertiary institutions and employment. The general findings in these studies indicated that most students made the transitions well both academically and socially. Professional attitudes and experiences were usually favourable about specific students while some general perceptions by educators about home education remained sceptical. Students expressed some apprehension about moving into mainstream institutions but this usually dissipated once students entered these institutions. Senior students attended mainstream institutions to meet new people, learn specific knowledge and gain appropriate certification into tertiary institutions. One study (Krout 2001) found that students re-entered compulsory age mainstream institutions for social opportunities even though these students had previously experienced social difficulties in mainstream institutions. The students who knew peers within their institutions settled well, while students were likely to experience difficulties when they did not know peers prior to entrance. The need for communication between professionals, parents and students was a common theme in these studies and there was a need for face-to-face conferencing about curriculum differences. The fact that professionals lacked knowledge about home education and home educated students was a factor limiting good communication between home educators and professionals. Parents home educated or returned students to mainstream institutions guided by their concerns for the best interests of their children and these interests varied over time with different individuals.

2.1.3 Australian Home Education

The small but growing research literature in Australia on home education included work conducted by one post doctoral study, one doctoral study, a number of other post graduate projects, Departments of Education reports and parliamentary reviews. Topics covered by this research were reasonably consistent with overseas findings of demographic features of home schooling families. These topics included parent reasons for home educating students, parent management of home schooling, management

of special needs students, the process of learning at home, student competencies and social development, student perceptions of their home schooling experiences, and the legislative and legal situation in all states and territories of Australia.

Sample sizes of these studies varied from 515 students (Harding 2003a) to one family (Trevaskis 2005) and two students (Clery 1998). Most of the larger studies examined quantitative data although Barratt-Peacock (1997) and Thomas (1998) produced large qualitative studies. The smaller studies also focused on qualitative information.

Demography

A number of consistent themes emerged from these studies (Education Queensland 2003, Harding 1997 2003b, New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies (OBOS) 2000, 2004, Patrick 1999). Home educators were randomly located in capital cities, regional cities and rural locations indicating that distance from mainstream educational facilities was not the main reason for educating children at home. Most families had two parents although there were a few single parents who home educated their children (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 2003c, 2006, Lampe 1988). The main educator was most commonly the mother. Some parents shared the role and very few fathers took the main role of educator. Education levels of parents varied from Year Ten to tertiary qualifications. Few parents who had primary responsibility for home education had formal teaching qualifications (Harding 1997, 2006, Krivanek 1988, Patrick 1999). This lack of teaching qualification made no apparent difference to the learning outcomes of students. Most mothers spent their time in the home, while a few had part-time work. The primary income earners came from a variety of professional, self-employed or trade positions.

Students were home educated between the ages of four and eighteen; however, approximately two thirds of home educated students were of primary school age (Harding 1997, OBOS 2000, 2004). Some studies (Harp 1998, OBOS 2000, 2004, Patrick 1999) found that many parents made the commitment to home educate for the long term. Their concern for their children's best interests was a significant factor in the decision to home educate and to remain home educating. Family cohesiveness, parenting roles, religious beliefs, and academic success were all mentioned as significant reasons for home educating children. After practicing home education, families reported greater family cohesiveness and this developed into a reason for continuing home education (Thomas 1998).

Harding (1997) found that seventy-nine percent of students had attended traditional

schools. A number of other studies indicated that a significant number of home educated children were withdrawn from mainstream schools (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Patrick 1999, Thomas 1998).

Parent Reasons for Choosing Home Education

Parent reasons for choosing home education were examined in a number of Australian studies (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Harding 1997, 2003a, c, Harp 1998, Education Queensland 2003, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jacob, et. al. 1991, Krivanek 1985, Maeder 1995, OBOS 2000, 2004, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998). The reasons given for Australian parents home educating their children varied in different studies and reflected the diverse population samples of each individual study. However, there were two major characteristics of parent decisions. Patrick (1999) described this as 'the push and pull' between home education and mainstream schooling. Parents' reasons for home educating children listed negative aspects of traditional schools and positive features of home education.

The negative aspects of mainstream schools included such things as poor professional practice, large class sizes, poor discipline, lower academic achievement, learning difficulties not catered for (especially for students with special needs), curriculum weaknesses, social problems such as bullying, negative peer pressure and low self-worth, values in schools unacceptable to parents, and their own children's unhappiness in mainstream schooling.

Home education was seen to offer positive benefits such as academic strength, broader curriculum, flexible learning to cater for individual needs, one-on-one teacher/student ratios, holistic learning connected to the 'real' world, values teaching, and stronger family relationships. Parents also thought their children experienced healthier social experiences due to mixing with wide age ranges of people unlike the same age socialisation experienced in traditional schools.

Academic Abilities

While there were no major studies on the academic status of home educated students in Australia, there was information available suggesting that home educated students were equal to, if not above average to, their formally educated peers in academic status. Thomas (1998) found that home educated children did not have difficulty entering mainstream institutions. In two studies, (Lampe 1988, Simich 1998) home educated students who sat standardized tests usually scored above average. Harding (2003a)

used competency based tests on Australian Christian Academy (ACA) students who were tested at three different year levels (Year 3, 5 and 7). The families were from both regulated and unregulated areas in Queensland and from a third unregulated group in Victoria. Student competency levels were equivalent whether regulated or not. In 2005, a study of home educated students who used the ACA program, found that students generally achieved very high academic results and many had entered tertiary institutions with ease (McColl 2005). Many parents expected their children to achieve higher academic results through home education as this was one of the common reasons for choosing home education. That Australian researchers have not considered this an important area of research would indicate that the academic success of Australian home educated students has not been a significant matter of concern or interest. Attempts to find representative samples are also difficult because of the hidden nature of the home educating population.

Socialisation

Many home educated children appreciated their social experiences at home, as opposed to negative experiences that some experienced while in mainstream schools (Broadhurst 1999, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2000, Clery 1998, Harp 1998, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jackson 2004, Krivanek 1985, 1988, Thomas 1998, Trevaskis 2005). In one study (Brosnan 1991), home educated children generally rated their families higher than traditionally educated students. A study of parental support from mothers and fathers indicated that responsibilities were shared and there were low levels of physical punishment or the withdrawal of privileges by mothers in particular. Sibling relationships were usually reported to be healthy and supportive. Self-esteem and mother support were significant while father support was also thought to lead to improved self-esteem in students. House work was shared, democratic practices were evident, and there was notable use of conversation, discussion, and expression of opinions. Family cohesiveness was a significant feature noticed with home schooling families. Findings on parents and students views of socialisation in many subsequent studies concurred with Brosnan's (1991) assessment (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Broadhurst 1999, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2000, Clery 1998, Harding 1997, 2006, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Lampe 1988, Maeder 1995, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998).

The definition of socialisation as understood by home educators appeared to differ from the more commonly understood meaning of socialisation found in mainstream education where students were rated for their ability to socialize with their peers. Thomas (1998) found that many parents thought the socialisation provided in school catered only

for same age interaction with large groups of children. As far as these parents were concerned this same age integration had no out of school relevance or equal in any other part of society. Home educating parents' views on socialisation favoured what has been described as vertical socialisation as opposed to the horizontal socialisation offered by mainstream schools (Clery 1998). These, and other studies, indicated that parents took the matter of socialisation seriously as they attempted to ensure their children experienced a broad range of social experiences. Home education network groups offered an important social link with other children from a wide range of ages, including same age peers with wide ranging interests and abilities. Children were also involved in various sporting and special interest groups or clubs, music groups, volunteer service opportunities of every kind, and church associations. Parents might start home educating with some misgivings about socialisation but grew in confidence as they saw their children becoming more competent in a wide variety of situations (Thomas 1998). Many home educating parents were adamant that school socialisation was unhealthy and damaging to their children. Home education was thought to allow their children to develop a wide range of social skills and healthy self-concepts.

Student views of socialisation were similar. A few children who were withdrawn from traditional schools, found the social change too great and returned to school (Thomas 1998). However, many more students (Broadhurst 1999, Clery 1998, Jackson 2007, McColl 2005, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Thomas 1998) found the opportunities to meet a wide range of people of all ages fulfilling and worthwhile. The quiet times on their own were not usually viewed as a disadvantage. Socialisation as experienced by home educated students was particularly beneficial to students who had problems with this aspect of education in mainstream institutions (Jackson 2007, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002).

While there were no large Australian research projects specifically on socialisation, the majority of available studies addressed socialisation in some form and indicated that socialisation for most Australian home educated students was not a significant concern for parents or students. One note of caution was sounded. In one study, children's satisfaction with their social experiences and autonomy was found to be directly related to parent attitudes and practices (Krivanek 1988).

Some studies (OBOS 2000, 2004, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Simich 1998) also found home educators wished that the general population had a more accurate and informed understanding of socialisation available to and experienced by the home educating community. These studies suggested that socialisation, as experienced by home educated students, provided a sound foundation

for adult life.

The Practice of Home Education

Several studies investigated the process of home education in Australia. The two largest studies (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Thomas 1998) on Australian home education were particularly interested in this aspect of home education and several smaller studies (Habibullah 2004, Honeybone 2000, Lampe 1988, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998) found similar themes supporting the findings described in the larger studies. Disparities between studies appeared to be the result of the different sample sizes and researcher perspective. These studies revealed that families used three basic approaches to home education: structured, semi-structured, open, natural learning, or various blends of these approaches. In a number of studies (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Honeybone 2000, Jacob et. al. 1991, OBOS 2004, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998 and Trevaskis 2005), parents began home educating children using school timetables, structures and classroom type environments to guide their programs. A small number of families maintained these structured programs but the majority moved to various blends of informality over time. Many families who used a semi-structured approach used basic curriculum for maths, English, comprehension and writing in the mornings and then allowed students to direct their own learning for the rest of the day.

Barratt-Peacock (1997) and Thomas (1998, 2002) found that all families in their studies engaged in conversational learning and both came to the conclusion that family conversation was one of the more significant aspects of home education. Earlier, Brosnan (1991) also found that conversation and family discussion were evident in home educating families but he did not draw any particular attention to its importance. Conversational learning was also noted but not strongly identified as a significant aspect in other studies (Broadhurst 1999, Brosnan 1991, Clery 1998, Habibullah 2004, Honeybone 2000, Krivanek 1988, Lampe 1988).

Student Views and Experiences

Several studies explored the views and experiences of home educated students (Broadhurst 1999, Carins 2002, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2007, Lampe 1988, McColl 2005). The average size of most studies was seven students, apart from Carins' (2002) twenty-six students and McColl's (2005) seventy students. A third study included thirty-six students (Lampe 1988). This limits the degree to which one may generalise the findings to the larger home education population. However, there were common threads even though the studies were conducted in different States (South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia), at different times and some

researchers were unaware of other Australian research in the area. The age range of the students involved fell between six and sixteen, apart from those in the two studies (Carins 2002, McColl 2005) that researched young adult experiences of Australian Christian Academy (ACA) or Australian Christian Education (ACE) students.

Krivanek (1988) found student autonomy in her sample was restricted to rather trivial matters. In other studies (Broadhurst 1999, Clery 1998, Jackson 2007), students commented favourably on their ability to choose how they planned their day, decided what they learnt, when they learnt, how they learnt, when they finished their schoolwork, and even made the decision to return to school (Simich 1998). All students, except one, in the four smaller studies said that home education was a positive experience. The one exception (Jackson, 2007) initially said that he 'hated' home education, but found many things about home education he appreciated and wished were part of mainstream education. Carins (2002) and McColl (2005) found that all their students were glad they had been home schooled with ACA or ACE, as they felt it had given them an advantage on becoming adults and no student felt that it had limited their career opportunities.

Students liked home education for its flexibility, the opportunity to make relevant decisions about their own learning, to receive prompt attention when needing help, to learn without the pressure to keep up with a class, and to have more personal time because they finished their work earlier. These were comments made by students who on their return to school scored at the top of their classes and in one case, for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), achieved a score of over ninety-eight from a possible 100. Some children found they enjoyed having more time with 'Mum.' Pursuing interests over long periods of time was also important to students, as were the casual and informal home environment where they felt they learnt more. One student decided that home education helped him get ahead when he did return to school while the majority of these students thought they would home educate their own children in the future.

Several students said there was nothing that they disliked about home education. When questioned about the possibility of missing school friends a number of students indicated they did miss friends at school but this was not a good enough reason to stop being home educated. Other negative aspects included the inability to find out information from experts in particular subject areas promptly and the lack of class discussion on various topics, while boredom was a less common reason. About one fifth of the students in McColl's (2005) study felt they had missed social interaction opportunities.

Student attitudes to school appeared to be dependent on the age at which they had contact with mainstream education. Young students who started education in school all had negative perceptions of traditional school. Their reasons for disliking mainstream education included having less work now than their peers at school (Broadhurst 1999, Honeybone 2000), poor social situations at school where they felt victimized, and institutional practices that disturbed their ability to work and learn effectively in mainstream institutions. Only one of Honeybone's (2000) eight children, and one other student (Jackson 2007), said they missed playing with friends at school. Some did not appreciate having to wait long periods of time for help while teachers were busy with other children. School was also seen as boring, with nothing to do. Others felt they were not given sufficient time to learn concepts without feeling threatened by school practices. A couple of these students said they could think of nothing positive about mainstream schools.

Older children (apart from one who had alternated between home and school (Clery 1998) who had re-entered mainstream education at the secondary school level, found they easily fitted into their year levels and achieved academically (Thomas 1998). A parliamentary review of home education in Queensland (Education Queensland 2003, p20) found there was 'anecdotal evidence' that home schooled children made a 'relatively smooth transition to schools.' Students appreciated the help of specialist teachers for various subjects, enjoyed class discussions, and found teachers friendly and helpful, liked contact with peers and 'muck around' time in breaks. However, there was some frustration with the normal queuing for help, noisy classrooms and other school distractions, lack of flexible timetables, and time restraints that hindered their pursuit of personal interests not catered for in the school program (Jackson 2007).

All studies found the majority of children were happy socially at home. Although they recognised they could have more friends at school, socialisation was not a reason to return to school. For those students who had experienced negative socialisation at school, home education allowed them the important opportunity of discovering that they had the ability to have real friends in a different environment. This also allowed their damaged social skills the opportunity for healing as they became stronger in limited and controlled social settings (Jackson 2007, Thomas 1998). Some students thought their school friends were envious of them, while others enjoyed meeting with home schooling friends and others through a variety of social outlets such as home education networks, sports, church and clubs. In these studies, students appreciated strong healthy family relationships. Although two studies (Honeybone 2000, Krivanek 1988) mentioned sibling rivalry in some families, in other families, siblings were important friends. While results on home educated students' self-awareness and self-determination in

Krivanek (1988) were mixed, in other studies that considered this aspect, it appeared home education had not hindered the development of self-esteem (Brosnan 1991, Clery 1998, Jackson 2007). In a number of cases, the opportunity to be home educated strengthened student sense of self-worth. Clery (1998) suggested that having personal time away from peers allowed students the opportunity to understand themselves. However, this area needs further research on larger populations in Australia.

When asked what professionals should know (Jackson 2007), one student said that home schooling was fun, but more importantly it allowed her to understand her academic work and her social world around her. Another student wanted to see some of the best aspects of home education included in schools. These included greater student control over curriculum, relevance to personal needs and interests, and flexibility in use of time. Both of these students were tentative about being up to their level before they re-entered school and would have appreciated having some way to determine this before they returned. As it was, neither of these two students had anything to worry about and returned successfully to school.

Special Needs Students

A number of studies in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia mentioned students with special learning and disability needs (Harding 2003b, Education Queensland 2003, OBOS 2004, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998). However, the studies that specifically focused on families dealing with special needs children, were conducted by Reilly (2004), Reilly, Chapman and O'Donoghue (2002), and Trevaskis (2005). In the home schooling population sampled by Education Queensland (2003), fifteen percent of the families cited special or medical needs as the primary reason for home schooling. Trevaskis (2005) concentrated on one family's struggles with language learning disabilities, while Reilly (2004) studied six families who had children with various disabilities and needs. These parents expressed similar reasons for educating children at home to other Australian home educating parents. Negative inclusion experiences into mainstream schools, poor social growth opportunities, lack of academic progress, and a lack of professional understanding of the child's disabilities led parents to consider home education. Positive features of home education surfaced and included flexibility to work with the individual needs of their children, one-on-one teaching, learning in real life contexts, and the opportunity for academic and social growth.

These parents were keen to receive sympathetic support from whatever agencies could appropriately work with them. However, parents noted a number of factors that

interfered with their ability to teach their children. Advice provided by professionals was of limited value and parents felt they would have benefited from better access to school and other community facilities. They also wanted the public to be made more aware of the positive opportunities allowed by home education.

Home schooling networks were important to all the families in Reilly's (2004) study. Network support led to increased parental 'confidence in their ability to manage the processes involved' (Reilly, personal communication, 2006) and social opportunities for children. She noted that home educating parents sacrificed a great deal to ensure the successful growth and maturity of their children.

The special needs of gifted children as met by home education, is an area needing further research in Australia. Mitchell and Tullberg (2006) observed that there were parents of gifted children home educating their children in Victoria (Williams 2003, 2004).

Challenging Aspects of Home Education

Two significant challenges to home educators were highlighted by a number of researchers. These were maternal stress, and parental dealings with bureaucracy.

Several studies noted that a small number of mothers experienced a certain degree of overload and stress (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Nicholls 1996, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998, Trevaskis 2005). Some studies suggested that mothers who attempted to adhere to strict school-like regimes experienced more significant stress. As mothers relaxed about the structure of their programs and focused more on their children's interests, and their need to take personal time out, stress levels lowered and mothers felt their children's learning improved. Three studies found some mothers felt home schooling required a great deal of commitment and preparation (Habibullah 2004, Honeybone 2000, Trevaskis 2005). Two researchers (Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Trevaskis 2005) found that a small number of mothers dealing with some form of special need, and who were home schooling because they felt that there was no other option, felt stress and disquiet about their home schooling experience. One study, (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004) listed items that caused concern to parents. These related to managing routine work and keeping children motivated, managing home and school work, and having no time for self. Because distance education was included in this sample it is difficult to determine if some of these aspects were specifically related to distance education or to home education more generally.

Significant levels of non-compliance to regulation and registration across Australia, suggest that parents did not find working with regulatory authorities satisfactory (Carins 1997, Harding 2003c, 2006, Harding & Farrell 2003, Jackson 1999, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Patrick 1999). Parents who were more experienced in home schooling found that the guidelines provided by the New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies (OBOS 2004) did not reflect an understanding of home schooling practice. Other parents found that contact or lack of appropriate contact with Departments of Education staff or distance education were unhelpful to their needs (Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, Trevaskis 2005).

The failure of the New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies (2004) and Education Queensland (2003) to understand the basic elements in Australian theory of home education contributed to tensions between home educators and officialdom. It would appear that a more informed understanding of the theory of Australian home education practice should inform legislation and regulation of home education to achieve a more satisfactory result for all parties.

Problems of Home Education Research in Australia

Any interpretation of research on home education in Australia must consider the significance of the findings in light of the fact that all research to date has been conducted with willing participants. There were no studies with control groups or with randomly selected participants. This problem was also noted as one of the most significant weaknesses of overseas research as well (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Reich 2005, Welner & Welner 1999).

Another factor impacting on home education research around Australia was the poor access by Australian researchers to the works of other Australasian researchers on home education. Distance, lost reports of research projects (Mulally 1993 referred to in Hunter 1994, Wallace 1999), and lack of publication made it difficult for researchers to locate the work of others. Because the home educating community was so varied and segmented, and because much of the home education research literature was unpublished, access to valuable work was restricted. The difficulty of locating research information was also compounded by the control of information and network membership by some of the early home education proponents (Lampe 1988). Very recently better listing of documents and speedy access through improved technologies has allowed wider access to material.

Theory of Home Education Practices

Barratt-Peacock (1997) described home education as a method of enculturation occurring in a 'community of learning practice'. He and Thomas (1998) thought family conversation was an important factor in home education practice. In 2003, Barratt-Peacock further developed his model of home education as a 'super model of a community of practice'. It outlined four key concepts: 'domestic occupation', 'parents as tutor/guides to fields of authentic adult practice', 'family conversation as a forum'; and 'role modeling' (Barratt-Peacock 2003, p106-108). This 'super community of learning practice' provided children with opportunities to interact with other 'communities of practice' while parents acted as 'mentor guides' (Barratt-Peacock, personal communication, 2006).

Trevaskis (2005) thought the learning experiences of her learning disabled children were best explained by work-based learning practices because they needed repetition in a variety of ways to learn basic skills.

Thomas (1998) valued the efficiency of informal learning and saw this as an extension of the learning styles of early childhood. He understood that conversation between child and adult allowed children the ability 'to hone their thinking skills' (p128). Learning in context also contributed to the efficiency of home learning. Children had mentors and guides to help them through their learning experiences when needed. Sequential and incremental learning as provided in traditional institutions was not the norm in informal learning. Many times children became engrossed in large topics for extended periods of time that school periods in formal education just could not allow. He found that children learnt in their own sequences and steps and sometimes this learning was staggered and at other times occurred in leaps. A good illustration of this was the fact that about one quarter of all the children in his study learnt to read quite late without any detrimental effect to their future educational opportunities.

From the theoretical understandings developed to date, it becomes clear that home educators use very different approaches to education than generally accepted practices found in traditional mainstream schools. This helps to explain why legislation and regulation that attempts to impose traditional school models of curriculum, assessment and regulation are difficult to enforce on home educating families. Few families educate their children using formal school model approaches.

Questions Arising from Home Education Literature

The home education literature from around the world and in Australia allows us to

contextualise the findings of this project. Demographic features of home educators were similar overseas and in Australia. How do the demographic features found in this research compare with previous findings? Overseas and Australian research, while not based on samples from total populations, indicated that home educated students generally achieved well academically, were socially well adjusted and usually exhibited high self-esteem. How does the self esteem, socialisation, and academic success of students in this study rate? Professional attitudes in Australia have not been investigated in earlier home education research literature. Overseas, there is a difference between the views of government administrators and principals and teachers. There is also a lack of professional knowledge about home education practices and experiences. How do professional attitudes in this study reflect or contradict overseas findings? What strengths and weaknesses do these professionals see in these home educated students when they move into mainstream institutions?

Overseas studies indicated that students experienced some apprehension when entering mainstream institutions but found their fears were generally unfounded. How do the students in this study find transition into mainstream institutions? What reasons are given for students entering mainstream institutions in this study and how do their experiences compare to students overseas? Parents were also seen to act in the best interests of students and these needs changed over time. Do the findings in this study reflect similar parental views and experiences?

Australian practice of home education has been identified in earlier research. How is the practice of home education in this study similar or dissimilar to these earlier findings? Australian studies indicated that home educated students appeared to be achieving well academically and socially. How do the students in this study perform in these two areas? A number of studies indicated that parents and students wanted conventional folk wisdom about home education challenged. Do parents and students in this study hold similar views? Australian home educated students have previously appreciated their home education opportunities. How do the students in this study value their home and mainstream educational experiences? Two challenges to home education practice were identified in earlier research – mother fatigue and poorly informed legislation. Are these challenges evident in the findings of this study?

2.1.4 Summary of Home Education Literature

In this overview of overseas and Australian home education research a number of key features of home education have been identified. The overseas research literature on student transition experiences should provide some guide to the possible findings of

an Australian study of home educated student transition with mainstream institutions. Although student transitions with mainstream institutions have been acknowledged in Australia, there has been no study of the process of transition for these students with mainstream institutions, parent reasons for moving students into mainstream in particular, professional responses to home educated student transition into and out of mainstream institutions, nor a study of student views and experiences of transitions with mainstream institutions. Home education is distinctly different from mainstream education. There is a need to understand how these differences might impact on student transitions with mainstream institutions and the ways in which professionals in institutions could work more closely with parents and students involved in such transitions.

2.2 Transition Literature

2.2.1 General Findings in Australian Transition Literature

Research on general student transitions into and between mainstream institutions is well established in Australia. The types of student transition movements explored included student movements from home into early child care facilities, into primary schools and early child care centres, into secondary school and into post compulsory school institutions such as Colleges of Technical And Further Education (TAFE), universities and employment. This research literature revealed a number of common themes. The transitions were described as moves between cultures. The main factors contributing to the ways transitions occurred included cultural differences, curriculum, continuities and discontinuities, family factors, institutional structures, professional factors, perspectives of all stakeholders, and student qualities such as needs and adjustments. A number of researchers noted that transition could be difficult for some students at all levels of mainstream education (Harris 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006, te Riele 2004, van Haren 2006). Methods of ensuring and improving these transitions were studied and three key words were consistently used – communication, collaboration and inclusion.

Stakeholders

The key stakeholders in students' transitions into and between mainstream institutions included professionals, institutions, parents, students, government, community and business (Dockett 2006, Kantanis 2002, Kellock 2006, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Australia) NECVER 2006, Whitton & Perry 2005). While the immediate stakeholders had recognisable influences, other factors such as employment, policy and community also contributed less directly to transition experiences. By identifying the stakeholders, researchers found it easier to identify differences in

philosophy, pedagogical theories (Dockett 2001, 2006, Hopps 2004, Vessey 2006), underlying contexts, misunderstandings and contradictions (Reid 2004, Rogers 2006) that could all contribute to complications in the transition process.

Culture

Cultural difference was one of the more important qualities that influenced the transition experience into and between institutions and was best understood as a transcultural move (Lawrence 2003, 2005, 2006). Some researchers (Fleer & Richardson 2004, Hanlen 2007, Hopps 2004) suggested it was important to understand the prior knowledge and cultural understandings of students when transitions were made. This included cultural differences between mainstream institutions (Cassity & Gow 2005, Hunter 2001, Margetts 2003). Some of the identified cultural differences between primary and secondary schools, for example, included curriculum, pedagogy, and learning contexts (Keeffe 2006, Scott 2006). Transitions were known to cause some mature aged students to experience cultural shock (Scevak & Cantwell 2007). In this study, the cultural differences between home education and mainstream institutions are explored in an attempt to identify possible differences that might contribute to these students experiencing culture shock and possible alienation. Discovering continuities and discontinuities is an important part of identifying possible cultural differences. Particular mainstream areas contributing to students' sense of continuity and discontinuity were curriculum and classroom practices (Hanlen 2007, Richardson 2005).

Professionals

The attitudes and practices of professional educators contributed significantly to the ways students experienced transitions into and between all mainstream institutions (Cassity & Gow 2005, Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) 2006, Dockett & Perry 2003(a,b), 2006, Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, Keeffe 2006, Lawrence 2003, 2005, Martin 2003, New South Wales Dept of Education and Training 2006, Vessey 2006). There were general principles thought important for professionals to consider when dealing with students' transitions across all age groups and situations. These principles included the recognition and need for communication between professionals, parents and/or students (DEST 2006, Hayes & Chodkiewicz 2005, Perry & Dockett 2006, Timperley, McNaughton, Howie & Robinson 2003); professional responsibility for making connections to ensure continuity, including curriculum, for students (Dockett & Perry 2006, Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, Hayes & Chodkiewicz 2005, Irwin 2006, Kift & Nelson 2005, New South Wales Dept of Education and Training 2006, Tennant 2005, Zyngier 2006); professional flexibility and

creative solutions to transition matters (Blackburn 2006, Cassity & Gow 2005, Ganeson 2006, Irwin 2006, Keeffe 2006, Konza 2005); awareness of variations in sociocultural backgrounds (Cassity & Gow 2005, Hanlen 2007, Lawrence 2005, 2006); consideration of individual diversity of students (Hunter 2002, Kift & Nelson 2005); recognition of classroom sociocultural dynamics for new students (DEST 2006, Dockett & Perry 2006, Hunter 2002); awareness of issues of social justice (Hunter 2002, Keeffe 2006, Tranter 2006); consideration of students' maturity in transition (Blackburn 2006, Nagel 2006); and help for students' management of stress and resilience (Blackburn 2006, Burvill-Shaw 2004, Richardson 2005).

The positive attributes and practices of teachers contributing to smoother transitions included acceptance, commitment, friendliness and inclusiveness towards parents and students (Gill, Winters & Friedman 2006). Specific pedagogy teaching coping and survival skills, orientation, student self-direction and management was important (Chadwick 2000, Kift & Nelson 2005, Lawrence 2006). While there was a need for teachers to understand how schools set boundaries, these qualities could create inclusive and exclusive practices. Professionals needed to establish wider links with the community and understand that valuable learning also occurred outside mainstream schools (Hayes & Chodkiewicz 2005). Another way of helping students to manage their transitions was to teach students how to critically evaluate their life potential, democratic opportunities and learning experiences (Hunter 2006, Keeffe 2006, Wood 2007). Teachers were responsible for providing continuity between home and school by communicating with families and making connections to a child's home culture and social practices (Hanlen 2007, Richardson 2005).

Professional attitudes to parents were documented. Professionals, particularly in the early years of formal education, did not think parents should teach children academic work before they entered mainstream institutions and parents were not generally viewed as equal partners in the education process. Neither were parents or students expected to contribute to curriculum (Dockett & Perry 2003). Research also indicated that professionals and parents valued many of the same qualities for children making early transitions into mainstream institutions but to different degrees (Dockett & Perry 2003(a)). Parents could provide useful knowledge to professionals that would contribute to better transitions for students (Perry & Dockett 2006, Makin, Jones Diaz & McLachlan 2007, Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006) but professionals did not always seek this information.

Difficulties were sometimes created for students making transitions when professionals and/or families involved in the transition had differing philosophies, and theories of

learning (Cooper & Lim 2006, Hopps 2004, Rennie 2006, Walker 2006). Problems were also created by lack of communication about students (Timperley, McNaughton, Howie & Robinson 2003). There was a need for professionals to recognise there was more than one way to know, learn and exist in the world (Hunter 2002). While professionals verbally acknowledged that parents were involved in students' transitions, particularly in the lower levels of education, professionals often did nothing practical about the need for parental inclusion (Gill, Winters & Friedman 2006). Professionals did not like students skipping grades (Martin 2006). Students, particularly those who left school early, were vulnerable to teacher factors (te Riele 2004). There were times when teachers did not feel supported by their organisations when working with the problems created by transition (Tranter 2006). Some teachers allowed socioeconomic and racial prejudice to colour their attitudes and actions towards some students (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006, Tranter 2006).

Institutional Structures

Institutional structures were known to have a significant influence on students when making transitions between mainstream institutions (Downs 2003, Ganeson 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006). The transition experiences of mainstream students into and between institutions were most constructively viewed when treated holistically by institutions (Vessey 2006). Institutions created continuities and discontinuities for transiting students (Cooper & Lim 2006, Dunlop 2003, Tranter 2006) and yet they often did not consult with students and their families about students' transition needs (Irwin 2006). There was a need for institutions to contribute to the smoother entrance and exit transitions of students (Blackburn 2006, Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, te Riele 2004) through curriculum development (Cunningham 2004, Dunlop 2003, Gilbert 2006, Keeffe 2006, Kift & Nelson 2005, Lawrence 2005, Walker 2006), sharing of student information (Fleer & Richardson 2004, Hopps 2004), communication and collaboration with professionals (Corkhill 2005, Keeffe 2006, Timperley, McNaughton, Howie & Robinson 2003) and families (DEST 2006, Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, Gentle 2004, Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006), and through student care (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006, te Riele 2004).

Philosophies, theories of pedagogy and learning, school culture and policy differences contributed to how institutions dealt with transitions (Cooper & Lim 2006, Fleer & Richardson 2004, Lawrence 2005, 2006, Petriwskyj 2005a,b, Tranter 2006). When these factors were not considered carefully they could contribute to student alienation (Reid 2004, Rogers 2006, te Riele 2004) and predispose some at-risk students to experience problems (Margetts 2003). Institutional gate keeping by requiring particular

certifications before allowing student entrance was another way in which problems for some young people could be created (te Riele 2004). Institutions were slow and inconsistent in making changes while both internal and external factors contributed to the problems requiring change (Hunter 2001). Schools and universities, while meant to be places that cultivated equality, often contributed to social injustice and class differences by their cultural qualities (Deckert-Peaceman 2007, Tranter 2006). One researcher (Hunter 2002) felt it was important for institutions to see transitions from three perspectives – before, during and after the transition had occurred.

Institutions could make positive contributions to inclusive practices by being proactive. Institutional awareness of student needs, the cultivation of an accepting school culture and inclusive practices were important (DEST 2006, Laughlin 2004, te Riele 2004). Support structures for teachers dealing with transitioning students, particularly from other cultures, were also important (Laughlin 2004). There was a need to consider the implementation of more flexible timetables and compatible curriculum (Dann 2005, DEST 2006, te Riele 2004).

Complex and insecure transitions also mean mainstream schooling needs to adapt to facilitate reentry, for example through more flexible timetabling, appropriate curriculum and facilities, and respectful treatment (te Riele 2004, p.12).

Promoting ‘hands-on life-related learning activities, integrated instruction, and co-operative learning groups’ with regular teachers helped students make smoother transitions into senior secondary (Blackburn 2006, p15). Two researchers thought there were six factors institutions should consider to encourage good student transition experiences, especially when the students came from noticeably different cultures:

[T]ransition points, the classroom, parents/guardians and communities, teachers, pathways to the future, and other school activities’ (Cassity & Gow 2005, p2).

It was also important for institutions to find ways to provide self-development programs (Dann 2005) and collaborate effectively and respectfully with all parties (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006). Another way in which institutions could move from their current ‘deficit discourses’ was to consider viewing transition through different theoretical frameworks such as constructivism, Vygotskyian sociocultural learning and critical pedagogies (Lawrence 2003, 2005, 2006).

Parents

Families were important to the success of student transitions at all levels of mainstream

education (Beavis 2006, Perry & Dockett 2006(a), Taylor & Nelms 2006, Weston, Qu & Soriano 2006). Much of the research on parental perspectives, experiences and issues with transitions was found in early childhood transitions – transition into preschool and kindergarten and then into primary school (Dockett & Perry 2003(a), O’Gorman, Farrell & Walsh 2004) and between home and primary school (Heriot & Beale 2004, Richardson 2005). Parents could contribute to smoother transition experiences for students moving between primary and secondary school (Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006) and offer support for the aspirations of students into post school work, TAFE and tertiary pathways (Beavis 2006, te Riele 2004, Tranter 2006, van Haren 2006).

Parental support in the early transitions in formal institutions was effective when parents encouraged a curiosity about learning and when they were aware of children’s differences in the way they learnt, were motivated, played, developed social skills, and their cognitive and concentration abilities (Heriot & Beale 2004). Parents were also able to help children manage the stress of transition and provide continuity between home and school (Richardson 2005, Vessey 2006).

Teachers and parents valued many of the same qualities thought necessary for students to make the transition into preschools or between preschools and primary schools, but the degree to which these qualities were valued was noticeably different between parents and teachers (Dockett and Perry 2003). Neither teachers nor parents felt parents should attempt to educate their children before the child arrived in professional care, although parents were encouraged to play with and read to children as important activities prior to children attending mainstream institutions.

Relevant communication between parents and teachers was important when students were making transitions to and between formal institutions (Lindner 2004, Merry 2003, Perry & Dockett 2006b). This communication was often not used effectively and needed to include such topics as student’s previous work (Jones 2003, Makin, Jones Diaz & McLachlan 2007, Taylor & Nelms 2006) and participation in school programs (Gill, Winters & Friedman 2006, Perry & Dockett 2006a,b), particularly in preschool and primary school transitions, but also with some students moving into secondary schools (Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006).

Parents generally wanted students to view their transitions into different levels of formal education as positive academic and social experiences (Vessey 2006, Whitton & Perry 2005). Some areas of parental concerns included adequate supervision of playgrounds (Vessey 2006), adjustment to classroom practices (Vessey 2006), concern

that no genuinely equal partnership existed between parents and teachers (Gill, Winters & Friedman 2006), travel arrangements (Whitton & Perry 2005), peer pressure (Whitton & Perry 2005), and discontinuities in family cultural knowledge (Cassity & Gow 2005, Margetts 2003, Rennie 2006).

Students

Transitions into, within and between formal educational institutions were known to contribute to the success or otherwise of students both academically and socially (Dockett & Perry 2006, Latham & Story 2006, Mursell 2005, Vessey 2006). Student self-concepts, identity, self-esteem, resilience and self efficacy were recognised by many researchers as important considerations in all transitions (Adams & Miezio 2005, Andrews, Ainley & Frydenberg 2004, Burton & Dowling 2005, Downs 2003, Ellis 2004, Ellis, Marsh, Craven & Richards 2004, Howard & Johnson 2005, Martin 2003, McGraw 2005, te Riele 2004, Tonkin & Watt 2003, Wilson & Gillies 2005).

It was well recognised that student perspectives of transition were important and that professionals benefitted by taking student views of transition into account (Dalglish, Haker, Lawson, Nelson & Reese 2006, Deckert-Peaceman 2007, Latham & Story 2006). Students' prior knowledge and cultural understandings should be acknowledged and used to help students make smoother transitions (Fleer & Richardson 2004, Hanlen 2007, Hopps 2004).

Students had general ideas about what to expect when making transitions into schools and other educational institutions (Dockett & Perry 2003(b), Hillman 2005, Vessey 2006, Whitton & Perry 2005). Students typically wanted to know the physical layout of the school, the written and unwritten rules, how to adjust to new curriculum, teaching and learning expectations, and new social environments (DEST) 2006). Students from other cultures did not like being treated differently to their peers (Martin 2003). Students who accepted that there was a transition and who were willing to move adjusted more easily than those who did not accept the transition (Martin 2003). Transitions could be beneficial, of no consequence or negative to students (DEST 2006).

Career pathways for students leaving school for work and further training were often not straightforward (Woods 2007). Those students who left school early appreciated the value of non-linear life pathways and life experiences (te Riele 2004). Career and income success were not predictable by final secondary school year results especially for boys who generally exceeded girls in income and full-time work outcomes (Butler & Woolley 2006, Scott 2006). Girls were much more dependent on academic success for

worthwhile career pathways (Scott 2006).

Students felt that school could be improved in a number of ways: better teacher control in and out of classrooms, better facilities, earlier school starting time, less homework, genuine adult care (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006) and a voice for the less popular students (Taylor & Nelms 2006). Taylor and Nelms (2006) also noted that peers could be a positive or negative influence. Self-efficacy, independence and freedom were important qualities for the more senior students (Bell, Smith & Bright 2005, Moss, Pittaway & McCarthy 2007, Smith & Dalton 2004). Lawrence (2005) described transition as a transcultural experience and argued that students should have the codes of behaviour explicitly explained (Lawrence 2006). There was a need to empower students, particularly older students when making transitions into new institutions (Gitari 2006).

While most students found it easy to make transitions into and between mainstream institutions, some students who came from families of low socioeconomic status, or with cultural differences were more vulnerable than others, (Cassity & Gow 2005, Margetts 2003) as were students whose parents denied the existence of their children's learning difficulties (Zieman 2005). These students could find transitions difficult at all levels of formal education (Harris 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006, te Riele 2004, van Haren 2006).

Improving Transitions

Throughout this transition research, the need for professionals and institutions to proactively communicate and collaborate with both parents and students became obvious. Continuity of transition was also achieved through inclusive practices and appropriate curriculum, school community attitudes of acceptance and integration of students, and a number of other initiatives. These included buddy systems (Vessey 2006), orientation visits (Chadwick 2000), student portfolios (Jones 2003), school readiness and adjustment (Dockett & Perry 2003(b), peer support (Ellis 2004), mentors (Adams & Miezio 2005, Knipe & Hussey 2004), pastoral care (Mursell 2005), school leadership development (Myers 2005), family resilience training (Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006) and explicit pedagogy to help students integrate well (Bellert & Graham 2006).

Questions Arising from the Transition Literature

It was important to identify the stakeholders in Australia when studying student transitions into and within mainstream institutions. This study investigates who the

stakeholders are when home educated students make transitions with mainstream institutions. There is significant research literature identifying professionals as key figures in students' transitions within mainstream institutions. They positively influenced students' transitions through inclusive practice, communication, collaboration, curriculum adjustment and student growth programs. Professionals sometimes exhibited unhelpful attitudes and practices such as exclusion of parents in the transition process, poor communication and a dislike of non-linear pathways for students. Some factors contributing to difficult transitions included differences in philosophies and theories of learning, poor communication and a need for professionals to recognise there was more than one way to learn and achieve an education. How do the professionals in this study rate on these factors when home educated students make transitions into mainstream institutions? Institutional factors also contributed to student transitions into and within mainstream institutions. They were responsible for creating continuities or discontinuities, appropriate curriculum, encouraging collaboration and support to families, developing suitable philosophies, theories of learning, school culture and policy. There needed to be an overall perspective of the transition process. Positive actions of institutions included inclusiveness, awareness of student needs, acceptance of cultural difference and provision of support structures such as flexible timetables, compatible curriculum, real life contextualised learning opportunities and developmental programs for students. Institutions were also known to engage in gate-keeping, being slow to change and contributing to the creation of class difference. Is there evidence that institutions, in this study, contribute in positive and negative ways to home educated student transitions with mainstream institutions?

Parents contributed to successful student transitions into and within mainstream institutions by encouraging student curiosity, being aware of individual student differences, helping students manage stress and providing continuity. Studies found parents were concerned primarily for the well being of their children, but also wanted more equal partnerships with professionals and were concerned about peer pressure. There was recognition that the way students viewed themselves through the transition experience was important. Professionals needed to consider student views of the transition experience and the nature of their prior learning.

Students also had suggestions about the ways mainstream institutions could make improvements. In this study, how do students view their transition experiences with mainstream institutions and do they have comments to make that may contribute to improvements in both mainstream and home education practices? The key ways transitions could be improved were by professionals and institutions being proactive about developing positive transition practices through communication, collaboration

and by providing continuity and known beneficial practices. In this study, are these beneficial practices evident and how might such practices contribute to equitable and positive transitions for future home educated students?

2.3 Conclusion

This research seeks to understand how home educated students experience transition from the perspectives of educational professionals, parents and students. The research literature on home education discussed in this chapter offers a context within which to understand the ways in which the sample in this research reflects common qualities known in other home education research both overseas and in Australia. The transition factors identified in overseas home education literature and in Australian mainstream transition research should help to identify likely areas of tension, and possibilities for improving transition experiences for home educated students.

Chapter 3: Methodological Theories

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks used in this research project, found within qualitative research practices, to analyse the data. Because three different theories are used, the ontology and epistemology used in this research are outlined. Grounded theory is only used in this thesis to direct the initial coding and analysis of the data. In this research, sociocultural theory, critical theory, and identity theory are used to ‘sensitize’ (Charmaz 2005, p.512) areas and topics that may become evident in the data. Mixing theories is not an attempt to blend theories into each other but to play them off against each other so that we can analyse research from different perspectives. Sociocultural theory allows us to explore the influence of transition on how students develop, learn and live within their communities. Critical theory is a form of inquiry that seeks to understand power relationships and how one can attempt to achieve greater democratic and personal freedom. Identity theory allows us to see how the experience of transition may influence the ways that students in this study view themselves.

3.1 Qualitative Research

This qualitative research project seeks to better understand the subjective views, experiences and meaning (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, Denzin & Lincoln 2005, McLeod & Yates 2006) home education students, home educating parents and associated professionals have of student transition movements between home and mainstream institutional education.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible ... qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices ... It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, pp.3-4).

Qualitative research generally has five key ingredients. It considers a phenomenon as a complex whole that cannot be reduced into separate parts (LeCompte & Goetz 1982, Strauss 1987, Wiersma 1995). The research should be conducted in the most natural settings possible, and participants’ perceptions of their situation sought because these are the focus of the study (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Any previous assumptions about the phenomena need to be ignored to allow the data to inform conclusions. The phenomena and results are essentially loose and have some degree of uncertainty (LeCompte & Goetz 1982, Strauss 1987, Wiersma 1995). In this study, the process of transition was viewed as a complex whole. Students making transitions

between home and mainstream institutions did not make these moves in isolation to others in their community. Parents and professionals were also involved in these transition experiences and their views helped to contextualise students' responses. Interviews were the medium through which data was collected and these interviews were conducted in the homes, offices and classrooms, or location of choice of the participants involved so that they were in their natural settings wherever possible (Carspecken 1996, Kvale 1996). The questions sought participant perceptions of their transition experiences with open ended guide questions which were asked in as casual and comfortable a manner as possible. While I do have life experiences and beliefs about what might be probable in participant responses because of my own experiences as a student who had made several transitions, as a home educating parent and as a professional (Stake 2005), every attempt has been made to ensure that participant responses and data analysis guide the conclusions drawn. It is acknowledged that the conclusions may not be directly transferable to other similar situations. However, it is expected that there will be broad principles that may provide some basic guidance for assisting other students making similar transitions. These findings may also help professionals and parents understand the appropriate support principles and practices to assist future students making the transition between home and mainstream education (Stake 2005).

3.1.1 Ontology

Throughout this project, reality is not considered to be stable and distinct but rather as objective and continually 'in motion' (Roberts 2003, p170). Like Freire, (Roberts 2003), Leont'ev (1978), and Vygotsky (1987) I believe that the objective world and our subjective consciousness of the objective world have to be understood in relation to each other. Our understanding of reality is 'socially constructed' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.8), continually 'in motion ... unfinished and ever-evolving' (Roberts 2003, p.170). We are able to know from different perspectives and therefore:

There is no single interpretative truth' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.23).

It is for this reason that this study has used three theoretical perspectives to explore when and why students moved between home and mainstream education.

3.1.2 Epistemology

We know through others and without interaction with others we cannot know (Young 2003). Our knowing is also an ever evolving and changing process that is informed by our history, culture and society. The meaning subjects give to their existence is central

to this project and means that this type of research is ‘value-laden’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p.8) and needs to be understood in that light. The subjective views of participants were sought yet needed to also be understood intersubjectively with their interactions within their communities and society (LeCompte & Goetz 1982, Vygotsky 1987, Roberts 2003). This research does not underestimate the significance of unconscious factors in individual and community lives (Donald 1991), but it is restricted to the meaning participants had of their transition experiences with home and mainstream education.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methodology has been used to initially code the data because little is known about the transition experiences of home educated students with mainstream institutions. The literature reviews of home education and Australian transition literature set the context for further analysis. The methodological theories provide a framework for understanding the meaning of the findings. However, while analysis, theorising and conceptual development is open and flexible, it is still established on and confined to this initial coding.

3.2.2 Mixed Theories

It seems to be a uniquely American tendency to categorize and label complicated theoretical perspectives as either this or that. Such labeling is dangerous, for it blinds us to enduring issues, shared concerns, and points of tension that cut across the landscape of the movement, issues that each inquirer must come to terms with in developing an identity as a social inquirer. In wrestling with the ways in which these philosophies restructure our efforts to understand what it means to “do” qualitative inquiry, what we face is not a choice of which label—interpretivist, constructivist, hermeneuticist, or something else—best suits us. Rather, we are confronted with choices about how each of us wants to live the life of a social inquirer (Schwandt 2000, p.205).

Since the middle of the twentieth century qualitative research has been conducted from an expanding variety of paradigms and perspectives. A growing number of researchers have used more than one perspective to create ‘blurred genres’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.3). Researchers, as ‘bricoleurs’, have borrowed ‘from many different disciplines’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.3), mostly in the humanities and sociologies, to search for appropriate theoretical frameworks within which to more adequately unpack their work. Sometimes this has meant the researcher has worked ‘between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.6).

Sociocultural theory, critical theory and identity theory, used in this research project, have been among the theories used by bricoleurs for this purpose (Charmaz 2005, Kincheloe & McLaren 2005, Lawrence 2005, 2006, McLeod & Yates 2006, Panofsky 2003, Young 2007). Theoretical paradigms, which represent ‘particular ontologies, epistemologies, ... methodologies’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.6) and perspectives need to be distinctively understood and recognised as important tools for providing a framework within which to conduct effective research. They should not create some fixed standpoint that might otherwise appear to lock researchers into a particular point of view (Aubrey, David, Cohen, Godfrey & Thompson 2000, Fine & Weis 2005, Gunstone, White & Fensham 1988, Guba & Lincoln 2005, Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, Saukko 2005). These three theories have been used to provide ‘sensitizing concepts’ (Charmaz 2005, p.512) in an attempt to more fully understand the experiences and views of the participants from different perspectives.

While Vygotskian sociocultural theory has deep roots in psychology and critical theory has grown out of sociology, there are many common understandings held by both sociocultural and critical theorists. Both schools of thought have developed from an ‘activist orientation to history’ (Peters, Lankshear, Olssen 2003, p.6) and philosophical understandings found in Marx’s work (Bruner 1987). Concepts understood by both Vygotsky and critical theorists of the Frankfurt school relate to the view that individuals are socially constructed through interaction with their social and cultural environment, and that language is significant to understanding meaning and subjectivity. This indicates there are fundamental links between critical theory and Vygotskian sociocultural theory.

Critical theory provides a critical social perspective or ‘mode of inquiry’ that attempts to promote ‘democratic liberation’ rather than a methodological theory (Peters Lankshear & Olssen 2003, p.12). Charmaz (2005) used critical theory with grounded theory to ensure she uncovered relationships of power. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) commented that a combination of social inquiry, Enactivism based on cognitive studies and the theoretical work of Vygotskian sociocultural theorists provided ‘a powerful grounding for a reconceptualization of the research act’ (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005, p.315). Others (Gillett 2003, Panofsky 2003, Young 2007) also combined critical theory with sociocultural theory.

Cultural theory, identity theory and critical theory were used effectively in the work of McLeod and Yates (2006). They deliberately used sociology and psychology to provide different perspectives for their study. They felt that use of only one perspective left gaps in their analysis and findings as they sought to understand the various facets of student

identity construction.

[W]e argue that we need to keep in focus both sociological and psychological ways of seeing, not to compress one to the other, and to actively acknowledge the different kind of insights each does and does not make possible (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.25).

While this research does not use psychoanalysis, another researcher recognised the potential benefit of using mixed theories; in his case, psychoanalysis and cultural theory, while recognizing their distinct differences. He noted that:

This entails neither incorporating psychoanalysis into cultural theory, nor claiming that either is a metadiscourse able to explain and resolve the lacunae in the other, nor creating a new synthetic theoretical field which might accommodate them both. Any such attempt to merge the two bodies of theory blunts their specific insights and ignores their incompatibilities and contradictions. What seems potentially more fruitful is the dialogue in which, although the two discourses remain distinct – they are always to some extent talking past each other – the questions untranslatably specific to each can provoke new thinking and insights in the other (Donald 1991, p.3).

The use of multiple theories (McLeod & Yates 2006) ensures that no one perspective is privileged and that various aspects of the ‘biographical, intellectual, and sociopolitical are acknowledged’ (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.29). In this study, the multiple starting points relate to the biographical, the social and the educational.

3.3 Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory combines understandings of subjectivity and psychology of learning theories set within social, cultural, historical and societal contexts. While there are various branches of sociocultural theory, in this study, the work of Vygotsky and his followers is used. Vygotsky and the work of neo-Vygotskians contribute to our knowledge of how students learn, especially within mainstream educational contexts. There also appear to be a number of connections between Vygotskian theories and Australian home education practices (Jackson 2008). This research project seeks to understand how the transition experiences of home educated students influences their view of their learning opportunities in both home and mainstream institutional settings from a sociocultural perspective.

Vygotsky (1987) challenged research work that ‘atomized’ the study of psychology. He claimed that social and cultural interactions were the most significant factors in the development of higher mental functions (Leont’ev 1997, Vygotsky 1987). He argued from this conclusion that any study of the development of higher mental

functions needed to be conducted in holistic and contextualised settings as a complex and holistic process or the resulting conclusions would be flawed (Vygotsky 1987). Speech was seen as the key tool of the mind as it mediated complex thought processes (Bruner 1987, Knox & Stevens 1993, Vygotsky 1987). To study this development, Vygotsky believed that the points of change between levels of development were highly significant to understanding the connections between thought and speech, and higher mental functions (Minick 1987, van der Veer 1997, Vygotsky 1987). He agreed with others that there were long stable periods of development, but thought that the processes of development were not based on evolving processes but on revolutionary ones that often had identifiable trigger events (Mahn 2003, Vygotsky 1997). Meaning making at the points of transition between stages of development, especially of the qualitative changes in a child's social relations within sociocultural environments, were key to understanding developmental changes (Mahn 2003). Meaning was central to understanding the subjective and higher mental function (Vygotsky 1987). While many theorists of his day disputed whether or not subjective knowledge could be studied with scientific rigour, he proposed that the type of interrogation used in judicial systems was an appropriate tool for exploring the subjective (Vygotsky 1997).

Children's conceptual development began with what Vygotsky explained were everyday concepts which they formed by generalizing visual and concrete experiences. At school (Vygotsky 1987) students developed scientific concepts from abstract concepts which were then used to interpret concrete situations. Karpov (2003b) felt that traditional schools did not effectively teach students mastery of the scientific concepts. However, when students were taught 'the methods of scientific analysis for different subject domains' (Karpov 2003b, p.78) students were able to achieve 'mastery of meaningful and broadly transferable scientific knowledge' (Karpov 2003b, p.79). It was also suggested (Karpov 2003b) that this led the students to become independent learners (also Zuckerman 2003). The understanding of these two types of concepts led Vygotsky to explain one of his most well known hypotheses—the zone of proximal development; that is, the achieved abilities of students did not measure their true level of development. Their level of development was determined by what they were able to achieve with the assistance of a more informed mediator (Bruner 1987, Chaiklin 2003, Leont'ev 1997). Vygotsky challenged constructivist ideas of discovery learning claiming they were not successful and that their theoretical assumptions were hard to defend (Karpov 2003b).

Culture has historical roots, both in the historical development of a particular culture over time and an individual's personal history (Vygotsky 1997, Leont'ev 1978). Individuals develop from interacting with one's culture and in turn contribute back to this culture. For Vygotsky, a child's development was a continuing process mediated by

interaction with more informed adults. Mediation through humans (Kozulin 2003, Lidz & Gindis 2003, Vygotsky 1987) and other tools of the mind were essential for enabling children to develop higher mental functions. Peers also provided mediation of learning although there were times when this mediation was not always beneficial (Portes & Vadeboncoeur 2003). Vygotsky (1987) and a number of neo-Vygotskian scholars (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller 2003) identified a number of weaknesses commonly found in mainstream educational practices such as the poor development of scientific concepts, critical thinking skills, poor initiative to change oneself, and that teachers did not contextualise knowledge and were poor mediators of knowledge. One needs to understand Vygotsky's work, however, in terms of the need for the personal component in any teaching situation in order to provide the most effective learning environments (Ageyev 2003).

Vygotsky (Ageyev 2003) rejected reductionist arguments that sought to explain human development through individualism or biology. In the United States in particular, but also in other western nations, schools strongly promote individual assessment and categorization at every level. Ageyev (2003) listed a collective society's values such as loyalty and looking out for each other, cooperation, relationships and identity formation tied to the community one belonged to. Features valued in 'individualistic cultures' (Ageyev 2003, p.443) promoted individual identity in small nuclear families and the "I" which valued achievement over relationship. Ageyev (2003) quoted Yoshida, to highlight the differences between these two approaches.

A society that values collectivism will obviously place a higher value on harmony and good interpersonal relationship while an individualistic society is likely to encourage behavior that brings merit to specific people (Ageyev 2003, p.445).

Some of the higher mental functions developed in children through mediation practices were 'self-regulation, representational thinking, and strategic problem solving' (Lidz & Gindis 2003, p.105). '[E]motional anticipation', as a significant factor in the success of learning activities, was another area of learning helped through effective mediation practices (Lidz & Gindis 2003).

Imagination was thought to contribute to the development of a child's cognitive skills (Egan & Gajdamaschko 2003, Vygotsky 1987). It was because of the ability to imagine that children were able to set the stage for the development of volitional skills (Vygotsky 1987). While Vygotsky did not fully develop his concept of volition, he thought that volitional skills gave children the ability to effectively exercise agency as this allowed them to think of alternative solutions. Bruner (1987) contended that:

Vygotsky *had* to confront the issue of the will, not so much because he was a child of his times, but rather because he was so dedicated to the concept of self-regulation, a concept that demands one take a stand on the issue of will. It is not surprising that the reflexive language is given so prominent a place in the “attainment” of will. For language is the linch-pin in his system of cultural-psychological theory. Man, who lives by his history, learns that history through language. ... In the end, man frees himself from that history by the very tool that history placed in his hands – language. It is a Promethean thread that Vygotsky weaves (Bruner 1987, p.15).

Leont’ev (1978, 2005), a follower of Vygotsky, further developed concepts of how we learnt, developed personality and how the will or volition was exercised. Based on Marxist thought, the development of human psychology was best understood through human activity. This means it was important to study process, which was living, rather than a final product. Human practice in society was the basis of human cognition and our activity formed the basis on which we determine truth, activity, power and universality. One could only understand an individual within a whole context. Individuals acted and changed their world and changed themselves simultaneously and they were never static. Three features needed to be examined together to understand the development of human cognition – the individual, activity and the material conditions surrounding the individual. Subjective understandings were grounded in our interactions with the objective world and were mediated by language which was the symbolism connecting the subjective and objective worlds.

Like the Frankfurt critical theorists, Leont’ev (1978) was concerned that capitalism caused ‘alienation’ because production was split between the practical workers or producers and the intellectuals who managed the businesses (Conroy 2003). This sense of alienation occurred because systems of activity were truncated and not seen as whole activities by the participants involved.

Reflection, as an important fluid process of the psyche, was informed by one’s historical socioculturalness. One could understand the psyche when it was thought of as a subjective image of objective reality. It was important to understand that our higher mental functions such as consciousness, personal sense and personality developed through series of interconnected and overlapping activities. These activities were based on actions and informed by perceptions based in our objective worlds. Leont’ev (1978) argued that individuals did not have privately constructed meanings that had no connection to our social worlds. Most of these psychological activities moved from the objective world into our subjective consciousness.

The complete activity of an individual at a particular time included his social connections with the world and formed the genuine foundation of personality. ‘Self-

knowledge' was a product of personality formation.

We have become accustomed to thinking that man represents a center in which are focused external influences and from which spread lines of his connections, his interactions with the external world, that this center, given consciousness, is really this "I." But this is not at all the way the matter stands. We have seen that multifaceted activities of the subject are intertwined one with another and connected in knots by objective relationships, social in their nature, into which he necessarily enters. These knots, their hierarchies, also form that secret "center of personality," which we call the "I"; in other words, this center lies not in the individual, not under the surface of his skin, but in his being (Leont'ev 1978, Chapter 5, Part II).

Leont'ev (1978) felt that the problem of self-consciousness as a centralized 'I' was an unresolved problem of psychology. Individual personality was more appropriately described as a 'system of social relations'. He found it difficult to think of an individual in the way egocentric traditions pre-Marxist understandings had (Chapter 5, Part II).

At the end of his life, Leont'ev (2005) explained how he thought the will developed and functioned. Volition was an outward movement from the subjective consciousness through action directed by a goal. There were two types of goals. One type of goal-oriented action could not be described as volitional or directed by choice. Sometimes choices were made that were not always developed through logical processes. The second type of goals led to actions that were conscious, essential and rational. These were described as volitional acts.

In a study of a group of children given tasks to complete before being rewarded, he found that motivation occurred best when internally driven rather than externally viewed. He found that our need for objects was weaker than our need for social achievement or recognition and concluded that:

[V]oluntary action appears first of all, early, and consequently, more simply, if we can put it that way, with an ideal stimulus than with a real stimulus; and the second paradox: it is more likely to appear in social subordination than in objective subordination to material conditions. That is all (Leont'ev 2005, p91).

Volitional effort was against typical 'muscle tone' (Leont'ev 2005, p.91) as it was an outward movement from the subjective to the objective world after thinking through consequences. While we may sometimes ignore the best choice of consequences, it is suggested here that good use of volition is based on an understanding of cause/effect relationships. Leont'ev (2005) felt this understanding was just an introduction to understanding how the will worked. This forms the basis for understanding the development of personality and autonomy from a Vygotskian historical, sociocultural

perspective.

The transition for young children from home to school was viewed by Vygotsky as a time when children necessarily moved from following their own interests to following the 'school agenda' (Bodrova & Leong 2003). Bodrova and Leong (2003) noted that it was easier for preschoolers to make the move to school when they had reached some degree of emotional and cognitive assimilation, 'self-regulation', and other mental abilities (Bodrova & Leong 2003, p.163). It is suggested here that transition between home education and mainstream institutions is a period of significant revolution and change (Karpov 2003a, Mahn 2003, Vygotsky 1998). Mahn also (2003) referred to the conclusions of the National Research Council to illustrate how it was important for professionals to know and utilise prior student learning:

“There is a good deal of evidence that learning is enhanced when teachers pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to a learning task, use this knowledge as a starting point for new instruction, and monitor students' changing conceptions as instruction proceeds” (quoted in Mahn 2003, p.120).

3.3.1 Questions Arising from Sociocultural Theory

A number of areas are opened for question from a study of sociocultural learning. Transition points were important to Vygotsky. What are the historical sociocultural contexts contributing to the findings in this study of the transition experiences of home educated students with mainstream institutions? Is the development of these students influenced by their interactions with both home education and mainstream institutions, and if so, how? How do students make meaning of their transition experiences and what meaning do parents and professionals have of the transition experiences of these students? How does an understanding of Vygotskyian learning practices contribute to our understanding of student learning through transition experiences of home educated students between home education and mainstream education? Do concepts such as holistic analysis (Fleer & Quinones 2007), mediation, scientific concepts, expert knowledge, embedded and contextual learning, emotional health, motivation and cognitive opportunity become evident in either or both educational settings and what might the similarities and/or dissimilarities be? Volition, or autonomy in this study, is the highest form of higher mental development in Vygotsky's (1987) and Leont'ev's (2005) work. In this study, is there evidence of the development of students' autonomy in home education and mainstream institutions? Do such things as maturity (Portes and Vadeboncoeur), school readiness (Bodrova & Leong 2003), student role, 'individual reflection' (Mahn 2003, p.134), 'self-regulation, representational thinking, and strategic problem solving' (Lidz & Gindis 2003, p.105) play a part in transition experiences of

these students? Professional practice, school agenda and folk wisdom can influence the transition experiences of mainstream students. How do these factors contribute to the transition experiences of home educated students making transitions with mainstream institutions? Vygotsky and neo-Vygotskians identified a number of weaknesses frequently found in mainstream education. Is there evidence of such weaknesses in mainstream institutions having caused problems for home educated students in this study?

One way to understand the differences between home education and mainstream education is through the community learning environment at home as compared to the individualism promoted by many mainstream institutions (Ageyev 2003). Is there evidence in this study that these differences exist? How do parents, professionals and students view these types of probable differences? Is there evidence of tensions between individual and community values in these home educated students and their parents when making transitions with mainstream institutions?

3.4 Critical Theory

Critical theory, as a particular research perspective, developed through sociology and associated disciplines with the intent of studying the broad patterns of social behaviour in society and to identify patterns of power. The aim of critical theory was to develop ways to make power relationships more equitable. Education was one area that attracted the attention of critical theorists because there were many recognised features of mainstream education that contributed to social injustice (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a). The ‘mass media and international capitalism’ were frequently identified as major contributors to the inability of misunderstood groups in society to find freedom (Giroux 2003, Gur-ze’ev 2003, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003b):

[A] society characterized by “total administration” and “total integration” ... rationalization and bureaucratization of life under capitalism, they [Adorno & Marcuse] held that such a development eclipsed the possibilities for social transformation or change on behalf of dispossessed groups (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003b, pp.7-8).

A number of the early critical theorists (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse & Giroux) felt that the ‘hegemonic pedagogical rhetoric’ (Gur-ze’ev 2003, p.21) of society had effectively penetrated every aspect of schooling. To become free of this rhetoric, these theorists recommended that citizens seek ‘conscious and social emancipation’ (Gur-ze’ev 2003, p.21). Another critical theorist called for teachers to act as ‘transformative intellectuals’ (Giroux 2003, p151, Gur-ze’ev 2003). One of the more significant factors contributing to society’s apparent blind embeddedness in capitalistic culture seemed to

be the failure for individuals to exercise autonomy. Many critical theorists promoted challenge and clashes with the established order to achieve greater democratic freedom (Gur-ze'ev 2003, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a).

It was thought that the stability of society was achieved when citizens were able to experience wholeness of mind, body and soul in both their private and public spaces (Conroy 2003). There was a difference between the way people experienced work and labour. Labour was activity organised and completed by the same individual and this practice was thought to promote holistic and connected views and relationships to community. Work was organised and directed by one group in society and carried out by a different group or groups. This disconnection was thought to contribute to disconnected and dysfunctional societies (Conroy 2003, Leont'ev 1978). Arendt (Conroy 2003) called for individuals to responsibly make decisions, or use their agency, about their labour. She also described how the narratives of individuals' lives were more important than any ideology which was empty of the human story. These narratives were the key to what she called public happiness and the political health of society.

Professional educators could challenge capitalistic power (Giroux 2003) by promoting progress through 'agency, theory, and praxis' (Young 2003, p.118). Character development occurred best when 'love of justice, respect of difference' and agency were promoted (Young 2003, p.118) and when students were encouraged to think critically (Giroux 2003, Young 2003). Dialogue was an important part of this process of critique (Roberts 2003). Capitalism's emphasis on 'commodification' made it difficult for:

[E]ducators and others to provide the condition for students to learn how to be critical agents willing to take risks, think oppositionally, and participate in shaping public life (Giroux 2003, p.146).

To achieve these goals, one needed to provide for choice in curriculum, awareness of different cultures, and proficiency in literacy and numeracy in the everyday lives of students. Power relationships were found in all institutions. When power differences existed between teachers and students, it could be difficult for students to achieve democratic goals. There was only a need for authority when there was a need to control and have power (Giroux 2003, Young 2003). The curriculum was an important factor in determining the ways in which power was exerted and through which students might achieve their potential. '[L]ocal knowledge' in curriculum was thought to improve the opportunities for greater freedom and democracy (Young 2003, p.129). The work of Foucault was known to challenge ideas that reflected attitudes of 'what goes without

saying' (Young 2003, p.124) because maintaining societal misconceptions could and had perpetuated injustice. While promoting the ability of individuals to practice agency, there were recognised tensions balancing agency and consensuality with community needs and expectations (Conroy 2003, Young 2003).

Student freedom could also be promoted through learning contexts that encouraged curiosity and imagination (Britzman & Dippo 2003). It was important to disrupt the stereotype of commonly held beliefs and practices by exploring unexpected places and new ideas in our attempts to improve mainstream education:

For imagination to turn around the world ... imagination must encounter new ideas, discussions one could not have alone, and confrontations with arguments and controversies that are not so easily settled (Britzman & Dippo 2003, p.138).

As part of the critical theorist movement, Fromm (1976) in his final book, 'To Have or To Be' divided society into two modes of existence: the 'having' mode and the 'being' mode. These two modes of existence were viewed as useful indicators of the altruistic health of society (Lankshear 2003). Fromm (1976) wanted society to choose to change from a society of greed in which people determined their happiness and value by what they possessed to a society in which people accepted themselves and others for who they were, and who were empowered to achieve genuine 'self-actualization, fulfillment, and abiding peace' (Lankshear 2003, p.56). Fromm (1976) described how the practice of both the 'having' and 'being' mode played out in people's daily lives. He described the differences one would notice in the way individuals learnt, remembered, conversed, read, exercised authority, knew or gained knowledge, exercised faith, and love. For example, when students learnt in the having and being modes their aims were different. In the 'having' mode students sought:

to hold onto what they "learned," either by entrusting it firmly to their memories or by carefully guarding their notes. They do not have to produce or create something new (Fromm 1976, p25).

For students in the 'being' mode:

The process of learning has an entirely different quality for students in the being mode of relatedness to the world. To begin with, they do not go to course lectures ... as a *tabulae rasae*. They have thought beforehand about the problems the lectures will be dealing with ... They do not simply acquire knowledge that they can take home and memorize. Each student has been affected and has changed ... (Fromm 1976, p25).

When one lived in the 'having' mode, individuals treated all these qualities as passive

possessions and used them to compare and rank themselves to others around them. When one lived in the 'being' mode, individuals treated all these qualities as activities and part of one's existence:

Having refers to things and things are fixed and describable. Being refers to experience, and human experience is in principle not describable (Fromm 1976, p71).

He described human nature as resisting things that 'prevent our growing' (Fromm 1976, p64) and discussed the dilemma of young people growing up facing greater restrictions imposed often by force on their 'autonomy, genuine desires and interests, and on his or her own will' (Fromm 1976, p 64) by those in society who lived in the 'having' mode. He described these imposed controls as creating harmful tensions between the child, family and society. He later summarised his understanding of the 'being' mode of existence:

Being refers to the real, in contrast to the falsified, illusionary picture. In this sense, any attempt to increase the sector of being means increased insight into the reality of one's self, of others, of the world around us. The main ethical goals of Judaism and Christianity – overcoming greed and hate – cannot be realized without another factor that is central in Buddhism and also plays a role in Judaism and in Christianity: The way to being is penetration through the surface and insight into reality (Fromm 1976, p81).

Fromm conceded that these two extremes of existence were generally small minorities in society with most people fitting somewhere in between (Fromm 1976). However, Lankshear (2003) felt that the 'having' mode of existence was more commonly found in society in recent years. Lankshear (2003) also thought it was quite easy to identify these two modes of existence through the language people used.

A more recent explanation of these contrasting modes of existence was made by Varela (1999). He accepted, as did Vygotsky (1987) and Leont'ev (1978), that humans were material beings who developed as historical sociocultural beings. From his knowledge of artificial intelligence, he treated cognition and consciousness as separate activities of the brain. He explained how our brains function harmoniously and spontaneously in a similar way to beehives and used this illustration to indicate that our brains do not function from some point of centralised command. The image we usually have of a centred self was, as far as he was concerned, an illusion or virtual reality. Following on from this, Varela also explored the central tenets of Christianity and Buddhism and used Buddhism to explain how many Buddhists actively practiced emptying themselves of self through meditation in their attempts to strive for reality.

One other great thinker who used critical theory philosophies was Freire (Roberts 2003). He viewed humans as praxical or capable of reflective thinking and then taking action with wisdom. It was most important that humans engage in dialogue because anti-dialogue practices were de-humanising. It was also important that those who were oppressed or misunderstood find ways to inform their 'oppressors' and seek freedom and self-determination (Roberts 2003, p.178).

3.4.1 Questions Arising From Critical Theory

Critical theorists challenge us to uncover power relationships in order to allow those outside the dominant power structures the ability to exercise autonomy and achieve social emancipation and social justice. Is there evidence of power relationships and practice of deficit discourses (Lawrence 2003) when these home educated students move between home and mainstream institutions? If there is evidence of social injustice, how can social emancipation, autonomy and justice be improved? Are the participants in this study, parents, professionals and students, aware of differences between home education and mainstream institutions and how such differences might be addressed? Is there room for acceptance of new ideas from transformative individuals outside the dominant power structures? Could reflective practices contribute to heightened awareness of all parties through better communication between the different groups and the establishment of a more mutually inclusive discourse? How might the work of Fromm (1976) and Varela (1999) on our two modes of existence contribute to our understanding of the transition experiences of home educated students with mainstream institutions? A number of critical theorists expressed concern about the need for greater connection between private lives and public involvement. Home education appears to be a private practice. How does this study shed light on the private/public lives and involvement of these transitioning students?

Home education, was labelled by Apple (2001, 2004, 2005) as a neo- conservative/ liberal movement supporting capitalistic qualities in society. However, might not home education be described as a grass roots movement with many different theoretical, economic and political qualities, some of which might challenge 'total administration and total integration' (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003b, p.7)? When viewed as a grass roots movement, could home education contribute to a fresh look at mainstream education as a means of contributing to some form of agency, democracy and freedom in the process of dominant forms of education?

Giroux (2003) was also highly critical of the privatization of education and felt this decreased the opportunities for students to develop democratic skills and interests.

Instead of excluding private home educators from discussions of democracy, agency and freedom, could home educators, especially those who have experienced both home and mainstream institutional education, contribute to ‘critical or transformative’ thinking about educational practices (Giroux 2003, p.151)? Could the seam between formal institutional education and home education create one of those opportunities to ‘encounter new ideas’, to have ‘discussions one could not have alone, and confrontations with arguments and controversies that are not so easily settled’ (Britzman & Dipboye 2003, p.138) but which contribute to a freer and more artistic form of education?

3.5 Identity Theory

The study of identity has been used in educational research to understand the ways in which individuals develop and become who they are. Gee (2000) referred to the importance of considering identity.

‘[I]dentity [is] an important tool for understanding schools and society ... and important issues of theory and practice in education’ (Gee 2000, p99-100).

In this study, ways of becoming were understood within the historical and sociocultural theoretical and explanatory frameworks of Vygotsky (1987), Leont’ev (1978) and other neoVygotskians. In line with Vygotskian understandings, there was a general consensus among theorists that identity, the subjective and mostly conscious understandings one has of oneself, was constructed within cultural and societal settings (Davies 2003, Fairclough 1992, Gee 1999, McLeod & Yates 2006, Leont’ev 1978, Vygotsky 1987). The types of discourses individuals were located in contributed to the ways in which they developed their individual identity (Davies 2003, Gee 1999, Schiffrin 1994). Discourse in this setting referred to the ways in which language and other symbolic tools of communication identified individual membership in various identifiable social groups (Fairclough 1992, Gee 1999). When individuals moved into different social groups, they could find their identity challenged and themselves in conflict with the different discourses and ideologies hidden behind those discourses. It was at the points of transition between discourses that ideologies and power structures became explicit (Fairclough 1992, Gee 1999, Kress 1985).

There were many and various understandings of what identity meant and how it could be defined or described (Baumeister 1986, Brown 2003, Gee 2000, Hall 1996, Sidorkin 1999). However, this study focused on the ways in which home educated students referred to their conceptions of individual identity and how their perceptions

of self varied or remained the same through their transition experiences between home education and mainstream education.

In keeping with Leont'ev's (1978) understandings of personality, there was an understanding that the self appeared to be multiple rather than singular (Sidorkin 1999). Individuals were also described as having a relatively stable core that was unique (Davies 2003, Fairclough 1992, Gee 1999). The beliefs, ideologies and values held by individuals contributed to the ways in which individuals perceived and developed their self-identity (Gee 1999, Fairclough 1992). The understanding of the self grew when they compared and contrasted their beliefs, ideologies and values to others around them (Baumeister 1986, Brown 2003, Hall 1997, Howe 1992, Simon 1997). This ideological identity was described as contributing to the ability of individuals to be agentic (Brown 2003, Davies 2003). When individuals moved between different discourses, there was room for the development of 'individual style and human agency' (Gee 1999, p167). While dominant discourses tended to overshadow other discourses, some discourses allowed individuals to act with more agency than others (Davies 2003, Gee 1999).

In one longitudinal study of the development of student identity the impact of particular secondary schools contributed differently to the way in which students were viewed as a 'good student' (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.47-48). These researchers wanted to know how schools produced good students and how students managed the process of becoming a good student within particular schools and within the broader culture of schools. They found some students had trouble understanding codes of behaviour. This was illustrated when one young man from a different culture found it difficult to fit into a particular school. His teachers did not understand or appreciate his efforts to be the 'good student' he understood from his home and previous schools. Students were 'badged' by the schools they attended even though they were also individuals. Different students received the message of 'good student' and the concept of working 'for the school as well as for themselves' differently (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.57). The qualities of students found to contribute to good management of general and particular cultures of schools were resilience, self-discipline and 'strategic thinking' (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.54). These researchers also found that factors such as curriculum, the history and location of particular schools, and the choices of parents, students and teachers had in impact on individual student potentials. Contradictions and correlations in 'the habitus formed in the family' and the distinctive cultures of schools also influenced the way student identities developed (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.25).

Personal independence was important to young people and common gendered themes were 'autonomy, connection, relationships, and individualization' (McLeod & Yates

2006, p.216). Girls preferred connection over autonomy but these researchers were unhappy with this binary and felt a better explanation was found in understanding the ‘culture of the self’ (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.27). Dreams, ‘decision-making and motivations of young people’ were important but had not been researched sufficiently to inform why and how young people were moving from childhood to adulthood and who they were or how they became (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.104).

The specific stories of students who move between two different types of education should indicate how students’ lives are embedded in the broader society. Specific stories cannot be understood however without reference to larger social contexts (Carspecken 1996, McLeod & Yates 2006) or be “reduced to single explanatory frameworks” (Benhabib 1995, quoted in McLeod and Yates 2006, p.28). An understanding of the situatedness of individuals invites questions about the purpose of schooling and the ways it can function differently. Schools make choices, as do individuals, but the playing field is not level and schools have significant power (McLeod and Yates 2006). The overlaying of cultural discourses of individuals with the broader discourses of society should provide a more textured understanding of the research topic (Gee 1999, McLeod & Yates 2006).

Home educated student identity was described by Sheffer (1995). She found these female students were conscious and proud of being unique individuals as distinct from those in mainstream institutions who typically fell in line with others’ expectations of them. These students exercised autonomy at home in ways that were challenged when some of these students attended mainstream institutions. Sheffer (1995) felt that the identity of home educated students challenged many conceptions of the way identity developed in mainstream institutions and offered positive differences to the problems frequently identified in student identity making in these institutions.

3.5.1 Questions Arising from Identity Theory

Identity theory allows us to examine the way individuals develop their sense of self. Many of the values and understandings used in identity theory are similar to those found in sociocultural theory and critical theory. What meaning do the participants in this study make of home education, transition movements and mainstream institutions? What is the process of transition for these students? How are student identities influenced by their home education practices, their transitions with mainstream institutions, and the mainstream institutions with which they interact? How might student qualities such as resilience, strategic thinking and self-discipline contribute to successful student transitions? How does the experience of transition contribute to their

understanding of the meaning and purpose of education and school? Is there evidence that these students are acting as ‘agentic’ individuals? Are decision-making, autonomy and power evident?

What background factors, such as home and school histories and agendas, individual contexts, similarities and dissimilarities between homes and institutions, curriculum, and learning styles contribute to the meaning these transitions have to these students, parents and professionals? How might an understanding of the dominant culture with its explicit and implicit codes of behaviour inform these student transitions with mainstream institutions (Lawrence 2003, 2006)? How do the textured understandings of the different discourses of parents, professionals and students connect with each other and the larger discourses in society? How do transition movements between home and mainstream institutions reveal continuities and contradictions, differences in ideologies, and power structures in the different discourses? Are there popular assumptions that are relevant or need challenging? Is gender a factor contributing to the transition experiences of these students? In particular, how do parent and professional practices, home and institutional factors contribute to these students’ understandings of what it means to be themselves and a ‘good’ student? Are there similarities or differences between the way these students develop identity to those Sheffer (1995) studied?

McLeod and Yates (2006) commented:

Schooling is the social institution that we subject all young lives to, and all those lives matter (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.228).

Home educated students and parents would agree that ‘all those lives matter’. For those students who have experienced mainstream education and home education, would they agree that all young lives need to be subjected to schooling as ‘the social institution’ that all young lives should be subjected to? Is the institution of school essential and always in the best interests of every young life in this study? What matters for these students who have experienced mainstream education and home education?

3.6 Conclusion

The use of three theoretical frameworks allows us to question the data from three different perspectives. Sociocultural theory allows us to explore the psychological features of the transition experiences of these students and the implications these might have on both parental and professional practice. Critical theory allows us to more explicitly examine issues of power, personal freedom and agency found in the homes

and mainstream institutions of these students, parents and professionals. Identity theory allows us to focus on the personalised meaning of these experiences particularly for the students making these transitions. Each theoretical framework has its own meanings and view of phenomena. However, in exploratory research of this nature, where we are trying to discover and understand what is happening to students, parents and professionals, these three explanatory and investigative frameworks provide us with useful tools not available if only one perspective were to be used.

Chapter 4: Method

4.1 Approaches to Research

4.1.1 Qualitative Research

This research project is a qualitative study exploring subjective data in naturalistic settings using an ethnographic approach. An ethnographic approach to research uses a process of inquiry to study phenomena in a systematic, contextual, natural and holistic manner using a variety of procedures (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, LeCompte & Goetz 1982, Wiersma 1995). Qualitative research in the social sciences grew out of a need to understand the 'other' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000) and it explores the subjective experiences or meanings given by participants to their experiences (Carspecken 1996, LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch 1993, McLeod & Yates 2007). Outcomes in qualitative research are uncertain because participants and institutions are able to exercise agency. There is no research in Australia and little research around the world on home educated student transitions between home and mainstream institutions. Home education is generally ignored by mainstream education researchers. In this sense these students are an 'other' whose views and experiences are often not even known to exist.

Quantitative Data

While this project is a qualitative study, it recognises that the use of quantitative data can enhance the understanding of a phenomenon (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson 2000) and there are areas in which quantitative data has been used in this project as it has arisen from within the research project. The analysis of quantitative data (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) provides an overview of some aspects of the study to provide a broader picture of the patterns of movements of these participants and the overall dimensions of the project. It has also been used to describe specific demographic information generated by the qualitative inquiry process. This includes numbers of students, parents and teachers in different categories to give some guidance to the overall size and balance of the research project. These groupings of participants have arisen from the self descriptions of participants. However, because the overall size of the home educating community is not known, any conclusions must be left open in terms of their general applicability to the population of transitioning home educated students, their parents and professionals involved (Carspecken 1996, Wiersma 1995).

Research Question

The research question asks when and why students move between home education and mainstream education because there is currently no literature on the movements of home educated students between home and mainstream education in Australia. Understanding the timing of transitions between home education and mainstream education should allow for better planning and preparation for the transitions between the two systems. Reasons for the transitions should contribute to our understanding of the subjective meanings and experiences of transition between home education and mainstream education for home educated students, their parents and the professionals who have been involved in these experiences.

Focus of Study

This study is interested in the experiences of change between two different types of educational settings. Participants were encouraged to provide a biographical story or narrative description of their transition experiences elicited through the use of open-ended interview guide questions. The theoretical aspects of this question have been explored in Chapter Three. The substantive focus of the question seeks the meaning participants made of the process of movement between mainstream institutions and home education. The theoretical methodologies of historical sociocultural theory, critical theory and identity theory (Carspecken 1996, Rogoff 2003) are used to analyse difference facets of these participant meanings.

4.2 Context

4.2.1 Victorian Education System

In this study, all participants, except two, lived in Victoria, Australia, at the time of the interviews, and had experienced most of their transitions within the Victorian education system. General schooling in Victoria is divided into primary, secondary and post secondary institutions. There were participants in the study who had experienced transitions in each of these categories. There were other divisions within each of these three categories. Within the primary school category, there were state schools, alternative schools, and private (usually with some religious affiliation) schools. Within the secondary school category, there were state schools, and private schools (with alternative and religious affiliation). There was also one state secondary school that had developed a specific alternative education program. McLeod and Yates (2006) noted that the private secondary schools in Victoria generally appeared to have a higher social status to state schools. Within the post secondary institutions there were Colleges of

Technical And Further Education (TAFEs) which catered for students seeking training in various trades and which also offered diploma courses that could be upgraded to university degree courses. Universities were also post secondary institutions. These were the mainstream education institutions with which the home educated students in this study made transitions.

4.2.2 Home Education Categories

From the work of Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003) and Thomas (1998), there appeared to be three major categories of home educating families in Australia. Any degree of variation between these three groups might be found. These three categories were: (1) 'The Natural Learning or Holistic Approach', (2) 'A Structured Learning Approach' and (3) 'The Eclectic Approach' (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, p.35-36) or Thomas's (1998) 'School Model', 'Becoming Less Formal' and 'Informal Learning' models (p.vi). These three categories describe the way home educating practices were identified in this study.

4.3 Methodological Issues

4.3.1 Subjective Experiences

Subjectivity or conscious meaning making (Carspecken 1996, Vygotsky 1987) of participants has become an important feature of recent research approaches and appears to reflect wider social and cultural change (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, McLeod & Yates 2006). It is this particular aspect of the transition experience which is seen as significant to understanding the meaning given to this experience by the participants in this project.

4.3.2 Objective Background

Carspecken (1996) described how the process of identifying the objective aspects of the research data and that normative-evaluative understandings could contribute to greater validity of the research project and a more reliable means of identifying from the specific information, what contributes to more generalized understandings. Rogoff's (2003) three lenses which focused on the key participant, their immediate associations and environment and the institutional backgrounds allowed one to assess the contextualised understandings of participant responses.

4.3.3 Research Questions

While the overall research question sought to understand when transitions were occurring and what meaning participants gave to these experiences, other subsidiary

questions attempted to better understand the emotional experiences and educational motivations and understandings of participants. The core questions asked student and parent participants to describe their transitions and outline some of their experiences and views prior to the transition, during the transition process and after the transition. In order to ensure that participants considered this process from various angles, they were also asked to comment on the positive, negative, indifferent and surprising aspects of their home education, mainstream education and the process of transition experiences. Professionals were asked to describe their experiences with home educated students who had moved between the two types of education. In addition to these topics, all participants were asked to provide definitions of key words in general use such as 'education', 'curriculum', 'learning styles', 'social abilities', 'self-concepts' and 'time frames for learning'. It was hoped that patterns between groups might indicate similarities and differences in views about these education practices and views. As there is currently no literature in Australia on these movements, policy makers, professionals and parents have little to guide or inform them when making decisions about student movement into or out of mainstream educational institutions.

4.3.4 Design of the Study

This research was designed to explore the patterns and experiences of transition between home and formal institutions from the perspectives of the students, parents and professionals involved in the transition. Some of the subsidiary questions were also designed to explore general attitudes and understandings of education. Sociocultural, Critical and Identity theories, and Home Education and Transition literatures and theories all contributed to the framing of this research project.

4.3.5 Scope of Study

The study aimed to explore the points of students' transitions at all levels of formal education, from primary school, secondary school, TAFE and university. The experiences of the three groups of participants, students, parents and professionals, were included to give this study breadth across the types of people who were impacted by these transitions. The types of home educating families involved, as identified by Barratt-Peacock (1997) and Thomas (1998), also allowed for a more comprehensive view of how students from these various types of home education styles experienced the transition process.

4.3.6 Identification of Subjects

Participants in this study were selected for their specific qualities and relevance to

the research topic (LeCompte & Goetz 1982). All participants were required to have experienced the transition movement between home education and mainstream institutions as a student, parent or professional. Within the student population, students were included who had made transitions between home and primary schools, secondary schools, TAFEs and/or universities. Parents included in the study came from the three broad categories of home education styles identified in earlier Australian research (Jacob et. al. 1991, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998). Professionals included in the study came from a variety of educational institutions or backgrounds. These included a variety of primary schools with teachers from a state primary school, DECV primary education unit, an alternative primary school, and two private religious primary schools. There were representatives from a state high school, DECV secondary education unit, an alternative state school program, and a private religious high school. There was also one tertiary lecturer, and a private art tutor. While these professionals did not cover every aspect of the formal educational sector due to the limitations of this study, it is felt that the professional participant group provided a range of professionals from the basic sectors of mainstream education that were significant to transitioning home education students and home educating parents.

4.3.7 Researcher Position

Researchers, with insider knowledge of participant situations, provide the most appropriate and successful support for participants when they are empathetic to participant situations (Carspecken 1996, LeCompte Preissle & Tesch 1993, McLeod & Yates 2006). The researcher is seen as a person who interacts with the research in many ways and is connected in a specific relationship to the participants in their study (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, Saukko 2005). Having experienced a variety of transitions between a number of different types of formal educational institutions as a primary and secondary school student, including seven years doing government provided distance education, I felt that I had some understanding of the possible meanings home educated students may attribute to their transition experiences. Those experiences were important aspects of my life and have contributed significantly to who I have become and how I interpret the world. While it was possible that student participants might have reacted negatively to me as a stranger adult, and that age difference and unfamiliarity may have presented a hurdle to my ability to successfully gain meaningful access to the student participants in this study, participant students did not appear to be uncomfortable with me during the interviews. Perhaps the everyday experiences of these young people who regularly converse with adults contributed to their apparent ease during the interviews.

As the parent of four home educated students who had all made the transition into

secondary school, I also felt that I had experienced the concerns of parents who had children making the transitions into formal education. I did not sense reserve from the parents involved in this study particularly after they had met me. One parent nearly cancelled the interview before she met me but appeared open, honest and comfortable once the interview started.

As a professional who is still active in secondary schools, I have listened to comments by colleagues about home education. This gave me a sense of the concerns and views that professionals might express with regard to home educated students. There was one group of participants with whom I did feel some disjuncture. I trained and currently practise as a secondary school teacher and I felt that I did not always understand the role, views and approaches to teaching of some of the primary teachers in this study.

There were also a number of participants, students, parents and professionals, with whom I was familiar before the research project began because we belonged to the same faith community. Although these participants were aware of my interest in this area, I had discussed little of the direction and expected implications of my research with any of these individuals. Most were more acquaintances rather than close friends. The responses of these participants were very similar in tone and content to participants who did not know me before the interviews and I do not believe this prior connection influenced the findings.

4.3.8 Snowballing

The sampling procedures used in this study were determined by the nature of the population being examined (Le Compte 1982, Wiersma 1995). It was impossible to establish a random sample of subjects in this study because there was and is no satisfactory means of identifying the full extent of the Australian or Victorian home educating communities. While all states now require registration of some form (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Education and Training Reform Act 2007 (Vic), known non-compliance is very high (Education Queensland 2003, Harding 2006, Jeffrey & Giskes, 2004). In the period in which data was collected, there were no legislated requirements in Victoria for families to register or notify the Department of Education of their decision to home educate children (Jackson 1999). As a result, the population of home educators in Victoria was indeterminable. The research question focused on a specific group within the home educating community and this meant the likelihood of finding a random sample of this specific group was impossible. There has been no attempt to create a statistically representative sample of this particular population.

A 'purposeful sample' (Wiersma 1995, p.297) or 'opportunity sample' was required in this study as the research was conducted on a 'conveniently accessible group' (Burns 1997, p.86). Two preconditions needed for purposeful samples are that they produce 'information rich' or 'intense descriptions' of the topic being investigated and that there are sufficient variations in the data to ensure a 'comprehensive structural description' (Wiersma 1995, p. 298). While this research was interested in discovering basic patterns of movement of home educated students between two systems of education, the research design was developed to try and appreciate the situated understandings participants had of their experiences of transitions, rather than developing a quantitative picture of these movements. In the initial stages of this project, there was very limited knowledge of where and how to locate home educating families and professionals who had experienced these transitions. However, it was felt that the range of parents, students and professionals included in this study provided a 'comprehensive structural description' of the data (Wiersma 1995, p. 298).

Selection of participants continued intermittently through snowballing techniques (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch 1993, Wiersma 1995) during the data collection process as the researcher became aware of other relevant potential participants whose experiences were considered of significance to the project (Wiersma 1995).

The criteria for inclusion/exclusion (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch 1993, Wiersma 1995) limited the participants to those students, parents and professionals who had been directly involved with transition experiences of home educated students between mainstream institutions and home education. Most participants were based in Victoria, however two participants, one parent and one tertiary professional, lived outside Victoria. The location of participants ranged from one end of the state to the other. Restricting the participant population to the state of Victoria made it easier for me, as the researcher, to have physical access to the participants and also contained the sampled population within one legislative framework.

Participants (Wiersma 1995) were gained through networking with contacts, but this led to a larger than expected group. While each participant's story was unique and specific, it became obvious that there were common threads between many of the stories provided. While it remains unknown whether any significantly new data could have been collected from a different selection of participants, it also became necessary to limit the sample size based on the feasibility of coding and analysing a large amount of data within the time restraints of this project (Wiersma 1995).

It is argued here that the results of this study should provide limited broad principles

from common patterns (Wiersma 1995) found in this particular population of transiting home education students, home educating parents and professionals. While the sample was not random, participants were located from within a wide range of situations. Among the participating home educating families, the three types of known home education practices identified by Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003), Simich (1998), and Thomas (1998) were included. Professionals came from a wide variety of mainstream institutional types. These included State primary and secondary schools, private Christian primary and secondary schools, alternative primary and secondary schools, Distance Education, and a tertiary institution.

4.3.9 Reliability – Internal and External

The relationship of the researcher to participants was significant for ensuring that adequate data was collected (MacLeod & Yates 2006). In this project, I, as the researcher gained access to home educating families because I had been a home educating parent and had either experienced or been personally aware of many aspects of home educating life. Because I had experienced education at home through correspondence courses, I was also able to relate to some of the experiences that students learning at home had. As a professional educator, I was also aware of professional views and experiences about educational issues including a variety of professional attitudes towards home education.

While only one source of data collection, interviews, was used, it is argued that the multiple groups of participants allowed for greater internal reliability. The interviews were often lengthy, however the guide questions for the interviews allowed for greater consistency of information gathered than open interviewing would have allowed. This also allowed differences of opinions to be more specifically located and worked through.

The participants in this study were located by networking and researcher knowledge of this particular Victorian community. This study was highly contextualised in the natural setting in which the participants were located.

The varied groupings of participants, the interview guide questions, the coding framework and analysis using the theoretical understandings of Australian home education and identity theory, critical theory and Vygotskian historical and sociocultural theories gave detailed background perspectives which should clearly identify the features of this study which might be significant to broader samples of similar populations and contribute to the study's external reliability (Carspecken 1996, Gee

1999).

4.3.10 Validity

This project focused on the holistic experiences of participants in the context of their 'natural' world environments and these situated and natural contexts contributed to the validity of the research data. Hughes (2001) noted that validity in qualitative research is judged 'according to the authenticity of the research participants voices' (Hughes 2001, p.48). Every attempt was made to ensure that the interview questions allowed for participant reflection when recalling past experiences and that the unique individual perspectives and responses to these questions were listened to respectfully and supportively.

Smith and Glass (1987 ...) identify naturalness of the data as one of the qualities by which to critique a naturalistic study. The natural state of a study should be without reactivity and artificiality and should have a minimum of observer effects. There should be checking for possible observer effects (Wiersma 1995, p274).

Internal validity needs to be established through inductive and deductive assessment of the data. Three different groups of informants gave three different perspectives of this type of transition experience (LeCompte & Goetz 1982). The interview questions allowed for exploration of historical aspects of specific participants' lives in a variety of ways, and this allowed for greater internal validity of participant responses (Gee 1999). Some interviews were conducted with a student, or parent or professional who had no connection to any other participant in the study. On other occasions, parents and students were interviewed together or separately and there were a few groups of interviews which, while separately conducted, were specific to the same participants – students, parents and professionals. Vygotsky (1987) and Gee (1999) observed that it is from the specific circumstances of our lives that we generalize our concepts. The possibility of attributing the findings and conclusions to the more general population of home education students who may make the transitions between mainstream institutions and home education is limited. However, the assertions made in this study should be of a general nature which can contribute to a better understanding of the experience of transition between home and formal institutions for home educated students (Carspecken 1996, Gee 1999).

Connections to known overseas and Australian literature on home education, overseas literature of transition experiences of home educated students, and transition literature of students in the general Australian mainstream educational context allows this research to be connected to findings in a number of other areas. The use of three different theoretical perspectives from historical sociocultural theory, critical theory

and identity theory contributed to contextualisation of the findings (Wiersma 1995). This web of knowledge should reasonably allow for embedded generalization of the findings and conclusions of this research project to other possible transition experiences of home educated students (Carspecken 1996, Gee 1999). By focusing on the process of transition in these results, and not on the specific experiences of individuals, understandings should be applicable to other similar situations. While every care has been taken to clearly outline the procedures used in this research, readers are responsible for how this knowledge is replicated, interpreted and used (Wiersma 1995).

This project attempted to empirically describe the transition experiences of home educated students between formal institutions and home. By using grounded theory approaches, with understandings from critical, identity and sociocultural theories, it is expected that there will be worthwhile contributions to educational knowledge (Charmaz 2005, Donald 1991, Kincheloe & McLaren 2003, Panofsky 2003).

4.3.11 Triangulation

Triangulation is used in qualitative research in order to establish the integrity of the data collected as an alternative to validation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Different methods of collecting data or use of a variety of sources of data may be used. In this study, interviews were used to collect data. However, in order to establish ‘cross-validation’ (LeCompte & Goetz 1982, Wiersma 1995) interviews were deliberately sought from three different groups of participants – home educated students who had made transitions with mainstream educational institutions, parents of home educated students who had made transitions with mainstream educational institutions and with professionals who had worked with home educated students who had made transitions with mainstream educational institutions. It is argued here that the three different perspectives from these different groups help to establish consistency and coverage of the data. Richardson (2000) felt that triangulation was too fixed a metaphor to describe this process, and used the term crystallisation because she felt that the metaphor of crystals allowed for a much wider, varied and growing understanding of the objects of study. The variety of experiences within each group contributed to crystallised perspectives (Richardson 2000, Richardson & St. Pierre 2005) of participant views and experiences and these factors contribute to a greater degree of integrity in the data.

We do not triangulate; we crystallize. ... Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity”; we feel how there is no single truth, and we see how texts validate themselves. Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p.963).

4.3.12 Analysis

Analysis of the data involved transcribing and then coding the interviews and field notes using concepts found within the data to build a comprehensive coding system. General classifications of the three groups and their particular qualities were established. Each interview question formed the basis for further classification of responses to particular concepts that arose out of the data and theories used (Carspecken 1996, Charmaz 2005, Wiersma 1995). After this process, ‘sensitizing concepts’ (McLeod & Yates 2006, p.512) from identity theory, critical theory and Vygotskian theories were used with this coded data to further explore qualities in the data.

4.3.13 Coding

While coding is a ‘subjective activity’ (Carspecken 1996, Wiersma 1995, p.267), it is essential that the data provide the coding framework so that codes are specific to the research project. Each group of participants provided the basis for major codes in conjunction with the interview questions. ‘Subcodes’ and ‘supplemental codes’ (Wiersma 1995, p.267) were developed to reflect themes which arose out of responses to the various interview questions and which related to topics raised by the literature reviews of home education and transition, and identity theory, critical theory and historical sociocultural theory.

4.3.14 Specificity to Generalisations

While the participants each had unique and specific narratives and views of the transition experience, they developed these in cultural and historical contexts (Carspecken 1996, McLeod & Yates 2006, Rogoff 2003, Vygotsky, 1987). The recurring themes that emerged from the data provided a window into the lives of these participants and indicated how they were located within broader cultural and historical contexts (Carspecken 1996, Gee 1999). It was from these themes that generalisations could be made to each group of participants. Generalities to home educated students who may make the transition in Victoria, or in Australia or elsewhere in the world are limited to plausible suggestions, but these can also be worthy of consideration because of the connections of these participants to broader cultural and historical contexts (Carspecken 1996, Gee 1999, McLeod & Yates 2006).

It is argued here that the results of this study should be generalizable (Gee 1999, Wiersma 1995) to the Victorian home education community in a limited sense. While the sample was in no way random, participants were located from within a wide range of situations. Among the home educating families included, the types of home

education practices represented fell across the three major groupings as identified by Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003), Simich (1998), and Thomas (1998). Professionals were found among a wide variety of known mainstream institutions.

Researchers need to identify who and what processes are involved in qualitative research (LeCompte, Priessle & Tesch 1993). It is then up to readers to generalize from the specific research to other situations or to follow the general patterns of the research in order to attempt to conduct similar research. The broad issues in this project are relevant to similar populations outside of Victoria, around Australia and for those in other locations such as those in North America and Europe and other countries where home education is a phenomenon. There would be familiar themes such as theoretical considerations, patterns of power, and discrepancies in the experiences of transition between various types of home education with the different forms of formal institutions that would be applicable to students in other countries where home education is practised (McLeod & Yates 2006).

4.3.15 Drawing Conclusions

During interviews and coding a number of questions arose which contributed to the further development of analysing the data. The amount of time spent collecting interviews and transcribing them was lengthy and occurred over a period of three years. Coding occurred during this process and continued after all interviews were collected over four years. Conclusions were made after lengthy analysis and reflection.

4.4 Other Considerations

4.4.1 What the Research Does Not Reveal

It is impossible to know if there are other groups from within the home educating population who may have made these types of transitions but who are not included in this sample except to acknowledge that there are probably such groups of home educators who are not involved in this research (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004). This also means that there is no known correlation to this unknown home educating community. The hidden nature of the home educating population means that any understanding of the general types of families home educating is not currently knowable (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004). Ethically, researchers cannot force families to participate in research and this means that those families who resist being identified are voluntarily excluded from the sample.

4.4.2 ‘Other’

There is a moral duty for researchers to foster a morality that ‘is grounded in the notion of being-for the Other’ (Schwandt 2000, p.204-205). Schwandt (2000) claimed that concern for the ‘other’ must be ‘intentional and that it is ‘not optional’ (Schwandt 2000, p.205).

‘Caring or being-for is a kind of responsibility that is prevoluntary, unremovable, not contractual, nonreciprocal, and asymmetrical’ (Schwandt 2000, p.205).

Feminist studies also highlighted the need for respectful consciousness of the ‘other’ (Christian 2005, Fine, Weis, Weeson & Wong 2000, Olesen 2000, 2005, Saukko 2005, Smith 1990).

Dialogic research sees itself seeking to give voice to experiences that have been neglected by mainstream society. If the methodological framework does not leave space for the experiences to address the discourses and social contexts that shape them, the experiences cannot speak about or back to the social structures that neglected them in the first place Saukko (2005, p.350)

Research needs to identify problems facing human subjects and the solutions required to make their lives better. Whatever method or methods are used, social inquiry that identifies the conundrums of human existence through different theoretical perspectives needs to guide the research project (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003). Home education in general, and home education students who have made transitions with mainstream institutions, are one of those groups of the ‘other’ who have been ignored by mainstream research and this research project is an attempt to try and address this omission.

4.4.3 Interviews

Interviews are part of our society and are historically and politically contextualised (Fontana & Frey 2005). When this project began, there was no indication that home education would become a political topic for Victorian home educators during this project (Mitchell 2006). Because of my own experiences with home education, as a student, parent and as a teacher, I felt that professionals and parents may not always understand what transition between home education and mainstream education might mean to the students and that a study of this nature could inform and hopefully improve outcomes for future transitioning students (Kvale 1999). With the changes in the political environment for Victorian home education, the need for greater understanding

of home education in general and for these transition experiences in particular became more evident through these political processes (Trevaskis, personal communication 2006). Each participant had a unique experience and many had not previously considered the implications of their transition experiences. Through the process of interviewing, participants and researcher collaborated together to construct these narratives of transition between home education and mainstream education (Fontana & Frey 2005). While many of the participants were initially strangers, most, especially students and parents, became friends of mine over the research period. It was most often the parents and, a little more reservedly, the students, who were keen to talk.

Because this is an area about which little is known in Australia, the interview questions were exploratory. Open ended guide questions were chosen as the tool for the interviews because they allowed participants to give wide ranging and narrative-like (Fontana & Frey 2005, Kvale 1999, McLeod & Yates 2006, Stake 2005) responses about their lived experiences while allowing the interview process to stay broadly focused on student transition experiences between the two systems (Fontana & Frey 2005, Kvale 1999).

Carspecken (1996) identified three aspects of a qualitative interview. Firstly, the types of questions should allow for maximum flexibility of responses. In this project, the three groups were given similar questions. All participants were asked to describe their personal experiences with home educated student transitions with formal institutions, and identify the entry/exit points at which transitions were taking place. They were also asked to describe how they understood particular commonly used educational terms ('education', 'curriculum', 'learning environments' and 'styles', 'time frames for learning', 'home and school links', 'social development', 'self-concepts') and how these might be interpreted in the particular experiences of the students with whom they had experiences (Gee 1999). It was hoped that these questions would contribute to the cultural, historical, political and social backdrops in which these transitions were taking place (Carspecken 1996, Gee 1999, Rogoff 2003).

Secondly, interviewer responses (Carspecken 1996) during the interview are known to contribute to the type and quality of responses gained from participants. Throughout the interview process, I was keenly aware that my responses – verbal, facial and body language – would influence participant response (Carspecken 1996, Fontana & Frey 2005, Kvale 1999). It is possible that participants might seek to provide the researcher with 'expected' answers (McLeod & Yates 2006), but I hoped that my experiences as a member of each of the three groups helped to reduce this possibility. I chose to present myself as someone who had experienced each or the three positions of the participant

groups as supportively as I could, and as one who understood some of the possible dilemmas and benefits that each group might chose to describe (Fontana & Frey 2005) while also attempting to not lead participant responses (Carspecken 1996, Fontana & Frey 2005, Kvale 1999).

Interview analysis, as the third part of the interview process (Carpsecken 1996), was set up to code the transcripts from the patterns that arose from within the data. These codes were then overlaid with sensitizing concepts (Charmaz 2005) gained from the theoretical frameworks (home education and transition literature, sociocultural, critical, identity and theories) that guided this study.

4.4.4 Limitations of these Interviews

Because the population (Wiersma 1995) of home educators was unknown, it was also impossible to identify the population of transitioning students. Locating possible participants was difficult and this meant that only a few three-way interviews that included students, parents and professionals were found. I still felt that it was important to collect the ‘narratives’ of other participants where I only had their experiences or on some occasions, the views of a member of another group, (parents, or parents and students, and on a couple of occasions, students and professionals). Gee (1999) argued that participants’ own stories provided valid data, and it was felt that these stories would also contribute to the integrity of the overall study (Carspecken 1996, Gee 1999). Interviews on their own do not necessarily provide depth in the data and limit the degree to which data can be checked against other sources of information (McLeod & Yates 2006). The size of this project also limited the number of interviews that it was feasible to conduct, transcribe and analyse (McLeod & Yates 2006). At the same time, the number of interviews collected and the consistencies found between responses contributed to the overall meaning of the findings. However, participant voice, while included was not the main focus of this particular research. Because of the exploratory nature of this research the common themes and discrepancies were the focus of this research and this limited the degree to which participant voice was forefronted. I am mindful that particular simplistic and generalized labels, such as types of home educating families, students in transition and categories of teachers may create inadequate understandings of these individuals (McLeod & Yates 2006).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

There are a number of areas that need to be considered by researchers to protect the participants and the institutions represented by both participants and the researcher.

Stake (2005) remarked that ‘qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world’ (Stake 2005, p.459). The participants are owed great care and respect. There are several key areas that need to be considered when protecting the rights and well-being of participants (Christian 2005, Fontana & Frey 2005, MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchord 2001, Mills 2003, Stake 2005). It is important for these participants to know that they will be protected from what they feel might lead to legal action. Because the legal position of home educators was and is a little unclear, a number of home educators needed to be assured that there would be no legal action taken against them if the Department of Education and Training discovered that they were home educating their children without express permission. A few professionals did not understand the legal position of home educators either, and felt that more needed to be done to supervise home education. By ensuring the privacy of each individual, the most feared source of harm was recognised and addressed. There were other participants who wanted to be recognised for what they had achieved and for them the privacy condition was not wanted. All participants were asked to read explanatory letters about the research project and sign appropriate consent forms. I personally read the letter to younger children and explained that their stories might make transition between home and school easier for other home educated students as well as explaining how they viewed both home education and mainstream schooling. All participants voluntarily participated in the interviews and had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the interview process. There were no significant areas of power except that I, as the researcher, chose the questions and made the final decisions as to what was included and excluded from the interview data (Newkirk 1996). Every endeavour was made to report participant comments in context with accuracy (Christian 2005).

4.5.1 What I Did

The research project, with the interview questions, explanatory statements and consent forms, was submitted to SCERH (Monash University’s Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans) before any interviews were conducted.

4.5.2 During the Interviews

All participants were provided with the appropriate explanatory statements. A separate statement written for students under the age of consent was read to the students. Consent forms were signed by all participants and by parents as well as students when students under the age of consent were interviewed. It was clearly explained in the explanatory statement that participants could stop the interview if they felt the need to without any further obligation or explanation to the researcher. It was also explained

that interviewees could refuse to respond if for any reason they felt uncomfortable with a question.

Transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants for checking and for their own records. The return of transcripts allowed participants to provide extra information and corrections to their comments during the interview.

As with most research, in the coding process the privacy of the individuals and institutions was protected by the use of pseudonyms. There was one formal institution where the identity of the school and informant was more difficult to conceal because there is only one institution in Victoria with the particular qualities that it has. This informant requested that they be able to read and comment on all the findings that related to themselves and their institution before the project concluded.

4.5.3 Bias

In this study, because of my own experiences as a transitioning student and home educating parent as well as the inclusion of two groups of participants who have actively practiced home education, this research project may appear to present a biased view promoting home education. Every attempt has been made to seek the views and opinions of those who hold a different perspective with regard to home education. All views have been compared with other literatures and theories to guide the analysis of the data in order to restrict possible biases that may appear. However, te Riele (2004) faced a similar possibility in her research and felt that sometimes there was a place for bias when it leads to challenges of mainstream power and dominant discourses that create alienation and conflict for minority groups in society. She argued that challenging mainstream ideas through apparently biased research could lead to fruitful dialogue about new ways to address stale issues in mainstream policy and practice which have an impact on more than the minority groups studied. It is intended here that any such bias will be used to stimulate and encourage fruitful dialogue for policy makers and mainstream educators in similar ways.

4.5.4 Summing Up

This project has been conducted searching for the factors which reveal both 'coherence and diversity' with participants in an attempt to understand both the 'product and the process' (Fonatana & Frey 2005, p.719) of how each interview can contribute to our collaboratively developed understandings of the transition experience from the perspectives of students, parents and professionals who have experienced or been

involved in transition between home and mainstream institutions. The findings in this study, regardless of any perceived handicap, are important because they suggest that there are misunderstandings by professionals, policy makers and the broader community of the implications of transition movements for home educated students with mainstream institutions (te Riele 2004).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the types of methods used, the reasons for their use and the limitations of this project. Home education is not a major topic in the discussions occurring in the dominant discourses of mainstream education. However all individuals are entitled to respectful treatment and the privilege of having their position treated seriously through research (te Riele 2004) and these transitioning home educated students and their parents are part of a subordinated minority group within educational practice. Their views and experiences will now be examined.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis - Parents

The parents in this study came from across Victoria, had varying numbers of children, moved children out of and into mainstream institutions, sometimes more than once and demographically resembled other home educating parents in Australia and around the world. The focus was on the ways in which they experienced both home education and mainstream education, their transition experiences moving students between home education and mainstream institutions and key themes found in the data.

5.1 The Sample

5.1.1 Criteria for Selection in Sample

Parents were self-selected by their response to requests for participants who fulfilled two criteria: they were home educators and had children who had moved between mainstream institutions and home education (see Appendix 1 for Parent Details).

5.1.2 Locating Sample

The sample of parents was located through a variety of channels. Professionals included in the study referred seven parents and this included one couple. There were five responses to advertisements in a widely distributed home education network journal, 'Otherways' (Alternative Education Resource Group 2003). Nine parents were referred by other parents in the study. Four parents were approached because I knew they had been involved in home education and children had also attended mainstream institutions. Four other parents were located individually. One parent attended a Christian home educator Expo, one was contacted through a casual acquaintance, one parent was located by my contacting an alternative school, and the fourth parent responded to a reference to the research in an interstate home educator newsletter. Five of the parents were known to me personally before the research through our common faith community.

5.1.3 Demography

Marital Status

All families represented two parent families except for one single parent. This low representation of single parents is typical of home educating families in Australian research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 2003c, 2006, Lampe 1988). Three couples

were included in the sample and this meant there were twenty-eight parent participants representing twenty-five families.

Geographic Spread

Seven parents, representing five families, were interviewed from Victoria's far east and far west countryside. Two parents lived near a large country city. There were four parents from three towns close to Melbourne, and ten parents, including one couple, from different areas of Melbourne's outer southern and eastern suburbs. There were also two parents closer to the centre of Melbourne. One parent participated in the study from Sydney. This geographical spread of home-educators is consistent with the findings of previous Australian home-education research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 1997, 2006, Patrick 1999).

Mother as Teacher

All mothers were the primary educator in these families (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Breshears 1996, Fegley 1993, Harding 1997, Hetzel 1998, Patrick 1999, Thomas 1998). Several mothers mentioned they had researched home education for lengthy periods of time before deciding it was the best educational option for their families (Cappello 1995). Most of these parents conducted their home education programs for a number of years. Earlier Australian research noted that parents home educated students for long periods of time (Harp 1998, OBOS 2000, 2004, Patrick 1999).

Involvement of Father

A few mothers mentioned that husbands were an important part of the home education program as previously identified in Australian research (Harding 1997, Patrick 1999). Some fathers organised maths and science work, one ran the outdoor and creative lessons, and the majority were generally supportive of their wife's teaching. Only one mother reported a father who opposed the concept of home-education and she only engaged in home-education twice, once for one year and then five years later for one term when two of four children had learning problems at school.

Number of Children in Family and Movement of Children

The number of children in these twenty-five families varied from one to eight children. One couple and one parent representing two families had one child, ten families had two children, two families had three children, seven families had four children, four families had five children, one family had six children and one family had eight children. The

average family size in known Australian home educating families is higher than normal (Harding 1997) or 3.5 children (Patrick 1999) and this sample is similar with an average family size of 3.3 children.

Twenty families had home-educated all children in the family. Of the five families where not all children were home educated, three families only home-educated their last one or two children in the family. The other two families had toddlers under school age.

In sixteen families, all children had entered mainstream education at some point. In the eight families where not all children had entered mainstream education, four families had children under compulsory school age and four parents had school aged children who had never attended mainstream education.

Gender of Students

These parents taught a total of sixty-seven students at home. Of these, thirty-five students were male and thirty-two students were female. The gender balance in this group was fairly even.

Parent Occupation

Ten of the mother participants were identified as 'mum at home with the kids'. The other parents had a profession, their own business or employment. There were four secondary school teachers, two specialist teachers and one TAFE lecturer. From the medical profession, there was a physician, a midwife and a specialist nurse. Two women ran their own businesses. There was also an office manager, hairdresser and university postgraduate student. The three fathers had occupations as farmer, sales representative and building industry tradesman turned artist. The breadth of occupations of home-educating parents is consistent with previous Australian research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Harding 1997, 2006). The lack of teaching qualifications was no obstacle for parent ability to teach one's own children as found in earlier Australian home education research (Harding 1997, 2006, Krivanek 1988, Patrick 1999).

Religion

While this project did not set out to explore the connection between religious or spiritual beliefs and the practice of home education, it should be noted that most parents referred to their beliefs at some point of the interview or in other discussions. Seventeen of the parents followed various Protestant beliefs, four parents were Roman Catholics,

two parents openly acknowledged atheist beliefs, while it remained unclear which belief system three other parents followed. Because there is no way of ascertaining the representativeness of this sample to the Victorian or Australian home educating community, there is no real way of determining if this proportional balance sheds any light on how beliefs may contribute to the practice of home education. The Victorian networks for home education do appear to represent a greater proportion of Protestant followers to others, but there does seem to be a wider dispersion of beliefs in the Victorian home-educating community as revealed in interests and membership of 'Otherways' (Alternative Education Resource Group 2003) than is found here. This sample, although collected through a wide variety of avenues, cannot be used definitively to indicate the degree to which particular beliefs are associated with home education practices although it may indicate trends for particular beliefs and the practice of home education. My personal acquaintance with five of these parents may also contribute to these numbers. From this perspective, this sample seems to reflect much of the known religious perspectives of home education practice as found in the United States of America (Apple 2001, 2005, 2006, Babbitt 1991, Breshears 1996, Burns 1993, Schalinske 1999).

Parent Experiences at School

Of the twenty-five parents who commented about their own personal experiences at school, two parents made only positive comments about their own school experiences. Ten parents 'loved learning', or 'loved primary school'. Two other parents loved extracurricular things including excursions and discussions with teachers. A further two parents acknowledged school had been OK. Many parents experienced negative social situations at school, and eight spoke of frustration with professional practice. One parent, while working as a special needs teacher, became concerned that mainstream institutions consistently failed to adequately provide for special needs students. These parental school experiences influencing the decision to home educate children were consistent with overseas findings (Knowles 1988). However, this factor cannot totally be accepted as the reason for all of these parents choosing to home educate their children (Barratt-Peacock 1997). There were other factors, reported below, contributing to these decisions.

Significance of this Sample to the General Home Education Population

It is argued here that this sample, while collected in different ways, cannot be used to attribute the general qualities of home educators in Victoria or Australia because the general population of home educators is unknowable.

5.1.4 Ability Levels of Students in Parent Sample

Terms

In this study, no parents were asked to provide reports or documentation to indicate the learning abilities of students. However, from comments made by parents, and in some cases by professionals included in the study, it was possible to make a rough assessment of student academic levels. Students were denoted as gifted when they had been assessed by professionals as such and/or had been promoted above their same-age peers several grades or had achieved early entry into university. Students were considered to be advanced learners when they regularly achieved A and A+ grades while in mainstream institutions. Students were considered to have learning disabilities, when they struggled to achieve average grades and/or had professionally diagnosed disabilities.

Gifted and Advanced Learners

Five families had gifted children, eleven families had children who were advanced learners and these families included other children with learning disabilities. Some children identified in early and mid primary school with learning disabilities or below average abilities achieved above average results when they re-entered mainstream education in secondary school. There were only two families where children did not appear to have learning disabilities and no comments indicated these children were advanced learners although they achieved well. There have been no studies in Australia exploring giftedness and home education although there is recent overseas literature on giftedness (Mitchell & Tullberg 2006, de Hoogh & Hoogeveen 2007).

Learning Disabilities

Sixteen parents, including two couples, had children with learning disabilities. Thirteen of the children from these families had been formally diagnosed by a professional and as reported by parents. One other child had learning difficulties diagnosed by teachers, and nine other children appeared to have had learning difficulties recognised by parents and sometimes teachers. The difficulties included dyslexia for eight of these children, three children were described as being 'visual spatial learners', while others had slow learning difficulties caused by Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), chronic fatigue, epilepsy or complications from premature birth. Seven children had difficulties with learning, especially learning to read and at least two of these children did not learn to read effectively till after turning eleven years old or more (Thomas 1998). One of the students was professionally diagnosed as being dyslexic, dyscalculic and dysgraphic. Earlier Australian research (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman &

O'Donoghue 2002) found some parents used home education for students with serious learning and health difficulties.

5.1.5 The Practice of Home Education

The three basic categories of home education curriculum practice – structured, eclectic and natural learners – were found in use by these families (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Beaven 1990, Jacob, et. al. 1991, Prince 1995, Ruff 1999, Simich 1998, Strange 1994, Taylor 1993, Treat 1990, Thomas 1998). Sixteen families used eclectic curriculum methods and this represented a higher proportion of eclectic practices than found in earlier studies (Patrick 1999). The families using eclectic programs ranged widely between those who used a noticeably strong academic focus (three families in particular) to one family, who used a simple core of subjects but relied heavily on natural learning opportunities. Five families used structured programs at the time of the interviews. Four of these families used Australian Christian Academy (ACA) material while three families were enrolled with Distance Education Correspondence, Victoria (DECV) at some point of their children's education. Two of these families thought they also offered significant natural learning opportunities to children and had moved from more formal to less formal approaches over time (Avner 1992, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Holinger 1999, OBOS 2004, Parker 1992, Thomas 1998). Two parents practised natural learning.

Educational Resources Used

Parents used resources from a variety of sources. Apart from using curriculum from ACA and DECV, parents mentioned other suppliers such as ABeckett, Charlotte Mason, Kingsley Educational, and Rod and Staff. Other parents visited regular book shops such as Collins, Dymocks and Link Educational.

5.2 Transition Movements

5.2.1 Initial Movement Out of Mainstream Education

Seventeen parents reported moves out from mainstream education to home education in their first transition (see Appendix 5 for the movements of parents' students into and out of mainstream institutions). Their reasons reflected the push and pull features (England 1998, Hetzel 1998, Patrick 1999, Stoppler 1998, Weinig 1993) for leaving mainstream education described in earlier research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Harding 1997, 2003(a, c), Harp 1998, Education Queensland 2003, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jacob et al. 1991, Krivanek 1985, Maeder 1995, OBOS 2004, Patrick

1999, Reilly et al. 2002, Reilly 2004, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998). Most of these moves were made in early to mid primary school. Only two of these moves were made during secondary school years. One of these two parents travelled during Year 11 and 12, the other removed her son with multiple learning difficulties (as assessed by a professional and reported by the parent) from Year 7 when she discovered he had only produced two lines of written work in a term and the teacher was unaware of this fact. Thirteen families moved children out of mainstream education as family groups and this accounted for the movement of thirty-one students. One of these families, represented by two parents, moved both children out but staggered the children's exit by one term to ensure the mother could cope with educating children at home.

Twelve of these families moved children out of mainstream education because their children were having various difficulties with the school system. Five parents had children with above average abilities who struggled with institutional methods of managing above average abilities and/or who experienced problems with peers because of these differences. Ten other families spoke of children struggling at school. These struggles often included some form of learning difficulty that appeared to contribute to problems with acceptance by some peers. These findings reflect similarities to earlier Australian research (Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Patrick 1999, Thomas 1998). Each of the four other families moved out of mainstream education due to family health problems, travel, school closure, family relocation, distance from school of choice, and family concern about values being learnt by children.

5.2.2 Initial Movements Into Mainstream Education

Eleven parents reported their initial moves into mainstream education at times other than the normal entrance into the beginning of primary school (see Appendix 5). Three parents reported that children requested or made the decision to enter mainstream education. Three parents reported maternal fatigue as the key reason for sending children to school. These parents sent all or a number of children to school at once. Three other parents each gave different reasons for sending children to school and these included: family move closer to school of choice, father wanted children in school, and student preparation for Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) – achieved at the conclusion of the final year of secondary school. One parent sent her son to school because he had become difficult to manage at home after his best friend (also a home educated student) moved interstate. Another parent entered her children part-time into alternative schools on an ongoing basis to extend their learning and social opportunities. Her children contributed to these decisions. Five of these families moved children as family groups into mainstream education and this accounted for the moves of eighteen

students.

5.2.3 Re-entry Into Mainstream Education

Eight parents had students who had re-entered mainstream education. In six of these families, students requested or decided to re-enter school for a variety of reasons. Two of these families had moved overseas or interstate and students sought social interaction with peers and specialist teachers. Four parents of late primary or early to mid secondary school students indicated children wanted access to specialist educators and some students also sought social interaction. One parent reported maternal exhaustion as the reason for re-entering her children into mainstream education. Another parent had returned a student to senior secondary school in time to sit VCE exams. A third parent was engaged in discussions, at the time of interview, with a local school principal to negotiate part-time attendance at primary school because one of her daughters sought social involvement with peers.

5.2.4 Part-Time

Six parents discussed part-time arrangements with schools and each part-time arrangement was unique to the particular family and school making it difficult to assess the overall effectiveness of part-time arrangements. Two parents were professionally involved with schools and their children were involved in the associated schools part-time, an arrangement both parents and students valued because children's concepts of their worlds expanded. Two families felt full day attendance for some days of the week in primary school worked well. Half-day attendance in primary school did not work well for one student struggling with health problems as the teacher struggled to regularly pre-prepare afternoon work for the student to do at home. Attendance at sporting events and excursions worked well for two families, but these students refused to visit school during break times even though teachers invited them. Part-time attendance for a student newly diagnosed with Aspergers in early secondary school created an important bridge helping him move later to full-time attendance. Day attendance in mid-secondary school was awkward as subject teachers were not used to preparing specific work for students outside of class time. These parents had students moving into and out of mainstream institutions at a variety of times for various reasons, and three families used both mainstream institutions and home education on an ongoing basis. A number of overseas studies and one Australian study noted that collaboration was occurring between home educators and mainstream institutions and recommended greater collaboration and understanding, particularly from professionals (Adams 1992, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995, Patrick 1998, Peavie 1999, Sherrer 1991).

At the same time, parents wanted assurance that their ability to exercise autonomy over their children's programs be protected (Adams 1992).

5.3 Parent Expectation of both Mainstream Education and Home Education

One of the early interview questions asked parents what their expectations were for both formal and home-education.

5.3.1 Parent Expectations of Mainstream Education

All I want is for the basics to be taught, that's my high chair (Jake)

Thirteen parents expected the '3 Rs' to be taught well and children to achieve in mainstream institutions. Three parents expressed concern that gifted children had difficulties fitting into mainstream institutions. One mother, a specialist teacher, recognised her son was academically more advanced than typical students. She thought he would cope socially, but expected his peers would bully him for his academic interests and differences. Another mother drove her son to school the first day dreading his experiences as she had been victimized at school (Knowles 1988). Both these children struggled at school socially and found the academic work too easy and boring. A few other parents, while expecting children to learn at school, did not expect school to be a place that was, in one mother's words, 'so nasty'. Three parents saw children socially isolated by cliques. Several parents were upset when children became disinterested in learning at school. Most parents looked forward to formal education providing a solid education that would also provide children with healthy social opportunities.

5.3.2 Parent Expectations of Home Education

I had heard of homeschooling ... weird people with gum boots ... I'd never even considered home schooling as an option ... someone ... suggested to me the year before ... 'You are already home educating – look at what you are doing' but I had this idea of school being ... structured lessons ... and I guess I had to go through that process in order to unlearn that ... I had to see what they were doing at school and realise that the structured lessons weren't anything wonderfully or exciting and were actually fairly negative. (Carol)

If they could do what I have done, being a late bloomer in life ... imagine what my kids

... are going to be able to do ... It's going to be phenomenal. (Lou)

Twenty-two parents discussed their expectations of home education. A few parents did not know what to expect. Two parents thought home education was something one did if a family lived in the back blocks but were unhappy with mainstream institutional failure to meet children's needs. Even when parents received training through Australian Christian Academy (ACA), as one did, they were sometimes still unsure what to expect. A few parents looked forward to going on more excursions and other outings to broaden their children's horizons. Several others all thought their children would be happier, have more rounded personalities, experience better family relationships and become confident and happier children. A number of parents thought home-education would provide their children with sound academic programs. Two parents with gifted children thought home education would offer 'phenomenal' learning opportunities after feeling trapped in mainstream institutions. Two parents with learning disabled children hoped their children would achieve academically at home. One mother had initially been concerned about taking on the role of teacher, but admitted this role had become the least of her concerns once she commenced home education.

Parental expectations of home education generally focused on healthy social and personal maturity for children. Some parents looked forward to building academic abilities but most parents hoped to meet their children's individual needs, whatever these might be.

5.4 Parent Experiences of Mainstream and Home Education

This study focused on the transition movements of students into and out of mainstream institutions and parent reasons for those transitions. Previous Australian and overseas home education literature has described the experiences of home education for parents and students. While it is important to understand parent experiences in both home and mainstream institutions, the scope of this project limits the degree to which these experiences have been discussed.

5.4.1 Experiences in Mainstream Education

Positives of Formal Education

Formal education [interstate first time] ... Ramona had a brilliant teacher. Really great ... And she was innovative. (Jaclyn)

The excellent teacher that he had in Year 1. She was brilliant ... a lot of positive ... whole communal doing things together ... that things are going to be done ... by a certain time ... and that support ... and the interaction between the students. (Jane)

A number of parents spoke highly of some aspects of mainstream institutions. Parents appreciated the academic opportunities offered in mainstream institutions, particularly in post primary ones, positive and supportive professionals, specialist and expert teachers, and peer mediation. Many of their children enjoyed great social experiences and school community events such as school productions, excursions, sports and art. A few parents recognised they also had more personal time when children attended mainstream institutions.

Negative Experiences of Parents in Mainstream Schooling

There are a great deal of negatives (Gina)

Negatives come first to mind. Home education negatives are not hitting [the same way] (Jake)

Just sort of age ... grouped grade levels ... Have it based on ... educational abilities as opposed to age structure, but then we don't want to make little Johnny feel bad, much more insecure growing up and go and jump off the Westgate bridge. (Lou)

The negative views parents held of mainstream education fell into a number of categories and included limitations created by institutional structures, professional behaviour and practices, limitations to learning opportunities, social problems, lack of meaningful time at home with children, psychological and general health problems of children, and values differences between home and mainstream institutions. Most of these complaints were directed to situations found in primary or occasionally junior secondary school. Alarmingly a significant number of parents were concerned that the negative experiences of mainstream schooling impacted so severely on mental health that children would consider self-harm.

Professional practice and interactions

[Our son] is severely learning disabled ... and no ... amount of talking to the school about his particular learning disability ... getting through to the school that he just did need to do things differently ... the school actually told me to stop wasting my time ... on my son because he was going to disappoint me ... that he would never achieve ... it was time that I backed off and let them educate him ... their way and I left and he's never been back to school. (Cara)

[Teachers] aim for the average, or just a little bit below average ... it penalizes everybody ... I can see the restrictions of school, how many kids you have [in] a classroom ... but I think they have to come up with ways of being able to ... let kids learn, a different way, and also let them have extension ... or something that's going to ... push those who need to be stretched. (Jaclyn)

I think [my son] needs to be challenged, so that he can be supported if he fails (he had been getting 20/20 [in spelling] all year). Teacher – “why would you want him to fail?” I felt like they weren't actually listening to me, or responding to his IQ test and psych recommendations. (Terry)

Many parents spoke of their frustrations when attempting to explain particular problems children were experiencing to unsympathetic and unresponsive professionals. The types of things parents described included professional inability to work with non-average abilities whether giftedness or learning disabilities, failure to acknowledge serious learning difficulties, reports indicating teachers were unaware of student abilities, teachers speaking to students with contempt in their voices and undermining student confidence, lack of parental involvement in student learning, mismatched reading programs to student abilities, unusual learning tasks without obvious value, students overlooked and ignored because of quiet behaviour, and ignoring parent attempts to discuss concerns. While these conscientious parents had children in mainstream institutions there was a sense of their feeling disempowered.

Socialisation

One of the reasons why we left the system ... Sam was suffering from bullying ... and it concerned me ... short term effects were bad enough, but the long term effects were a real worry as well. (Carol)

Everyone keeps talking to you about this socialisation ... it's not normal to socialise with 26 other people. It's not normal to be sitting with 26 who are listening to one person ... they can talk ... about socialisation all they like but it's not normal to be thrown into a school yard with 200 or up to a thousand other children ... wouldn't expect ourselves to be thrown into that situation and yet we throw our children into it. (Sabrina)

[You] wouldn't put 30 patients or computer guys with one screen - it just isn't human [referring to one teacher with thirty students]. (Sylvia)

Socialisation in mainstream institutions was regarded as a particular problem by some parents. Social problems included bullying and teacher inability to deal with it, schoolyard cliques, poor peer interactions and influence, differences in social values

and maturity between home educated students and mainstream peers, and professional expectations. Same age socialisation (Clery 1998) was rejected by home educating parents especially when it hindered vertical socialisation with all ages.

Other Negatives

I didn't know that a child could be so morose and depressed. Jarrett would come home from school each day and lie on the couch, and not move ... all he ever did after that was read books. ... he would pass on some of the annoying tactics [learnt at school] to his younger brother. (Karlita)

[W]hen I saw the kids in primary school ... I could see these same kind of kids [ADHD students] and they were being all treated the same way ... I realized why they end up in secondary schools stuffed up, because the school system in primary schools failed them. They ... can't cope with being in a classroom, so they get put out of the classroom, so they don't learn anything, so when they come back, they're further behind. (Kirsty)

Parents were unhappy with a number of other factors in mainstream institutions. These included a loss of family time, children's health problems, values differences between home and school, 'lucky dip' experiences finding good teachers, poor communication from school, inappropriate discipline, and unmet specific needs. The psychological health of students was one particular area of concern for four parents who wondered about future possible suicide attempts. One parent discovered these fears were warranted. A few parents did recognise that good teachers worked in a difficult system. Some parents had children who struggled in their first encounter with mainstream institutions but had positive experiences on their return to mainstream institutions after time at home.

The negatives of mainstream institutions, as viewed by these parents through the lens of their own and their children's experiences indicate the serious nature of their concerns with mainstream structures, professional behaviour and their children's specific needs. A number of parents still felt raw from these experiences.

In home education research literature, parent reasons for educating children at home were described as 'pedagogical,' 'sociological' or 'ideological' (Romanowksi 2001(a,b), Tator 2002). The parents in this study described unique and yet similar problems that could simply be categorised into pedagogical, sociological and ideological categories, but this simplification of problems masks significant meaning and pain to the families involved. The use of these categories also undervalues the contributions made by

mainstream institutions and professional practice to family decisions to leave a system which appears to be incapable of dealing with problems of difference outside of average student ability.

5.4.2 Experiences in Home Education

Positive Experiences

Well, I think everything about it is positive ... We've been doing this for such a long time, that I can't actually imagine what it would be like, not to be a home educator.
(Arlene)

Home education was a way of life for these families. Eleven mothers specifically explained how they felt family had been drawn closer or improved while home educating children than when children attended mainstream schools. This included improved sibling relationships and greater respect for family members. Several parents enjoyed having their children around all the time and regarded children as friends and unique individuals. Some families enjoyed more family outings and excursions. One parent found the family operated more as a team than a collection of individuals. These comments were consistent with earlier Australian and overseas research (Breshears 1996, Gray 1992, Hainlen 1995, Harp 1998, OBOS 2000, 2004, Patrick 1999, Phillips 1998) and reflect similarities to Ageyev's (2003) comments contrasting Russian community values to the individualism found in the United States.

Positives for Children

They're ... more mature. They've matured a lot. (Anita)

Many parents described how children were learning more effectively and efficiently at home than when attending mainstream institutions. Parents of children with learning difficulties thought the problems had been either corrected or improved. Those parents with gifted or learning advanced students were pleased when children did not feel restricted to the pace of classes and were able to pursue advanced studies suited to their interests. Conversation about anything and everything, and holistic approaches to learning were also valued when contextualised in the daily lives of families (Barratt-Peacock 2003, Thomas 1998). Parents reported happier and relaxed children who learnt to work at home, demonstrated creativity, imagination, interest and pursuit of hobbies (Egan & Gajdamaschko 2003, Vygotsky 1987). All families with health problems saw improvements in children's health. Several parents thought children were better able

to act as independent learners, make decisions and be more responsible for their own learning when at home (Batterbee 1993, Giroux 2003, Hill 1995, Lankshear 2003, Moss 1995, Rice 1999, Williams, L. 1990, Young 2003).

Positives for Parents

It's a LOT easier than I thought. (Cara)

I feel very fulfilled, being able to teach my own children. (Heidi)

Thirteen mothers enjoyed their children's company and thought there were greater opportunities to experience this when home educating children. Parents appreciated learning with their children, close family connections, children having more free time, work done economically, fewer distractions, less housework, greater control of curriculum, flexibility of lifestyle, and ability to reduce detrimental influences such as negative peer pressure on children. Husbands expressed surprised admiration for their partner's organisational abilities educating children at home. Parents described the 'thrill' they experienced watching children's enthusiasm, persistence and keenness to learn. On one occasion this included shock of finding every plum on the plum tree picked and cut in half because a child wanted to know if every plum had a seed in it (Fromm 1976). Three mothers enjoyed not being part of the parent gossip groups commonly found at school gates each morning. Two parents who used externally provided curriculum appreciated the structure this provided to learning routines at home. In one home, flexible use of DECV made a gifted teenager's learning less 'haphazard' and this was helped by the use of tutors. Another parent thought ACA helped his son with learning disabilities. Watching children relax and grow holistically was preferable to watching them become depressed and unmotivated while in mainstream institutions. Home education was also convenient for travelling families.

Negative Experiences

I can't think of any negatives. I'm quite happy to home school for six years. (Gina)

Having them around 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I find that quite difficult. (Deanna)

FEW, IF ANY, NEGATIVES

When asked to describe the negatives of home education, the most common parental response was that negatives did not exist or were insignificant and that any problems

were less problematic than keeping children in mainstream institutions. Parents referred, however to some problems and these included loss of professional careers, 'messier' houses, inability to be fully involved in children's learning due to illness, less time with partners, maternal stress, and problems working with unsuitable curriculum for particular children's needs. Three parents thought children did not always appreciate the constant company of their mothers. Two parents thought children missed out on group discussions. Socialisation was often an initial concern of home educators, but usually disappeared with time. One father initially resented community questions about the lack of social opportunities for home educated students. However, after an itinerant lifestyle around Australia, he decided that his children needed more social life and enrolled them in mainstream education. Overall, parents thought these problems were insignificant to the benefits of educating children at home. All parents with children who struggled in mainstream institutions thought they had made the best decision when they removed children to take up home education. However, a few were disappointed they had not felt able to leave children in mainstream institutions.

TENSIONS AND STRESSES

[It's] jolly hard work (Darlene)

I expected that ... he would never be as demanding as what he is. (Kirsty)

A small number of mothers experienced tensions at home. These parents sometimes missed their personal social life and adult conversation, or felt disconnected and isolated from general community conversation and sometimes found balancing a career with home education tricky. Four parents thought home education added tensions to family life, particularly, in one home with an unsupportive spouse. While home education networks were appreciated by many parents, a few found some networks could be exclusive, difficult to locate, or mismatched to their interests or children's needs. Being new in an area could also contribute to feelings of isolation. A few parents also felt burdened by the responsibility of taking on the sole care of their children's education especially when each child's needs were unique. Some children resisted doing carefully prepared work and one experienced home educator found balancing freedom and autonomy a challenge in her earlier days. Several mothers acknowledged struggles with stress as a result and four chose to send children to mainstream institutions full time or for short periods of time as a result. In spite of this, parents thought children experienced few negatives.

5.5 Process of Change – Parent Perspective

The process of change began when parents began to think about changing between home education and mainstream education.

5.5.1 Into Home Education

It was a pressure cooker before. (Anita)

Absolute pressure cooker. (Jake)

pressure from the school ... placed on us, to place on Troy ... It was very difficult, coming to the decision because ... we were breaking out of the norm ... challenging school, we had to look really deeply and make sure that, it would be the right thing, by our children. We also ... had neighbours who were home schooling their girls and they are excellent examples. (Anita)

In seven weeks he had done two lines of writing in one book ... [She said] she understood where he was coming from and that she ... would keep a closer eye on him ... and 'I don't know what you're worried about' ... I got her to show me his work ... she went and got the book and came and showed me his work, there was nothing in there ... And that's when we took [our son] out of the school. (Cara)

The hardest thing was making the decision ... and telling people ... going to the school and telling them, that was hard. (Carol)

So they reported me to the Department ... 'a religious nut' and all that stuff. (Gina)

Nineteen parents in this study moved children from mainstream institutions to home as the first transition move. Most parents withdrew children from early to mid primary school and the reasons given ranged from difficulties experienced by gifted students, problems for learning disabled students, poor management of health problems while students were at school, and social problems usually associated with these problems. Two parents removed children from early secondary school because they had learning difficulties not addressed effectively by professionals, and one Year 11 student chose to learn at home because of different personal values to those in mainstream institutions.

The decision to leave mainstream institutions and to educate children at home was difficult for many parents. A number of parents researched home education over extended periods of time before making the decision (including two who checked the Victorian Department of Education and Training's list of Curriculum Standard Framework (CSF) requirements). Some parents removed children from mainstream

institutions over an end of year break. Others removed them at the end of a term or semester after deciding a few weeks earlier to do home education. The process of deciding usually eventuated after a series of unhappy incidences for children at school and/or between parent and professionals and culminated with a trigger that left parents feeling efforts to communicate with professionals were futile. Parents made the decision while watching children fall behind academically and/or socially and often become psychologically depressed.

Three parents reported positive or helpful interactions with the professionals in schools they were associated with when they informed staff of their decisions to remove children from mainstream schools. Nine parents reported histories of discussions with professionals that achieved no institutional resolution to their problems. Several parents felt it was the 'worst' thing to inform their respective schools of their intention to home educate children and quite a few left in tears or emotionally drained from their encounters with professionals.

And he went, 'Oh no, that's the most terrible thing you could ever do to us' ... 'If there's anything I could do to talk you out of it' and all this sort of stuff the ... I was actually very disappointed I'd told him ... because we'd decided to finish off the term, and there were ... five weeks to go ... the poor kids, they really copped it. They really copped it ... The teachers were making it a big deal in the classroom. Every time I went up there ... some of them were quite rude to me, telling me, 'I don't know what you think doing, you're not a teacher' ... he [principal] was very much against me home schooling and [my daughter's] prep teacher ... she ... had a go at me a couple of times while I was up there ... 'You're not a teacher, what are you doing? I think you'll be very disappointed. I'm very disappointed' and then hardly spoke to me after that. (Sabrina)

The teachers talked to children in two families about the probable negative effects of leaving school and openly encouraged other children, often the children's antagonists, to befriend and beg them to stay. Farewell parties were given on students' final day at schools and these led children to ask to stay at school. A third family was invited to stay in regular contact with the school and children encouraged to attend school during break times but the children found these situations uncomfortable. However, all parents thought children realised, after time at home, that these were not the actions of real friends as no follow up contacts occurred. Parents described their children's relief and 'excitement' when told they would be learning at home. The children appeared happier and their learning improved.

Some professionals were both diplomatic and supportive of parents who removed children from their schools. Some tried to establish ongoing links to encourage good

will towards their schools. Other professionals were supportive and inclusive of home educating parents wanting to enter children part-time or temporarily in their schools and yet showed a completely different face to parents who wanted to remove children from school as was the case of two parents with the same principal. Other professionals seemed unwilling to understand or listen to the frustrations and observations of parents or were adamant parents should not home educate children. At the same time they failed to demonstrate any understanding of how home education functioned or contributed to children's learning. These negative reactions by professionals indicated a need for professionals to be better informed about the reasons parents home educated children, what the outcomes are and what beneficial approaches might be made to support these parents and students.

The change over time for families varied. Eleven parents were careful to start their children on their home program on regular school days although some initially extended normal holiday times by a week or so. Some parents tried to ease their children into work with fun activities. A couple of parents using academic programs admitted they would not push their children as hard second time around but would use more 'deschooling' learning opportunities through life experiences. A number of parents spoke of maintaining the option to return children to school if this need arose and chose curriculum similar to school curricula for this reason.

Before making the decision to home educate children, parents researched possible curriculum. Visits to experienced home educators were common. The kinds of materials used by parents starting home education after mainstream attendance included selections of texts different to those used at school to encourage children's interests, and books from regular book shops because parents did not know where to locate school texts and home education suppliers. A few parents, nervous of starting their own curriculum, accessed ACA or DECV. One parent, with no teaching experience chose ACA because it provided training for home educating parents. Parents also used tick sheets, computers and internet resources. Several parents started with 'classrooms' and timetables but most quickly discarded these as children resisted such structures (Avner 1992, Holinger 1999, Jacob et. al. 1991, Parker 1992, Prince 1995, Taylor 1993, Thomas 1998).

5.5.2 Into Mainstream Education

Oh, absolutely everything [positive] ... she did, just excelled. (Gina – about Zara's return to secondary school)

Fifteen parents had children enter or re-enter mainstream education and most moved into primary schools. Several students entered secondary school and several entered TAFE. There were a variety of reasons for these moves.

Primary School

Eight families moved home educated children into primary school. Three families sent children to school because of maternal fatigue. All the children in two of these families and the primary aged children of a third family were sent as family groups. A fourth family was sent to school twice as a family group. The father did not support home education on either occasion even though one or more children were struggling either academically and/or socially at school. A fifth family moved closer to a school of choice. The youngest son in a sixth family was taken to school when he refused to work at home after his close home educated friend moved interstate and there were no suitable companions in the home education network. Three other children from two families made the decision to return to school.

Student Decision to Enter Mainstream

Three children chose to enter/return to primary school. One boy chose to enter early primary school against his parents' wishes. Two students chose to enter Year 6 with the support of their parents. All three experienced difficulties fitting into mainstream institutions socially. Two of these children were gifted or learning advanced and found their success alienated the established peer rankings. The third student was very tall for his age, had learning difficulties, displayed a lack of understanding of school protocols by interacting with peers of all ages, and was misunderstood by professionals. One student never returned to compulsory schooling, the second student continued to struggle in secondary school until she moved to another school and the third student entered secondary school fitting in well academically and socially. The parent of the advanced learner who struggled to fit in socially had professionals later speak to her about the experience:

A couple of teachers ... who know the social structure and have seen that class go through ... They've all said it's probably because they felt threatened, because she was able to learn ... have really good grades. They'd previously been ... the top of the tree, so to speak for grades, and for somebody else to come along, and they didn't like it. So I don't know. (Liz)

Preparation for Transition into Mainstream Institutions

The types of preparation parents made to help these students attend school varied

according to the reasons for sending or allowing children to enter mainstream institutions. All children in this sample used school compatible curricula or had learnt the expected skills needed for their age levels and most children succeeded and performed at the top end of their classes. All parents had tried to ensure children had broad social experiences across different age groups while at home. Four of these children, gifted or advanced learners, experienced some difficulties socially integrating with their peers. It seemed that in spite of their broad social experiences, their mainstream peers, who socialised in same age groups found it difficult to accept these children who were culturally different, especially when they achieved well academically. These children also had interests and skills not usually found among their mainstream peers. While individual personalities may have contributed to some problems, in most cases, there appeared to be a lack of professional understanding and timely input that could have alleviated tensions and contributed to better student social integration. These four children functioned well socially in other situations both inside and outside mainstream institutions.

Visits to schools, in and out of operation or for orientation days, were common before most families sent children to school. One parent explained that she took her children to their new school a couple of times.

Transition Experiences and Culture Shock

I've actually made sure that Arden was sufficiently ... aware of the cultural mores, so that when he met them ... he didn't suffer culture shock ... [T]he first time he went in to [a country state secondary school], I said ... 'Now, this is a Systems school ... And they have ways of doing things that you won't have met before. It is very different' ... I said, 'It's a bit like being in Japan ... we had to learn how to bow at the right places, we had to learn how to greet people ... Well it's the same in a school. They have ways of doing things and they have a culture of their own. It's like a sub-culture that's in our culture, and so the usual rules of polite behaviour are not sufficient. Just be on the look out for them and be aware that some things will seem a bit strange and different ...'

[T]he first time we went there ... he was fine ... but when we left, in the car on the way home, he said to me, very accusingly, 'Mum, you didn't tell me it was a school for mentally retarded children.' ...

And I said, 'Well actually, it's not dear ... they were ordinary, normal, country kids'.

He said to me, 'You're kidding me'.

And I said, 'No'.

He said, 'They're incredible rough'.

And I said, 'Well, yes, country people can be a bit rough' ...

He said, 'And some weren't very intelligent, if I may say so ... Did you notice them, instead of just going to their lockers and just getting their books out, they were

swearing at each other and pushing and shoving and tripping each other up. They were behaving like hooligans’.

And I said, ‘That’s pretty normal, I think.’ (Arlene)

One parent explicitly explained her understanding of the potential culture shock her children could experience when entering mainstream institutions and how she attempted to alert her children to this cultural shift. Most parents did not comment about the transition experience from the perspective of a cultural change.

Secondary School

Seven parents had children who moved from home education into secondary schools. Children of two parents chose to enter school in mid secondary school and fitted in well academically and socially. The children of five parents successfully entered secondary school in Year 10 or 11 in preparation for the VCE. Parents expressed some concerns about these moves such as culture shock, not being up to academic standard, social challenge when from isolated properties, or whether students could organise their work sufficiently. Orientation programs and meeting mainstream peers prior to the start of school were helpful for two students. The isolated student experienced culture shock and social challenge and one other worked through health challenges living away from home. However, parents reported that all students successfully entered and achieved their VCE regardless of challenges faced.

Technical And Further Education

Seven parents had students who entered mainstream education through the TAFE system. Most students were two or three years under the usual entry age requirement of their courses but they enjoyed their studies, achieved well and generally felt socially comfortable. One parent described the struggle her son had when challenged about his anti-alcohol stand, work ethic and other values but she felt that with the help of mentoring from family friends he grew from the experience. Parents described how two children were able to successfully enter university through their TAFE courses.

It would appear from these examples that home educating students were successfully entering mainstream education at different levels and through non-linear pathways (te Reile 2003, 2004). Many of these students appeared to have better than average academic abilities, even when some had struggled to achieve average marks in primary school. Some students who entered mainstream institutions did experience some social discomfort. However, it is questionable whether these children and their families could be attributed full responsibility for this discomfort. The socialisation experienced

by their mainstream peers was often limited to same age children. This difference highlights some of the less desirable features of socialisation at school and the inability of children brought up in mainstream institutions to accommodate difference and new competition, especially where groups of children have developed strong ‘cliques.’

The students who entered secondary school through the middle and senior years appeared to make good transitions both academically and socially without any major preparation by their parents although two students appeared to feel a little socially challenged. The students who entered through the TAFE system also managed the experience positively and achieved well academically. Most students experienced no difficulties socially. One student benefited from mentoring when challenged about his values.

After examining these student entries into mainstream institutions, there do appear to be transition points that might be a little more difficult than others for some students. Entry into the final year of primary school in particular, when mainstream students have established friendship groups was difficult for a few students. Their experiences were not helped by professional ignorance of home education practices and values. It was recognised in other Australian transition research literature that students did not find transitions between mainstream institutions easy when parents did not recognise their learning difficulties (Zieman 2005). In most instances these parents were very aware of student learning differences.

5.6 Parent Attitudes to Educational Concepts

To ensure the clarity and meaning of commonly used educational terms, parents, professionals and students were asked to describe their understandings of particular terms. It was also expected this would reveal more specifically how each of these groups applied these concepts to their own practices. The terms included ‘Curriculum’, ‘Education’, ‘Learning Styles’, ‘Home and School Links’, ‘Socialisation’, ‘Self Concepts’ and ‘Time Frames for learning’. The parent responses are categorised below.

5.6.1 Curriculum

As far as I see it, the curriculum in school is an artificial separation of life into little compartments ... maths ... English and ... science where at home a lot of things ... just cross all those borders. (Carol)

Canned curriculum? Sort of ... a one size fits all programme? I feel curriculum can

be a helpful aid, but that you tailor it to meet the child's abilities and interests. Then it becomes your slave and not the other way round, and not your master. (Davita)

You know, if it's not working well ... Find another way ... It's like getting out a bigger hammer. Every time. (Jake)

I hate standardized curriculums. I hate ... treating kids like they're all ... sausages in a sausage machine ... I think home schooling allows you to tailor the curriculum to them individually. So that's what I believe about curriculum. (Kasha)

I think the curriculum doesn't allow ... enough getting out into the community and seeing what's actually going on. One of the things I like about home schooling is the curriculum is tailored to each individual ... is so hard for the school system because there's no individuality ... kids are marked on every single subject ... they're expected to know this little bit of everything ... it puts a lot of pressure on kids ... that's ... why so many kids get ... into their high school years and they just burn out. (Sabrina)

Parents who used eclectic or natural learning programs expressed strong views about curriculum content and structure. Curriculum needed to be flexible, cater to children's interests and act as a guide for learning. The eclectic families tended to have core subjects for reading, writing and maths. Some families followed academic subjects while others worked more with children's interests through projects. These parents did not accept the way mainstream curricula isolated learning from real life contexts assuming that all children had the same learning needs. Parents were always open to new ways to encourage their children's learning. For example, a few parents used tutors for subjects beyond their abilities. Parents were also alert to resources in the community they could include in programs if suited to children's interests. These parents worked towards curriculum tailored to children's individual uniqueness and ensured meaningful real life learning contexts.

5.6.2 Education

Wasn't it Einstein that said ... my schooling, my education was only halted by a couple of years in school? (Karlita) Edison. (Jarratt)

Basically, when I started teaching, the first month ... the I was only 21, but I thought, if I ever have kids, they're not going to school. I was just so disgusted with the system. (Kasha)

How can a person ... say they love someone and then be so quick and so easy to let other people to screw 'em over. I don't get that ... I just don't get that ... how can things like love and nurturing, and learning and education and safety and guidance, and mentoring and all those things that are part of being a parent, to me, I take very

seriously. (Lou)

Education is supposed to be stuff that you learn and keep with you. Not learn for the week you're doing it and then forget all about it again. (Sabrina)

Many parents thought education was about developing a love for life long learning, and/or and the development of an intrinsic desire to learn. Education was also described as preparing one with life skills and as a process. Two parents thought certification had limited value as did some university learning. Education was more than gaining certain recognised levels of learning offered by mainstream education. Parents wanted children to love learning for learning's sake and not be limited to viewing it as a series of certificates. Parents did not think mainstream institutions provided the best education.

5.6.3 Home and School Links

They're very good. I'm happy with the school, the principal's really good ... he's actually homeschooled himself and so he's ... identifies really well, with me and ... they're doing a good job. They send news letters home ... You feel as though you are part of the school. (Fannie)

I think there needs to be more ... listened more and prepared to ... act on it. I think they listened but it went in one ear and out the other, to a certain extent. (Jaclyn)

I found that my ... communications with the teachers ... were all very positive and very good, while the children were doing well. But when problems arose ... all I met with was misunderstanding. (Rowena)

When asked what kind of links should be maintained between professionals and parents when students attended mainstream institutions, many parents identified 'communication' as the vital link and included terms such as 'absolutely', 'essential', 'vital', 'a necessity' to illustrate this need. Others wanted to feel supported. Several parents made positive comments about the communication they had with professionals. A few other parents spoke of their frustration speaking with professionals who did not understand them or their children's needs, ignored quiet well-behaved children, and yet assumed that, as professionals, they knew best.

5.6.4 Learning Styles

He learns everything hearing things and hands on ... we do very little writing ... But he knows far more by watching the 'Discovery' channels, listening to his story cassettes,

listening to the radio, watching TV ... and actually getting out there and working with people, and that's how he learns. (Cara)

At home you just accept that each child is different. And it doesn't matter what kind of learner they are. They're just Sam is a Sam learner. Brad is a Brad learner. Carl is a Carl learner. (Carol)

This is ... one thing great about homeschooling. The conversations that we have, because ... our home environment is a learning environment as well. (Lou)

I think it's hugely important to try and ... ascertain what their, each child's, what works for them ... Some are very hands on. They've got to virtually do stuff. (Tammie)

Parents generally thought each child was a unique learner and they illustrated the ways each child in a family learnt differently to all other family members. However, the most common learning style mentioned by parents was that children needed to learn 'hands on.' Many parents made reference to various classification schemes or descriptions of learning styles in educational literature, particularly Gardiner's learning styles (Gardiner 2005). Five parents referred to discussions, conversations, 'hearing' and talking as being important to children's learning. Other parents did not comment about conversation in the family, but Australian research previously identified conversation as an important part of learning in home educating families (Barratt-Peacock 2003, Thomas 1998).

5.6.5 Time Frames for Learning

I hate that system. I think that is REALLY bad ... and I think that is what puts pressure on children and can actually undermine their confidence, and hold them up ... That was one ... of my main gripes, with the school system, was that pressure. (Anita)

Gabbie kicked a lot of time frames out window [because she wanted to know] NOW. (Liz)

All of the nineteen parents who discussed time frames in which to achieve specific learning goals, thought it was important to allow flexibility because each child learnt uniquely. They thought time frames should not interfere with genuine learning. One parent explained that the focus on learning particular things in particular time slots at schools helped condition school children to think learning only took place in school, unlike home educated students who seemed to learn more enthusiastically throughout life. Children were known to select and pursue particular interests, sometimes for months. Other children appeared to learn erratically, even when in mainstream

institutions. Home educating parents worked to promote children's learning experiences within the learning styles, interests and time frames most comfortable for their children. These rarely met the time frames for achieving particular learning goals they had observed in mainstream institutions (Mahn 2003, Thomas 1998).

5.6.6 Socialisation

The million-dollar question! (Anita)

The enculturation of children. Children have to be initiated in to a culture and will be in spite of our best efforts, unless they are totally neglected ... it can be facilitated or otherwise ... growing within a family, taking part in activities within the wider community ... that's the natural way for enculturation to occur to me. (Arlene)

I think the need for ... [socialisation] is exaggerated. And I think people assume socialisation means ... children spending time with their peers ... socialisation's actually [a] much wider concept than that ... you should really help your children socialize with a wider group and ages of people, which you can never do when they've been ... schooled [in mainstream institutions]. (Davita)

[T]he biggest one that we've experienced ... was that people tend to point the finger at 'What about their social activity?' ... 'Aren't they deprived from that?' (Ken)

Don't you hate that question? Mate, I can't believe it. Every time, anyone finds out you're home schooling the whole social thing! ... 99% of conversation you have with people is about this social thing, and I'm sick of it. It's a pain in the bum - to be quite honest. (Lou)

Socialisation for most home educating families was 'not an issue' and a few parents thought societal and professional concern about socialisation unjustified. Davita summed up the typical sentiments of home educating parents about socialisation. Socialisation was not just about peer interactions but about broad healthy interactions with a wide range of people in all age brackets; something schools were unable to foster. Their children enjoyed same age peer socialisation and parents made efforts to ensure children had these opportunities through home education networks, clubs, sports groups and church affiliations. Socialisation was also described as an 'enculturation process' where children were 'initiated in to a culture' that occurred naturally in the family setting. The negatives of mainstream institutional socialisation included the inability to socialise outside of one's age bracket and limited ability to learn the 'responsibilities of being an adult.' Society was described as 'fractured' because young people did not have opportunities to be involved in caring for younger people or being more involved with their elders. Parents did not view the social experiences offered by school as ideal

and several were upset with their children's unhealthy social experiences in schools. All children who had suffered from unhealthy social situations at school were able to develop healthier social opportunities at home and develop better tactics to deal with negative social situations. Home educating parental concern that children learn to socialise across all ages of the community was reported in other Australian home education research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Clery 1999, Thomas 1998).

A few parents indicated that socialisation at home could sometimes be a problem. Migration and itinerancy, lack of inclusive and like-minded home education networks, parental shyness and personality, and lack of networks in more remote areas could reduce socialisation opportunities for families.

5.6.7 Self-Concepts

Since Sam has been at home, he's become more confident in himself and become more aware of other people's needs ... when he was at school he had very little awareness of himself, let alone other people ... the sit down and be quiet routine was never going to help him there. (Carol)

That's probably the largest reason why I have continued to home educate ... I guess we've been blessed to experience opposite ends of the spectrum, in that Jarratt ... was bullied because he was intellectually advanced. Danar, I'm certain, would have been bullied if he'd gone to school because he was intellectually, on the other end of the scale ... and again, that's one of the things that other people comment on, is that neither Jarratt expects the world to be at his feet because he's ... intellectually advanced, Danar doesn't treat himself as any less of a person because he's not an academic. (Karlita)

My kids have really discovered who they are within themselves outside of school. My son's giftedness has never been a problem since he left school. When he was at school ... because he was different and because his abilities were far greater than the rest of the kids, it was always an issue. So he never had the opportunity to find who he was. (Lou)

Children get such a distorted self-concept because they compare themselves to 26 other children in that classroom ... So I find that their own self values have just improved when they're not comparing themselves to all these other kids who have talents. (Sabrina)

Thirteen parents thought their children's sense of self worth was of primary importance and this was the 'main' reason three parents removed their children from mainstream institutions or had not put them in these institutions in the first place. Six parents

thought their children's self-concepts had not been enhanced by their first experiences in mainstream institutions. Eight parents thought the way their primary school aged children viewed themselves improved noticeably at home after being in mainstream institutions previously. Two parents had not stopped to consider their children's self concepts but they and others emphasised they just wanted children to have a healthy and balanced view of themselves. Three parents also thought their children's beliefs informed the way they viewed themselves. Parents were concerned with the way children viewed themselves and they thought home provided a better environment for helping children develop healthy self-concepts than mainstream schooling.

5.7 Themes Drawn from Parent Comments

Parents rejected the importance of typical societal concerns about their children's social needs. However, parents were concerned that their children be able to learn according to their needs, function independently as they grew towards adulthood, and develop healthy balanced views of themselves. The development of children's autonomy was also important to many parents. Socialisation was discussed as a major topic, but not as a concern. Parents also spoke about mainstream institutional structures, practices and interactions that had contributed to their personal experiences and influenced their views.

5.7.1 Learning

He ... was unable to read ... He didn't learn to read [at school] ... for the next couple of years ... they seemed to pick up concepts a lot faster [at home] ... a few basic things ... when they are at school ... tend to go over their heads. (Cheryl)

They were taught at their own pace [at home]. (Ken)

Not only teach them school work now, or to read and write, but to teach them ... everything that ... is involved in running a household and ... relating to other people. (Heidi)

Spatial learner ... another reason ... that's another plus for the home schooling because we're able to teach him in an appropriate sort of way for his learning style. (Jane)

All parents, except one, specifically spoke of children's learning needs. Parents were interested in their children learning the basics, in real life contexts and thought this happened best at home. They recognised that each of their children learnt in

individually unique ways and often needed flexible curriculum. Parents wanted children to develop a love of learning and become independent learners who did not have to wait to be told what to learn. Many parents were able to effectively mediate children's learning and were 'delighted in' watching children's interest, curiosity, self-direction, motivation and knowledge grow.

Parents found children learnt better at home than in mainstream institutions. The exceptions to this were children who used inflexible externally provided curriculum, especially when there were learning difficulties. Many parents were surprised at how easy it was to teach their children at home. A few other parents found teaching children to read particularly difficult. Children sometimes resisted the way parents wanted them to learn and parents had to adjust teaching/learning environments to suit.

Several parents, whether children had been moved into or out of mainstream institutions, felt schools had not provided the best learning environments for their children. Parents thought professionals were not able to adequately cater for the needs of faster or slower learners and as a result children became either frustrated with unchallenging work or missed important concepts and were left behind. There were regrets that school did not provide for contextual learning opportunities in community and that children's interest in learning had been 'killed at school'.

5.7.2 Autonomy, Self Determination

Once we'd made the decision, I was happy as Larry ... He reacted REALLY well. He was very excited. (Anita)

Fourteen parents in this study made some reference to autonomy. Eight parents, referred to parental rights and ability to make decisions about their children's education through such things as curriculum design. Six parents also encouraged and respected children's decisions about educational pathways even when they disagreed with these decisions. Nine parents experienced uncertainty and angst while making the decision to home educate children and explored educational and social options carefully. Once the decision was made, they felt relieved and happy.

The parents in this study exemplified the meaning of self-determination to their children when they chose to go against societal norms and expectations that children attend mainstream institutions. Many of these parents encouraged the practice of responsible autonomy in children by encouraging them to contribute to decisions about when they studied and the curriculum material used. Some of these parents also respected and

encouraged student self-determination about whether to be educated at home or in mainstream institutions.

5.7.3 Institutional Structures, Practices and Interactions with Professionals

I put her into Kinder, they didn't appreciate her knowing how to read and they didn't appreciate her knowing how to write. (Brianna)

Epilepsy people know, you put pressure on a child with epilepsy and you ... stop them from functioning basically ... at school ... And that's what ... was really happening. (Jake)

When I really believed the teachers didn't understand his epilepsy and the impacts that it was having on his life. They didn't have a full grasp on it, even ... though ... the school psychologist had given them paper work and everything ... they wanted us ... to just pile him with more pressure here ... as well. (Anita)

Tensions and disquiet were most evident in parents' descriptions of the impact institutional structures and practices had on their children and in parent interactions with professionals.

Generalised Views

A few parents had little positive to report about mainstream education. The kinds of negatives described regarding mainstream institutions included references to the lack of comparability of home education with mainstream education, that mainstream education had little to offer young people, and that mainstream institutions were 'stilted,' 'artificial' and 'unnatural'. Parents balked at the thought of there being anything natural about putting thirty children together with age as the only common denominator. Neither had they found mainstream institutions capable of effectively dealing with children with other than average abilities. More than one parent felt reports did not reflect reality and were unhelpful. Parents wondered why teachers seemed unable to notice that children had not understood key concepts, or were unable to better manage some of the negative social situations their children experienced, especially in the playgrounds. Two parents were disappointed teachers did not appear to encourage values upheld at home and one parent wished teachers demonstrated greater broadmindedness and encouraged different points of view. Parents also wished professionals did not assume they had all the answers and were more willing to be open and work collaboratively with students. There was also general resentment that schools

robbed families of valuable quality time together.

Impact of School on Children's Self-Esteem

Eleven parents grew concerned watching children becoming less enthusiastic about studies and life generally while in mainstream institutions compared to when they were at home. Parents watched happy children become depressed, lose interest in learning, struggle socially, and lose connection with family. Some parents tried to discuss concerns with professionals but felt professionals did not appreciate or understand their views. When parents then decided to home educate their children, a number of these parents faced hostile and intimidating comments from these same professionals.

Positive Views

Not all views held by parents were negative, even by parents who had experienced disappointment with mainstream education and professionals. Parents were prepared to value the positive things about their interactions with mainstream institutions. For example, one primary school was described as an 'extraordinary little school', and other parents were grateful for the love and care teachers showed children. Parents were happy with the way children fitted into secondary school and TAFE. Some were amazed that children achieved as well as they did in mainstream institutions, especially when there had been a history of learning difficulties.

Mainstream Institutions Have Their Place

Parents recognised mainstream institutions had their place, both for other people's children and their own. Those few parents who used mainstream institutions part-time valued this opportunity, even though the outcomes and arrangements were not always the most desirable. Parents saw benefits from interactions with mainstream institutions in two ways: the provision of part-time facilities, and attendance in senior secondary school.

Parents of eleven home educated students found access to TAFE important. Many of these students attended TAFE two or three years below the typical age of entry into particular courses. In this sample, apart from social challenges to one student, all students achieved highly in their chosen TAFE courses, felt comfortable socially and enjoyed the work.

Parents described some professionals as very diplomatic and supportive of parents who removed their children from schools. Some professionals tried to establish ongoing

links to encourage good will towards their schools. There were other professionals who were supportive and inclusive to home educating parents wanting to enter children part-time or temporarily in their schools and yet showed a completely different face to parents who wanted to remove children from school as in the case of Kasha's and Sabrina's principal and teachers. Other professionals did not appear to understand or listen to parent frustrations and observations or were adamant parents should not home educate children without displaying any understanding of home education practice and contribution to children's learning. These negative and uninformed reactions indicated a need for better professional knowledge and understanding of parent reasons for home educating children, outcomes of home education practice, and possible support services mainstream institutions could offer. Parents identified problems existing in mainstream institutions as restrictions created by school structure, poor handling of student differences such as giftedness, learning disabilities and health, and negative professional reactions to parents' choice of home education. These comments also revealed windows of opportunity for collaboration.

5.8 Home Education Evaluated

Can be a really positive option for some. (Fiona)

So glad took them out of school. (Gina)

My home schooling's fantastic ... my children have the best life. (Kasha)

There'd be a lot of kids that it would suit ... nicest thing you could give your kids... taking time out of school. (Jake)

Fantastic idea. (Lloyd)

Been much more important shaping experience for all. (Rowena)

Better in every way. (Sabrina)

When evaluating home education twelve parents thought home education was worthwhile and important for family unity and closeness. Descriptive words such as 'fantastic,' 'best,' 'nicest,' 'terrific' and 'whole lifestyle' laced their comments. Parents spoke most about how home education had been important for their children. A few referred to the way it had contributed to quality family life. Parents also thought it less stressful than sending children to school. Two parents, who had children with health problems and subsequent learning difficulties thought there would be other children

who could benefit from home education.

At the same time as valuing their home education experiences and explaining that it was a natural way to learn, parents also thought that home education had its ‘good and bad things’. It was not always easy, especially when parents had problems motivating children to work or locating suitable curriculum for particular student needs. Factors contributing to parent negative experiences with home education included too informal management of programs, lack of peer mediation opportunities (Jackson 2008), unsupportive spouses, lack of extended family support, itinerancy, poor access to home education networks and mother fatigue. Other concerns included lack of access to team sports, and reduced personal time and income even though these parents thought this a small sacrifice.

Parents valued the opportunities at home to encourage children’s autonomy, self-reliance, independent learning, love of learning, respect for family members, and responsibility to do their best. They were able to encourage struggling students to achieve and respect their best efforts and to become worthwhile and contributing citizens.

The public profile of home education was viewed as an area needing attention. Five parents wanted other parents to have easier access and accurate information about home education provided publicly and not just through market suppliers. Parents also wanted professionals to realise that professionals did not have all the answers.

5.9 Conclusion

Parents were happy with their home education programs because they felt their children were noticeably better off at home. A few mothers experienced stress and fatigue and sent children to mainstream institutions. Those parents who started their children’s education in mainstream institutions withdrew them because children’s needs were not being met. They reported tensions in their interactions with professionals often due to a lack of equal two-way communication and concern about some aspects of institutional practice and structure. Parents who entered children into mainstream institutions after practicing home education were generally happy with their interactions with professionals although some also expressed a sense of regret that they had not been able to continue their home education programs. They explained that they respected their children’s decisions, including children’s decisions to enter mainstream institutions. In the following chapter, the views and experiences of professionals provide a different perspective to the transitions of home educated students with mainstream institutions.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis - Professionals

The professionals in this study represent educators working in a wide variety of both primary and secondary schools, and in tertiary and private tutoring capacities. While most of these professionals had limited individual experience working with home educated students, their combined involvement provides a broad backdrop against which to understand professional experiences with transitioning home educated students and their families.

6.1 The Sample

6.1.1 Criteria for Selection in Sample

Professional educators were included in the sample if they had worked with home educated students and their families during their professional careers. Professionals were sought in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of mainstream education. Locating professionals who knew they had worked with home-educated students in mainstream settings was not easy.

6.1.2 The Sample – How Professionals were Located

Many educational institutions, including personnel from the Department of Education and Training were approached by phone and twenty institutions received a letter inviting participation, but most of these institutions were not aware of home educated students in their schools or were unable to be involved with the research project. Other contacts with schools or professionals were organised through: a family; private tutor; advertisement by one organisation in 'Otherways' (Russell-Head 2002), a home education network magazine; a conference on alternative education; my personal association with a secondary school and its associated institutions; and personal acquaintance with a tertiary lecturer. DECV was included as I was aware that home educating parents often approached DECV. (Details of the professionals involved in the study are found in Appendix 2.)

6.1.3 Types of Schools Represented

In this sample, there were representatives from six primary schools represented by two different denominational Protestant primary schools, one state primary school, one alternative primary school, one Protestant K-12 school and DECV – primary. There

were four secondary schools represented by one Protestant secondary school, one Protestant K-12 school, one state secondary school, and DECV – secondary. There was also one interstate international school and one interstate private tertiary institution represented.

6.1.4 Geographic Spread

The sample of teachers in this study came mostly from areas around outer eastern and southern Melbourne. The state primary and secondary schools represented in the study were located in a country town. The DECV teachers were located at the DECV centre in an inner suburb of Melbourne. A university professor had worked with an international school and a tertiary lecturer referred to students who lived interstate.

6.1.5 Significance of this Sample to the General Professional Population

It is not possible to ensure this sample reflects either the number or types of schools or professionals with whom home educated students have interacted as the population of home educators is unknown, nor is the population of professionals who have worked with home educated students known.

6.1.6 Years of Professional Experience with Home Educated Students

This sample of professionals accumulated over 120 years of experience with seventy-one home educated students. Three professionals recalled interactions with students from seven home educating families each, three professionals worked with students from five home educating families each, three professionals worked with three home educating families each, four professionals worked with two home educating families and two professionals worked with one home educating family each. This limited professional experience with home educating families restricts generalisability of the research findings. However, as there is no currently available information of these types of transitions in Australia, these limited findings are important to our initial understanding of this phenomenon.

6.1.7 Professional Positions, Professional and Student Numbers and Gender

There were seventeen professionals involved in this research: nine females, and eight males. These included five primary school principals, who had interacted with twenty-five students. Four primary school teachers interacted with seven home educated

students. Three secondary school principals or senior administrators interacted with thirteen home educated students while one administrator chose to speak globally about home educated students. Five secondary school teachers interacted with twenty-six home educated students. The private tutor interacted with five students and the tertiary lecturer described interactions with one home educated student. Seventy-seven students were described in professional observations of which forty-six students were male, thirty were female while the gender of three was not mentioned. There was overlap with four parents and seven students also interviewed in this research. The descriptions that follow provide a picture of professional experiences with home educated students.

6.2 Professional Experiences

6.2.1 Primary School Professionals

Primary School Principals

It was very hard for her to ... perhaps integrate ... with groups because of being... at home, doing her own thing ... Academically? She did pretty well ... She wasn't behind ... it was more the social side as opposed [to] ... her academic side of things. (Abigail)

They found the school situation a novelty and to have all of these children who wanted to be their friends ... a real bonus for them ... they really enjoyed in the main the social interaction, even though the boys had their hiccups. (Phil)

Very strong academically ... But ... I thought it was really important, they maintain that social contact ... with the ... teachers ... the expertise ... [and] have an opportunity to utilize the resources here. (Russell)

The teachers found that ... unfortunately on this occasion they were well behind... academically, and this created ... some fairly ... significant problems ... for them ... to catch up, and ... socially, they were behind ... the eight ball ... because they ... just weren't used to ... giving and taking and mixing with others ... in a social environment ... particularly well. (Warren)

The five primary school principals who had worked with home educating families and their children were Abigail, Dawn, Phil, Russell and Warren. Table 6.1 provides a summary of primary school principals' comments about the abilities of the home educated students who made transitions into their institutions. Table 6.2 illustrates the types of transitions made by these students when known.

Table 6.1 Primary School Principals' Assessment of Home Educated Students Abilities

Name	Family	Academic	Socially	Other
Abigail (Alternative Primary School)	F 1	✓	× Improved over year at school – Thought difficulties managing classroom social situations – she tried to improve	
	F 2	✓✓ Did extension work of Year 7 in Year 6	✓ No real comment	
Dawn (Private Protestant School)	F-1-S-1...F	✓✓	✓	Family used DECV
	F-1-S-2...F	✓✓	✓	
	F-2 – 1...M	×	×	
	F-2-S-2...(F) 3-4 (Little comment)			
	F-3-S-Jamie F-2-S-Arianna F-2-S-Sally	× × × All three children – learning difficulties	✓ ✓ ✓	Children had test assessed learning difficulties, and learning difficulties for one child were known prior to school entrance by parents Ken and Fannie
F4 – Gabbie (S) - Liz (P)	✓✓ Academically Fine	× Socially struggled		
F5 – 1...M (Diabetic) 2...M 3...F	✓✓ Achieved highly	✓ Better than Gabbie, still needed time to adjust		
Phil (Private Protestant Primary School)	F1-S-1...M F-1-S-2...F F-1-S-3...F F-1-S-4...M	✓✓ ✓✓ ✓ ✓ Child 1 – Gifted as assessed in national test	✓× ✓ ✓ × Social problems of 2 boys more associated with family breakdown than home ed.	Family breakdown occurred after the first three children entered school. Child no. four was not educated at home during school years
	F2-S-1...F F-2-S-2...F	✓✓ ✓✓	✓✓ ✓✓	
Russell (State Primary School)	F-1-S-1...M F-1-S-2...M	✓✓ ✓✓	✓✓ ✓✓ But concerned being at home would jeopardise their social development	

Warren (Private Protestant Primary School)	F-1 – 1	✓✓	✓✓	Excellent adjustment slowly initially through part time sport events Felt that problems were due to itinerant life and domestic problems, not home ed.
	F-2-S-1...?	x	x	
	F-2-S-2...?	x	x	
	F-2-S-3...?	x	x	

Table 6.2 Student Movement of Students Known to Primary School Principals

Name	Student	Student Movement											
		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12
Abigail	F1-1	H	H	H	H	H	S	H	H				
	F2-1	S	S	S	S	S	S	H	S	S	S	H	
Dawn	F1-S-1	D	D	D	D	D	S						
	F1-S-2	D	D	D	S	S	S						
	F2-S-1	S	S	S	H	H	S						
	F2-2 – 4	?											
	F3 - Jamie	H	H	H	S								
	F3 - Arianna	H	S										
	F3 - Sally	S											
	F4 - Gabbie	H	H	H	H	H	PT	H					
	F5-S-1	H	H	H	H	H	S						
	F5-S-2	H	H	H	H	S	S						
	F5-S-3	H	S	S	S	S	S						
Phil	F1-S-1	H	H	H	H	H	S						
	F1-S-2	H	H	H	H	S	S						
	F1-S-3	H	H	S	S	S	S						
	F1-S-4	S	S	S	S	S	S						
	F2-S-1	H	H	H	S	S	S						
	F2-S-2	H	H	S	S	S	S						
Russell	F1-S-1	S	S	H	PT	PT	S	S	S				
	F1-S-2	S	H	PT	PT	S	S	S					
Warren	F-1...M	H	H	H	H	H	PT	S					
	F-2 – 1?	H	H	H	S	H	?						
	F-2 – 2?	H	H	S	H	?							
	F-2 – 3?	H	S	H	?								

Place	Code
Visitor	V
Home	H
School	S
Part Time	PT
Distance	D
TAFE	T
Traineeship	TR
University	U
Work	W

The primary school principals discussed the entrance of twenty-seven students from twelve families. Principals described how home educated children fitted into school academically and socially.

Most of the children these principals worked with fitted into school academically very well. Thirteen students were above average ability, including one gifted student, and two students who achieved good grades. There were ten students from three families who two principals thought had problems academically. All three of these families lived itinerant lifestyles. Three of these students had professionally recognised learning difficulties and the parents, included in this study, were aware of these learning difficulties prior to children attending school. One itinerant family enrolled students for only five months. The children were ‘well behind ... academically’ and had social problems indicated by a lack of understanding of how to give and take. This principal thought the problems were due more to family relationships and itinerant lifestyle but added they had missed out on the stability of formal classroom learning. Another principal described the academic and social abilities of one family of four children as an academic and social ‘disaster’ and thought the family lacked stability.

Principals found that five primary school children were very social. Nine students displayed no difficulties socially, but there were eight students who did have difficulties. One student started off well in school socially but this changed when his parents separated a few months after entering primary school, while another student struggled early but developed well over the year. The types of social problems described by principals included the inability to fit in with classmates, inability to work with peer groups and immaturity. One principal thought one home educated student’s difficulties fitting in with classmates who ‘tried to be friendly’ were exacerbated by having grown up as an only child and not being ‘taught to be a child’.

These principals generally described positive academic and social skills of the students they had worked with. Three principals described the ways some students had struggled, especially when problems were associated with family itinerancy or family dysfunction. Professionals were mostly concerned about social development. There was some recognition that schools did not provide all the answers to student needs. One principal felt it was important for children to mix with peers in school and have access to experts and school resources. He had established a multi-aged community classroom to cater for these different needs. Another principal found one family particularly difficult as the mother was described as ‘unusual,’ ‘different,’ ‘flighty,’ likely to ‘chop and change’ and had ‘issues with everything.’ She also thought the children ‘looked different’ because they had ‘home made haircuts.’ Her defining description for the

family was 'Hilly Billy.' This family left the school after five months, moved to other schools, tried more home education and requested twice more to be enrolled in this particular school. Principals occasionally experienced problems with families who demanded services outside of normal institutional expectations.

Primary School Teachers

Their level is generally lower, than that of their peers ... Reading usually tends to be a bit of a problem. And things such as pencil grip, making their writing ... easy ... one ... currently ... in year 6. And he's age 12 ... straight away he's older than the norm for year 6 ... it's ... reading comprehension, the oral presentation and probably their handwriting are obvious areas that they are usually lower on ... Maths can be higher or it can be lower. (Adele)

She (Ramona) didn't have any ... very strong weaknesses, like obvious weakness ... BUT her ... time management skills were very poor ... the standard of the work was very good, but they were just not consistent. And I think ... there were lots of other things going on ... horse riding lessons ... ballet lessons ... church ... travelling and schoolwork was done. (Bev)

Two ... bright children ... Extremely bright academically. (Gabbie) was able to cope very well with all academic subjects ... home work ... was always done. And beautifully presented, but socially she was not as adept as the rest of the class ... (John) was also quite a bright ... student. He was a boy ... able to understand things quite well, he could read quite well, ... his maths was a little down ... but his writing was a problem. (Lucy)

Adele, Bev, Lucy and Steve were the four primary school teachers who had worked with seven home educated students and their families. Two DECV teachers worked with two students, one Year 3 student and one Year 6 student. One Year 6 teacher in a private protestant school taught two students and one state school community classroom teacher taught two students. Four students went into Year 6 (two in DECV and two in the same private primary school class), one student had attended school, returned home a short time and started DECV in Year 3 and two others were in a community class of about mid primary school level. Table 6.3 provides a summary of primary school teachers' comments about the abilities of the home educated students who made transitions into their institutions. Table 6.4 illustrates the types of transitions made by these students when known.

All teachers commented on student academic ability and two teachers referred to the social interactions of two children. The state school primary teacher did not provide any specific information about the abilities of his two students and spoke more

generally about his overall impressions. Four students were assessed as ‘above the norm’ including two described as ‘extremely bright’ and one as ‘quite bright.’ This student, however, was also assessed as not at the top of his class in maths and having ‘scant’ writing skills and poor presentation. The three female students achieved highly, presenting work ‘beautifully’. One student was assessed with learning problems. He was older than the norm for his Year level, had lower than expected reading and comprehension levels, problems with ‘pencil grip’ and writing because of a poor ‘vocabulary within the writing words.’ In spite of these problems, his teacher recognised that his ‘general environmental awareness was above par’ and he had the ability to ‘state his opinions quite well ... [and make] a good strong point’ verbally.

DECV teachers were uncomfortable assessing social development but one teacher did note that her Year 3 student was involved in her community. The one student reported as having social difficulties mixing with other students was Gabbie, an only child. Her principal and class teacher thought this was probably due to spending too much time with adults.

Table 6.3 Primary School Teachers’ Assessment of Home Educated Student Abilities

Name	Family	Academic	Socially	Other
Adele (DECV)	S-1 – 1 - 12yr old (Yr 6)...M	× *Reading lower *Pencil Grip – problem *Writing – trouble putting ideas down *Math – on par *Environmental awareness – above par *Verbally stated opinions clearly	N/A	
	S-2 – 1 (Yr 6)...F	✓✓ *Above norm *Very thorough	N/A	Child had ADHD and environmental and food allergies
Bev (DECV)	S-1 – 1 (Yr 3)...F (Ramona)	✓✓ *‘Extremely bright’ *Couldn’t determine motor skills as used computer *No strong weaknesses	✓ Appeared to be involved in community including horse riding, ballet, church, travelling	Problem with time management

Lucy (Private Protestant School)	S-1 – 1 – Gabbie (Yr 6)...F	✓✓ *‘Extremely bright’	× Socially not adept as rest of class	
	S-2 – 1 – John (Yr 6)...M	✓✓ *‘Quite ... bright’ *Understood well *Read well *Maths a little down *Writing-a problem	✓ Had to learn his place a bit	
Steve (State Primary School)	S-1...M S-2...M	N/A	N/A	Students attended part-time and work well.

Table 6.4 Student Movement Known to Primary School Teachers

Name	Student	Student Movement											
		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12
Adele	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	D						
	F2-S1	S	S	H	H	H	D						
Bev	F1-S1	S	S	H	D	D	D	?					
	-Romana												
Lucy	F1-S1 – Gabbie	H	H	H	H	H	PT	H					
	F2-S2 – John	H	H	H	H	H	H	S					
Steve	F1-S1	?	?	PT									
	F1-S2	?	PT										

Place	Code
Visitor	V
Home	H
School	S
Part Time	PT
Distance	D
TAFE	T
Traineeship	TR
University	U
Work	W

Summary of Primary School Findings - Professional Concerns

These primary professionals were sometimes aware of family dynamics or health problems contributing to learning and social problems of these students. On the whole these professionals spoke almost exclusively about student academic and social development. Most of the children in this group appeared to have high academic abilities and good social skills. There were also a few children assessed with learning difficulties. These professionals described family itinerancy, family dysfunction and cultural difference as the cause of academic and social problems experienced by a few transitioning home educated students and only one principal thought the practice of home education contributed to some students social and academic problems.

Teacher concerns about academic weaknesses referred mostly to children’s reading and

writing abilities. One teacher found home educated students could demonstrate ‘higher ... [or] lower’ maths abilities. The two DECV teachers and one other teacher were concerned with the development of ‘pencil grip’ and ‘motor skills,’ or ‘scant’ and poorly presented written work.

Four principals and one teacher referred to their concerns about socialisation. Professional reference to poor social skills referred to student problems interacting with peers, sometimes due to doing their own thing regardless of others. The use of school compatible curriculum made it easier for students to move into one school. Two professionals indicated their negative reactions to the concept of the practice of home education. One professional recognised her student was a high achiever but thought the student had not been doing home education long enough for problems to develop. A third professional described the successful entry of all his students but wondered if parents who educated students at home had ‘different’ views of education and probably issues with mainstream education.

Professionals did not refer to the type of home education curriculum used by parents, or student learning styles, apart from one principal. They described socialisation as same age peer interactions and co-operation in social interactions within classroom situations. One principal and one teacher described how they understood students’ learnt individually and attempted to meet these needs through the development of a community classroom. One teacher sought to learn how to contextualise real world connections to learning from home educating parents. Some of these professionals held reservations about general home education practice even when the home educated students they had encountered worked and achieved well both academically and socially.

6.2.2 The Secondary School Professionals

Secondary School Principals

I suspect that p'rhaps ... the eldest one (Gary) ... may have even left it a bit late, because ... in some ways ... wanted to cut loose because he hadn't had the freedom that he got once he came to school ... [The] girl (Vicki) ... adapted really well ... has been ... in some ways ... better than the boy ... he's very clever, but ... he has wasted a bit of time. (Althea)

I can't really relate any negative experiences ... for all intents and purposes, the transition ... was very smooth. They've been happy and they've done well ... there hasn't been any major issues. But the transition has been a lot more of a challenge ... for this [one] individual ... The home schooling ... was ... not a major impact ... this child ... had other issues that were really clouding ... the situation. (Warren)

Warren was the only professional who had experienced home educated students in secondary school as a school principal. Althea, however, was the senior co-ordinator in her K-12 school and functioned as a principal at that level. Table 6.5 provides a summary of secondary school principal comments about the abilities of the home educated students who made transitions into their institutions. Table 6.6 illustrates the types of transitions made by these students when known.

Table 6.5 Secondary School Principals' Assessment of Home Educated Students Abilities

Name ✓×	Family	Academic	Socially	Other
Althea	F-1-S-1...M	✓✓	✓✓ School Captain	Family used natural learning methods, & entered together Both parents involved.
	F-1-S-2...M	✓✓	✓✓ School Captain	
	F-1-S-3...M	✓✓	✓✓ Vice School Captain	
	F-1-S-4...M	✓✓	✓✓	
	F-2-Gary...M	✓✓ Very clever, Americanised content of home curriculum not always relevant to strict VCE curriculum	✓✓ Socially 'cut loose' a bit after being at home.	Aware of the eclectic curriculum
	F-2-Vicki...F	✓✓ Adapted well in every way	✓✓	
	F-3-S-1...F	✓✓	✓✓	Boys had difficulties settling into school structures – thought a personality thing, not home education
	F-3-S-2...M	× Struggling – not working well	✓	
	F-3-S-3...M	× Struggling – not working well	✓	
	F-3-S-4...M	× Struggling – not working well	✓ Home education 'hadn't damaged them'	
Warren	S-1...M	✓✓ Smooth transition Done Well	✓✓ Happy	
	S-2...M	✓✓ Attended part-time and achieving well	✓✓	
	S-3...F	N/A	N/A	Family difficulties - not home education

Table 6.6 Student Movement Known to Secondary School Principals

Name	Student	Student Movement											
		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12
Althea	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S
	F1-S2	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S
	F1-S3	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
	F1-S4	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S			
	F2-Gary	?	?	?	?	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S
	F2-Vicki	?	?	?	?	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S
	F3-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S
	F3-S2	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S
	F3-S3	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Warren	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S
	F2-S2	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S
	F3-S3	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	S	?			

Place	Code
Visitor	V
Home	H
School	S
Part Time	PT
Distance	D
TAFE	T
Traineeship	TR
University	U
Work	W

The two secondary school administrators discussed the entrance into mainstream secondary schools of thirteen students from six families. Two families entered children as family groups into secondary school. Three students entered at Year 11 and three students entered in Year 7 and one in Year 8. Two students came in with older siblings. Both administrators had some idea how long children had been home educated and one had some understanding of home curriculum used.

Most children achieved at a high level academically and appeared to have no problems socially. These administrators recognised that other factors contributed to the way students settled into school such as family circumstances and personality. Students who had prior social connections to the school community adjusted easily. These professionals observed that parents appeared to seek expert knowledge when sending children to secondary school. One student appeared to ‘cut loose’ because he had greater freedom at school than at home.

Secondary School Teachers

If the child isn't coping with main stream schooling, then I think that's the right time, for them to have the break ... She just wasn't coping with the high school ... mum wisely pulled her out and was home schooling her and then got the help in year 11 from us

here. (Adele)

A boy ... And [mum was] ... at wits end as to what to do with him 'cause he wasn't writing ... reading ... [or] doing his maths very well ... I suggested ... he go through a whole lot of tests for hearing and vision and it actually turned out that he was dyslexic. (Adele)

Adele, Kathy, Leon, Nick and Tony worked as secondary school teachers and engaged with home educated students and their families. Table 6.7 provides a summary of secondary school teachers' comments about the abilities of the home educated students who made transitions into their institutions. Table 6.8 illustrates the types of transitions made by these students when known.

Table 6.7 Secondary School Teachers' Assessment of Home Educated Students Abilities

Name ✓×	Family	Academic	Socially	Other
Adele	F-1-S-1...F	✓✓	✓	Family movement into DECV Student very demanding but easy to discuss things with
	F-2-S-1...F	✓✓	✓	Student very demanding, but easy to discuss things with
	F-3-S-1...M	×✓ Diagnosed after entering DECV with dyslexia – 'improved dramatically' once diagnosed	N/A	Family movement – middle child
	F-1-S-1...F	✓ Average ability, very conscientious	N/A	
	F-1-S-1...F	× Parent's rejected parts of DECV work on religious grounds, Adele thought this contributed to below normal level of achievement	× Felt that this girl had problems socialising with others at DECV seminars and that this religious group were 'very cliquey'	

Kathy	F-1-S-1...F	✓✓	×✓ Not strong socially initially but became strong	The older the children became, the more they attended school – felt missing something
	F-1-S-2...M	✓✓	×✓ Not strong socially initially but became strong	The younger student regularly consulted with Yr 11 & 12 Physics and Chemistry teachers when in Year 7 about his work at home
	F-2-S-1...F	N/A	N/A	Part-time student because of dramatic pursuits
	F-3-S-1...F	✓✓ Attended tutor for specialist classes	× No time for social opportunities	Felt parent pushed child in unhealthy ways
	F-4-S-1...M	N/A	× Bullied and humiliated at school so did home education	Father removed child after social problems from bullying at school
Leon	F-1-S-1...M	✓ Enthusiastic and 'ideal' student. Had problems with spelling as spelt phonetically	✓ Initially not good in classroom socialisation but 'making great strides socially'	Student did not understand classroom rules. Felt boy's academic progress blocked by his mother
	F-2-S-1...M	✓✓ Fitted in 'very well' academically although started with atrocious spelling	✓✓ Fitted in 'very well' socially although quiet	Student attended PT, completed VCE and entered university in career of choice
	F-3-S-1...M John	✓✓ 'doing really well'	✓✓ Very social, enthusiastic, keen, polite, full of life	Felt John was enthusiastic and polite student, friendly with everyone across the school. Stayed in touch with family when John went home from phobia.
	F-4-S-1...F Gabbie	✓✓ 'worked hard ... work was tops'	✓ Did not notice close friendships with others but found her enthusiastic, keen, polite and 'very friendly' with adults. Thought maybe a little socially naïve with peers	
	F-5-S-1...M Rory	✓	✓	Both boys did not like work. No problems academically or socially
	F-5-S-2...M Brant	✓	✓	

	F-6-S-1...M Cheryl's 2nd son	✓ Worked own pace and direction	✓ Loner with own opinions	Thought student 'more homed than schooled.' Unaware student had received only 1¼ years at home.
Nick	F1-S-1...F	✓✓ 'outstanding actually...produced brilliant work'	N/A	An outstanding student in a difficult subject
	F2-S-1...M	✓	N/A	'quite well'
	F3-S-1...M	✓✓ 'Extremely well'	N/A	
	F-4-S-1...M	✓✓ Won prizes consistently while with DECV in languages	N/A	Student had unsatisfactory experience in early years of primary school. High achiever in DECV
	F-5-S-1...F	× Student did not submit work	N/A	Nick was aware that this student had been very successful in her chosen area of expertise. Was also aware family also used a USA curriculum successfully for an older child. DECV did not work for this student
	F-6-S-1...M	× Student appeared 'disengaged'	N/A	Thought student started DECV because his mother wanted him to. He did not stay and complete work
	F-7-S-1...F	✓✓ 'above average'	✓	Student known to have dropped out of primary school at some stage. Had achieved well through university
	F-8-S-1...M	✓✓ Achieved well but found DECV 'just got in the way of their education'	N/A	Student had completed a bridging course to university and completed studies at a top Melbourne university.

Tony	F-1-S-1...M	✓ Thought would benefit student if family had 'clearer learning outcomes'	✓	Student did not seem to have difficulties academically and Tony did not mind student's lack of awareness of classroom culture but felt a community classroom helped the student bridge the differences between home education and mainstream.
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Table 6.8 Student Movement Known to Secondary School Teachers

Name	Student	Student Movement											
		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12
Adele	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	D
	F2-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	D
	F3-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	D					
	F4-S1	S	S	S	S	H	H	D	D	H			
	F5-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	D					
Kathy	F1-S1	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	F1-S2	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	F2-S1	?	?	?	?	?	?	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	F3-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
	F4-S1	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Leon	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	?				
	F2-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	F3-S1 ...	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S
	John F4-S1 ...	H	H	H	H	H	S	H	S	S	S	S	S
	Gabbie F5-S1							S	S	S	S	S	S
	Rory F5-S2												
	Brant F6-S1 (Cheryl's 2nd son)	H	S	S	H	S	S	S					
Nick	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	D
	F2-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	AYCE	AYCE
	F3-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	D
	F4-S1	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	D	D	D
	F5-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	H	H	H
	F6-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	?
	F7-S1	S	S	S?	H?	H?	H	H	H	D	D	D	D
	F8-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	D	H	H	H	H	H
Tony	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	PT					

Place	Code	Distance	D
Visitor	V	TAFE	T
Home	H	Traineeship	TR
School	S	University	U
Part Time	PT	Work	W

The secondary school teachers discussed the academic and social abilities of twenty-six students, representing nineteen males and seven females who entered secondary school

from home education. The academic outcomes of two students were not mentioned. Academic abilities of students were revealed through teacher descriptions of student abilities. Teachers identified thirteen of these students as high or very high academic achievers, seven achieved good average grades and four students had difficulties. The four students with academic difficulties used DECV. The suggested reasons for student difficulties were learning disabilities, parent objection to curriculum content, career or sporting pursuits, and lack of student motivation to learn as parent directed.

Discussion of socialisation was limited in this group because DECV teachers found it difficult to assess social skills. Out of sixteen students, professionals thought two adjusted really well, eleven adjusted well and three students had problems socially. Professionals identified social problems arising from membership in an exclusive religious group, cliques, pushing/domineering parent, little contact with peers, and primary school bullying. One professional observed that two students with weak social skills improved over time in school while another thought home educated students demonstrated mixed abilities. One professional thought one student demonstrated good social skills, especially with adults after two earlier primary professionals had assessed her as having social problems with peers probably due to too much time with adults. Overall, these professionals described home educated students with generally good social skills. Professionals recognised that the social difficulties of a few students were generally not the result of home education practices.

One of the difficulties faced by these professionals was that most did not know the students prior or later histories. This was particularly true about student learning peculiarities, home curriculum used and outcomes of student educational pathways. In one instance, a professional identified a student as more 'homed, rather than home schooled.' On further investigation, it was discovered the student, then in mid secondary school, had only been home educated for two periods of time totalling no more than one and a quarter years.

Three professionals described student behaviour indicating that some students were unaware of the cultural and social expectations of students in mainstream institutions. Highly motivated and achieving senior students in DECV could initially be very forward and demanding of teacher time until teachers encouraged more thoughtful contact while at the same time appreciating student enthusiasm. All these students demonstrated improvement, maturity and resilience when politely corrected. A teacher in a typical mainstream class observed one student who would 'blurt it out, just shout it out.' Another teacher in a community classroom noticed his home educated student did not understand typical classroom culture but thought this helped the other students

appreciate ‘difference’ and provided a ‘different perspective’ of learning to mainstream peers.

Access Yaralee Community Education*

One country state school (AYCE) had established a unique part-time program for students who for a variety of reasons did not attend mainstream institutions. The organiser of this program was interviewed and chose to speak globally about the program rather than specific students. She chose to maintain a particular balance of students in her program and explained that out of one hundred and twenty students, she had about one quarter home educated students, one quarter ‘school refusers,’ one quarter had health problems and the final quarter were students pursuing unique and/or elite activities that made it difficult for them to attend a mainstream institution. She thought that generally, home educated students had good academic skills and were socially well adjusted but thought they had gaps in their education. Although some parents in this study described a few children’s behaviour as verging on refusal to attend mainstream institutions, she did not classify school refusers as home educated students.

Private Tutor

The private tutor found the mother of her first home educated student was always present and controlling. She thought the other four secondary school aged home educated students worked independently unlike her mainstream students and thought they were socially well adjusted, although some were quiet students.

Tertiary Entrance from Home Education

Table 6.9 provides a summary of the tertiary lecturer’s comments about the abilities of one home educated student who made a transition into his institutions. Table 6.10 illustrates the types of transitions made by this student.

Table 6.9 Tertiary Lecturer’s Assessment of a Home Educated Student’s Abilities

Name ✓×	Family	Academic	Socially	Other
Lynden	F1-S1...F	✓✓	×	

Table 6.10 Student Movement Known to Tertiary Lecturer

Name	Student	Student Movement													
		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	U	
Lynden	F1-S1	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	U

* An pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the school.

Place	Code
Visitor	V
Home	H
School	S
Part Time	PT
Distance	D
TAFE	T
Traineeship	TR
University	U
Work	W

The one tertiary professional represented in this study had worked with a number of home educated students but only discussed his experiences with one home educated student. This student had come from an isolated farm and entered a tertiary institution after doing Year 12 at home. He felt she managed academically but socially struggled and this led to a general drop in grades in her first year. He thought the student's view of the world was limited by her parent's narrow world-view and she consequently struggled with the different social expectations, actions and world-views of her peers.

6.3 Movement of Students between Home Education and Mainstream Education

6.3.1 Student movement

Of the twenty-seven students that primary school principals worked with, six students entered mainstream in Year 6. Five of these students were not known to have attended school prior to this entrance. Two of these Year 6 families also had other children (5) enter school at the same time. Only three students in the primary school principal's student sample were known to have attended mainstream institutions prior to their home education program. Eight families, involving twenty-three students moved into mainstream as family groups. Two families moved out again within a year of attendance at primary school to return to home education and a third family left school within a year but the principal was not sure if they had returned to home education or not. One principal thought mothers generally put family groups of children into school because of maternal fatigue.

Four out of seven students known to the primary school teachers entered primary school in Year 6 and were thought to have only previously been educated at home. Two students had started in mainstream for two years, been at home and then used DECV. Three students attended primary school part-time for one year or less, and another student entered part way through a year. Three students accessed DECV for some of

their primary schooling.

In the secondary school principals' sample of thirteen students, two families moved into mainstream as family units accounting for the movement of eight students. Three students, including one student in a family group, moved into Year 11 in preparation for the VCE exam. Two students moved into Year 7. Three students had left mainstream institutions to do home education as primary school aged students before re-entering into secondary school, but both professionals who worked with these students were unaware of the exact histories or reasons why.

Secondary teachers reported the largest number of students making transitions between home and mainstream institutions. Of the twenty-six students known to secondary school teachers, nine students entered mainstream institutions or DECV in Year 7. Two students entered mainstream in Year 6 and did not spend the full year at school. Another student entered secondary school part-time in Year 8. Only four students were known to have attended mainstream institutions prior to their home education experience and had first left mainstream education during primary school. Three students attended mainstream institutions and home education twice each. Six students attended mainstream institutions part-time. Two students from the same family attended mainstream institutions part-time through primary and secondary school and appeared to do so satisfactorily as one was known to have successfully entered university. Six students entered secondary school in Year 11 and all appeared to have only used home education prior to this entrance into mainstream institutions. Professionals of at least four students were unaware of the exact history or reasons for transition movements of these students.

The total number of known student transitions for professionals referred to seventy-three students. Forty-nine students moved into mainstream institutions in their first known transition with mainstream institutions and twelve students moved out of mainstream as the first known transition. Thirteen students were known to have made at least two transitions between home and mainstream education.

6.3.2 Part-Time

So if you're constantly presenting kids with ... things that have no instinctive or intrinsic interest to them, they're going to, or they can, increasingly resist learning. Whereas if you can offer them choices, and some schools can have a totally negotiated curriculum, which would offer them choices ... but partial home schooling/partial school schooling offers that negotiation too ... collaboration works for everybody. (Kathy)

We have ... two boys ... in the class and they come ... three days a week ... they're very grounded kids ... they're with their mother, who's separated ... she feels that [she] ... would like to be involved with them ... in a more ... whole sense ... So their home schooling suits that part ... and also she'd like to have ... the advantages of ... the social aspects in the school and also the facilities that the school have that the kids might not always get access to. (Steve)

Seven professionals had students attend part-time. Five of these worked in primary schools and they thought the programs had been beneficial for all parties. Two primary professionals referred to the same student who attended three days a week in an arrangement that worked well. Another primary school principal found a student's transition had been made easier by part-time attendance to sporting events the previous year. Two other primary professionals encouraged home educating families to attend on a three day-a-week basis in a community classroom and provided access to specialist subject areas. Three secondary school teachers also had different part-time arrangements. One had a student attend for a couple of days a week and felt it worked well, encouraged mainstream students to think more openly about their learning but thought there were gaps in the student's learning. The second secondary school teacher had a student who attended for particular subjects on an ongoing basis and found the student progressed well. In the third situation, the students were encouraged to access specialist teachers and pursue advanced learning while interacting with mainstream peers and attending some regular classes. Two professionals working with part-time students thought there was a lack of 'continuity' for some students and this sometimes created problems.

6.3.3 Transition Programs

Two professionals described the programs they used to help students, including home educated students to make smoother transitions into mainstream institutions. One professional promoted the buddy system and the other professional ran orientation programs at the end of the previous year for new students entering her school.

6.4 General level of education of home educated students

Professionals were asked to make a general assessment of the level of education of home educated students. Seven professionals thought the students they had dealt with entered school with a generally high level of education. One professional thought her one home educated student entered her program at the level she expected. Three professionals thought home educated students' levels of education could vary

considerably. Two professionals thought home educated students sometimes had ‘gaps’ in their education while a third professional thought all students had ‘gaps’ but these were not important in the overall picture of a student’s education. One teacher also thought there could be differences in philosophies between home education and mainstream education revealing tensions in ‘teaching models’ and ‘benchmarking’ particularly in the case of part-time students.

6.4.1 Literacy and Numeracy Skills

I think they’re good. Absolutely. (Abigail)

It’s literacy and I can’t really comment a lot about numeracy because I don’t teach them maths, but some of them seem to me to be a bit weak in that. But ... I’ve seen kids from primary school that have not the foggiest notion ... I couldn’t single them out and say that. No. (Leon)

This is just the sort of impression that I have of children that are home schooled ... have ... skills in certain areas in greater depth than they do ... in a normal institution and so ... they can be very high fliers in one [area]. (Nick)

Where you’d expect them to be. Some are actually, above expectations as regards that age group. (Russell)

All professionals, except one primary principal, thought most students exhibited average or above average literacy and numeracy skills. However, when discussing general home educated students’ literacy and numeracy skills, six primary professionals qualified their comments indicating general attitudes not necessarily favouring home education as a satisfactory form of education. Two professionals also made comments indicating their lack of awareness of home education programs used by the students they taught and of home education practices generally. One secondary school professional noticed some students excelled in one particular area of interest, often more noticeably than mainstream peers. The average and above average literacy and numeracy skills of home educated students observed by these professionals about particular students are consistent with home education research both in Australia and overseas (Davis 2000, England 1998, Fash 1994, Harding 2003a, Holder 2001, Johnson-Silvey 1999, Luebke 1999, Marlow 1992, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995, McColl 2005, Rothermel 2004, Rudner 1999, Thomas 1998).

6.4.2 Social Abilities and Development

I met her on two occasions, she'd been fine, but ... that was only ... with adults. There was the two girls of the family ... and the mother and myself. But she seemed outgoing and... certainly in her written work, there was lots of engagement with family and other people. (Bev about Ramona)

Sort of a caring ... way with her ... Tended to wander a lot. Not join in activities, sporting activities as much. (Lucy about Gabbie)

Her worldview was rather small and therefore she had trouble with things outside that range. (Lynden)

Funnily enough ... the social skills on the whole, they were pretty good. (Marielle)

They ... most certainly enjoyed having other children around them. (Phil)

Because I saw that as the biggest deficit in what they were doing ... the aspect of working with other children, n' other adults ... those social skills are the same, so important. (Russell)

It's a big challenge and transition, to come from a home schooled environment ... to the main school ... and when they come in to a group of kids who have different values, different ways of doing things, that sometimes they're reticent to get involved, because they don't see those kids meeting values that they've learnt are important. (Tony)

The professionals in this project generally found most home educated students were socially competent, especially when given time to adjust. Overall, professionals reported forty-two students who functioned well socially. There were also sixteen DECV students who DECV teachers were reticent to assess socially. However, professionals expressed some concern for the weak social abilities of fourteen students. At least three of these students developed socially during their part-time mainstream experiences. Professionals thought family dysfunction and itinerancy had contributed to poor social behaviour in ten students. These generally positive assessments of home educated students' social abilities are consistent with both Australian and overseas home education research literature on socialisation (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Breshears 1996, Broadhurst 1999, Brosnan 1991, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2000, Clery 1998, Fash 1994, Harding 1997, 2006, Holder 2001, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Lampe 1988, Lee 1994, Maeder 1995, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998).

Initially all professionals described student social skills as the ability to get on with

peers. When asked to define socialisation, four professionals referred to student ability to socialise with peers, and one applied it to student classroom behaviour. Social development was described as the ability to get on with others, employability, make conversation, or as personal qualities such as ‘humility,’ ‘compassion,’ ‘flexibility’ and understanding ‘relationship’ even though these were recognised as ‘huge’ expectations. Four professionals found it difficult to define socialisation. Two principals explained socialisation as an awareness of one’s place in society and ability to manage this within systems of society and the ability to make decisions within respectful boundaries of society, others and personal needs.

Professionals described positive personal qualities of home educated students and thought these were sometimes missing in their mainstream peers. These qualities included depth of personality, good manners, independence, self-direction and responsibility. Two professionals described these students as ‘very grounded’ and one added that home educated students were a mix of strength and sensitivity, vulnerability and open emotions while also demonstrating resilience and the ability to ‘be themselves.’ Another professional thought it very empowering for children to realise their parents understood and provided for their needs.

Ten professionals thought socialisation was their biggest concern about home education practice. While two professionals thought the students they taught had social skills, they knew of others through colleagues who had difficulties socialising. The transition experience was described as a potentially difficult experience and one professional described it as a move between two cultures. Another professional questioned the value of the social experiences of mainstream students, particularly during school breaks.

6.4.3 Adjustment to Formal Education

The home schooling children are generally very well behaved. Very, very few behaviour problems with home school, apart from the social ones of not being able to mix. (Helen)

The parent of the child that I’ve got ... would like to know ... where their child is against benchmarks for example. And so, without having to totally institutionalise the child, it would be good for there to be easily accessible ways for home school kids to check whether they’re at. (Steve)

Six professionals indicated that all of their students had adjusted to mainstream education without difficulty. Two other professionals thought the majority of their students had adjusted well to mainstream institutions except for a few students. Family

factors were identified as the key influences contributing to poor transitions into mainstream institutions. Three professionals theorised about students benefiting from some form of transition program and thought the social dimension needed particular focus. In one school, parents often began negotiations six months in advance of transitions to ensure student academic parity to mainstream peers. Professionals thought problems adjusting to mainstream institutions were the result of family dynamics, itinerancy, curriculum differences, overly narrow world views, too much time in adult company and student personality. Two professionals found students needed time, about a term, to settle in. One professional thought his family would have liked some way of knowing how to assess the comparability of their academic levels with mainstream practices. Another observed that a few students found the adjustment a ‘struggle’ especially when the parent was made all the decisions. The overall adjustment of these home educated students into mainstream education was mostly successful, especially with time, and without noticeable problems according to these professionals. Only one professional mentioned student problems with time management when using DECV. Home educated student ease of adjustment in transitions into mainstream institutions is in keeping with overseas literature on that topic (Goymer 2001, Gray 1998, Holder 2001, Jenkins 1990, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Prue 1997). Krout (2001) found that students who had experienced social difficulties in earlier experiences in mainstream institutions sometimes experienced difficulties when re-entering mainstream institutions at a later date and the findings in this study are similar.

6.5 Practices, Views, Definitions of Professionals

Because the interviews followed guide questions as a reference for discussion only, not all professionals responded to every question asked and not all professionals addressed all interview topics. The summary and analysis below provides details of the responses received to these topics.

6.5.1 Education

Education is ... love of learning ... developing skills ... make one's live ... better ... in all areas ... it is a total process, so therefore I would not ... be an advocate of home schooling, totally removed from our environ[ment] ... where there's no mixing and socialising with other children, 'cause I would see education as a total thing ... developing skills to ... prepare themselves ... for their whole life, to making ... their life richer, fuller. It's not easy. (Bev)

Most professionals saw ‘education’ as a process of which school or formal education

was only a part. Some professionals felt quite challenged when asked to provide a definition or description of education. Education was described as a process, journey, lifelong pathway, encompassing the ‘whole’ person and enabling one to reach their full potential, and providing tools and skills necessary for unknown futures. One professional, with connections to home educators, thought the ‘joy of learning’ was often removed through the process of mainstream education but opened to home educators. He also observed that some home educating parents seemed to ‘simulate a 1940’s rural school.’ One professional described education as the ‘love of learning,’ ‘lifelong learning’ and a ‘total process,’ but added that home education could not provide these qualities because it was ‘totally removed from our environment.’ Two professionals indicated that one could experience the ‘joy of learning’ outside of mainstream education.

6.5.2 Curriculum

[I feel] straight jacketed ... by the tyranny of the curriculum. (Leon)

My view ... of curriculum guidelines are ... they’re there for the guidance of wise people and blind adherence of fools. (Russell)

I don’t have a lot of information about their curriculum except that I know ... they have a broad curriculum. (Steve)

I found that the students ... came with a very sound ... knowledge base and also with a very good attitude towards learning. Wanted to please, appeared to ... work hard and were ... mature and conscientious in their approach to learning. (Warren)

Six professionals indicated their students had been well prepared academically for mainstream institutions. Three professionals, from both primary and secondary schools thought students had ‘gaps’ in their learning compared to mainstream peers, while a fourth professional argued that we all have gaps. Two professionals thought students best made the transition when home curriculum was similar to school curriculum such as DECV programs. Two also referred to some home curriculum that was ‘foot loose ... and fancy free’ as a contributing factor to students having difficulties adjusting to mainstream institutions. It was clear from discussions that many professionals were unaware of curriculum used by home educators and one primary school professional found it incomprehensible that any parent could successfully educate children at home. There were also differences between professionals about the value of school curriculum to mainstream institutional students. Three thought their programs allowed appropriate individualisation of curriculum, while four others bemoaned the restrictions and lack of

creativity and limited ability of mainstream curriculum to deal with individual needs. Two professionals thought home education allowed appropriate freedom in curriculum to encourage individual interests and were keen to learn ideas for more life embedded curriculum suggestions. There was a sense of frustration and disempowerment experienced by these professionals because of the restrictions created by the centralising and impersonal qualities of institutionally designed curricula.

6.5.3 Learning Styles

I'm really keen ... I'm very aware ... that learning is quite complex, and just because we've been doing things the same [way] for 50 years doesn't necessarily mean it's the best way, but ... the more we find out about the human brain, the more we realize it's really complex ... we have to keep ... exploring ways of engaging kids better. Because we have failed certain groups of kids in the past ... really failed a lot of kids in [mathematics], by ... the way we've approached them ... we[re] always looking at rejigging the structures we put in the school ... we just don't ... go plonking all the 9 year olds in the grade, calling them grade 3 because [they] happen to be age 9. Now we would rather look at the group and say, 'Look, let's see them as a group of 40 or 50 children and ... group them according to their needs and ... take into account the academic, the emotional, and intelli[gence] ... social aspects as well as friendship groups and, (big sigh) and also parents' requests and teachers' requests, and so forth. (Russell)

There were a wide range of professional responses to questions about student learning styles. Twelve professionals agreed students learn in different ways. Seven of these professionals explained it was their responsibility to cater for these different learning styles by providing a variety of learning situations. Four professionals thought learning styles were not an issue in their programs because they provided 'hands on' learning, treated children uniquely, catered for different learning styles, or provided specialist programs through expert teachers. Three other professionals planned curriculum around Gardiner's (2005) multiple intelligences with other dimensions added: 'spirituality, philosophy, ecology, social justice and community' set 'in social contexts.' Four professionals with both primary and secondary school experience recognised the ability of home education to cater more effectively for individual learning styles than mainstream institutions. Two primary professionals indicated their home educated students had no difficulties working in group learning situations because they were very well behaved. One DECV professional thought the usefulness of DECV to students with different learning styles was that it catered well for students with good writing skills who needed 'face to face' instruction as opposed to the 'herd situation' of classrooms. It was less suitable for students who were not good writers and who learnt better in practical situations.

While some professionals thought learning styles were either a non-issue or were adequately catered for within mainstream education, other professionals willingly admitted that home education better provided for individual learning styles than mainstream institutions. It was evident that some professionals – principals and teachers – felt disempowered by their inability to adequately cater for all student learning styles because of the restrictions they experienced working in mainstream institutions.

6.5.4 Home and School Links

Between school and home school community ... I think it's vital ... I don't think there's enough of it. And we should be actively saying, 'what can we do to help you?' And sit down and ... a focus group. Get some home school parents along ... do you see us as the enemy? 'Cause so often teachers see the home schoolers as the enemy - the parents ... So communication. Absolutely vital. (Leon)

It's important to respect the fact that the parents know a great deal about the temperament of the child, their learning styles, where they're at academically. I think all of those things are crucial for a school to listen to and to take on board. (Warren)

Twelve professionals considered communication between their institutions and parents in general as a key part of their role as educators. Seven professionals explained it was their responsibility to find ways to include parents in their programs. Professionals communicated with parents through direct contact as situations arose, invitations to school events, when planning of curriculum, and recognition that parents, especially home educating parents, had specific knowledge of student temperaments, learning styles and academic levels. Typical communication included school newsletters, parent/teacher nights and informal discussions. Four professionals valued the willingness of home educating parents to engage in discussions and be involved in school programs. One professional wanted greater formal and informal contact with parents, in general, but felt the restrictions of mainstream institutional structures limited immediate communication opportunities. This professional also felt some teachers had an attitude of 'us' versus 'them' towards home educating parents.

Generally, these professionals demonstrated respect and inclusiveness for the contributions and involvement of parents. Home educating families appeared, from these comments, to be valued for their contribution to the school either generally or specifically. However, some schools appeared to have sought their input more pro-actively than others.

6.5.5 Differing Levels of Ability

I'd say $\frac{3}{4}$ s of the home schooled kids are [gifted]? (Helen)

That's always a challenge because ... they aren't the same ... and there were diverse differences. (Phil)

You're going to have a range of ... abilities ... it shouldn't be an issue ... any good school should recognise that when a group of kids come in, regardless of if they're all the same age, they've got a range of abilities. (Russell)

The majority of teachers recognised that all students, including home educated students, had varying levels of ability. Many professionals acknowledged their responsibility to cater for these differences. There were differences of opinion about how to provide for advanced or gifted students. Two professionals noted that many home educated students were academically advanced on entrance into mainstream institutions. One professional thought it was important schools allow and encourage some students to work ahead of their age levels and part-time schooling had been a worthwhile way for gifted students to achieve this outcome gracefully at her school. A couple of institutions were able to allow students to work at different levels because of flexible structures, while a few others resisted grade skipping because they felt it was more important for students to remain with similar aged peers. There were variations in the way professionals classified student resistance to school. One professional classified school refusers in a different category to home educated students. Professionals also expressed concern that a few home educating parents and students sometimes had unrealistic career expectations not matched to student output. Professionals generally recognised the need to cater for students' different ability levels but there were obvious variations in the ways they assessed and catered for these differences.

6.5.6 Time Frames

It's 'little boxes made of ticky-tacky just the same'. 'Little boxes', you know the song? ... Look ... at the classroom, it's rectangular. What's the shape of a box? Rectangular. What's the shape the desk? Rectangular. What's the shape of my space on the desk? Rectangular ... What's the shape of your locker? Rectangular. We're forced into rectangular boxes. And we all lock step, and our legs are all tied together so now we turn, yeah. (Leon in frustration about students achieving time frames)

The majority of professionals viewed time frames for learning as a guide but recognised not all individuals fitted within these frames. Seven professionals referred to the individuality of learners and recognised 'their needs can vary widely'. One primary

school professional thought it was ‘ridiculous’ to attempt to teach children work for which they were not ready. Another secondary school professional challenged the authorship of time frames, ‘bench marks’ or the concept of attempting to educate students ‘in batches.’ Only two primary professionals used time frames as part of normal teaching procedure.

Time frames were seen as a broad guide but one professional admitted this was one area where mainstream education had a little flexibility but nowhere near enough for the diverse needs of individual students. Professionals acknowledged there was little they could do in mainstream to adequately provide for the wide variation in student ability. A sense of disempowerment was evident in professional comments when discussing time frames and variations in student abilities because of the rigidity and restrictions set by institutional education.

6.5.7 Self-Concepts

I think they see themselves as something quite different ... I can only think of this one family, I would say possibly ... special, because I've been home schooled. (Bev)

I'm really positive about home schooling ... I really, think that it's valuable when its home schooling ... he was outwardly the ideal kid that you want in the school ... he was enthusiastic, he was keen, he wanted to learn, but the problems came because... he hadn't been given any structure ... He would just blurt it out, just shout out, when they were doing some writing or something ... he found it really hard to cope with the idea that there are others ... in the class as well. So he'd missed out on some socialization stuff. (Leon)

Well, as far as I'm aware, it's quite healthy. (Nick)

They're very calm, they're very quiet ... they've got some ... really nice aspects ... to ... their nature but ... I'd still like to see that kind of tested with others ... with kids their own age. Having their peers around them ... and sort of, instead of adults, largely, then ... it would be good, I think it's a good thing ... They were very grounded kids, a lot of the time. (Steve)

I think they're very strong and they're also very sensitive. (Tony)

All professionals who addressed the topic of student self-esteem or self-image thought it was important for all students to have a healthy self-esteem or self-image but student self-perceptions varied. Seven professionals referred specifically to home educated students' self-image. Four thought these students exhibited healthy self-esteem and three wondered if these students could exhibit unhealthily high self-esteem. One of

these professionals thought two home educated students had unrealistic expectations of career opportunities not matched by academic output. The other two professionals thought home educated students could appear to think they were ‘special’ or ‘the only person that matters.’ One also needs to add the positive comments of most professionals who described these students as grounded, positive and independent students. These findings are similar to findings on home educated students’ self-esteem reported in earlier Australian and overseas literature (Brosnan 1991, Hill 1995, Holder 2001, Krivanek 1988, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Lee 1994, Sheffer 1995, Taylor 1986, Taylor 2001, Thomas 1998).

Professional understandings of factors contributing to healthy self-esteem varied and included home, school and peers, resilience, a strong belief system encouraging rational decision making, social and sport activities and a child’s individuality. Self-esteem could improve with greater knowledge because this contributed to more informed decision-making. Two professionals thought student self-image should not be restricted to either home or school. They also thought neither institutions nor fundamentally religious homes should cause children to become ‘anxious’ or be made to feel restricted. They saw a need for these types of concerns to be more publicly debated and that the Department of Education and Training would probably be interested in home educator and school partnerships:

because they’re anxious about some kids being ... fundamentalistly brought up in disturbed ... homes that aren’t accountable. (Tony)

Two professionals had witnessed the long lasting negative impact of mainstream peer comments, including one-off comments, on student self-images. Four administrative professionals had implemented programs to improve general student self-esteem.

6.6 Professional Reservations

I think they’re good. Absolutely ... you need the back up and you need the resources to be able ... to help a child with it. (Abigail)

That was just one child ... but I’m not sure how long she’d been home schooling ... I would say that she’d probably ... only been home schooling a matter of six months. It was not something that had been going on ... my understanding is that she’d only been home schooling for a short time. (Bev)

In Australian transition literature, research (Dockett and Perry 2003, Gill, Winters & Friedman 2006) indicated many professionals found it difficult to communicate and

collaborate with parents as equal partners in the education of mainstream students. The overseas home education research literature also found that professionals held reservations about the efficacy of home education in general, although their particular experiences with home educated students had been positive (Davis 2000, Luebke 1999, Marlow 1992, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995). In this study, comments made by a small number of primary school professionals indicated professional hesitancy to accept home education as a viable educational practice or which raised questions about the societal authenticity of parent reasons for choosing home education. Most comments were mild. A couple of professionals passed positive comments about high home educated student performance but then qualified their comments. Two professionals described families' appearances as 'different' or 'hilly billy'. One professional explained how one advanced learner student had only been home educated for a short period meaning there had been insufficient time at home for any damage to her learning opportunities to occur. Another professional explained that while her students had been bright, she knew other teachers who had experienced working with home educated students with problems. An undertone of caution, reticence and lack of acceptance towards home education practice and practitioners was apparent in the views expressed by a few professionals. When particular families were contacted after professional interviews, it became clear that two professionals had made inaccurate assumptions about the practices, outcomes and/or reasons for home education in those particular families.

6.7 Evaluation of Experiences with Home Educated Students and their Parents

I think it's been excellent. I couldn't complain about it, with any of these people. They've been wonderful. (Althea)

Overall, did not see home schooling a positive thing! Not overly (Dawn)

The only thing is ... probably it needs some formalization. It hasn't got any formalization at the moment, and be accepted as a way to go. And then maybe ... some assistance put in to assist the home schoolers. (Helen)

It was great. I wish I had more experience. (Kathy)

I've always thought ... and this might be a bit right out left ... people who home school children, really have a complex about our current school situation. I'm not quite sure of the reason, whether it's because ... a poor experience they've had themselves ... ? (Phil)

For the children ... there [are] some issues, I think ... that need to be worked through ... it's been good, it's been a positive. So far, it's ... been positive ... and I'd like to know more about ... that interaction ... I'm not opposed to it. (Steve)

My summary is that it would be very positive. (Warren)

Eleven professionals summed up their experiences working with home educated students as positive ones. Five were particularly positive about their overall interactions with home educated students and their families. One primary professional prefaced her positive comments working with two students she had earlier evaluated as above average students with: 'Well, it wasn't a failure.' Another thought home education was not something everyone could or should do as he thought parents needed to be prepared and committed. A third professional thought she had limited experience with home educated students but would like to work with home educated students at her school in the future. Three professionals expressed their reservations about some aspects of home education from their personal experiences and observations. In particular, they thought some home educated students had 'social' problems when they entered mainstream education.

Professionals made other concluding comments. Two primary school professionals wondered about parent motivation to home educate and then later to enter students into mainstream institutions although one thought re-entry was due to maternal fatigue. Two secondary school professionals thought it important to provide good communication and clear guidelines for effective transition. Another secondary professional knew of two students who had meandered in and out of mainstream institutions on a number of times and successfully entered university without their VCE.

The experiences these professionals had with home educators varied from generally excellent and positive interactions to a few that were less than positive for the professionals, students and home educating families involved. Key concerns professionals had for home educated students were their academic levels and social abilities. Most professionals found students were usually well established academically unless there were learning disabilities or contributing family factors. The majority of students also exhibited healthy social abilities. A few professionals were concerned about students receiving good academic foundations but most professionals expressed greatest concern for the social development of home educated students. This view was held even though the majority of students with whom they had worked appeared to have had no social problems entering mainstream institutions.

Few professionals commented on whether these students had developed healthy

self-concepts or not. Many of these professionals recognised the various restrictions mainstream education placed on their ability to provide adequately for the variety of individual student needs. They expressed a feeling of disempowerment about their own abilities to meet these needs in mainstream institutions. Tensions became obvious between their personal experiences and their understandings and attitudes towards home education in general. Most professionals knew little about the programs parents used, the prior histories or the typical outcomes of students who had been home educated and how students might view their experiences. There was also little professional understanding of the reasons parents moved children into and out of mainstream institutions. A few of these professionals indicated they thought home educators were 'different' to the typical members of society with whom they worked.

6.8 Conclusion

In summing up, the majority of professional opinion found that the home educated students with whom they had personal experience adjusted well to the transition into mainstream institutions both academically and socially although some needed a little time to settle in. This chapter has found that professionals were primarily concerned with the academic and social adjustment of their students. While generally interested in the healthy development of student self concepts, professionals did not specifically assess student self worth or comment on the impact of institutional structures on family life. Neither did they indicate they understood how home education worked. In the next chapter, the transition experiences of home educated students are examined.

Chapter 7: Data Analysis Students - 1

The data and findings from student interviews are divided into two chapters. In this chapter, a brief overview is given of student experiences in both home education and mainstream institutions. The process of transitions between the two educational systems is explored in more detail and sets the backdrop for the themes that emerged from the data and which are discussed in Chapter 8.

7.1 Students

The forty home educated students interviewed in this study representing a wide range of ages, had interacted with different levels and types of mainstream education. They came from across the state of Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne, and were found through a variety of means for the interviews. The mainstream institutions these students had interacted with included primary schools (state and private), secondary schools (state and private), TAFEs and universities. The type of home education curriculum used by these students divided into the three basic types of curricula known to be used by Australian home educators – structured, eclectic and natural/unstructured curriculum (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Thomas 1998). (Details of the students involved in this study are found in Appendix 3.)

7.1.1 Gender

There were twelve female and twenty-eight male students in this participant group. Because the sample was found through snow-balling procedures, the gender imbalance of the study was not controlled. The reason for such a strong gender imbalance may be a feature of the learning needs of boys in mainstream institutions who frequently have more learning difficulties than girls (Irwin 2006). However, this gender aspect of home educated student transition was not a primary focus of this study and would need to be researched in a larger quantitative study before such a claim could be substantiated.

7.1.2 Age Range

Students ranged in age from five years to twenty-seven years of age. In the age range of five to ten years, there were fourteen students. Several of these younger students did not contribute significantly to the interviews but their comments were treated as important. In the age range of eleven to fourteen year olds, there were eight students. In the age range of fifteen to eighteen year olds, there were nine students. (Because the age of

eighteen and the legal age of adulthood is generally achieved in Year 12 this age group has been included in the senior years of school.) There were seven young adults over eighteen years of age.

7.1.3 Academic Ability

While there was no specific question asking students to reveal their academic abilities, it was possible from the responses given by students, professionals and parents to determine their general academic abilities. These students fell into four recognisable categories which were: gifted learners, advanced learners, students with average and good learning abilities, and students with learning disadvantages and/or disabilities. Gifted learners included those students who achieved well above the academic level of their classmates as indicated by professional testing or placement in special classes several years above their age level or early entry into university. In this study there were four gifted learners including one student with Aspergers. There were sixteen advanced learners who easily achieved A+ grades in their year levels. There were seven students with average learning abilities. Thirteen students who struggled to gain average grades and often had professionally recognised learning difficulties such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia or health issues were identified as students with learning disadvantages. Health issues for five students included ADHD due to food allergies, chronic fatigue (two students), and epilepsy associated with food intolerances.

7.1.4 The Students

The students were divided into age groups to clarify student movement at different levels and identify student groups. There were four age categories: five to ten year olds, eleven to fourteen year olds, fifteen to eighteen year olds and young adults. A few students were included in different age categories to keep them in their family group because they made transitions as family groups (see Appendix 6). Student movements into and out of mainstream institutions are illustrated in Tables 7.1 to 7.4.

7.1.5 Transition Experience and Time of Interview

Because of the difficulties locating home educated students who had made transitions with mainstream education, students' transition experiences were not generally immediate to the time of interview and this may have contributed to the ways in which these experiences were remembered and reported. However, these students' views were important to this exploratory research providing an overall picture of student transition experiences and impressions to guide future research in the area (Kvale 1996).

7.1.6 Interaction Patterns with Mainstream Education

When this project began, it was thought student movements might indicate patterns of entry into and out of mainstream education. However, this sample of students has not revealed 'typical' or expected patterns of movement. The exception to this was that all eleven students, who started in mainstream institutions and left mainstream education for the first time, left in early to mid primary school. It was difficult to pick other 'typical' entrance or exit points for these students although there was some evidence that students entered senior secondary school in Year 11 (four students) in order to gain the VCE and TER (Tertiary Entrance Ranking) for university entrance. There was also evidence that some students entered mainstream institutions either in Year 6 of primary school (three students) or the first two years of secondary school (three students).

Movement into or out of mainstream institutions occurred both in family groups and as individuals independently to the movement of other family members. Three families entered mainstream education for the first time as family groups and the reason given was maternal fatigue. Ten families initially exited mainstream institutions as family groups and reasons given included inadequate provision for gifted students, social problems, lack of family time, learning difficulties and health problems. Students from ten families moved independently to other family members into and out of mainstream education.

7.1.7 Mainstream Institutions Attended by Students

Mainstream institutions entered by students included primary schools, secondary schools, TAFEs and universities. Eighteen students only entered primary school. Four students only entered secondary school, and two students only entered TAFE. Seven students entered both primary and secondary schools; two students entered primary school and TAFE and one student entered primary school and university. Two students entered secondary school and TAFE. Three students entered primary school, secondary school and TAFE while one student entered primary school, TAFE and university. Another feature of these students' movements was their multiple entrances and exits of various mainstream institutions.

7.1.8 Geographical Location of Students

The majority (twenty-four) of students came from areas outside metropolitan Melbourne and included four students from towns within an hour's drive of Melbourne, six students near a rural city; three of whom lived in a satellite suburb and three of whom lived on a rural property out of the city. One student lived in a small country town, and thirteen

Table 7.1 Student Movement 8-10 year olds

TABLES OF STUDENT MOVEMENT

Five to Ten Year Olds: Brock; Jamie, Ariana and Sally; Julian, Jeff, Adrian and Alex; Luke and Lily; Sam, Brad and Carl; Stuart, Latisha and Shana; and Troy and Aiden.

Name	Age/Year Level	Curriculum	Movement Between Home and Primary School													
			PREP		Year 1	Year 2		Year 3	Year 4		Year 5	Year 6				
F-1 - Brock	10	Eclectic	PT	S	PT	H	PT	H	PT	H	PT	S				
F-2 - Jamie	10	ACA	H	H	H	H	S									
Ariana	7	ACA	H	H	H											
Sally	6	ACA	H	S												
F-3 – Julian	12	ACA/Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	S							
Jeff	10	ACA/Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	S								
Adrian	8	ACA/Eclectic	H	H	H	S	S									
F-4 – Luke	10	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S								
Lily	8	Eclectic	S	S	S	H										
F-5 – Sam	10	Natural	S	S	S	S	S	S								
Brad	8	Natural	S	S	S	H	H									
Carl	6	Natural	V	H	H											
F-7 – Stuart	13	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	H
Latisha	10	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	H	H	S	H	H		
Shana	8	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	S	H	H	H	S	H	H			
F-8 - Troy	8	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	H						
Aiden	6	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	H	H								

Place	Code
Visitor	V
Home	H
School	S
Alternative	AltS
Part Time	PT
Distance	D

TAFE	T
Traineeship	TR
University	U
Work	W

Tables 7.2, 7.3 & 7.4 Student Movement

Eleven to Fourteen Year Olds: David; Gabbie; John; Mike; and Ramona.

Name	Age/Year Level	Curriculum	Movement Between Home And School											
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9			
David	14	ACA/Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S			
Gabbie	14 & 15	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	PT	H	S	S	PT
John	14	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	H	S	
Mike	15	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	H
Ramona	12	DECV/Eclectic	S	S	S	S	H	D	D	D	D	H		

Fifteen to Eighteen Year Olds: Arden, Alysia, Fifi; Gary and Vicki; Robert; Rory and Brant; and Zara.

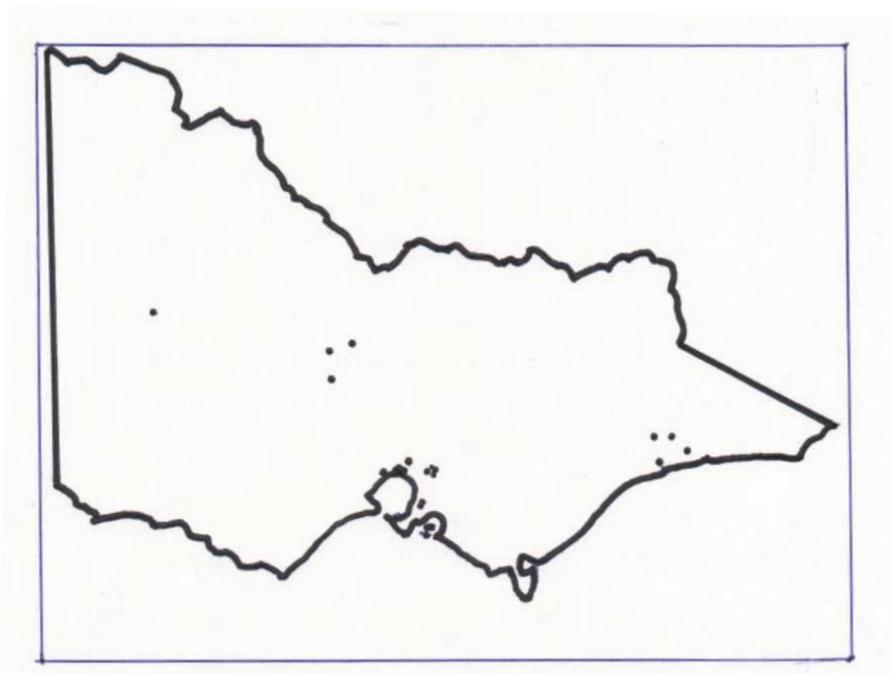
Name	Age/Year Level	Curriculum	Movement Between Home and School												
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	
Arden	17	Natural/Eclectic	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	
Alysia	16	ACA	H	H	H	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		
Fifi	16	DECV/Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	D	D	H	H	H	PT	PT	T
Gary	18	Eclectic	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S
Vicki	17	Eclectic	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S
Robert	17	ACA	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Rory	17	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	H	S
Brant	15	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S		
Zara	15	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	

Young Adults: Duane and Justin; Jarratt, Danar and Tarun; Kieran; Lana; and Mitchell.

Name	Age/Year Level	Curriculum	Movement Between Home and Mainstream															
			Yr1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11	Yr 12	Trainee-ship	TAFE	Uni	
Duane	21	ACA	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	T	S	S			
Justin	19	ACA	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	T	T	T				
Jarratt	21	Natural	H	H	S	H	H	H	H	T	T	T	U	U				
Danar	19	Natural	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	TR	TR	TR					
Tarun	14	Natural	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	T							
Kieran	24	ACA	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	W	W		T		
Lana	19	DECV	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S		T		
Mitchell	27	Eclectic	H	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H				U

students lived on varying sized properties in the outer Victorian countryside. Only two families involving three students gave distance from mainstream institutions as a reason for using home education.

Sixteen students came from within the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne. Two students lived in an inner suburb, one student lived in an inner-middle suburb, six students lived in the outer eastern suburbs and seven students lived in the outer eastern and southern fringe of the metropolitan area.



Map 7.1 Geographical Distribution of students

7.1.9 Students' Families

The students in this sample came from twenty families. The largest family had eight children, two families had six children, three families had five children, two families had four children, five families had three children, six families had two children and two families had one child. Not all children in all families had attended mainstream institutions. In one family, an older sibling had never been home educated. In all other families, all children had been home educated at some point of their education unless children were younger than the compulsory school age, as was the case in two families. One single parent family was included and all other families had two parents.

7.1.10 Locating Students for Interviewing

Students were mostly interviewed through parental referral. Six students were personally known to the interviewer prior to the interviews, one student was named by two professionals and one was located through a chance meeting.

7.1.11 Home Education Curriculum Used by Students

Fifteen students used a structured curriculum for some if not all of their home education years. Fourteen of these students had used the ACA program. Three students used DECV. One of these students included natural learning opportunities, another used eclectic curriculum to add to the basic DECV subjects and a third student used DECV full time for two years in between two home educating periods. Nineteen students used eclectic programs and seven students learnt through 'natural learning' curriculum. Because some students changed programs or used combinations of curricula, the totals of these groups do not equal the total number of students.

7.1.12 Religion

Students were not asked their religious affiliations and religion did not feature in student interviews apart from references to social opportunities in church communities by a number of students.

7.2 General Student Views of their Home Education and Mainstream Education Experiences.

The views and experiences of students about home education and mainstream institutions provide a context within which to place the main themes that arose out of the data. Because of the limitations of this project, these views and experiences are not examined here in detail.

7.2.1 About Home Education

Positives

I liked home schooling. (Alysia – 16)

I like most of it. (Ariana – 7)

Like to stay home. (Brad – 8)

Can't think of anything that don't like. (David – 14)

I like to stay round my home all day. (Latisha – 10)

School at home better than school, but still school. (Mike – 15)

Oh I like it. (Sally – 6)

I really like home schooling, I can do things like piano and swimming during school time ... when people would normally be at school. (Shana – 8)

[I] definitely prefer home schooling. (Stuart – 13)

Like it - house - dirty, its nice an' cozy. (Troy – 8)

When describing their experiences at home, students spoke of their freedom and flexibility to choose when they worked, what they learnt and how they learnt. At home, they appreciated their personalised learning opportunities, being comfortable at home, enduring social friendships, good family relationships, ability to pursue their own interests and they felt motivated to learn.

Negatives

I can't really think of anything that I didn't particularly like about it. (Alysia – 16)

Dunno Not enough socialising. (Adrian – 8)

can't think of anything [not liked], if that's an answer. (Brock – 10)

I can't think of anything. (David – 14)

There wasn't anything I had a problem with, at all. (John – 14)

No, it was pretty good. (Lana – 19)

probably not much [did not like]. (Latisha – 10)

Dislike! Uhm ... Uhmm ... Sphew... (Luke – 10)

Nothing really. (Shana – 8)

Seventeen students thought less contact with large numbers of peers was the most negative aspect of learning at home, however, most of these students felt this was not a reason to attend mainstream institutions. Students' second most common comment

describing negatives about being at home was that there were no negatives (twelve) or very few negatives (five). Five adolescent or older students thought their learning opportunities were limited at home, four adolescent or older students thought parents had limited specialist knowledge, three older students felt they procrastinated about schoolwork, three adolescent or older students were occasionally bored, and three adolescent or older students felt parents were stretched coping with large families.

7.2.2 About Mainstream

Positives

I quite liked it (first school). I wasn't opposed to it, really. (Gary – 18)

Only liked a couple of things. (Mike – 15)

Really enjoyed home school and primary school - both good. (Mitchell – 21)

I think it was good fun, and liked that [first] school ...I had lots of fun. (Ramona – 12)

More people to socialize with ... that's basically it. (Rory – 17)

I really like my school (senior school). (Vicki – 17)

Twenty-three students appreciated social opportunities at school. Other positives of mainstream institutional experiences included, specialist teachers, peer discussions, considerate professionals, institutional structures, breaks, and extracurricular activities. Four students thought experiencing the negatives of school was a positive because they understood why home education was better.

Negatives

The only ... formal education I've ever [had], grade 4, in Melbourne ... just didn't feel like it was important at all. (Alysia – 16)

They're completely depressing ... feel of ... negativeness ... disinterest ... well none seems to want to be there ... Generally public schools are ... minimum security prisons ... like how all the bars across the windows and the fences, no barbed wire ... I thought that was a little bit surprising ... No barbed wire but ...Their depression ... Looks like a minimum security prison ... they are there because they have to be ... Nobody actually seems to want to be there. (Arden – 17)

I didn't think it was very interesting at all. (Carl – 6)

School itself, there wasn't a lot to like about it. (Jarratt – 21)

Nothing, I hated it ... No, I hated school. (Kieran – 24)

No! I did not like school. (Luke – 10)

Not really anything. (Mike – 15)

A hard question ... An interesting experience ... It was interesting to see how other children have their lives and, I feel sorry for them ... I didn't like a lot of things. (Stuart – 13)

Students' comments about the negatives of mainstream institutions were often intense with particular comments about school socialisation the strongest for sixteen students. Other negative features included institutional structures, poor learning opportunities, and teachers who did not understand their needs.

Most students spoke warmly of their home education experience and found it difficult to think of negatives about home education. Many students liked school but a number of students also expressed strong negative emotions about mainstream education. These perspectives surfaced in all interview questions.

7.3 Process of Change

Movements of home educated students in relation to mainstream education fell into five main categories – (1) into school from home education, (2) out of school into home education, (3) re-entry into school, (4) return to home and (5) entry into post compulsory educational institutions such as TAFE and University. Some common themes flowed through all five categories. There were also themes particular to each group.

7.3.1 From Home To School First Time

Oh, hadn't been to school, didn't know what it was like. (Brant – 15)

I didn't have any idea. (David – 14)

Went in to classroom. Was really weird going in there, with all these people in there ... it was just, never been in the classroom with people my own age, girls my own age. That was ... a big shock ... I ... just didn't really KNOW what it was like to be in a

classroom. Never done it before. (John – 14)

I didn't know anything about school really. 'Cause I'd never been (sigh). (Lana – 19)

Twenty-two students moved from home education into mainstream institutions in their first move between the two systems of education. Seventeen students entered primary school, three students entered secondary school and two students entered TAFE as their first transition experience between the two systems of education.

Three families involving ten students entered school for the first time as family groups because of maternal fatigue. Before the end of this study, two children from the first family and all other children in these families returned to home education. Most returned home within twelve months or less even though the parents of two families thought their children would remain in school. The third family had purposefully enrolled children in primary school for only one term. These parents were included in the parent interviews.

Seven other students as individuals entered primary school for the first time and four of these students attended part-time. Part-time arrangements included irregular days because the mother was a specialist teacher, a few days a week for three students due to mother teaching part-time, eased entry into mainstream for an Aspergers student, and because a family had weekly country commitments. Three solo students entered full time into primary school, because of ill health in the family, personal choice, and failure to work at home due to the loss of a best friend. Three students entered secondary school for the first time. Two, from the same family, each started separately in Year 7 while the third student started in Year 11. One mother felt she did not have the expertise to teach secondary school students and the Year 11 student and her parents, did not want to attempt VCE by distance education.

The two students who entered TAFE in the first move into mainstream institutions came from the same family. One chose to gain certificates through traineeships while the second chose to pursue a trade course.

Decision to Attend Mainstream the First Time

I think we just ... wanted to go. (Brant – 15)

I didn't want to go to school. Didn't prepare to go to school. My parents forced me to go to school ... my dad had to drag me into school ... [because] I was a pain in the arse at home. (John – 14)

Sort of combined ... I felt that it was the natural thing to do ... but I did want to go to school. I didn't really want to do VCE through correspondence. I felt that it would be too hard and that I probably wouldn't push my self enough. (Lana – 19)

The decision to enter mainstream the first time was mostly a parental decision. One student in primary school decided to enter against his parents' wishes. Another primary school student did not want to attend school, but refused to work at home after losing a best friend interstate. The secondary school students were involved in or happy with the parents' decision. The two TAFE students personally made the decision to attend TAFE.

First Day/Week Experiences

I came late, went into the classroom ... 15 minutes ... I remember ... it was quite weird. They were all crouching under their tables or something, which I realized they were praying later on ... came in and sat down. Listened, didn't talk to anyone. Just listened to Mrs. Lucy. Didn't do any work. And then at recess, just nothing again. Just sat there by myself ... after that we did maths and I didn't do anything ... at lunch time ... I didn't realize that everyone was around the other side of the classroom eating their lunch and I was just sitting there by myself, eating my lunch and then, I walked around the corner and saw they were playing soccer ... then Barry said, 'Oh, come and play soccer,' so I went to play soccer ... that was pretty kind ... [At home after first day] ... 'I'm never going there again.' ... 'Cause ... I didn't have any friends. No one talked to me ... Which was expected though ... [After a week] ... I still didn't want to go ... 'cause I thought home schooling was better, which it is, but, I thought, 'Yeah, I could have some fun with this,' so, kept on going ... [Settled in] Oh, probably another week after I started making friends. (John – 14)

The first day or first week experiences were usually memorable. A number of students were excited to be going to school. Students mentioned feeling welcomed when introduced to classes by name. Student emotional responses prior to transition into mainstream schools were typical of mainstream students moving to new situations as most were excited, some had no idea what to expect and a few experienced apprehension due to uncertainty and concern about the quantity of work to expect (Cassity & Gow 2005, Harris 2006, Margetts 2003, Taylor & Nelms 2006, te Riele 2004, van Haren 2006).

Socialisation and Emotional Responses

Contributing factors to successful transitions for students moving into school included students knowing mainstream peers prior to entry, support through the first day and weeks with buddies and guides, professional and parent recognition and management of bullying and cliques, and inclusive professionals. A few students listed the personal

need to be friendly towards peers. Most students easily managed the academic work as there was usually less work than expected and they discovered they were not behind in their studies. Situations contributing to poor social transitions included failure by institutions and professionals to be aware and inclusive of new students, to manage bullying and cliques, and failure to provide buddies when students felt new, isolated and ignored.

Some students accepted responsibility for adjusting to new environments and reaching out to peers. One or two had to learn their own limits:

When I came to school, I thought I was far superior to all the other kids ... I was a home schooler, I thought I was the best ... I thought I was real smart, smarter than them. I don't need them. I'm better than them. But, one time ... the question was called out to the class, and I put my hand up and I got it wrong, and another guy got it right ... I was like, 'YOU ARE JOKING' ... I was crushed, that day. It was the worst day of my life ... I finally realized, 'I'm not as good as I thought I was. (John – 14)

First day and week experiences highlighted to these students how different their own educational experiences at home were to peers who had grown up in mainstream institutions.

School Protocols.

Of quiet ... not distracting the people next to you and ... ask every time you wanted go to the toilet and things like that. (Alysia – 16)

[One teacher all day in primary school] ... that was pretty bad ... But ... I could get away with anything because I was new ... That was alright ... You just have to listen to her, you can't talk. She'd snap, and yell at you. Send you out of classroom or something. (John – 14)

A number of students felt daunted trying to understand how mainstream institutions functioned. The types of structures they noticed were the timetable, time management of assignments, classroom protocols such as sitting quietly, not talking, and asking to go to the toilet. Students noticed teachers fulfilled a different role to parents, did not always engage in activities they directed and often spent more time managing classes rather than promoting learning activities. Students were not always aware there were also unspoken but defined social rules among students in the schoolyard.

Fitting into School

I guess one of the interesting things of discovery was ... what I actually did at school for ... 12 months. The ... fact that I was further ahead in many areas than what ... the other students were, which if I had been at school, obviously I would have been hindered, in that regard. (Jarratt – 21)

Oh, the first week for me ... wasn't being so hard. (Jeff – 10)

I basically did the same work, I'd covered the previous year in grade 5 ... the work [was] pretty easy. (Gabbie – 14)

No first entry student reported experiencing serious difficulties fitting into school. A number of students found the shift easy academically and socially.

Preparation for Move to School

While minimum preparations were made by many families, a few students remembered practicing waking early, buying books, trying on uniforms, visiting schools when closed and when operating and attending orientation days. One student thought he had to just experience school to know what it was like.

Missing Autonomy

Several students missed the autonomy they had exercised at home and this included the ability to work at their own pace and manage their own learning.

All these students appreciated their home education and thought it valuable. They recognised that home education had allowed them to develop and mature personally without the constraints of worrying about what others might think.

7.3.2 Re-entry into School

I ... had NO idea what was going to happen ... as far as being prepared for a situation like that. I had no idea, of, or what was sort of expected ... how things ran, how any of that worked. (Duane – 21)

I was very excited, because I wanted to go to high school. (Fifi – 17)

Mixed. Mixed emotions ... whether I'd be able to keep up with the class. Whether I'd fit in. (Kieran – 24)

Eleven students returned to school a second time. Two students, sisters, returned to the primary school they had previously attended for two three week visits in the two years after their first entrance. All other students returned to secondary school. Four students returned to mid or senior secondary school after several years at home. Three students took a year out of secondary school and returned to school. One of these left for overseas travel, the other two left for family reasons. One student entered secondary school after a term out at the end of primary school. One student took a term break after a traumatic event in Year 7 and returned in Year 8.

Many of the topics discussed by students who entered mainstream institutions for the first time were also raised by home educated students who entered mainstream institutions for a second time. Five key topics discussed by students included learning, socialisation, ease of re-entry into school and positive views of mainstream education.

Student emotional responses about the return to mainstream schools were partially moderated by who made the decision to return. Even when students had made the primary decision to return to mainstream institutions, students generally tended to be a little tentative about what a return to school involved. Students were usually happy and excited about attending mainstream institutions but most experienced some concern about being up to the academic levels of their peers even though re-entry fears were usually ill founded. Students enjoyed the new social experiences, especially when they knew some of their mainstream peers prior to re-entry. The few students who experienced social difficulties re-entering mainstream institutions had previously experienced social problems in school (Krout 2001). Social problems included bullying and social cliques or social disconnection due to moving from interstate.

Positive Comments about Re-entering Secondary School

Someone who can answer all your questions, I felt I learnt a lot more that way than doing it through textbooks just learning ... who knew about science and that he made sure you understood. They were able to answer questions. (Duane – 21)

At Mid Suburb Secondary School ... all the teachers, when you walked past would say 'hi' to you, and they were always including you in different things. (Gabbie – 14)

The teachers were really friendly when I met them first ... everyone was really nice ... it was like they'd all just been given a great big lecture and ... to just be really nice to you instead ... I thought that was how it was ... They were just automatically nice and I thought that was really nice because ... it made me feel more welcome. (Zara – 15)

Students described positive features of school and these ranged from well-equipped science labs, the greater convenience of attendance full time over part-time in mid secondary school to the general inclusive atmosphere and lack of bullying in the schools. But the greatest numbers of positive comments were directed to the helpful and professional teachers students met. Teachers were there to present specialist knowledge, answer questions, give educational advice, ensure students understood their work, maintain discipline and apply appropriate pressure to keep students up-to-date with work. These teachers were professional with their subject knowledge, considerate and helpful, welcoming, friendly, inclusive, and ‘really nice.’

No student reported difficulties academically re-entering school except for one student with known learning difficulties. Most students enjoyed the new social experiences except for three students. One of these found it difficult moving from interstate and the other two experienced bullying and/or social cliques. One of these students found these problems vanished when she moved schools. Several students thought the transition was easier than expected and two thought they were better prepared academically than their mainstream peers.

Decision to Re-enter Mainstream Institutions

It was pretty much ... the parents and myself had sort of decided together that I'd had enough of home schooling. (Duane – 21)

I was ... probably thinking about it like for about a year and a half before ... But ... I know I always expected that from the start that I was going to do Year 11 and 12 [at school]. (Gary - 18)

I think Mum and Dad had just done, inquiries into that. (Kieran – 24)

My decision. (Vicki – 17)

I decided ... I made up a list and put the advantages and disadvantages ... I wrote a list and put advantages and disadvantages on one side of the page and on the other side of the page ... of home schooling and schooling and school came up like two more extra. (Zara – 15)

Most students in this group were adolescents and returned to mainstream education after making the decision to return either by themselves or with their parents. Reasons for returning to mainstream institutions included access to specialist teachers, socialisation, and attainment of VCE or other certification.

7.3.3 From School to Home

I didn't really miss school as much. (Vicki – 17)

[Study at home was] ... still school. (Mike – 15)

Eighteen students started their education in mainstream institutions and later moved to home education. Sixteen students moved out of primary schools. Six students, in family groups, were withdrawn from primary school because gifted and advanced learners were not challenged in school and were socially discriminated against due to their abilities. Other reasons for changing to home education included school closure, students over-stretched by extracurricular programs, health problems, and learning differences usually compounded by social problems. Four students were withdrawn from secondary school, two for family reasons, one for overseas travel and the other because of learning difficulties and he followed an older sibling out.

Missing Friends

I did miss some of my friends ... a few times I invited one of them over. (Brad – 8)

And I still saw a few friends and mucked around ... from school, every now and then. (Gary – 18)

We went in to the school ... join in to their sports ... afternoons ... we still saw like a lot of our friends on the weekend. (Mitchell – 27)

I was seeing new people who were doing homeschooling. (Robert – 17)

Seventeen students who left school admitted missing school friends but this was usually a minor loss. Students reported better family relationships. Five gifted, advanced learners and learning disability students found social experiences improved at home. Lack of suitable friends in home education networks reduced the relief of being away from the negative social experiences of school for one student. Not one of these students thought less socialisation at home was a reason to return to school, especially in the first few years.

Enjoying Learning at Home

I liked it from the fact of being on the farm and learning out door things like farm things and ... mechanical things, and being the old man's little boy. You know what I mean

(soft chuckle), little offside. That was pretty good. (Duane – 21)

At the time ... I wasn't quite sure about it, ... but I think I was OK with it ... But I'd give it a go. And, I didn't really know what it was like. (Fifi – 17)

Students enjoyed their move to home. Most were excited by the change. A few spoke of feeling a little tentative but all felt the move was worthwhile. All students appreciated a sense of freedom and autonomy they had not experienced in mainstream institutions.

Most students moved straight into a learning program at home without difficulties and described learning more at home than at school. Students with learning difficulties still struggled but made progress. Advanced learners enjoyed learning at their own pace. Two gifted learners took months to settle back into learning routines. The students who did not appreciate the change as much, all used externally provided structured curriculum.

Decision

Mum made the decision. Yet I ... as a person felt like it at the time. (Gary – 18)

I was excited ... I'd actually approached Mum and Dad and said, 'Can I be taught at home'. ... And they then said that they'd actually just started investigating home schooling. (Kieran – 24)

The change was easy ... I wanted to do it earlier than we actually did. (Sam – 10)

Like Mum and Dad wanted to do it and they asked me would I like to, and I said, 'yeah, alright' ... we did it. (Vicki – 17)

The decision to move from school to home was made by parents, but many students were involved in and recognised the merit of the decision. One gifted and another learning disabled student asked to go home or thought it should have happened earlier. A few were diffident about the move, but soon valued the experience once at home.

Ease of Transition

I think I was learning algebra at the time and all the different formulas and Dad was a maths teacher, or had studied to be a maths teacher at the university, and he loved maths. So it was hard 'cause ... he always put the pressure on me to write out all the formulas and know maths very well and it just wouldn't click. There was many

an argument about schoolwork that I didn't want to do that they wanted me to do.
(laughing). (Kieran – 24)

I think that was the longest space between me finishing [writing] a book. (Sam – 10)

Most students found the move to home easy. One advanced learner student thought his new structured curriculum too easy. Two gifted and one learning disabled student found it difficult to settle into work at home. The gifted students spent months recovering from the social difficulties experienced at school. One of them, Sam, was so stressed by his school experiences that it was a considerable time before he was able to resume his hobby of writing short stories, some of which have since been published in a home education journal. The student with learning difficulties continued to have learning difficulties at home.

Time of Move

A number of students moved out of mainstream institutions over an end of year break. Several moved partway through the school year, usually at the end of a term. Home study programs often followed mainstream education calendars although some took an extra week off.

Curriculum

Nine students used some form of eclectic program, a family with gifted students moved into a natural learning program, five started with ACA and one used DECV part-time.

Connections with School

Most students who left school to start home education cut their ties completely with the schools they left. Three students maintained some connection with their schools to continue sporting activities, attend lunch-times, excursion and other outings. These children happily joined excursion groups, but found it uncomfortable to return to school for breaks, preferring to meet friends out of school hours.

7.3.4 Return to Home

Oh, missed all the people there, 'cause ... there was nothing to do. (Brant – 15)

Enjoyed that a lot ... at own pace. (Gabbie – 14)

Five students returned to home education after attending school, all of whom had been home educated prior to attending mainstream institutions in the first place. The reason for returning to home education contributed to how the student responded to the return home. Two academically strong students attended primary school for one year each and both wanted to return to home education after feeling socially alienated at school and not academically challenged. The gifted student had difficulties settling into an academic routine on his return home and took a year off to settle back home without any apparent long-term detrimental effect. These students were happy at home and both successfully entered TAFE in their next transition move into mainstream education.

Three students returned to home education because of changes in family circumstances. These students missed mainstream education although they were comfortable about learning at home again. They appreciated having some autonomy over their learning situations but missed the contact with other students. The experience did not seem to have put these students' education or social experiences behind but it was not their personal decision to leave school in the first place and they were glad to later return to mainstream education.

7.3.5 Part-Time Attendance

Eight students discussed a variety of part-time attendance patterns in mainstream institutions that varied according to student needs, age level, institutions involved, and family connections to the institutions. Their experiences were mostly successful while some were less successful than others depending on the arrangements.

Part-time arrangements included students spending some days a week at school, attending sporting and/or other events, or particular periods in a day. The arrangements that worked well included student attendance for particular days during the week in primary school, part-time attendance for particular subjects in secondary school and university, and for sporting and/or special events in primary school. The arrangements that did not work so well included half-day attendance in a state primary school when the student had health problems, day attendance in a private secondary school when subjects were presented in random periods, and student attendance at school break times in primary school. The main reasons part-time did not work well for students attending classes was the problems professionals faced setting work outside of their routines and students sensing professional resistance to the extra workload.

Table 7.5 TAFE Student Details

Student	Occasion	Institution	Days a week	Periods in day	Arrangements & Outcomes
Arden	1st time Year 1 – 10	Alternative Primary & Secondary Schools	2-3		Pursued interest areas at home. Worked well.
	2nd time Year 9-10	TAFE	Part day		Own work at home. Worked well
	3rd time Year 11	AYCE	1		Completed set work at home. Worked well.
Brock	Sporting and Event inclusion in various primary schools – Year 1 – 4	Private and State school	Casual attendance		Inclusion in particular events in different schools. Worked well.
David	Stepped entry into Year 8 secondary school	Private Secondary School		Part-time	Trial to help student enter mainstream full time. Worked well.
Fifi	1st time Year 4	State primary school		Half-day	To allow student health recovery time. Student tired and felt missed work.
	2nd time Year 9 & 10	Private secondary school		Subject attendance	Fun subjects at school, academic subjects at home. Worked well
Gabbie	1st time Year 6 for ½ year	Private primary school	First 3 days of week		Last 2 days at home in country with work instructions from teacher. Worked well.
	2nd time Year 9 for ½ year	Private secondary school	3 days of week		Found it difficult to gain work from subject teachers for periods missed.
Luke	Year 4	State primary school		Attendance at school break times and special events & excursions	Student enjoyed excursions but uncomfortable attending school in breaks.
Lily	Year 2	State primary school		Attendance at school break times and special events & excursions	Student enjoyed excursions but uncomfortable attending school in breaks.
Mitchell	Year 6	Private Primary School		Attendance at sporting afternoons	Student enjoyed staying in contact with old friends. Worked well.

	University	University		Attendance at particular classes.	Mixed 1st & 2nd year classes with distance subjects included. Found easier to adjust more slowly.
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7.3.6 Into Post Compulsory Education Institutions

And now I've actually enjoyed ... TAFE this year. (Alysia – 16)

[At TAFE] I enjoyed it. A huge amount ... Oh yeah. I really loved it ... It was ... generous ... fun. (Arden – 17)

I liked ... having the achievement of the fact that like ... I had a piece of paper at the end of it. (Danar – 19)

[At TAFE] ... YES! Yeah ... I had a lot of fun there. That's when I sort of decided ... 'What have I been missing out of with home schooling all of these years?' ... Mostly socially. (Duane – 21)

There ... wasn't a large ... paradigm shift for want of a better description but there was obviously gone from being at home every day to being in there every day ... it was fantastic from a learning perspective and just sort ... all met real nice people in the process ... obviously got to learn about something which ... welding and messing around with ... welding at home prior to doing that. So that was when you got to learn how to do it properly and ... get a piece of paper to ... say you can actually do it. It was fantastic from a learning perspective. (Jarratt – 21)

I don't know if there was anything I liked about TAFE. (Justin – 19)

I don't think there is anything I really like about it [TAFE]. (Tarun – 14)

Nine students entered TAFE from home education. All young adults at the time of interview including two of the 14-18 year olds, except one university student, attended TAFE. One home educated student attended TAFE for one year after completing Year 11 and 12 in secondary school before starting a university course. Relevant learning and socialisation were the dominant topics raised by home educated students about their TAFE experiences and all except one felt they fitted in well. One student initially experienced bullying because he had different values to older students. Other positive features of student transition into TAFE included autonomy, ease of entry, adult learning environment, learning opportunities, access to expert knowledge, and enjoyment of relevant and self-selected courses. Students valued orientation programs, and most adjusted well to TAFE courses.

Students undertook a variety of courses chosen to suit their individual preferences and usually entered below the normal entrance age into TAFE. Most students enjoyed their classes and all achieved well academically.

Table 7.6 Student Courses Undertaken at TAFE

Student	Year Level and/or Age	Course
Alysia	Year 10	General Education Course – in preparation for nursing courses Victorian Multi Medias Course
Arden	Year 10	Information Technology Subjects
Duane	Year 10	Child Care Workers Course – completed a Diploma in Early
Fifi	Year 11	Child care
Jarratt	13	Welding Course, Information Technology Course
Justin	Year 9/15	Agricultural Management Course
Kieran	18	General Studies
Lana	18	Agricultural Management Course
Rory	16	Mechanics
Tarun	14	Mechanics

Student Traineeships

Student	Age	Course
Danar	15	Apiarist, Retail Operations III & IV
Kieran	24	Hospitality Operations for security and crowd control, Retail cadetship

Course Entry Requirements

These students were able to enter courses without normal entry requirements. Three students approached relevant staff in their preferred course and entry requirements were waived. All these students achieved a high academic standard in their respective courses. One of the lecturers who had allowed a thirteen year old into his class was disappointed when he could not persuade this student to present work in external competitions because the student had decided to focus on another course.

Negatives

I think that probably the only negative thing I can think of with the welding course was when I ... was given a hard time by one of the staff members ... he was trying to get me to go on to do ... a welding competition and I'd said to him that I wasn't really sure that I wanted to continue doing welding which was pointless and he wasn't overly impressed but ... that's about it as far as negatives. (Jarratt – 21)

Only four students mentioned negative aspects of their TAFE experiences which included frustration with a poorly organised program, continued problems with learning difficulties, waiting for teacher attention in class, insufficient 'hands on' learning opportunities, challenges to personal values from other students, and mild frustration

with the pushiness of one teacher to continue a course when the student had made other plans.

University

I really liked the small uni sort of thing ... and I developed quite a few ... friends ... amongst ... the School of Engineering ... there [were] ... two lecturers that I'd count ... like really good friends and ... all the others ... about 50% of them ... I knew quite well and would drop in from time to time. (Mitchell – 27)

By the end of this research project, ten students had achieved entrance into tertiary institutions however, only one entered university directly from home education. He passed a Standard Achievement Test and took samples of his work to the faculty of the university he wished to enter. They were impressed with his work and encouraged him to continue to work through distance subjects as they felt he had the maturity and drive to achieve through that learning approach. A second student entered university through the TAFE system and had been accepted into a doctoral program at the time of the interview.

The student who entered directly into university appreciated the small country campus he attended because staff and students were friendly. He also thought the small campus meant students were individually noticed more than they might be on a larger campus. Because this student mixed first and second year subjects, he thought it took him longer to adjust socially to campus life but felt the longer time suited his personality and gave him time to adjust to the classroom. He also appreciated accessibility to and friendships with lecturers.

[I]t gave me a chance ... to get used to ... like the classroom style of education and that. (Mitchell – 27)

This home educated student achieved university entrance and made adjustments to the academic and social differences he encountered. Student personality also seemed to influence the way he made these adjustments. In summary, home educated students in this study did not have difficulties gaining university entrance, nor were they challenged with the academic load in their chosen subject areas once there. Their home education appeared to have provided them with the skills to make the most of adult learning environments.

7.4 Common Transition Themes

There were several common themes found in these transition experiences. Most students felt they lacked knowledge about how mainstream institutions operated and were tentative about what to expect, especially whether they would be able to achieve required academic levels. Orientation programs and student support were valuable when settling into mainstream institutions. Regardless of the direction of the transition, students recognised and appreciated their changed learning environment concluding that they benefited academically, and often socially, from the moves either way. While parents made the decision to move children, particularly younger children, these students were usually involved in the decision-making process or happy with the decision. As young people reached adolescence, they were more proactive in the decision to learn through mainstream institutions or occasionally through home education. All students appreciated aspects of their education experience at home and thought it was an important part of their education. Older students and some younger students who moved from home to mainstream institutions also appreciated aspects of their mainstream education.

7.4.1 Orientation Programs

Students generally appreciated orientation programs especially those encouraging students to become acquainted with mainstream peers. Visits to schools, during and outside school time, were also important and enabled students to understand the layout of institutions and classroom practice. TAFE students appreciated orientation presentations when they were able to discuss the nature of course material and meet future lecturers.

Other beneficial transition programs included buddies or student guides, and introduction by name to classes while still being allowed to blend with the rest of the class. Professional inclusiveness and expertise were the most commented on qualities contributing to easy student transitions.

7.4.2 Autonomy vs. Structure

These students were used to exercising autonomy about time, space/place, pace and topic of study while learning at home. When moving into the structured programs of mainstream institutions, students were not always aware of classroom protocol, timetables, course and assignment requirements, and typical teacher interactions and boundaries with students. While students appeared to adjust to these features well, clear instruction of these aspects of mainstream institutions could alleviate tension and

misunderstanding for future students.

7.4.3 Home and School – Different roles – Different times

These students appreciated both their home education and mainstream education experiences. They valued their autonomy, freedom and learning opportunities at home. In mainstream institutions, students valued learning from experts, class discussions, social opportunities, and being organised by the structural qualities of mainstream education. Many of these students did not appreciate their academic and/or social experiences while in primary schools but came back enthusiastically into secondary school where they generally settled in well both academically and socially. When students entered mainstream institutions, they looked to their teachers for acceptance and support during their transition experience. All students valued their home education experiences or thought home education provided an important and valuable learning environment when they needed it. These students' needs were fulfilled in different places at different times in their journey of learning.

7.5 Conclusion

Students moved into and out of mainstream educational institutions at all levels and a number moved between home and mainstream institutions without apparent difficulties. It was clear that for some students, the ability to leave mainstream institutions was important for their sense of self-worth, academic and social opportunities. Students described positive features of both home and mainstream institutions indicating that both forms of education had their place. In the following chapter, the key themes of autonomy, learning, socialisation, and self-worth, identified by students as different about their experiences at home and in mainstream institutions are further explored.

Chapter 8: Data Analysis - Students - 2

After examining individual student experiences in home education, in mainstream education and through the transition movements between the two systems, a number of themes became apparent. These themes included autonomy, student learning, socialisation, self-concepts, institutional structures, and these are now examined.

8.1 Autonomy, Self-Determination, Flexibility and Freedom

When students described their experiences at home, they spoke more about their autonomy than any other aspect of their home education experience. Three distinct qualities of autonomy for home educated students became evident in this study: flexibility, freedom, and self-determination.

8.1.1 Flexibility

I liked the flexibility and being at home. (Alysia – 16)

It's more flexible in doing what you want to do. (Arden – 17)

It allows me to choose, what, how the days are run, and everything like that. (Brock – 10)

You can learn at your own pace. (Duane – 21)

The fact that I can work at my own pace, also how I can do it in my own time. (Fifi – 17)

Flexibility ... probably was biggest thing really. (Mitchell – 27)

Home schooling ... gave flexibility ... do what want to when want to. (Vicki – 17)

Even though students used a variety of curriculum, fifteen students considered flexibility or the ability to set one's own pace and manage one's own time, the most valuable aspect of their home education experience. The type of curriculum used also contributed to student sense of autonomy. All students who used eclectic and natural learning approaches appreciated being able to select topics of interest. There were a number of students using externally prepared structured curriculum who expressed the

greatest discontent with home education. They thought the work became boring and was mismatched to their interests and needs. Despite this they did value being able to select interesting electives.

8.1.2 Freedom

Mostly the freedom...there isn't that much structure so you can pretty much chose to do what you want. ... you don't have to do anything ... there's no, you must do this then, then this, then this, then this. So it's more flexible in doing what you want to do. (Arden – 17)

Just the freedom ... to do what I wanted to do. I spent many, many, many hours reading ... all sorts of material. (Jarratt – 21)

Weren't kind of restricted to what the rest of the class restricted to. (Robert – 17)

When I want to learn about things - You look at them when ever you like, you don't have to learn about them between 9 o' clock and 3.30. (Sam – 10)

Seventeen students used the term 'freedom,' or its derivative 'free,' to describe one of their positive features of home education. Most references to freedom were about freedom with time. Students spoke of being 'free' or having 'more time' to learn, to play and do their own thing. Several boys worked early and quickly to spend more times outdoors to do such things as building cubby houses. A few students preferred to sleep in. Students were able to develop long-term projects of personal interest, in areas such as music, science, writing, computers and photography. They felt free from regimentation, school uniforms, long daily bus trips, and being tied to average student ability. Freedom to choose location of study was also important.

8.1.3 Decision to Enter or Leave Mainstream Institutions

With [primary] school ... the entire reason for pushing issue, it actually ... wanting to go versus Mum and Dad both saying 'No, you don't want to do this' ... was purely to my reasoning was to make friends ... and ... have some so called social contact. (Jarratt – 21)

I knew I would [return to school]. Things pass, you get over it. And in the end ... I thought, there was no point wasting my time, I may as well ... just go back to school, who cares. So I just got over it like that. (John – 14)

I was kind of happy, knowing that I was leaving for home school ... Ah, yeah! To get out of. (Luke – 10)

Well, see I think I wanted to [leave school]. I'm not too sure. 'Cause of the other girl ... and that. (Ramona – 12)

Eleven, mostly older, students described their personal decision to enter or leave mainstream institutions or remain at home and a further eight discussed making decisions about attendance in mainstream institutions with their parents. Often parents made the decision to withdraw students from school in the primary school years but all students (except one) felt that the decision had been made in their best interests. Most commented that they had been involved in the decision making process. A few students had not been sure about leaving school but all (except one) expressed appreciation for having left school to do home education. The one exception felt isolated on the family farm and restricted by the externally structured curriculum he found both too easy and overly repetitive especially when in his early teens. Nine students felt somewhat relieved to study at home. Most teenage students made the decision to enter mainstream institutions by themselves or in conjunction with parents. Three parents opposed student decisions to attend mainstream institutions, but once in school they supported their students. Two male students thought of attending mainstream institutions in Year 10 but decided to remain home. One attended school the following year and the other stayed home till entering university. One student chose to attend primary school against his parents' wishes in order to meet friends, but only stayed a year and did not return to mainstream institutions until he entered TAFE at thirteen. The usual reasons for wanting to attend mainstream institutions varied between the need for specialist instruction and/or social needs. Students attended TAFE to pursue learning interests.

8.1.4 Autonomy as Practiced at School

We are allowed, to a certain extent, to ... influence what we actually do ... in English, our English teacher has actually given us a choice of what texts we want to do, next year. (Arden – 17)

You get the more choice of things to do. (Brant – 15)

Two students mentioned autonomy at school and this included greater subject choice and the ability to select Year 11 English texts. Two students missed self-management of time and pace at school while a third student felt freer from peer pressure than her mainstream peers. Students rarely mentioned the ability to exercise autonomy when in mainstream institutions.

8.2 Learning

I'm definitely more hands on person ... and I have to be able to talk ... I can't just sit there ... and work it out, without actually having, without being able to look at it or talk about it and figure it out ... which you don't, wouldn't get much ... in big classroom situation. (Alysia – 16)

If you really wanted to get somewhere in education, you're probably better to be home schooled. (Justin – 19)

You just learn more than at school and stuff. (Vicki – 17)

When I was homeschooled I got to ... learn a lot more stuff than I thought I would have learnt at school because ... I just absorbed it more. (Zara – 15)

Students discussed learning opportunities at home and in mainstream institutions through responses to several interview questions. Learning was the second most discussed aspect of education at home. The learning topics referred to included curriculum, learning at home, learning in mainstream institutions, learning environments, learning styles, and the meaning of education to these students. All students thought they learnt more at home than they did in mainstream institutions regardless of ability. Student age contributed to student attitude to and appreciation of learning at home as younger students were happy at home while many teenagers preferred to learn in mainstream institutions.

8.2.1 Curriculum

In the end it was so, so easy to do. But that was by my choice, because I was just fed up with it. I didn't want to do it ... the parents and myself had sort of decided together that I'd had enough of home schooling ... I couldn't really stick it out any longer. I'd had a guts full of it. (Duane – 21)

I teach myself stuff ... I don't need a teacher to tell me stuff! (Sam – 10)

There were distinct differences in attitudes to learning at home between the students who followed eclectic or natural learning programs to those who used an externally structured curriculum, whether it was ACA or DECV. The students who used a natural learning approach or eclectic curriculum felt their learning was contextualised, challenging, interesting, relevant, suited to their interests and self-directed. Students who used externally structured curriculum started well but most found they lost interest in learning over time – usually within two years, thought there was a lack of creativity

and became 'bored' with the work.

8.2.2 Learning at Home

Be able to learn things the way I needed. (Alysia – 16)

Because at home, I got to learn the basics ... and investigated things I was ... interested in. (Arden – 17)

I probably learnt more I reckon 'cause I did more work at home than at school. (Brant – 15)

Being able to learn ... that was good. (Fifi – 17)

I think the biggest thing is just the ability ... as Danar said earlier, was learning to learn as opposed to be spoon-fed. (Jarratt – 21)

In homeschooling, you learn a lot more. (Justin – 19)

They've given me the foundation or fundamentals to get through life. (Kieran – 24)

Doing ... all my earlier studies at home was really good ... Gave me that much ... more room for expanding where I wanted to do ... and learning different ways. (Lana – 19)

Probably sort of independent study, independent learning ... to learning sort of life skills ... like a good foundation. (Vicki – 17)

All students appreciated being able to learn the foundations well, in contextualised and meaningful ways, self-pace work to their own ability, self-direct their learning, and 'learn how to learn' when at home. Students were usually aware of how they learnt best too.

I have to, or at least would prefer to ... understand how everything works. (Arden – 17)

Reading I LOVE! (Brock – 10)

Or by finding out and experimenting? ... Showing me how to do it. If I can see someone do it, I can pretty much pick it up, straight away. (John – 14)

I certainly spend a ... lot of time researching things and reading ... and still do. (Jarratt – 21)

I like to go to the library ... and get books. I ... look up on the library catalogue to see if I can find ... any books to find out whatever I have a question about. (Sam – 10)

Gifted, advanced learners and students with learning difficulties appreciated 'interactive,' 'hands-on', 'unthreatened,' 'focused' and 'fun' learning while at home. Some students were keen readers and researchers spending days, weeks and/or months on topics of interest. Other teenage students thought their learning at home helped them develop good study habits, maturity and become 'independent learners' with deeper and broader learning experiences than mainstream peers.

I have benefited personally ... the one on one. (Fifi – 17)

Learn better through talking. (Kieran – 24)

Students with learning difficulties also valued supportive, immediate, 'one-on-one' learning situations, repetition, persistence and time to understand difficult subjects. Two students found learning at home still difficult but better than learning in mainstream institutions. As unique, individual learners, these students thought they were free to learn in ways that best suited their abilities, needs and interests.

to have support there all the time. (Alysia – 16)

Enjoyed ... my mum helping me do my work. (Fifi – 17)

If I don't understand, I'm allowed to...stop for a little while and think about it and go back to it ... just the ableness to go my parents for, when I need it ... Like if I need help in one part, particular subject ... they can help me. (Zara – 15)

Opportunities for conversation and discussion were also part of the home learning environment appreciated by students. Access to immediate support and explanation meant that students were able to sense progress when facing difficulties. Warm family relationships were important to these students' learning experiences.

[Liked] how I got work mailed out to me, all ready set, and I was home all day instead of part-school/half home ... and I found that just having the consistency ... being at home, and having my work sent out to me. ... there was nothing I disliked [about DECV]. (Fifi – 17)

Externally structured programs provided some students with a consistent curriculum to begin their home education programs, especially when parents felt unsure about what children should learn. Students initially enjoyed the exchange of mail from these programs.

Scrapping, mostly ... But ... I also found, much to ... my own detriment, I will admit, that it was so easy ... to cheat on them as well. As far as the ACE stuff, so it was by

my choice I didn't learn as much as I probably could have, with home schooling, to a point. (Duane – 21)

one time in year 4 (doing DECV) I had to do my one times tables and that was boring (laughing) ... Year 4 ... but it was my one times tables! (Ramona – 12)

The main criticisms of learning at home were from students who used externally prepared curriculum and structured learning styles. These students thought they were unable to discuss their work with teachers and peers in immediate contexts, curriculum was disconnected to their needs, it was boring, compartmentalised with stereotypical information learnt in isolation to the 'bigger picture. They felt they lost their appreciation and love of learning. One of these students felt that his prepared curriculum encouraged learning by 'cheating' because it was so easy. Other negatives at home included lack of self-discipline, parents not subject experts, parents too busy in large families, and occasionally students lacked focus. Overall however, there were few criticisms about learning at home.

8.2.3 Learning in Mainstream Institutions – particularly Schools

But at school you got to ... read more. (Brant – 15)

I found I actually ... would have learnt more ... if you had problems ... there were people who knew what they were on about ... to be able to help you as far as their background knowledge. (Duane – 21)

School can't cater for each individual's every need ... I didn't need as much one on one [in secondary school] as I did in primary school when I was doing maths and the harder subjects. (Fifi – 17)

And you get to learn a lot more. (Jamie - 10)

Reading books in library at lunch time - 'that's fun.' (Julian – 12)

Enjoyed the academic features of primary school and social. (Mitchell – 27)

I was with someone and she said, 'Oh yeah ... in cooking class we're learning how to cook rice' and I, 'Oh, OK!' ... 'cause I've been cooking like three course ... meals and stuff that it's just kind of weird for me ... like looking after children and stuff ... I guess ... I'm sort of a bit more advanced than other teenagers might be. (Vicki – 17)

Students described a number of features of their learning in mainstream education that were distinctive to their experiences learning at home. Comments about the value of

learning in school were specific to secondary school, particularly senior secondary school.

There's more teachers to help you with the stuff and there. (Brant – 15)

Enjoyed learning with a group in secondary school. (Fifi – 17)

Are more teachers to help you understand questions. (Rory – 17)

There was always people to discuss things with. (Vicki – 17)

You can have ... like a whole lesson of just talking about one particular thing. (Zara – 15)

Students who entered mainstream institutions, usually for a second time, were mostly positive about their views and experiences learning in mainstream institutions. Students chose to attend institutions to gain entrance to career pathways. Positive features of mainstream education included easy work, discipline and structure, greater subject choice for some and courses specific to student needs and interests. Students who had used prepared structured curriculum thought knowledge was more contextualised. Several students appreciated good facilities and extracurricular activities not available at home. However, home educated students who attended secondary schools particularly appreciated access to and interaction with specialist teachers, and involvement in class discussion and group learning.

Just some of the kid's attitudes towards things ... and not like willing to participate, other kids aren't willing to participate in different things like sports ... it's a bit hard. (Gabbie – 14)

Especially first year [university] students who come straight out of VCE, expect everything to be spoon fed to them and ... really don't have any interest in what they are learning versus, people who really want to learn something and will do what it takes to get there. (Jarratt – 21)

Because ... all of the kids ... up until year 10, everyone's sort of like ... you don't really study. You don't have to study or anything ... so some of them kind of struggle to get down and ... do what they're suppose to do. (Vicki – 17)

There were more criticisms of learning in mainstream education than positive comments by students. Criticism came from those who left in primary school, but there were also critiques from students entering secondary school. Secondary school students objected to the inability of mainstream institutions to cater for the individual, the different attitudes of mainstream peers to learning describing them as 'spoon-fed' and unable

to engage in independent learning. A few students felt they had problems adjusting to mainstream curriculum because they did not know what to expect.

But I didn't like my ...classes... what I had to do. (Brad – 8)

It was boring ... the school was easy. (Lily – 8)

It was boring ... 'There wasn't really much, well ... the work was very easy ... it was kind of like repeating, again and again ... And it was just getting more and more boring each time and it just wasn't interesting, at all. (Luke – 10)

I got bored with books. Some of them were very easy. (Ramona – 12)

Gifted and advanced learner students identified problems in primary school and these included wasted spare time waiting for slower students and 'easy,' 'boring,' 'unchallenging,' and 'uninteresting' work that left them with unmet needs.

Dislikes would be ... I ... didn't like the academic side that much. (Danar – 19)

I didn't like how you didn't get like ... a one on one ... Have to keep up with the class. (Fifi – 17)

Didn't like reading or writing. (Mike – 15)

No pen and paper ... I'm like Danar. Just do it. No pen and paper. I HATE pen and paper. (Tarun – 14)

Students with learning disadvantages and/or difficulties identified different problems and these included being embarrassed when they did not understand work, there were no 'hands on' learning opportunities, there were boring and controlling lessons, big classes, and they needed clearer explanations. Students also felt they were sometimes ignored and penalised for being slow, especially when they were quiet students. These students felt the way their learning difficulties were handled by professionals led other students to tease them.

The teachers basically said, 'Alright you've got to have this done by this date. Just do it. If you have any problems, or concerns or want anything, ask me' ... It is flexible because you can do it. They don't say you must do this bit today, this bit tomorrow, that bit the day after. (Arden – 17)

As far as TAFE and Uni sort of thing was concerned ... it's certainly been a valuable ... basically it was just a stepping stone in ... we did try and bypass, it was the easiest way. (Jarratt – 21)

Students who attended TAFE valued flexible, relevant, self-selected courses, ‘hands-on’ learning opportunities, which catered to adult learning opportunities.

I guess I sort of use it as a tunnel ... now I’m out in the work force ... most of my colleagues also look back on their uni experience and say ... ‘Oh, this was only like ... 10% relevant to what we’re really doing’ ... If you don’t play the system ... like if you can’t play the system, just go through and ... Do what’s got to be done. Get your piece of paper and then ... continue ... the fullness of ... your learning. (Mitchell – 27)

The two students who entered university also appreciated their learning opportunities, but one, in particular, thought learning there was directed at gaining certification, tunnel visioned and only ten percent relevant to one’s career. Both thought learning was a life time activity.

8.3 Learning Environments

Students were specifically asked to describe their views of learning environments and five particular types of environments were identified – own space, ‘hands-on’, quiet, focused, and relational learning environments.

8.3.1 Personal Learning Space:

Oh, outside, in the bush. (Brant – 15)

As long as I can look out the window every now and again and see our lambs running around on nice green grass. (Brock – 10)

By yourself. (Lana – 19)

My favourite place is for learning different things is just outside ... study or ... the patio from there, for me. (Latisha – 10)

I prefer learning inside, unless there’s something and we go outside ... I prefer learning inside ... sometimes we sit down that end. (Ramona – 12)

I don’t normally like at my desk ... Not quite yet. (Shana – 8)

128 acres is a pretty good place to learn yeah (Danar – 19) That’s what I reckon. Up the creeks and stuff like that. (Tarun – 14)

We could sit in the lounge room and do our work and just think about it for awhile and be in like a relaxed position and not being able to sit up and do all that stuff ... that was helpful because it felt, like it made me more relaxed and stuff. (Zara – 15)

8.3.2 Hands-on Learning:

There's all different types of learning environments you can think of, but you're learning the more hands on things in the environment is goin' to be where you would do that. Like if you were learning mechanic sort of things. And the best sort of environment would be in a mechanics workshop or something like that. (Alysia – 16)

I best learn, actually, doing things and being shown things, I s'ppose you call it on the job training. Is the way I learn best. (Duane – 21)

Oh, I learn best out there doing it, hands on. (Justin – 19)

8.3.3 Quiet Working Space:

I really dislike background noise. That's the main thing. (Arden – 17)

When I transitioned into school that was another thing I had to adjust to and I had to adjust to boys making a noisy environment ... Well the best learning environment for me is when everyone is quiet ... I quite enjoy tests 'cause they're quiet. (laughing). (Gabbie – 14)

The home learning environment for me was a bit ... I like having quietness when I really need to think about things but ... you don't think for all the times through the day ... but at school it's good, like the noise and being able to discuss things with your friends and everything. ... It helps me focus on my school. (Gary – 18)

Ah, that depends ... how noisy they are. (Jamie – 10)

I didn't like ... working with a whole lot of other children that were making noise. (Latisha – 10)

8.3.4 Ability to Focus:

The mind starts to drift if it gets too quiet at home ... I find that hard to focus then. (Gary – 18)

For certain things ... you have to focus and ... delve in really deep into something. (Mitchell – 27)

Sometimes it's ... a little bit distracting because there's my computer and my keyboard and stereo system and stuff all around me. (Stuart – 13)

Only problem is, usually, they [at school] talk and I get distracted a bit. (Vicki – 17)

8.3.5 Relationships with Mentors:

One on one ... Like yeah, me and someone else telling me what to do. (John – 14)

There needs to be more one-on-one, or close relationships between teachers and pupils, is what I believe (chuckling). (Kieran – 24)

I like to feel comfortable around the people I'm with as well, like feel open to discuss stuff and so on ... I like to feel that I can ask for help ... or explanations if I need them ... but it's alright talking. (Vicki – 17)

Mum and Dad were like really positive towards it ... that was helpful. (Zara – 15)

Students described their best learning environments. Thirteen students described working in their own preferred space whether this was outdoors, a particular corner, a desk or multiple locations. The ability to choose learning environments was as important as the location. Males in particular preferred to learn out doors, especially if they could learn 'hands on.' Quietness was important for seven students who found this an aspect of mainstream they had to adjust to. Relational learning environments were important to six students, especially through accepting, appreciative, supportive and 'one-on-one' learning situations. Six students needed a focused environment free of distractions as found in mainstream institutions. Five students valued a comfortable learning environment. Other good learning environments included places where students could be themselves, have access to public libraries and the internet, and working on one's own, and/or with others, or in small groups. As students grew older, learning needs changed. Students spoke of being better able to cope with different learning environments as they moved into secondary school, particularly the senior years. A number of these students appreciated classroom discussions.

8.4 Learning Styles

8.4.1 Hands On Learning:

I'm definitely more hands on person. (Alysia – 16)

It is when you make some things. (Brad – 8)

Doingness, experimenting, with the things. (Brant – 15)

I'd find out by doing it. (Danar – 19)

I best learn, actually, doing things. (Daune – 21)

I like to learn by doing. (Fifi – 17)

I learn best out there doing it, hands on. (Justin – 19)

I like to learn by doing. (Mike -15)

Doing. (Rory – 17)

Learn by doing. (Tarun – 14)

8.4.2 Learning through Discussion:

I have to be able to talk, like take maths for instance. I have to be able to talk about each problem. I can't just sit there and then, and work it out ... without being able to, look at it or, talk about it, and figure it out. (Alysia – 16)

I ask a questions, mostly. (Brad – 8)

I learn best if, I actually have someone who can explain things to me. (Arden – 17)

Discussing things. (Gary – 18)

Telling me, yeah. Explaining it. (John – 14)

I just don't have determination to sit down, fill out paper work, read books. I'd rather ask questions ... Learn better through talking and practical. (Kieran – 24)

Well I ask questions, about it. (Sam – 10)

I like learning by talking about stuff, discussing stuff. (Vicki – 17)

8.4.3 Learning through Reading and Research:

Basically studying ... Reading I LOVE. (Brock – 10)

Mainly by reading. (Gary – 18)

I certainly spend a ... lot of time researching things and reading. (Jarratt – 21)

I don't learn very well from, from books and ... paper and that. I can look at something for ages and not pick it up. (Lana – 19)

I like to go to the library ... and get books. I ... look up on the library catalogue to see if I can find ... any books to find out whatever I have a question about. (Sam – 10)

8.4.4 Learning through Demonstration:

And being shown things. (Duane – 21)

And also, having people show me things, I can't figure out ... and then letting me do it as well, so that I know how to do it. (Gary – 18)

Showing me how to do it. If I can see someone do it, I can pretty much pick it up, straight away. (John – 14)

By ... somebody showing me how to do it and then sort of doing it for myself. (Lana – 19)

These students had experienced learning in different ways and it was expected that they would have some idea about how they might learn best. Apart from several students speaking of individual differences in learning styles, fourteen students spoke specifically about their appreciation and/or need to learn 'hands on.' The students who referred to this learning style were often students who had some kind of learning difficulty but this group included advanced learners and average students as well. Nine students liked to discuss or ask questions about their learning. Six students spoke of learning through warm and supportive relationships with parents. Five students understood best when shown how to do their work. Four gifted and advanced learners liked to read and research their work at length. One student specifically thought she learnt best through repetition.

Several students described how they did not learn academic work well and this included four students who struggled with reading and a couple who struggled to learn in large classrooms, when there was no 'hands on' learning, or when there were disinterested classmates. One advanced learner was adamant he did not like learning through concept maps or formulas.

8.4.5 The Meaning of Education

What is education for? I mean, that's not exactly the same as saying what is schooling? (Arden – 17)

Developing, to a certain extent developing who you are as a person as learning how to

handle responsibilities and that sort of thing as well as learning. (Duane – 21)

Educating yourself isn't boring. (Robert – 17)

Although some students felt challenged when asked to provide a definition of 'education,' a number of themes became evident in their responses. These themes included seeing education as something to do with learning, a process through which individuals developed, the pathway to become 'well rounded persons', achieving one's potential, learning to handle responsibility, time management, preparation for adult life and careers, to build the economy, learning 'skills for life,' and just 'knowing.' Nine students thought education was about learning. Five students saw education as something they determined and some thought this was being able to learn anything they wanted to know in interesting and relevant ways. Six students discussed education as the activity of learning particular subjects. Six students also thought education was the teacher's job to 'help equip' students with 'skills.' Two students thought education included a social dimension of learning how to get on with others and engage in intelligent conversation.

Unhelpful education was delivered in the 'boringest way possible' at home or in mainstream institutions, was overly controlling, over-structured, linear, stereotypical, compartmentalised and decontextualised from life.

One student summed up education as 'life is learning, fluid, flexible, relevant [and] contextual' and not separated from real life. There was an overall sense that these students thought education was a process of achieving one's potential and was more than school knowledge.

8.5 Socialisation

I was also part of a home schooling group at that time so my social needs were being met as well. (Fifi – 15)

If you want to know how to get out and be involved with the rest of the community and people like that, you're probably better go to school, if that makes sense. (Justin – 19)

Socialisation was one of the three most important topics discussed by these home educated students but student experiences and perspectives of socialisation were complex, making analysis difficult. All students had views about the socialisation they experienced at home and at school. All students appreciated friends, friendship

and social opportunities. The types of social experiences these students had varied between home and mainstream education and between particular times at home and in mainstream institutions.

Student comments about socialisation have been divided into four main sections: the positive and negative aspects of socialisation at home, the positive and negative aspects of socialisation in mainstream institutions, socialisation through transitions, and student responses to societal concerns for their social opportunities.

8.5.1 Socialisation At Home

Not as much socialising. (Adrian – 8)

The only real negative I can think of at the moment ... there are not much social interaction, because at a school, generally you're engaging and talking to other people ... At home you aren't exposed to as many people ... you don't get the same level of social interaction ... not as many opportunities to ... develop friends ... I don't have relatively that many friends, [but] I have ... got on closer I think with my friends. (Arden – 17)

I think it was just, the main reason I didn't like doing it was more so the way it was done, the fact that it was out here, so isolated from everyone else. (Duane – 21)

So I have friends [at home] ... Occasionally I felt like ... wanting to be with my friends at little bit more. But that was only occasionally ... Nothing else. (Fifi - 17)

I have more friends [at home] than I had (with emotion). (Sam – 10)

They assume in school, and you only get to know the friends that are there ... Like I would never have met Jack if I was at school. I guess I might have but ... (Tarun – 14)

Discussion of socialisation at home as a positive factor was overshadowed in importance by autonomy and learning, but it was the most common negative factor identified by students at home. However, students put the negative aspects of socialisation at home into perspective because there were more important positives about learning at home. Fifteen students were happy with their social opportunities at home whether they met friends every day, once a week or less frequently. Seven students thought there were times when it might have been nice to have more friends around, but this was not considered to be a major problem. However, the lack of social contact with peers was or became the worst feature of home education for ten students.

Friendships were developed through a number of outlets such as sporting clubs, interest

groups, church, parent's friends, other home educating families and home education networks. Three male students found there were no similarly aged peers in their home education networks and they appreciated meeting same aged peers in mainstream institutions.

Social Opportunities at Home:

I think ... like I've got to, spend time with people of all different ages throughout the whole of my education. Kids, like just ... in a year level [at school], when we got together with different people ... I got to spend time with young kids and their parents ... people my own age as well. (Alysia – 16)

I found that ... when you're socializing at school, it's very much in to your own age group and my friends don't really talk to people ... different [to] their age but at home schooling I found ... not just me, but other children and young people just were friends with people of all ages. (Fifi – 17)

I think that the friends that I've made are life friends, rather than ... most of my friends that go to school ... their friends from school are sort, of I s'ppose, friends from school. They're ... only that, whereas the friends that I've got are friends all the time and will be all the time. (Jarratt – 21)

Students valued certain features of their social experiences in home education and these included multi-aged friendships, fewer but more mutual, meaningful, lifelong and interest based friendships, better opportunities to improve social skills, better management of bullying, and superior social opportunities to those experienced in mainstream institutions. One mostly mainstreamed student would have preferred home education if he had developed these kinds of friendships at home.

Personality and Own Company:

I'm a very social person so I've ... always been out with my friends and things. (Alysia – 16)

And I'm mostly a loner ... For most of the time I ENJOY being alone ... and I can do some things that two people can't do. Like if there's a really good bike, then there won't be any argument on who gets it. (Brock – 10)

I'm a people person. (Fifi – 17)

I've, gone off for ages by myself and that would ... still be fun. (Lana – 19)

There ... very stereotypical thing that home schoolers are introverted (laughing) which I enjoyed ... it's certainly not the case of my sister [who] is the opposite to that With myself as ... having that natural tendency ... to draw on my strength from being introverted. (Mitchell – 27)

Older students recognised that people had different personalities, whether more extraverted or introverted, and these contributed to the ease with which students were able to socialise regardless of whether they were at home or attended mainstream institutions. Several students spoke of being content with and/or enjoying their own company.

Social Dilemmas as Teenagers:

And I also really missed the social aspect because, we'd just moved to Australia so we didn't know anyone here as well. And it was kind of really hard to actually get to know people in just like from church as well. (Gary – 18)

Probably ... not getting out and involved with ... the district, like the rest of the kids ... It's probably important for people who homeschool to do some sort of sport or social activity. (Justin – 19)

It got to the point where I felt I was trapped in it, because my parents decided that was the way I was going to go, and I didn't have choice or whether or not it was my friends or in the friends I had ... they were all younger than me. I got sick of going to their places ... they were physically a few years younger than me ... And because it was during my mid teens ... Being a secondary school year but, still having to hang out with the primary school kids and stuff. (Kieran – 24)

As students became teenagers, they often sensed a need for more socialisation with peers and found that home could be restrictive and overly sheltering, especially when there were no suitable same aged peers in the local home education network or they lived in isolated places. Five factors particularly contributed to students viewing socialisation at home as problematic: itinerancy, travel, isolation, loss of close friends and lack of appropriate peers within home education networks. Student social needs also changed as they grew into adolescence. Four male students were particularly challenged by their lack of social opportunity at home and its impact on their personal identity and struggles. Two brothers lived on an isolated property and the other two had experienced social problems while in mainstream institutions earlier and then were unable to find suitable peers within home education networks.

8.5.2 Socialisation At School

Positives of Mainstream Socialisation:

I like about school ... there are lots of friends and lots of school children. (Ariana – 7)

I really like the social aspect of it. It's like having all my friends there. Seeing them every day. (Gary – 18)

It's pretty fun. Especially with the ladies. It's pretty good ... I have no experience flirting with girls or anything. It's ... quite, quite weird. (John – 14)

I liked playing with my friends ... think that's all. (Lily – 8)

More people to socialize with. (Rory – 17)

I like ... the school, 'cause you get to meet ... and ... have ... nice friends and that's all. (Sally – 6)

I did like being with lots and lots of kids my age. (Shana – 8)

Twenty-two students described positive social experiences in mainstream institutions and fifteen students described the negative aspects of socialisation in mainstream institutions. Students valued socialisation in mainstream institutions because they met more people and had new social experiences. Students who had lived an itinerant lifestyle and not established friendships or migrated to Australia and lost former friends particularly felt the need to meet peers. However, responses depended on whether the students had started their education in primary schools and returned to secondary school or entered mainstream institutions later than compulsory school entrance and met friends or experienced social difficulties. Some students reported both positive and negative experiences.

Negatives of Mainstream Socialisation:

I remember gettin' beaten up a lot ... there was a particular group of kids. I was a chubby little kid and they liked pulling my cheeks, and beating me up ... and making fun of me. (Kieran – 24)

A lot of people say I've matured quicker and the kids will take a long time to catch up to me. (Gabbie – 14)

Students' descriptions of the negative aspects of mainstream socialisation aroused the

strongest emotions and several students found these experiences painful to discuss, even several years after the events to which they referred. Those factors contributing to this social discomfort came mostly as a result of cultural, values and academic differences, bullying, schoolyard cliques, and distracting and unhelpful peers.

CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC DIFFERENCES:

Cultural and academic differences were evident in the experiences of seven students who found they were different to average mainstream students. Three gifted students all experienced social difficulties in primary schools. Three advanced learners, because of their high academic abilities, found their presence challenged established student ability rankings, resulting in students reacting to the special treatment they received. These students were viewed by peers and some professionals as a 'problem' to the social balance of the class group. Three students felt uncomfortable and surprised when some of their peers acted immaturely in response to teacher requests. Two students, one primary and one senior secondary school student referred to the invisible and unknown but powerful social expectations of peers in mainstream institutions. One late primary school student felt culturally isolated from mainstream peers when he discovered his computer repair and music creation hobbies were not normal activities for his classmates. He felt:

A lot of people thought I was a bit weird because I was home schooled and they didn't treat me very nicely ... I might have been a bit smarter than them. (Stuart – 13)

BULLYING:

It was basically a lot of getting picked on and bullied and so forth ... and also ... they'd been there since prep and sort of gone through the process ... and I was a stranger in a way ... and was doing better than they were and of course that leads to ... upset, and giving people a hard time, so ... When ... these guys didn't want to have anything to do with me, I went and made friends elsewhere, shared ... with the females. (Jarratt – 21)

I was sick of being bullied a lot. (Ramona – 12)

I got teased a lot. (Zara – 15)

Ten students reported bullying as a problem in mainstream institutions. These students identified professional practices as the initiating marker distinguishing them from their peers. They thought some mainstream peers then discriminated against them because of their academic differences – whether successful or struggling. Several students felt unsupported by professionals when dealing with these situations.

Schoolyard Cliques:

Social problems. Yeah, yeah ... I don't! Certainly, there's ... the maturity side of things but I think a lot of it's also just the so called rules that appear during ... school sort of thing, in the groups of friends and ... which ... students go through that sort of stuff if they go to school anyway. ... in groups or out of groups. (Jarratt – 21)

They just...went round in a group ... they wouldn't let us in. (Ramona – 12)

School-yard cliques were identified as a problem by five students, both males and females. Two students felt they were eventually able to break through the barriers but others never broke through these clique barriers and left mainstream institutions, or in one instance, moved to a different school.

VALUES DIFFERENCES:

Dislikes ... I dunno, probably the other kids attitude ... to alcohol and stuff like that. And their lack of work ethic. (Justin – 19)

Two students discussed the differences in values they had grown up with compared to the displayed values of mainstream peers and the tensions they subsequently experienced. One young TAFE student was shocked when older peers challenged his attitude to alcohol, his work ethic and other behaviour. Through mentoring he was able to maintain his stand and eventually gain peer respect. The other student did not explain if she felt she resolved she different values to peers but later left the school concerned.

STUDENTS VIEWS OF SOCIAL SKILLS OF MAINSTREAM PEERS:

I think it's a very individual thing that, like there's even some children at the school ... who's not that confident and ... they hardly ever see anyone else out of school, or even their own real group of friends. (Gary – 18)

And I think that kids in school, place too much, emphasis on that social network ... They've got to be with a group of friends ... it seems that some kids don't know how to play by themselves. (Lana – 19)

Several students recognised that personality and interests contributed to their 'difference' to mainstream students but these students also thought they had developed abilities their mainstream peers lacked. Students thought mainstream peers often missed out on deep and meaningful friendships, were unable to communicate well with people of different ages, and were too peer dependent to enjoy their own company.

8.5.3 Social Experiences Through Transition

Because students made transitions in two directions, their social experiences had different values according to the direction of change. Several students who had been socially challenged at school found the move to home education provided an important positive, nurturing, healing and less threatening social environment than they had experienced in mainstream institutions. Students who enjoyed friendships at school and then moved home were sometimes tentative about the move, but discovered they were able to stay connected with friends out of school hours, made new friends in home education networks and discovered how to make friends with people of different ages and interests. The ability to make more same age peer friendships was one of the two main reasons adolescent students chose to enter or return to mainstream institutions. Most of these students found they adjusted well to the different social environment in mainstream institutions. Many found it easy when they had developed friendships with mainstream peers prior to entry into mainstream institutions. Those students who experienced difficulties re-entering mainstream institutions had also experienced social problems during their first mainstream educational experiences.

8.5.4 Recovery Time after School

I guess I was struggling to survive the social side of things and when you're ... constantly being harassed for your academic abilities, they're not the sort of thing that you want ... it was probably 6 to 12 months, easy ... that it took ... to recover. (Jarratt – 21)

Being in the early stages of life and a lot of your psychological things start from going to school and people putting you down, laughing at you and the likes ... probably the worst thing about a school. (Kieran – 24)

Most students, who moved out of mainstream education because of difficulties experienced in the system, moved promptly into learning programs at home. The exceptions were two of the gifted students who had experienced difficulties, particularly social problems, in primary school. Both students took months to recover an interest in academic pursuits. The break did not appear to weaken their academic success and improved their social development opportunities. One student with learning difficulties felt the negative social experiences of early primary school scarred him for life.

8.5.5 At TAFE and University

Probably 20 or 30 [students] ... I was the youngest ... There were ... a couple of other

guys there who were ... about 17 or 18, so, I got on ... fairly well with them ... I didn't have any problem with relating to the other people. (Arden – 17)

I was sort of ... the young one of the group and they all sort of, they all looked after me, and helped me out then ... I was the little guy. (Duane – 21)

Oh well, the first week, when they found out that I was 15, they had a go at me and I didn't drink, didn't smoke ... the students had a real go at me. But in the end they ended up respecting me. Was still good. (Justin – 19)

Nine students (six male and three female) attended TAFE at some point of their educational pathways and socialisation was an important topic in descriptions of their experiences. One of these males and a tenth male student also pursued traineeships through the TAFE system. All students, except one, described positive social interaction with other students. Most of the male students reported being the youngest in their respective courses by at least two or three years. The males usually felt the older students in the courses supported them respectfully and these students appreciated this care. Three students recognised that social interaction was restricted to course hours but they were not concerned about this and a few students were impressed with how pleasant people were at TAFE. One male student was not interested in socially interacting with the others in his class and made little comment. One fifteen year old male student was challenged by eighteen year old students for his stand against alcohol and other unproductive social behaviour and found mentoring helped him work through this situation. When asked if he might have found the situation more manageable if he had been forewarned of this possibility, he felt he might not have attended TAFE at all if he had known. A little later in the year, these same antagonists expressed admiration and respect for his personal stand and he felt empowered by this.

The student who had moved from home education to university appreciated the social environment of a small country campus where he developed friendships with lecturers and students. He felt that by doing some distance subjects he was able to slowly adjust socially in a personally satisfactory way to campus life.

8.5.6 Socialisation as a 'Problem' for Home Educated Students

Oh, my Friends! ... they don't mind ... They wished that I came to school but I don't wish that. Every time ... They go " I wish I could laze around all day". I say "I'm not lazying all day" ... "Oh you get to work on the couch, not hard ... on the chair." (Luke – 10)

Well, social's just a joke really ... I see so many people but ... of course in school ...

I think it's ... crowd situation where home schooling is like ... socialisation you get to when you finish school. When you can actually decide what level you want ... We can go for a bike ride or go visiting. (Stuart – 13)

Not just friends ... that you sort of have to be with. (Tarun – 14)

Many students were aware of society's concerns about their 'socialisation problems' as home schooled students and thought these societal views were misinformed, fixated, unwarranted and annoying. One younger student thought he should have used a tape-recorder every time someone asked about his socialisation opportunities at home. These students wanted professionals and society to know that they did have life-long friends with all ages while at home and that professional supervision of large groups of students could be viewed as a form of 'crowd control'. Gifted students felt that age-segregated classes were both discriminatory and destructive and that what professionals thought were 'small social gains' in school were really experienced 'big losses'.

8.6 Structure and Professionals

School can't cater for each individual's every need. (Fifi – 17)

When discussing mainstream institutions, students frequently used the term 'structure' to refer to the regularities found in these institutions and viewed these as different to their flexible and free environments at home. Students expressed both appreciation for and dislike of the way mainstream education was structured and had more to say about the negative features of mainstream institutional structure than they did about the positive features.

8.6.1 Positive Features of Less Structure at Home:

Less structure. (Arden – 17)

If I was interested in something, I'd just be able to check it out and find out about it without having to ... go through all the processes that you might have to find out if you wanted to do something in school. (Danar – 19)

Structured versus unstructured. Would be the words. (Jarratt - 21)

It wasn't structured or routined. (Kieran – 24)

I ... like being ... one of the first people to ... have questions asked, 'cause I'm not ...

in a room of 30 other people wanting to know the answer ... I could take as much time as I wanted to ... pass the subject ... if I didn't get one particular thing, I could spend a couple more ... hours or whatever time, to try and get it. (Zara – 15)

Five students, who were academically strong or had learning disabilities, noted the lack of structure at home in comparison to structure found in mainstream institutions. Students felt this lack of structure allowed them more effective and meaningful learning opportunities.

8.6.2 School Structure

Positives of School Structure

Just the way it was all ... structured. (Duane – 21)

Just enjoyed the change ... I liked the classroom kind of set-up. (Fifi – 17)

Just the more structured way of looking at things. (Gary – 18)

Classroom environment ... you can sort of discuss ideas and interact. (Vicki – 17)

Ten secondary school students appreciated the regularities and structures of mainstream education. These students liked the change in environment, classroom set up, regularity of roll-mark, structure and pressure to perform. School breaks were appreciated by all and several students liked the extracurricular activities such as school bands, athletic days, sports and teacher organised fun days.

All TAFE students valued their learning experiences. They felt the way TAFE classes and courses were organised suited their learning styles, were relevant to their interests, encouraged flexible and adult learning outcomes and allowed flexible time management. One student had originally been concerned she would be trapped in organisational structure but found it worked well. A second student was disappointed when he discovered his course did not provide more 'hands on' learning in his particular course. Traineeships provided another student with the flexibility he felt most comfortable with, especially one-on-one learning opportunities.

Negatives of School Structure

I hated the thought of going to any organisation thing ... TAFE is just not the best place to be ... the organisation and the courses, up in the air, not very well planned

sometimes. (Alysia – 16)

The way the whole school structure ... different classes and essays and requirements, course requirements and that sort of thing ... and you had no real concept of what teachers would demand. (Duane – 21)

Structured versus unstructured. Would be the words. (Jarratt – 21)

Fifteen primary and secondary school students described negative structural features of mainstream institutions. Students disliked the general structure of school programs, specific subject demands, pressure to perform, restrictions of movement in classrooms, time and place constraints, unclear expectations for newcomers, waiting for teacher attention in large groups, homework, discipline, creativity restricted by timetables and set classes, poor capital facilities or institutional organisation, and uniform requirements. Most students found these structures distasteful but not oppressive enough to leave mainstream institutions.

Set Times:

Sit down for a long time. (Jeff – 10)

You have to stay there ... from 9 until 3:30 ... Can't go home ... can't finish early ... If you finish early, you just have to sit there. (John – 14)

The timetable. I hated timetable. I hate bells, I hate having to be somewhere at a specific time or sit in a class for set amount of time and just do that thing. Especially like with the art. I didn't always want to do art at ... that particular time ... I might be in chemistry or something and I'd have this great idea and I'd want to go over and finish my art piece, but, you'd sort of lose that, that idea or feeling for, you know, what you wanted to do. (Lana – 19)

It didn't seem right to let somebody my age whose life should be so structured. Yes, that was probably one of the main things. Being less structure. (Stuart – 13)

Some students were not used to set times. Sitting for long periods of time in environments they would not select at home was one restriction. Another mainstream institutional restriction was the way student time was not considered. Prompt work at home meant more useable free time. In mainstream institutions prompt work meant boring periods of time waiting for other students so there was no incentive to be efficient with time management. Travel between school and home was an added time restraint and fixture.

Behavioural Expectations and Regulated Activities:

Especially ... I didn't understand a lot of team sports ... and I didn't understand the rules, and nobody went out of their way to come and help me and show me the rules and show me how to play the sport and so there wasn't a real understanding for stuff that I hadn't ever been to school and I hadn't ... played these things. Stuff like that ... They didn't realize that I ... I hadn't gone through PE and been taught specific sports and how you play them ... They knew, but they didn't really understand, I suppose. (Lana – 19)

Homework:

You have to work all day, and then ... do your homework. Another couple of hours at home. (Mike – 15)

Bloomin' homework! (Stuart – 13)

School Discipline:

All the restricting things ... like they're pointless ... just like it's unnecessary, like ... the detentions at our school, should like lunchtime, is pick things up. And like you get it for some very silly stuff ... that I don't like ... like if your shirt is hanging out and stuff like that. (Gary – 18)

Get into trouble there ... Oh, just talking. If you were at home you could talk whenever you wanted too. (John – 14)

The detention system ... Oh, I don't know, for being noisy in class. (Rory – 17)

Students did not always understand the behavioural expectations in regulated activities such as general classroom behaviour, team sports and the invisible rules of the school-yard. At home students were able to engage in long and complex projects while at school, lack of suitable facilities and individual time meant that these learning activities were curtailed. Homework was another way in which personal time was reduced, often for no apparent academic or relevant learning outcome, especially when students achieved more effective learning at home without it. Breaks were awkward times for these students, especially when new to mainstream institutions and a new cultural environment. These were times when they became acutely aware of their difference to peers. A number of students, mostly male, found they were disciplined for talking in class and other apparently trivial matters. These students were used to engaging in conversation at home and it was an important part of their learning process (Barratt-

Peacock 1997, Jackson 2008, Thomas 1998). These students were also used to making significant decisions at home and not being constantly told what to do.

8.6.3 Professionals

Positive Views of Teachers

And all the teachers are pretty nice. (Vicki – 17)

Many students described positive views and experiences with teachers. Young students who had previously been home schooled and older students who returned to mainstream institutions a second time thought professionals were friendly and helpful. Several students considered some of their teachers to be friends, particularly in secondary school, TAFE and university.

Students appreciated teachers who spent time with them and who encouraged fun and flexibility in their classrooms. Teachers who were listeners, accepting, easy to get on with, gentle, inclusive, ‘nice’, interactive, patient, considerate and professional were also respected. Secondary school students enjoyed teacher flexibility with instantaneous classroom discussions on wide ranging topics. Having one parent at home all day did not always mean students wanted one teacher all day at school. While one student found it challenging becoming accustomed to the variety of teachers in early secondary school, another student loved having multiple teachers in contrast to what he had experienced with one teacher all day in late primary school.

All the [secondary] teachers. You don't ... just have one teacher, like in primary school. That was pretty dodgy. You have all these different teachers ... it's good. (John – 14)

Negative Views of Teachers

The teachers seem about the same, they don't ... seem to be ... happy to be there ... and just generally depressing. (Arden – 17)

Probably the only thing is certain teachers. I really get along pretty well with most of my teachers, but there's like one, two ... that don't get along with as well. (Gary – 18)

Teachers didn't spend as much time as mum would to help. (Lana – 19)

Pressure from teachers. (Rory – 17)

'Cause try and chase the teacher around the room all the time. He's always helping ...

everyone else. (Tarun – 14)

Students who started their education in mainstream institutions spoke most about the ways teachers' actions exacerbated their individual needs and thought this made them feel unimportant. These students did not like being ignored when needing help, especially when quiet and well behaved, or being taught things they already knew because the teacher did not know what they knew. Two students spoke of having personality differences with teachers. Students who moved from home to mainstream institutions felt some teachers needed to provide clearer instructions and be conscious of students' home education background. Several students were surprised teachers were not as helpful as parents were, that some teachers yelled, worked quickly on the white/blackboards, and put pressure on students to complete work promptly. One student thought she was more vulnerable to bullying if she approached teachers about her problems.

8.7 Students' Views of Themselves

Compared to most kids my age ... I am better educated than most, because a boy who was born two weeks after me, is way below me, way. (Brock – 10)

Being homeschooled to a point, has taught me a lot ... of practical skills, that you wouldn't get at school. ... given me a lot of confidence as far as like working around machinery. (Duane – 21)

I found that I could be more myself, at home and I learnt and got to know who I was more, when I did home schooling. (Fifi – 17)

I'm a very confident person. ... I know I can achieve things, if I put my mind to it. (Gabbie – 14)

I'm independent ... but I still take in to consideration other people's view points ... I'm not a rebel or anything but ... I didn't have any one to tell me what to do so [while at home] ... I had to make my own mind up about things. (Gary – 18)

Oh, Pretty highly. Yeah. (John – 14)

You were what you were and that was that and it didn't really matter as much. (Lana – 19)

I know it was completely different ... I felt like I was getting really shy when I was at school. (Latisha – 10)

I didn't have to worry about what other people thought of me then [at home]. (Ramona

– 12)

When I was in school, I thought, I didn't really matter because of all these other kids.
(Shana – 8)

Except the only problem with this is ... I don't really know what to compare myself to, so. I would like to have a strong sense of how smart I am. (Stuart – 13)

At home ... I had lots more self-esteem. (Zara – 15)

When students were asked to describe the way they viewed themselves, many students balked and were unsure how to answer. Some younger students, in particular, found this question difficult. Students were better able to respond to this question when asked if they thought differently about themselves at school to when they were at home.

All students who responded to this question thought they viewed themselves in a positive way although some added qualifications. A few students, particularly males, were unsure about their social abilities. However, when referring to life skills, all students felt they were capable and competent.

A number of secondary school aged students explained that they felt less controlled by peer pressure than their mainstream peers appeared to be and attributed this to being home educated. Two male students, felt comfortable with who they were but also wanted to have some idea of how they compared with other students.

Several students, particularly females, thought it was important to be themselves regardless of what their peers thought and saw themselves as valuable people who had a right to their own opinions.

8.7.1 At Home:

When asked if home education had hindered the development of self-esteem, a number of students objected because they thought being home educated improved the way they viewed themselves. One student explained that being at home increased her self-confidence and ability to think for herself.

I suppose it helped my confidence a lot because ... I felt that the years I'm doing home schooling, were critical years and were beneficial being home because I wasn't surrounded by peer pressure to be something other than, that I wasn't. (Fifi – 17)

Most students explained that at home they did not really think about how they viewed

themselves, but they did think they had a more positive view of themselves than when in mainstream institutions.

8.7.2 At School:

I had to look after myself! I had trouble looking after myself, let alone other people.
(Sam – 10)

I think that's partly because I was sort of quite rejected. (Stuart – 13)

At school students reported they thought differently about themselves to the way they had at home. Self-views included becoming more shy, introverted, self-conscious, 'unmotivated, 'pulled down,' 'quite rejected,' concerned about what others thought and concerned that they did not matter to anyone. One student expressed confusion as to how one worked out who they were when they had 'magnificent' abilities in maths and not a clue when it came to sports. This particular student had found his early primary school experiences difficult.

Students were generally vague when asked how they developed ideas about themselves. One thought it came from 'inside' his heart. Another thought it mostly came from her parents. A third thought it came 'from life experiences' and several indicated that they did not know.

Several students thought they had experienced times in their lives when they had been easily influenced by the views of peers or had difficulties thinking positively of themselves as a result of negative interactions with peers at school. One older male student found the process of choosing his own values a long journey. Two students did not think there had been any difference in their views of themselves between home and school.

Several older students also thought there were personality factors influencing the way they viewed themselves. A few thought they were 'out going,' 'people person[s]' and 'nice to people.' Others felt they were introverted and unsure how to deal with people and they also thought the way they viewed themselves changed over time.

These home educated students developed healthy views of themselves while at home. Many found their experiences in mainstream, particularly in the earlier years, challenged this strong self identity. Most of the older students felt they had developed some independence from peer pressure and were more able than their mainstream

peers to be themselves. When at home, these students did not stop to think about who they were as they felt no need to make comparisons to anyone else. These home educated student comments about the way they viewed themselves were similar to those identified by Sheffer (1995) when she explored student identity of adolescent home educated girls.

8.8 Student Closing Comments

Actually ... personally I prefer home education, but then again, I'm completely biased. (Arden – 17)

I would recommend it ... for the course work is a lot more, how could I say, direct, as in, there's ... not so much mucking around. (Duane – 21)

I would never change back to going to school the whole time. (Fifi – 17)

It's great ... If you're having trouble at school, no friends or something, home schooling is the way to go. If you're like an out, if you want to get friends and stuff, go to school. But ... you wouldn't go to school [to] learn. If you want to learn, go home! ... at home is the best place to learn. (John – 14)

I look at society as like the basket scales. The old baskets scales, for someone to rise, someone must go down, so everyone puts people down because they can rise ... You get the groups who are always pick[ed] on, laughed at, called nerds and now that they're out of school, they still believe that and are too scared to step out of that and aim ... in case they make a mistake and muck up. (Kieran – 24)

I love home schooling (Ramona – 12)

I think though, it's a good thing that there's discussion about it because I do see the merits of ... homeschooling for quite a few people. (Robert – 17)

Tell them ... to write to my mum. (Stuart – 13)

Some of the time it's like 'you're home schooled?' It's kind of like, 'What the hell are you doing?' ... it's, 'is there something wrong with your head or something?' ... They're kind of a bit ... And sort of put off by it ... even you ... maybe stupid or something, like you don't know anything ... they shouldn't be scared of it, like shouldn't put it down, because it does have its value, and ... there's more than one way of teaching something, learning stuff. (Vicki – 17)

The final interview question asked students what they wanted professionals and others to know about home education. Most students felt that the interview process had

covered their experiences and views and had nothing further to add but there were a number of students who did add to earlier comments. Many of these comments revealed how they thought society had a negative view of them as home schooled students and added that they wanted these views challenged. They wanted professionals and the public to gain a more accurate picture of what home education was about and acknowledge how valuable their home education experience had been to them personally.

Most students valued their home education and were grateful for the opportunity to learn this way. Even students who had not appreciated everything about their home education experience thought home education was beneficial and an important educational option.

Students saw a need for public discussion of the benefits and advantages of home education because they thought that other students might benefit from this type of education.

Some students described a few ‘provisos’ to the otherwise beneficial features of home education. These provisos included the need for the ‘right resources’, parents being available to individual children, especially in large families, recognition that some parents did not have expert knowledge, isolated students needing access to community sports and events, and a need to know student level of ability when entering mainstream institutions.

The four main topics – learning, agency, socialisation and institutional structure – were maintained in the closing comments. Some students appreciated their natural learning opportunities. Others valued their eclectic education and felt that it provided students with a solid, contextual and ‘superior’ education base for their future learning. The two students who entered university contributed their successful transition into university to their home education. Students who used structured externally provided curriculum appreciated aspects of their home learning experiences but felt there needed to be greater flexibility to accommodate individual needs and interests, and allow for greater creativity and context in real life situations.

Students identified problems with the structure of mainstream institutions and these included problems created by age divided classes for different ability students, restrictions to student autonomy, home work and ‘busy work’ that reduced valuable personal time, time wasting through classroom management strategies, and the psychological damage done to students who experienced continual ‘put down[s]’.

Good social opportunities were available to most of these students while at home in different ways to socialisation experienced in mainstream institutions. At home, students were able to develop meaningful and long-term relationships with people who had similar interests in ways not often available in mainstream institutions. Students critiqued the socialisation experiences of their mainstream educated peers. These students viewed the need of many mainstream students to fit in with peers as a weakness. Some students who experienced negative social experiences at school through bullying and cliques found relief from these situations when at home. Several students appreciated the social opportunities of school but valued these in relation to the type of learning they received at home. One older student felt society needed to change from thinking that for one person to rise in life they had to put someone else down.

Many of these students valued both their home education and mainstream experiences. The few students who used part-time features of mainstream institutions saw benefit in part-time opportunities, but this depended on the level at which part-time was undertaken and how the part-time was organised.

Students did not appreciate being confronted with professional prejudice and ignorance about home education. They had experienced this prejudice in professionals, who judged them by experiences with one other home educated student, and who spoke of home education as if it were aberrant social behaviour. One student explained there needed to be informed legislation to enable more students the ability to achieve at home when opportunities in mainstream institutions were inadequate.

Students valued strong and healthy relationships with parents and siblings that grew through their home education programs. Home education promoted greater recognition and respect for the uniqueness of each individual and provided opportunities to exercise self-determination through personal freedom and flexibility to learn more effectively and efficiently.

8.9 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the views students held of both their home education and mainstream experiences especially as they related to student autonomy, learning needs, socialisation and identity. The chapter that follows compares the views and experiences of all three participant groups, parents, professionals and students, and makes connections between these positions and the overseas and Australian home education research and the Australian research on mainstream student transitions.

Chapter 9: Links with the Literature (1)

Each of the three groups of participants – parents, professionals and students – had shared and unique characteristics and perspectives identifying areas of common ground and areas of tensions between the three groups. In this study the parents provided the most information as professionals and students spoke more succinctly. Analysis of the qualitative data provided characteristics of these home educating families and students. Connections are now made to these commonalities and tensions between the three groups and to the research literature on home education and transition.

9.1 The Parents

9.1.1 Connections

Mothers were the key spokesperson in interviews and they conducted the home education programs, although a few had the active support of fathers. Although most families were two parent families, there was one single parent in this study. The types of curricula used in this group were predominantly eclectic although a few families used externally prepared curriculum either from ACA or DECV. Only two families used a natural learning approach. These characteristics, including types of occupations and geographic distribution, are similar to those found in other Australian studies (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 1997, 2006, Patrick 1999, Thomas 1998). One exception is the high number of families using an eclectic program. Harding (2006) found there were fairly equal numbers of families using the three main types of programs, with perhaps a higher proportion using externally prepared curriculum. His result may have reflected his access to ACA families, however the reasons for such a high proportion of eclectic users in this study is unknown. Families using natural learning either moved students out of mainstream education or had no intention of entering students into mainstream institutions unless students chose otherwise (see Appendix 6 for family and student connections to professionals and institutions).

Family Group Movement

The main first direction of family groups was twelve families involving thirty-one students who moved out of mainstream institutions. Only three family groups involving eleven students moved into mainstream education as the first direction of change. Five families moved individual children out of mainstream institutions and five families moved individual children into mainstream institutions as the first move between the

two systems.

9.1.2 Reasons for Moving Out of Mainstream

Parents usually made the decision to remove children from mainstream institutions. Reasons for removing children included concern to alleviate academic and social tensions for children with giftedness, advanced learning abilities, learning difficulties or health needs. Other reasons for removing children out of mainstream institutions included family travel, school closure, student decision, family relocation, and values differences between the family and the institution children attended.

9.1.3 Reasons for Movement Into Mainstream

Three parents reported maternal fatigue as the key reason for entering family groups of students into primary schools. Two other families moved children into mainstream institutions, including DECV, due to father disapproval of home education and mother concerns for children's curriculum needs. Student decision accounted for most students entering secondary school and TAFE. Parents supported secondary school students' decision to attend mainstream institutions, even when they disapproved of the move. Other family reasons for students moving into mainstream institutions included student access to specialist teachers in preparation for VCE, student loneliness and lack of cooperation due to changed circumstances at home, and availability of part-time attendance.

9.1.4 Part-Time

Part-time attendance to mainstream institutions was reported by six families. Four families entered students and two had exited mainstream institutions. Most parents thought this offered positive experiences, particularly socially, and aided adjustment to mainstream institutions. However, there were some complications, with students unwilling to participate fully, problems managing the external components in schools not set up for distance learning, and missed classes, particularly in secondary school when whole days were missed. It worked well when secondary school students limited attendance to particular subjects.

9.1.5 Parental Expectations of Mainstream

When students were sent to school, either at normal entrance age or other times, parents expected institutions to cater for children's needs by providing basic academic skills, extensions of work for gifted students, assistance for learning disabled students, healthy

social opportunities and a happy, safe environment.

9.1.6 Parental Expectations of Home Education

When parents chose to home educate children, many were unsure of what to expect. They did expect home education would broaden their children's horizons, allow children to develop into well rounded, balanced and happy individuals, provide a sound academic foundation, and cater for learning differences. A few parents also hoped it would relieve children from the oppression some had experienced at school. As mothers practiced home education they grew in confidence as children learnt and became more contented.

9.1.7 Experiences in Mainstream

Parents reported positive experiences with mainstream institutions and these included innovative, supportive, and organised professionals who promoted academic excellence, encouraged parental involvement, and implemented inclusive practices. They enjoyed watching children interacting with peers socially and intellectually.

Parents reported negative experiences with mainstream institutions and these included the limitations of institutional structures, professional behaviour and practice, limited learning opportunities especially for children with different learning needs to the average student, negative socialisation – including bullying, cliques and mismatches in maturity levels to same aged peers, negative impact on children's self-esteem and health, and little support for family values or respect for family time.

Parent reasons for engaging with or exiting mainstream education followed on from these experiences and they found home education was a workable alternative where negative experiences were minimised. Parents sent children to mainstream institutions because they viewed mainstream institutions as places where children could learn effectively, and interact with expert professionals and peers.

9.1.8 Experiences in Home Education

Parents reported positive experiences from their engagement in home education. These included greater family unity, and benefits to children and parents. Children had better learning opportunities incorporating individualised and contextualised learning, improved motivation to learn, greater happiness, improved health, and better self-esteem. Children developed learning independence and avoided problems found in mainstream institutions. Parents often found home education easier than having

children in mainstream institutions as it allowed greater flexibility of family and personal time, and reduced stress from supporting unhappy children.

Parents reported a number of negative experiences doing home education although many parents thought children experienced few if any negatives at home. Parents were challenged by the responsibility of starting home education but these concerns quickly disappeared. Some personal concerns included disconnection from community conversation, loneliness when no suitable home education networks were available, suspended personal careers, less time with spouses, 'messy' houses, financial constraints, having children around '24x7,' and stresses from maintaining their program and discipline. Most mothers put up with these inconveniences and found them minor inconveniences although three mothers sent children to school because of these tensions. Parents also disliked society's reactions to home education, particularly the perceived misinformed focus on inadequate socialisation.

9.1.9 Decision to Move Out of Mainstream Institutions

Parents often found the decision making process to home educate children difficult and many reported engaging in lengthy research. Three parents found professionals supportive of their decision. However nine parents faced strong professional opposition and seven reported what they considered to be professional blackmail, including attempts to thwart their decision to educate children at home by putting on special farewell parties, speaking against home education directly to children, and occasionally reporting parents to the Department of Education and Training.

Most families moved out of mainstream institutions over an end of the year break while a few moved at the end of a semester or term. Eight families kept the option of returning open and chose curriculum to suit an easy transition. Parents selected resources from a number of sources but some parents sought 'teacher training' and others did not know how to access non-sectarian market supplied information. Access to DECV was important for two families but they needed more flexible and individually tailored programs over the long-term.

Home education networks were often a source of support although a few parents found it difficult to locate ones with similar values to their own, or found they were exclusive or nonexistent in their local areas.

The reasons given and experiences described by parents in this study for home educating their children were similar to those found in all previous Australian home

education research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 1997, Jeffries & Giske 2004, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998) and research from around the world (Aurini & Davies 2005, Bolle, Wessel, Mulvihill 2007, Neuman & Aviram 2003). The experiences described and reasons given easily fell into what Patrick (1999; also Hetzel 1998, Weinig 1993) identified as the negative ‘push’ factors parents experienced in their association with mainstream institutions, and the positive ‘pull’ factors of home education. Recent overseas literature more closely examines parent reasons for choosing to home educate children. While Apple (2006, 2007) recognised there were different groups of home educators in the United States, he focused on the qualities of the fundamentalist and right winged Christian community of home educators. He explained how parents exercised ‘market choice’ as understood in neo-liberal terminology to mean these parents were actively seeking class distinction and exclusive education. Most of the parents in this study did have Christian beliefs but this type of market choice was not easily identified in the reasons provided or the experiences they described. One parent also explained that the work of Illich and Holt were important for their choice of home education. In recent overseas literature (Aurini & Davies 2005, Neuman & Aviram 2003) exploring parental reasons for choosing to home educate children, many home educating families exercised ‘choice.’ However, they were engaged in home education to practice ‘intensive parenting’ reflecting the general culture of more recent times (Aurini & Davies 2005). Intensive parenting here is understood to mean parents set out to provide a warm and nurturing environment to support their children in a more direct manner than achievable when children attended mainstream institutions. The parents in this study, whether Christian, atheist or those who held no identified belief system, were more clearly identified as parents providing ‘intensive parenting’ experiences for their children than exercising neo-liberal market choice (Apple 2001, 2006, 2007).

9.1.10 Movement into Mainstream

Families thought children usually made the transition into mainstream institutions with ease, although parents were aware children often experienced some form of culture shock with the ways institutions functioned and mainstream peers acted. Parents respected student autonomy, especially when students made the decision to enter mainstream institutions or remain at home.

Parents were proactive about preparing students for transitions through visits to institutions in and out of operating hours and on orientation days, encouraging friendships with mainstream peers, and discussing possible culture shock. However, they generally felt preparations were minimal.

Students from eight families made the decision to enter TAFE apart from one student who made a joint decision with parents. Three families had male students who entered TAFE two to three years under typical age levels. Parents thought their TAFE students were happy with courses, achieved highly and appreciated adult learning approaches. Only one student felt challenged on entry into TAFE but managed this with supportive mentoring.

9.1. 11 The Entry Points

Family entry generally occurred when the eldest child was in mid to late primary school. Patterns of individual student movement were blurred with students entering and leaving at various times. The clearest common entry point were six students who entered mainstream institutions in Year 11.

9.1.12 Parent Definitions of Common Educational Terms

There were common themes in parent definitions of frequently used educational terms. Parents viewed education as a life long love of learning. Curriculum was described as a guide to contextualise learning to life and student interests. Learning styles were unique to each child. The use of time frames in mainstream institutions were the reason some children experienced problems at school, whether students were gifted, learning advanced or learning disabled and needed more flexibility (Thomas 1998).

Parents had strong views about the meaning of socialisation (Clery 1998) and thought it occurred best in families and communities, otherwise known as vertical socialisation. They thought same age groups contributed to the development of poor social skills. Parents recognised social problems could be caused by family itinerancy, lack of peers in home education networks and perhaps also by parental shyness.

Healthy self-esteem (Brosnan 1991, Hill 1995, Holder 2001, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Lee 1994, Sheffer 1995, Taylor 1986, Taylor 2001) was valued by most parents and was the reason several parents removed children from mainstream institutions. Most thought self-esteem improved at home and was challenged in mainstream institutions. A small number of parents did not mention student self-esteem.

Parents took their rights and responsibilities to educate their children seriously and proactively (England 1998, Harding 2006, Harding & Farrell 2003). By their example, they modelled self-determination and encouraged students to exercise autonomy in their daily learning and when deciding whether to attend mainstream institutions. They

sometimes chose compatible school curriculum for this purpose. There was consensus that both public and professionals needed a clearer understanding of the nature of home education.

9.1.13 Parent Evaluation of Home Education

Parents thought home education was an important educational alternative and valued student ability to make meaningful life decisions, develop 'self-reliance', independent learning skills, maturity of mind, intellect and wisdom. Parents recognised that home education had its strengths and weaknesses and these included a recognition that parent practices and management could be too informal for some students, some students missed the benefits of peer mediated learning available in mainstream institutions, were handicapped when there were no suitable home education networks, and benefited from supportive spouses and extended family. Several parents also thought school structures disempowered professionals from implementing needed changes, especially for students with different learning abilities.

Home educating parents experienced the greatest joy watching children learn effectively, and develop better self-esteem and family connectedness (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Breshears 1996, Gray 1992 Hainlen 1995, Phillips 1998, Romanowski 2001(a,b), Stoppler 1998, Thomas 1998). The main concerns of parents involved their interactions with inflexible institutions and uncooperative professionals who did not appear to listen to or understand their concerns about their children (Dockett & Perry 2003(a), Hetzel 1998, Irwin 2006, Jeffrey & Giskes, 2004, OBOS 2004, Weinig 1993).

9.2 Professionals and Parents

The majority of professionals in this study described home educated students' transitions into mainstream education from home education as positive ones and described most students as academically equal or above average and socially well adjusted (Thomas 1998). Professional interest in home educated students focused on student academic and social abilities and reflected similar characteristics to overseas findings of professional attitudes (Luebke 1999, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995). Two thought there were 'gaps' in student knowledge while one professional explained that all students had gaps. One primary school principal, who had experienced a number of inward home educated student transitions was not favourably impressed with home education because a number of her students had presented with learning difficulties and poor social adjustment. Other professionals were generally pleased with the academic and social abilities of these students and noted that although

a few students presented with learning difficulties these were not caused by home education practice. They also observed that social problems were associated more with family dysfunction or itinerancy, rather than home education practice.

9.2.1 Entry and Exit of Students with Mainstream

Professionals interacted with seventy-seven students. They indicated that many students moved into mainstream institutions as family groups, and some as single students. Three primary principals thought that maternal fatigue (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Nicholls 1996, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998, Trevaskis 2005) or mother recognition of limited teaching ability contributed to the decision to enter families into primary school or early secondary school. The most common entry points in primary school seemed to be Year 6 for the eldest child. Single students often entered in Year 6, Year 7 or Year 8. Another common entry point was in Year 11 when the rest of the family sometimes followed into lower year levels. One professional knew of a student who entered a tertiary institution from home education.

Professionals identified maternal fatigue and stress as a contributing factor to entry into mainstream institutions. Three parents in this study entered students into mainstream institutions due to maternal fatigue. Two of these parents used externally provided curriculum. Jeffrey and Giskes (2004) found that some parents, who struggled to maintain student motivation and routines, manage home and school and had reduced personal time, developed maternal stress. In their study, distance education was included as home education. In this study, however, these types of problems appeared to be associated most with families who used externally prepared structured programs. In contrast to this, the professionals who sensed students had difficulties with school programs felt some students had received little direction with their learning because non-typical to school curriculum was thought to have been used. For easy entry into mainstream institutions, two professionals thought curricula similar to mainstream was helpful for some students.

Only seven professionals were aware if students had returned to home education after leaving their institutions. Parent and professional awareness of student movement into and out of mainstream institutions reflect both similar and dissimilar findings. Both groups were aware there were movements between the two types of education, however professionals were more conscious of family entrance into mainstream institutions than they were of family exits. Professionals observed that most students successfully entered mainstream institutions unless there were other factors contributing to learning and social problems such as family dysfunction, itinerancy and learning disabilities.

Professionals were much less aware of what happened to students who exited their institutions. Two principals felt there were instability issues in the two families who exited their institutions but both professionals did not know the final outcomes for these students. Two DECV professionals also noted that students exited their institution to return to home education. The outcomes of student exits from DECV were often unknown, but one professional was aware of two students who had later successfully entered university.

Parents, however, reported more exits than initial entries into mainstream institutions and all parents thought children had improved academically and socially as a result of these movements. Parents also added that children's self-esteem had improved when moving out of mainstream institutions. Professionals did not comment on this aspect of their home educated students' well being unless specifically asked apart from one DECV teacher who noted that a number of high achieving home educated students appeared to be very confident.

9.2.2 Definitions

The definitions discussed by both professionals and parents provided a useful window into the similar and different perspectives each group had of educational issues related to these students.

Education

Both professionals and parents saw education as a process preparing young people effectively for the adult world and as a life long journey extending beyond the boundaries of mainstream education. Both groups wanted students to experience the 'joy of learning.' Professionals felt mainstream education provided the basic ingredients for such an education, but a number of professionals noted that mainstream education sometimes failed to help students see the 'joy of learning' and one explained how mainstream institutions even blocked learning pathways for some young people and 'killed' their love for learning. Parents thought home education provided children with opportunities to promote motivation, relevance and interest. They added that children seemed to lose the 'joy of learning' while in mainstream institutions.

Curriculum

Four professionals thought their curriculum adequately catered for the overall needs of students. Two primary school principals found that home educated students who used DECV material more easily slotted into their programs and this reflected similar

findings about the importance of reducing of tensions between mainstream institutions through appropriate curriculum (Woods & Homer 2005). Four professionals thought mainstream curricula limited opportunities to connect with all students' interests and was only useful as a guide. Four professionals acknowledged the benefits of flexible and free home education curriculum. Only four professionals identified possible curriculum used at home. Parents described curriculum as a plan of learning and three had studied the state government education requirements. One reason for removing students from mainstream institutions was the failure of school curriculum to cater for individual needs. While ensuring students learnt the basics, parents usually moved to more flexible curriculum over time encouraging students to connect to the real world and learn in context. Some parents chose school compatible curriculum but tailored it to student needs and interests. Parents who reported difficulties motivating children to learn used externally provided curricula.

Learning Styles

Five professionals thought their programs provided adequate flexibility to cater for all different learning needs. Eight professionals recognised home education's ability to cater more adequately for different learning styles than mainstream education. This inability of mainstream institutions to cater for individual learning styles was a key reason many parents removed children from mainstream institutions. Parents also struggled to cater to students' needs in the long term when using externally prepared curriculum such as ACA and DECV.

Time Frames

The majority of professionals recognised time frames were a useful guide when developing curriculum but could be counter productive for some students. Many parents also found time frames either limited their children's learning opportunities or set difficult benchmarks children struggled to achieve.

Socialisation

Professionals described the successful social transition of the majority of their home educated students and identified causes other than home education practice when there were social problems. At the same time, professionals considered socialisation their primary concern for home educated students. Professional definitions of socialisation included the ability to function competently in society and typically assessed student social ability by the way students mixed with peers and behaved in classrooms. Two professionals observed that home educated students interacted well with adults. Parents

were explicit that socialisation was best achieved by children learning to mix and feel comfortable with a wide age and interest range of people in the community. They described aspects of school socialisation that had hurt their children and ways home education had helped children grow socially. The type of socialisation professionals used to assess social abilities was considered by parents to be unnatural in the adult social world and they disagreed that this type of institutional socialisation was either necessary or healthy.

Self Concepts

When describing their experiences with home educated students, professionals did not specifically discuss student self-concepts. It was only when asked directly about student self-concepts that professionals described their observations. The personal qualities professionals noted about students included good manners, sensitivity, resilience, groundedness, ability to 'be themselves,' independence, self-direction, responsibility, and a strong sense of 'own-ness.' These observations are in contrast to overseas professional concern about home educated student self-esteem (Lee 1994). Ten parents thought student self-esteem had been seriously challenged in mainstream institutions and this had been a key factor in family decisions to home educate students. Parents consistently reported their children's self-esteem improved while doing home education.

9.2.3 Personality

A few professionals thought student personality needed to be considered when assessing home educated student transitions and social abilities. Parents did not specifically raise the topic about variation in student personalities although it was strongly implied by their recognition that each child was a unique individual.

9.2.4 Institutional Level of Professionals

Most professionals spoke highly of their experiences with particular home educated students but many used expressions indicating some reservations about home education's general impact. Secondary school teachers seemed to view home education as more viable than some primary teachers who appeared to view home education with greater reservations. Parents described more tensions with primary school teachers and greater appreciation of specialist secondary school teachers.

9.2.5 Transition

A few professionals, particularly principals or senior teachers, discussed the policies

and practices they had in place to ease the transition of any new students into their institutions and these included buddy systems, orientation days and extensive discussions with parents. Two professionals thought home educated students took time to settle in but this was helped when they knew a few mainstream peers. Parents also thought these were beneficial transition activities.

9.2.6 Professional Disempowerment

Because participants were asked to discuss several key educational terms, it was possible to explore the views and attitudes of participants in a way the general interview did not provide. When discussing such things as catering to individual student needs, curriculum restrictions, time frames for achieving work, and student self concepts it became clear that some professionals recognised that mainstream institutional practices limited the way professionals were able to function, particularly in response to individual student needs. In this sense, many of the professionals expressed a sense of disempowerment about fulfilling their ideals to achieve the best educational outcomes for students. Parental withdrawal of students indicated they recognised there were limitations to mainstream educational practices.

9.2.7 Professional Bias

A number of professionals indicated in various ways their positive views towards particular home educated students. However, it was also possible to detect some professional bias against home education generally. Parents spoke of the prejudice and misinformation they faced when speaking with other professionals about home education. This reflects similar findings in Australian mainstream transition literature indicating that professionals were not always cooperative and collaborative in their interactions with parents of students making transitions between mainstream institutions (Docket & Perry 2003(a), Irwin 2006) and overseas home education research (Cappello 1995, DeRoche 1993, Howell 1996, Luebke 1999, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995, Peavie 1999). There appeared to be tensions and misunderstandings between professionals and parents about the meaning and benefit of home education practice.

9.2.8 Summing Up – Parents and Professionals

On the whole, professionals, while politely guarded in their comments, acknowledged that home educated students generally presented as above average academic achievers who were socially competent. Professionals also explained that academic or social problems were best understood through factors other than the practice of home education. Points of agreement between parents and professionals included the

limitation of mainstream institutions to effectively cater for individual needs in a number of ways. The source of greatest discrepancy between the two groups concerned the practiced meaning of socialisation. Other areas of discrepancy included professional failure to acknowledge the impact of mainstream education on family life and individual students. Neither did professionals comment about student self-esteem until specifically asked. They did note that many students had high levels of self-esteem and occasionally this was unhelpfully high.

9.3 The Students

The total number of students referred to in this study was one hundred and twenty-nine students after accounting for overlap of students known to more than one participant group. Forty students were interviewed, and this included twenty-eight male and twelve female students. The parents' group referred to sixty-four students of whom thirty-five were male and twenty-nine were female. The professional group referred to seventy-seven students of whom forty-six were male and thirty were female with the gender of three students unknown. All three groups reported more males than females but this gender imbalance was most obvious among the student participants. At this stage it is unclear why there were more males than females. The parent and professional groups indicated more balanced gender numbers than this student group. This feature of the home educated student population has not been reported as a significant aspect of Australian home education in research literature. One possible cause for a gender imbalance might be the well known feature of greater numbers of boys having difficulties in mainstream institutions than females (Irwin 2006) but gender imbalance has not been pursued in this study. When the overlap of students is accounted for, there are sixty-one males and sixty-four females indicating there is minimal gender imbalance.

9.3.1 Student movement

In the student group of participants, twenty-four students moved into mainstream institutions in their first transition experience. In the professional group, forty-nine students moved into mainstream institutions in their first transition experience. Parents reported twenty-seven students moving into mainstream institutions as the first transition experience.

In the student group of participants, sixteen students moved out of mainstream institutions in their first transition experience. In the professionals' group, twelve students moved out of mainstream institutions as their first known transition experience.

Parents reported thirty-six students moving out of mainstream institutions as the first transition experience.

Table 9.1 Participant Numbers Entering and Exiting Mainstream Institutions in Each Group

Participant Group	Entry Into Mainstream	Exit From Mainstream
Students	24	16
Professionals	49	12
Parents	27	36

It is more likely that there are greater numbers moving out of mainstream because parents are aware of students' long-term movements. Because any comparisons with the home educating population are not possible, this information only indicates that there are significant numbers of home educated students moving both ways between mainstream education and home education.

9.3.2 Geographical Spread of Students

The geographical spread of these home educated students reflects the location of their families, many of whom are included in this study. The spread across city, rural cities, towns and country properties is similar to the geographic spread of home educators in earlier Australian research (Harding 1997, 2006, McColl 2005, Patrick 1999). It is clear from this that these home educators are not taking up home education due primarily to distance from mainstream educational institutions.

9.3.3 Curriculum

The curriculum used by these student participants fell into the three known categories of curricula used by Australian home educating families (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Harding 2006, Thomas 1998) – structured, eclectic and natural learning. Sixteen students used some form of structured curriculum, starting in the early stages of their home education experience. Thirteen students used ACA for part of their home education but most students did not stay on this program for more than a year or two. Seven students used ACA for all of their home education. Three students used DECV with only one of these students using basic DECV subjects throughout their home education. The other two students each only used DECV for two years. Nineteen students used a variety of eclectic programs and six students from two families used a natural learning approach.

There were two types of student responses to the varieties of curriculum used. Students in families using natural learning were happy with their individualised learning

opportunities, as were most students who used eclectic curricula. One student, using an eclectic program thought his mother wanted to control his learning outcomes. His mother admitted in hindsight she would have done better to be more flexible with his curriculum and had changed her approach with her younger children. Those students who expressed dissatisfaction with their curriculum used externally prepared curriculum, which they found became irrelevant and inflexible over time. Parents found children resisted learning set curriculum mismatched to their interests and learning needs over time. These parents either put students into mainstream institutions to relieve the stress or more commonly changed to less rigid curriculum suited to their children's interests. Of the three mothers who entered students as family groups into mainstream institutions due to maternal fatigue, two used ACA and one followed a fairly structured eclectic program. Nine professionals did not know what curriculum families had used and professional opinion about home education curriculum also varied. Two primary school principals thought students made the transition more easily when home curriculum was closely aligned to mainstream curriculum. Other professionals felt the freer home programs encouraged students to develop broad knowledge bases that held them in good stead once in post primary mainstream institutions. The exceptions to this were the few students who had not developed adequate literacy and numeracy skills to slot easily into mainstream institutions, particularly in DECV. One professional thought a student who entered mainstream 'cut loose' a little after working in a controlled learning environment using an eclectic curriculum.

The views of the three participant groups towards curricula spread over a broad spectrum of attitudes and experiences with home education curricula. However, flexible home education curricula based on student needs and interests appeared to set these students up for happy and effective educational pathways.

9.3.4 Transition

In the parent and student groups, family movement into primary schools occurred mainly because of maternal fatigue. The eldest child was occasionally entered into early secondary school, but more commonly into primary school. Individual students moved into and out of mainstream institutions – often moving into late primary school or later institutions. Parents and students also indicated students asked to enter or return to mainstream institutions in mid to late secondary school or were included in the decision making process. Other reasons for student transitions into mainstream institutions included family relocation, students attempting Year 11 and 12, and change in social circumstances at home.

When families moved out of mainstream education the common reasons given were that students with different learning needs were not adequately catered for; social opportunities were limited; and children's self-esteem challenged as a result of mainstream institutional practices. Other reasons included health problems not easily managed in mainstream institutions, family travel, state school closure, family relocation or change of circumstance, and to a lesser extent, value differences between home and mainstream institutions.

Professionals found some students moved into mainstream institutions in family groups and reasons included maternal fatigue and parental feelings of inadequacy to teach specialist subjects. Secondary school professionals did not indicate knowledge of student decisions to enter, leave or re-enter mainstream institutions but spoke of the moves as if the decision was a parental one.

9.3.5 Positives and Negatives of Mainstream Education

Student views regarding the positives and negatives of both home education and mainstream education allow an insight into the ways they valued both forms of education and identified weaknesses in each system.

Positives of Mainstream

Students appreciated a number of things about their mainstream educational experiences. Those factors contributing to a successful transition included welcoming and inclusive professionals, knowing mainstream peers in advance, buddies or guides, and orientation days. Older students thought they had advantages over their mainstream peers such as being less peer dependant, and having greater independence as learners than mainstream peers whom they thought needed to be 'spoon-fed.' Students thought their home education experiences, regardless of curriculum used, had enhanced their academic abilities and they did not feel academically challenged on their return to mainstream institutions. Most thought they were on par or above most peers in their classes. Those few students who felt they had difficulties academically had professionally recognised learning difficulties. Secondary school students enjoyed peer socialisation opportunities, learning experiences with specialist teachers and peer mediation of learning. Similar student views of mainstream education were identified in earlier Australian home education research (Broadhurst 1999, Carins 2002, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2007, Lampe 1988, McColl 2005).

Parents appreciated good communication between home and mainstream institutions, professionals who were organised, innovative, supportive, inclusive of parents, and

catered to their children's learning needs. Some mothers were relieved to have others take the burden for responsibility educating their children. They appreciated their children having great social opportunities with peers who could challenge their views and learning in meaningful ways, and be involved in school excursions and community events not available to students at home.

Professionals valued the way most home educated students presented with high academic levels and good social skills and parents who had prepared children well.

Negatives of Mainstream Education

Students who left mainstream institutions to do home education identified discriminatory institutional practices which they felt had led other mainstream peers to target them for being different.

Students who moved into mainstream institutions, whether as a first or second entry found some aspects of the transition challenging. These challenges included first day or week challenges with little explicit assistance, apprehension prior to entry about their compatibility with institutional standards, structural challenges such as timetables, set classes, classroom protocols, teachers with different roles to parents, social cliques and bullying, and unspoken school yard rules. There were contrary student opinions about having multiple or single teachers in late primary and early secondary school. Once in mainstream institutions, students missed the autonomy and individual learning opportunities available to them via home education.

Students' identified socialisation as the most significant problem area when they attended mainstream institutions and thought institutional structures and practices contributed to their social problems with peers because of their ability differences. Institutional structures and practices were seen to restrict autonomy experienced and valued at home. Students also identified poor learning environments and failure to cater for their particular learning styles as other weaknesses of mainstream education. A number of students found they thought less highly of themselves while at school than when at home.

Parents' comments about the negatives of mainstream education focused more on the impact of mainstream institutions at the primary school level on their children and included lower academic levels, and restricted facilities for students with learning and/or health differences. Parents spoke of battles to be heard by professionals when children were struggling at school, lower student self-esteem, negative social

experiences that seemed to stem from the way their children's difference in learning abilities were treated by professionals.

Professionals agreed that institutional structures and practices limited the ways they were able to cater to the needs of individual students who had learning differences outside the norm for students in their systems or provide for unique student interests. Professionals did not seem aware that this inability to more adequately cater for students with learning differences appeared to leave these students more open to inappropriate social discrimination in the schoolyard.

9.3.6 The Positives and Negatives of Home Education

Sixteen students moved from mainstream institutions into home education and eleven students returned to home education for varying lengths of time after attending mainstream education.

Student Positives of Home Education

While parents made the decision to start educating students at home during the primary school years, students were usually involved in the decision making process and agreed with the decision. Students found the transition easy, although a few were tentative. They usually settled quickly apart from two gifted students who needed time to heal from negative experiences in mainstream institutions. All students thought they learnt better at home than in mainstream institutions. Students appreciated their autonomy experienced through flexibility, freedom and self-determination, relevant, interesting and contextualised learning environments, and closer family relationships (Broadhurst 1999, Brosnan 1991, Carins 2002, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2007, Lampe 1988, McColl 2005). They felt they had better family relationships than their peers in mainstream institutions. Post primary school students often reached a stage where they saw value in returning to mainstream institutions for academic and social reasons.

Parents valued watching children grow into well rounded and contented young people who achieved academically and socially in ways that were beyond their experiences in mainstream institutions (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Education Queensland 2003, Harp 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jeffrey & Giske 2004, OBOS 2004, Patrick 1999, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998). Most families started their home education programs promptly and thought students learnt better at home.

Professionals made no reference to these broad positive views and experiences of both parents and students. Instead they focused on positive student academic and social

outcomes. Home educated students were recognised and valued by some professionals as independent learners but professionals did not discuss how students may have achieved these qualities nor suggested how they might achieve a similar outcome in mainstream education even though they hoped all students would develop a lifelong love of learning.

Student Negatives of Home Education

Most students found it difficult to think of negatives about home education. Students commented most about having fewer same-aged peers but most found this an unimportant aspect of learning at home. Struggling students discovered they still had to study. Older students often thought the lack of specialist teachers and same age peer interactions a reason to leave home education. Other negatives included the use of uninteresting and irrelevant externally prepared curriculum and returning to home education because of changed family circumstances outside their own choice. Similar findings were made in earlier Australian research (Broadhurst 1999, Carins 2002, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2007, Lampe 1988, McColl 2005).

Parents

Parents also felt there were few if any negatives about home education. Any concerns parents had before starting their program vanished as they discovered children responding well to learning at home. Some mothers did feel their personal life was more restricted but thought this a minor cost in exchange for having more contented children at home. A few mothers experienced maternal stress and three mothers sent children to school for various periods of time. Other negatives included a sense of isolation from mainstream society and lack of satisfactory connection with suitable home education networks for both parents and children.

Professionals

Professionals were not asked to describe the negatives of home education. They described the successful transitions particular home educated students made into mainstream institutions but spoke generally about the possible social problems home educated students might experience (Luebke 1999, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995). Two principals thought parents found educating children at home challenging, especially in specialist subject areas and sent children to school as a result.

All students enjoyed aspects of both home and mainstream educational experiences. However, even those who had reservations about their experiences at home felt they

received a more thorough education at home.

9.4 Transitions with Mainstream – The Issues

9.4.1 Ease of Entry

All three groups – students, parents and professionals – found that most students were able to make the transitions into mainstream education without significant difficulties. Parents and students felt that orientation days and opportunities for their children to meet mainstream peers prior to attendance were helpful. This ease of entry into mainstream education is in keeping with earlier Australian findings (McColl 2005, Thomas 1998). Overseas research in this area also indicates home educated students generally entered mainstream institutions academically and socially with ease (Bolle, Wessel & Mulvihill 2007, Holder 20001, Lattibeaudiere 2000).

9.4.2 Concerns

Students' main concern, when re-entering mainstream institutions, was whether their academic levels were equivalent to peers. These fears were unfounded, unless there were learning difficulties, but these fears detracted from their entry experiences. Parents did not express concerns about student re-entry into mainstream institutions. One parent with a son recently diagnosed with Aspergers, found part-time attendance eased his transition. Professionals thought a few students were not aware of school cultural norms but found students settled with time. They found a few students entered with diagnosed learning difficulties but usually thought these were not associated with home education practice. Social problems were also thought to be the result of family itinerancy and/or dysfunction although two professionals thought one student had spent too much time with adults.

9.4.3 On Professionals

Students appreciated helpful, friendly and inclusive professionals who were experts in their fields especially in the secondary years of school or post compulsory education. Students valued professionals who provided fun, were easy to get on with, interactive, patient, considerate, gentle, gave clear instructions, provided variety and allowed class discussion (Levy & Murray 2005). Students did not appreciate professionals who did not understand their needs, yelled for attention, did not provide clear instructions, were not aware of students capabilities, ignored quiet students, rushed work, left students feeling unimportant, or who used practices that identified students as different to others

by promoting them to classes above their age limit or keeping them in to catch up with difficult work.

Parents appreciated helpful and considerate teachers who were expert educators and prompt communicators when there were difficulties. They found professionals sometimes difficult to contact and some found professionals did not understand their particular children's problems even after receiving information from specialist professionals. Parents were aware institutional structural limitations sometimes restricted the ability of professionals to adequately deal with problems they or their children were experiencing.

Professionals found students to be generally mature, polite and well behaved. These students exhibited many of the qualities and skills recognised elsewhere as beneficial for students moving into employment and university (Taylor, Pear & Stewart 2005). They sometimes found these students were forward about their needs and while professionals valued student openness, they found they needed to set clear boundaries to which students responded well. Professionals found home educated students were comfortable talking with adults but a few professionals seemed a little uncomfortable with this and thought this indicated social problems due to lack of peer contact. They found parents keen and cooperative and valued discussions with parents about student abilities. Other concerns professionals expressed included parent challenges to school curriculum based on beliefs and values outside normal societal expectations especially when these restricted student learning opportunities. One professional wondered if some home educating parents had issues with mainstream practices and values.

9.4.4 Learning

The second most valued aspect of home education to students was their learning opportunities. Students particularly valued 'hands on' learning, but also appreciated learning the basics, contextualised learning experiences, learning relevant life skills, unthreatening and self-selected learning environments, the ability to focus and follow interests according to needs, good study habits, respect as unique learners and learning how to learn. They also appreciated having mediated learning opportunities through one-on-one support with immediate explanations and directions from parents. Student appreciation of learning at home was identified in earlier Australian research (Broadhurst 1999, Carins 2002, Clery 1998, Honeybone 2000, Jackson 2007, Lampe 1988, McColl 2005). Two students using externally prepared curriculum had difficulties learning uninteresting and irrelevant work and found parents, particularly in large families, were not always available when needed. When students attended mainstream

institutions, they valued expert teachers and peer mediation of learning. The students who attended TAFE enjoyed the ability to select interest-based and contextualised courses, with relevance to career pathways, presented by specialist teachers, in an adult learning environment with flexible assignments.

Parents expected children in mainstream institutions to be taught the basics, extended when achieving well, and supported when facing difficulties. Parents at home were able to cater to students with learning needs, whether gifted, advanced learners or learning disabled. They found students resisted irrelevant or uninteresting curriculum.

Professionals appreciated the way many home educated students presented as self-motivated and independent learners. When discussing time frames, curriculum and learning styles some professionals admitted they felt frustrated when unable to meet the various learning needs of all students. A few professionals endeavoured to use innovative programs to achieve better outcomes for these types of needs. Two professionals actively sought ways to learn from home educators to improve contextual learning opportunities in their classrooms.

Learning Differences to Average

In this study most students fell clearly into two groups of abilities: gifted and advanced learners (twenty-one) and students with learning or health disabilities (thirteen). Earlier Australian research indicated there were home educated students with learning disabilities (Harding 2003b, Education Queensland 2003, OBOS 2004, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman and O'Donoghue 2002, Simich 1998, Trevaskis 2005). Some students, identified by professionals in early to mid-primary school with learning disabilities were able to achieve better than expected when they re-entered mainstream institutions later in secondary school. Parents were convinced that home education provided some severely learning disabled students with a worthwhile chance in life. In Australia, gifted students are known to use home education but there is no research in this area (Mitchell & Tullberg 2006). Professionals noted that many home educated students who entered mainstream institutions were high academic achievers and one identified a gifted student. They also identified a few students with learning difficulties not caused by home education practices. One professional did not evaluate home education positively because a number of home educated students had entered her mainstream institution with learning difficulties. At this stage, it is difficult to assess whether family circumstances were part of the problem or if home education practices exacerbated them. However, learning disabled students in this study all thought they learnt more effectively at home.

9.4.5 Autonomy

At home students most valued their opportunities to exercise three types of autonomy – flexibility of pace and time, freedom to organise work around interests and needs, and self-determination to attend mainstream institutions or not (Broadhurst 1999; Clery 1998; Jackson 2007). Three older students preferred the structure of mainstream institutions to full autonomy at home and three students found procrastination a problem at home. In mainstream institutions students missed flexibility of time, space and topic of study but were relieved of the need to constantly make decisions. Autonomy was mentioned twice in reference to mainstream institutions and included contributing to choice of text and ability to select subjects not available at home. One student, who felt controlled at home ‘cut loose’ a bit once in a mainstream institution.

Parents respected student decisions to organise their pace, time for study, select topics of interest and whether to attend mainstream institutions or not. They found students resisted learning from externally provided curriculum over time and other programs not based on student interests and needs but did not speak of autonomy directly or about its absence in mainstream institutions. However, one earlier Australian study (Brosnan 1991) found that democratic practices were a feature of home education environments.

Professionals appreciated the way home educated students behaved as independent learners but made no comment about student exercise of autonomy as part of their educational practices or assessment criteria. Professionals did not seem to be aware that students exercised extensive autonomy and no professional remarked about students’ contributions to the decision to attend mainstream institutions.

9.4.6 Culture and Cultural Differences Between Home and Mainstream Educations

Students were aware cultural practices of mainstream institutions were very different to their home culture. They referred to mainstream institutional cultural features such as the teacher/student relationships and boundaries, set classes, classroom protocols, timetables, course structure, assignment requirements and the un-spoken rules of the schoolyard. These students also discussed mainstream peer behaviour and qualities and these observations included the way mainstream students needed to be spoon-fed, were peer dependant, unable to communicate with people outside one’s age group, demonstrated a lack of maturity, were often unsupportive of school community, displayed ignorance of many life skills, and had a poor ability to enjoy one’s own company. Students often used the word ‘structure’ to describe their views of the way mainstream institutions functioned. This was in opposition to the freedom and lack of

fixed structure they had experienced at home. Students did not comment about their experiences at home as anything other than the ordinary.

One parent spoke about the cultural differences between mainstream and home education and had discussed these with her children. Other parents were aware of differences but did not elucidate them.

Professionals recognised that some students found the culture of mainstream institutions different but also noticed that some students were not aware that schools had particular and expected cultural features. One professional described the way some students appeared to live in their own world oblivious to the rest of the class. When professionals explained expected protocols they found students generally responded promptly and positively. The importance of professionals being aware of the cultural differences between institutions when students made transitions between mainstream institutions had previously been recognised in Australian transition literature (Cassity & Gow 2005, Flear & Richardson 2004, Hanlen 2007, Hopps 2004, Hunter 2001, Keeffe 2006, Lawrence 2003, 2005, 2006, Margetts 2003, Scott 2006).

9.4.7 Recognition of the Limitations of Mainstream Institutions

Students identified structural limitations of mainstream institutions as the second most commonly recognised negative aspect of mainstream institutions. These limitations included such items as poor learning opportunities mismatched to abilities, time and place constraints, restriction of movement and conversation, poor facilities, uniforms, stifled creative opportunities, uninteresting and decontextualised learning, unproductive break times, unclear expectations of new-comers, waiting for teacher attention in large groups, homework that reduced productive personal time, and lack of effective reward for working promptly.

Parents recognised students experienced challenges in mainstream institutions such as time frames for learning and/or curriculum mismatched to individual abilities, and less free personal and family time – a significant grievance of a number of parents. They also felt the same age peer social relationships expected in mainstream institutions encouraged tensions with values of inclusiveness and cooperation valued at home, and that features of consumerism were introduced to home that had not existed prior to these transitions into mainstream institutions.

Professionals agreed that mainstream education was not able to cater effectively to all individual needs and learning styles, that there were restrictions to the development

of contextualised curriculum and that time frames for learning were guides but not universally applicable. While a very few professionals, mostly in the primary sector, explained that schools were able to adequately provide for all needs and one primary teacher thought it impossible for learning and social needs to be catered for at home, most recognised there were limitations to mainstream education. Other transition literature recognised that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach did not even suit tertiary students (Kantanis 2002).

All three participant groups identified areas of tensions with structural limitations of mainstream institutions. However, each participant group held particular perspectives about the meaning of these structural limitations.

9.4.8 Socialisation

The meaning and experience of socialisation for all three of the participant groups in this study was complex but this was especially true for student perspectives.

When asked about the positives of home education, students rarely referred to socialisation. On further reflection, a number of students identified positive features of socialisation at home that included: the ability to comfortably mix with different age groups, unlike mainstream peers; genuine lifelong friendships unlike many school friendships that ended when school ended; and improved family relationships. When discussing the negatives of home education, socialisation was discussed twice as much as the next most common topic. Students often described how there was less contact with same aged peers at home than found in mainstream institutions but most students thought this an insignificant problem. Those students who viewed limited opportunities for socialisation as a significant problem lived in isolated areas, had moved from interstate or overseas, or temporarily returned to home education due to changes in family circumstances beyond their control. These factors created a desire for greater social opportunities and contributed to student decision to enter or return to mainstream education.

When describing the positive and negative features of mainstream education, students referred to socialisation as the most significant topic on both counts. For most students who entered or re-entered primary or secondary school after home education, socialisation with peers was usually regarded as a positive experience. For students who started in mainstream and moved to home education, poor socialisation had been a major contributing factor for moving home. Most of these students did not blame peers for their poor social experiences but identified institutional practices that created

difference as the cause, leading peers to view them as different. Social opportunities at home allowed time, space and healing for students who had been particularly hurt by this aspect of mainstream education (Jackson 2007, Thomas 1998). These home educated student views of socialisation are consistent with earlier Australian research findings (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Broadhurst 1999, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2000, Clery 1998, Harding 1997, 2006, Honeybone 2000, Hunter 1994, Jackson 2007, Jeffrey & Giskes 2004, Lampe 1988, Maeder 1995, McColl 2005, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Simich 1998, Thomas 1998).

Parents frequently evaluated the differences between the vertical social opportunities for students at home compared to their less valued horizontal social experiences found in mainstream institutions (Clery 1998). All parents were aware of societal concerns about the possible poor social opportunities their children might experience at home. Most parents thought these societal concerns ignorant and ill-informed. Most parents also endeavoured to provide regular social opportunities for children through various community events and groups because of these concerns. Two parents were disappointed children missed out on peer discussion in mainstream institutions while at home and two others thought their itinerant lifestyle limited social opportunities at home. However, all parents were not convinced that the social opportunities provided in mainstream institutions were always appropriate for children.

Professionals considered socialisation to be their number one concern for home educated students. Only two professionals thought home education could provide better social opportunities than mainstream institutions and all appeared to value the more horizontal social opportunities for children to mix with their peers, as found in mainstream institutions and regarded these as essential for developing future life skills.

When students discussed their experiences in mainstream institutions, they referred more to their interactions with their teachers than to their peers and often spoke of teachers as valued friends. Professionals noted these students were competent speaking with adults. Several professionals thought this was caused by a lack of socialisation with peers and appeared to feel uncomfortable with students who sought their company in preference to peers. Perhaps there is a need for professionals and society to revisit the question of socialisation and discuss what they would ideally like it to mean to mainstream students from a life long perspective before challenging home educators for their perspectives on socialisation.

When making the transitions into mainstream institutions a number of parents, professionals and students found the transition was easier when students had already

established social links with some mainstream peers. This is in keeping with transition literature that recognised the importance of social links for mainstream students making transitions within mainstream institutions (Burton & Dowling 2005, Kantanis 2002, Ramsay, Jones & Barker 2007).

Socialisation is an area of tension between home educators and professionals. Professionals appear not to understand the views and experiences of home educating parents or students. They need a clearer understanding of what they value about mainstream socialisation and why this is important. They also need a clearer understanding of what these parents and students value and why. Parents and students had similar understandings of the types of socialisation they valued. However, several students expressed concern about the breadth and meaning of their social experiences at home.

9.4.9 Personality

Several students recognised that personality differences influenced student satisfaction in both their home and mainstream educational experiences as they realised individuals could be ‘people persons’ or introverts. There were a few introverted male students who needed time and experience to better understand their personality because early failure to understand this had contributed to some personal conflict in adolescent years. Parents did not refer to personality as a topic except in recognition that each child was unique and individual. Several professionals did recognise that home educated students had varying personalities and this needed to be factored into evaluation and assessment, particularly when considering social integration into mainstream institutions.

9.4.10 Self concepts

The topic of students’ self-concepts was brought up specifically by the interviewer to all three groups of participants and did not arise naturally out of the interview process.

Most students balked when asked to describe what they thought self-concepts were and how they developed. When the question was re-phrased to ask if students thought differently of themselves at school to the way they did at home, those students who responded gave a consistent response indicating they thought highly of themselves or felt valued, especially when at home. A number of students, from all age groups, felt less valued when they attended mainstream institutions. When asked to describe the differences in their views of themselves between the two systems students explained that while at home, they acted as themselves without comparative reference to others.

They seemed puzzled to explain that when at home it was unimportant to consider one's personal value. When at school students felt evaluated comparatively with all other students. While one study (Krivanek 1988) described mixed results about the development of home educated student self-concepts, two other Australian studies (Brosnan 1991, Clery 1998) found home educated students had healthy self-concepts. Clery (1998) thought students grew personally from having private time away from peers and this is consistent with the findings in this study.

Thirteen parents thought the way students viewed themselves was important. Ten parents expressed deep fear about the long-term damage and repercussions of poor student self-concepts when children were in mainstream institutions and withdrew children as a result. Some parents with Christian religious beliefs, thought children understood their value because of their belief systems as did a small number of professionals. Two of these parents thought it was a potential problem to encourage children to think 'too highly' of themselves if not kept within a particular perspective.

Professionals were asked to discuss the relevance of children's self-concepts in a generalised setting and responded with comments about the need for all children to develop healthy self-concepts. Apart from two DECV teachers, professionals did not comment about the way their home educated students viewed themselves in response to this question. However, general professional descriptions of home educated students' behaviour indicated these students appeared to be comfortable with who they were. A few professionals thought these students could have a lack of awareness of classroom social structures. When students proactively sought help from teachers, they felt the need to explicitly set boundaries and, when this was done, found students responded with maturity and resilience.

Healthy home educated student self-esteem and high self-concepts has consistently been found in overseas and Australian home education research literature (Bolle, Wessel & Mulvihill 2007, Brosnan 1991, Hill 1995, Holder 2001, Lattibeaudiere 2000, Lee 1994, Sheffer 1995, Taylor 1986, Taylor 2001). The results in this study concur with earlier findings with an added dimension. Students did not appear to think comparatively about themselves while at home.

9.5 Other Mainstream Educational Experiences

9.5.1 Technical And Further Education

TAFE institutions were an important part of the transition experience into mainstream

institutions for older home educated students. At the beginning of this study, the significance of this particular transition point to home educated students was not known and no TAFE professionals were included. In a survey of Victorian home educators in 2006 (Harding 2006), twenty-six percent of home educated students entered TAFE courses, twenty-three percent had entered university courses and thirty percent had entered paid employment. In this study of nine young adult students, seven had entered TAFE and two had entered university with a third accepted into university for the following year. Four students had also been employed and one of these had set up his own business. Two of the students who attained university entrance attended both TAFE and university. While the proportions of students attending TAFE and university were higher here than in the 2006 survey (Harding 2006) the findings in this study indicate that TAFE is an important avenue for home educated student access to mainstream education.

One might think that home educated students used entry into TAFE as an alternative career pathway to tertiary institutions. However, only two of the TAFE students used TAFE for this purpose. The other TAFE students attended TAFE to pursue areas of particular expertise, interest and to gain qualifications for future employment.

All students who entered TAFE valued their entry and most enjoyed their chosen courses. They appreciated the adult learning environments, most social contact, even though most of this was limited to in-class time, and flexible arrangements for assignments. They found the relevant and contextualised learning experiences matched their particular interests and/or career pathways. All males entered TAFE two to three years younger than the expected entry age and most did not have the required entry qualifications. This necessitated negotiation with relevant course professionals. However, despite not meeting entry requirements all students appeared to have achieved very well.

All parents, except one, indicated students made the choice to enter TAFE. The other student entry was a combined parent and student decision. All parents thought students had achieved well and benefited from their TAFE experiences.

This is an area needing further research and the limitations of this project prohibited the inclusion of further participants. However, student and parent perspectives of this transition point indicate this avenue into mainstream institutions has been an important one and should be useful for informing future directions of research in this area.

9.5.2 Part Time Attendance in Mainstream

Eight students engaged in a variety of part-time attendance arrangements. Most students found this was valuable, especially inclusion in sports days and excursions. However, there were three part-time arrangements that did not appear to work well. These included attendance for half-days, or attendance in break times in primary school, and day attendance in secondary school where subjects were taught in specific periods over the week. Apart from student discomfort returning to school during breaks, the main problem appeared to be the difficulties professionals had preparing extra work ahead of time for specific student needs when extra to normal teaching duties.

Six parents discussed part-time arrangements with schools. The arrangements they found useful in primary school included ongoing day attendance from one to four days a week, and inclusion in sporting days, special events and excursions. Arrangements that did not work included half-day attendance in primary school because of the extra demands on professionals to prepare work and attendance in primary school unstructured breaks. Part-time attendance was useful for helping students with learning difficulties to gradually adjust to mainstream institutions, as was on-going subject attendance. Attendance in secondary school for set days proved difficult because subject teachers felt challenged preparing work in advance for the days students did not attend.

Seven professionals worked with part-time home educated students. In primary school, particular day attendance seemed to work well for all parties. Student inclusion in sports, drama events and excursions also worked well. In secondary school, students' attendance for particular subjects also worked well for teachers and students.

It seems that part-time inclusion of home educated students in excursions, sporting and drama events were worthwhile ways of introducing or including students in some aspects of mainstream education. The students who attended for particular days of the week worked well in primary school, but not in secondary school because subject work became disconnected. Students who attended academic classes benefited from regular attendance to particular subjects in secondary school.

9.5.3 Two Particular Educational Institutions

Distance Education by Correspondence, Victoria

Three parents appreciated access to DECV as they felt supported in their early endeavours to cater for children's learning needs in the first years of using home education. One professional explained that DECV provided an important option

for students who might otherwise feel anxious about moving straight into a typical mainstream classroom, especially when students had earlier been challenged in mainstream institutions. This option was not so successful for students who did not have strong reading and writing skills. Parents found the usefulness of DECV limited by its narrow flexibility in response to student interests and abilities over time but thought there should be greater access to DECV resources. Three students discussed their reactions to DECV. They found it a useful guide for their learning, but all found it difficult to stay motivated and interested when it did not cater specifically to their individual and different learning needs. Two students moved to more personalised eclectic programs after two years.

Access Yarralee Community Education

One government provided program, run through a country secondary school, catered to non-average students including home educated students. Specialist teachers met with students one day a week and students were provided with set work for the following week. On a visit to one of these centres, it was clear students appreciated the flexible and adult learning methods used. The needs of students with different abilities were catered for including non-age segregated learning opportunities. This facility was an important option as it offered a halfway institution for students whose needs were not adequately catered for in mainstream institutions and for whom home education was not a fulltime option. It also provided a safe way for students needing time to adjust back into mainstream institutions. One parent had placed a student with learning difficulties in this program but found it unsatisfactory for his particular needs. Another parent valued the way her son enjoyed this program in senior secondary school. One student valued his learning opportunities in senior secondary school through AYCE. A junior secondary school student briefly visited AYCE after experiencing trauma in a secondary school, but he felt uncomfortable in this environment and returned to his previous school.

9.6 Professional and Society Prejudice

Several students felt that professionals, legislators and the public did not understand the value of home education and reacted to the topic of home education as if it were a problem to a healthy society. Students wanted the public to know that home education had provided them with the best learning environment and allowed them to experience autonomy, develop confidence and independence in ways they did not believe achievable if they had attended mainstream institutions all the time.

Some parents found professionals often reacted negatively and had caused these parents emotional distress when parents communicated their decision to home educate their children. This was true even when there were known difficulties for the child if they remained in mainstream institutions. Parents felt professionals and the public did not understand that home education had contributed to happier children, happier families, improved learning, health improvements, and higher academic outcomes. The socialisation question was recognised by students and particularly parents as the area of greatest misunderstanding by professionals and the public. These student and parent sentiments were similar to those found in earlier Australian home education research (Jackson 2007, OBOS 2004, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004, Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2002, Simich 1998).

Professionals in this study held positive views about most experiences with particular parents and students who used home education. However, many seemed reserved about the general efficacy of home education. Professionals in mainstream institutions did not always understand student transitions between various mainstream institutions and there was little evidence that they initiated communication with parents (Irwin 20006, Perry & Dockett 2006b). The professionals who were involved in this research recognised the need for communication and collaboration (Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006), however, there seems to be a need for professionals to be less concerned about gatekeeping (Hunter 2001) and more concerned about students' holistic development. These students benefited greatly from their transitions and were able to move with ease between the two types of education.

9.7 Evaluation

When students were asked to evaluate both their home and mainstream educational experiences all students responded that the best learning environment was at home. This included those who had struggled to use externally prepared structured curriculum. Students who had entered or returned to mainstream institutions in late primary through to senior secondary school all appreciated the social opportunities offered at school. This included students who had to work around bullying and social cliques. Changing mainstream schools was one effective way to improve the social experiences for one student. Students valued their learning experiences at home and, when in mainstream institutions, valued professional subject expertise, class and teacher discussions, group learning opportunities and social opportunities with peers.

When parents evaluated both the home and mainstream educational experiences of their children, parents felt their children were generally better off academically and

socially at home. Even though a few parents were challenged by the enormity of the responsibility of educating their children, all parents felt children were more content, developed a greater love of learning unless using an externally prepared curriculum, developed life skills, and were more competent and self-directed at home than when children were at school. Parents valued inclusive, competent, expert, organised and communicative professionals in mainstream institutions (Gill, Winters & Friedman 2006, Jones 2003, Makin, Jones Diaz & McLachlan 2007, Perry & Dockett 2006b, Shortt, Toumbourou, Chapman & Power 2006, Taylor & Nelms 2006).

When professionals were asked to evaluate their personal experiences with home educated students, there were a few who had worked with students who had poor learning abilities and/or social skills. However, the majority of professionals described experiences with students who entered mainstream with good to excellent academic and social skills. Through these comments, professionals acknowledged that most home educated students were achieving academically and socially at home without identifying the reasons for this. One professional could not conceive how home educating parents could expect to enable children to achieve academically while a number of others found it hard to understand how home educated students could develop socially. There appeared to be tension between the lived reality of professional experiences with particular home educated students and parents and professional attitudes towards home education in general (Cappello 1995, DeRoche 1993, Howell 1996, Luebke 1999, Mayberry Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995, Peavie 1999). There is closer connection between the views and experiences of parents and students about the value of home education, but there are subtle differences between the lived experiences of parents and students. Parents valued happy contented children who learnt well and socialised broadly. Students valued learning opportunities, autonomy and the ability to be themselves.

9.7.1 A Place for Both?

Students valued aspects of both their mainstream and home education experiences. They served different purposes at different times. Parents valued the opportunity to experience the joy of seeing their children develop holistically at home and also appreciated the expertise and professionalism of educators in mainstream institutions.

Professionals did not understand the meaning of the home education experience to most students or parents but found students adjusted reasonably well to mainstream institutions. A few professionals recognised that, for some students, home education did offer a more appropriate form of education than mainstream education, but this

position was not widespread among this group of professionals. Professional attitudes towards home education reflect similarities to overseas findings (Luebke 1999, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995). While professionals acknowledged that home education worked, their responses were cautious. Typical mainstream student transitions worked best when there was professional understanding and institutional support (Blackburn 2006, Cooper & Lim 2006, Dunlop 2003, Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006, te Riele 2004, Taylor & Nelms 2006, Tranter 2006). The transitions of home educated students with mainstream institutions would be enhanced if professionals better understood and supported these transitions. It is suggested here that student comments about transition into mainstream institutions be sought by professionals to improve transition experiences for future home educated students (Dalglish, Haker, Lawson, Nelson & Reese 2006). In this study there appears to be professional discourse that treats home education in general as a deficit discourse without justification (Lawrence 2003).

From this study of student, parent and professional experiences with home education, it is clear there is room and a need for access to both types of education. The need for opportunities in either or both types of educational systems vary for students and families according to their individual circumstances.

9.8 Conclusion

This chapter has compared the views and experiences of parents, professionals and students and made connections to overseas and Australian home education literature and Australian transition literature. The chapter that follows overlays historical sociocultural, critical and identity theoretical perspectives to the data collected from parents, professionals and students.

Chapter 10: Links with the Literature (2)

In this study, four themes of autonomy, learning, socialisation and identity became apparent in the analysis of student data issues. One other important theme was power. However, before these issues can effectively be addressed, the historical sociocultural features of home education and mainstream education need to be identified.

10.1 The Setting

10.1.1 Historically

Home education was widely practiced in Australia during the 1800s (Amies 1986) prior to the introduction of free, secular and compulsory schooling that led to the majority of children being educated in mainstream institutions. From the early 1970s, home education re-appeared as a result of the influences of Holt, Illich and later, Moore (Ennis 1978, Hunter 1989, 1990, 1991, 1994, Krivanek 1985, Lipscombe 1980). Alternative educators were the first group to be researched (Ennis 1978, Krivanek 1988, Lampe 1988), but research on Christian families followed (Hunter 1989, 1990, 1994). In more recent research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Thomas 1998) these groups were still evident but there was also a shift to less ideologically or religiously polarised families using home education. In this study, while there were several families practicing home education using the principles of early alternative educators and there were many more who held Christian beliefs; the practice of home education by families in this study is best described as ‘intensive parenting’ (Aruini & Davies 2005). The Australian media has drawn public attention to home education over the years (Barlow 2002, Carew 2002, Clark & Barraclough 1999, Job 1999, Jones 1991, Mornington Peninsula Leader 2002, Williams & Thomas 1996, Whitfield 2004a,b), illustrating how effective home education is and raising questions about the ways in which home education might restrict the academic or, more particularly, the social opportunities of the students involved. This media exposure to home education contributed to the movement of several families in this study out of mainstream institutions into home education.

When this project began, legislation in Victoria covering home education was encapsulated in a few words maintaining the right of parents to educate their children in school or ‘otherwise’ (Education and Community Services (Vic) 2001, Education Act (Vic) 1958, Jackson 1999). However, the official position of the Department of Education and Training was revealed in documents to government school principals (Jackson 1999) which positioned home education as an illegal activity unless properly

processed by the Department of Education and Training. This was in spite of court cases upholding the right of parents to decide what form of education to provide for their children without reference to the Department of Education and Training. Over the course of this study, legislation and regulations changed (Education and Training Reform Act (Vic) 2007, Education and Training Reform Regulations (Vic) 2007) to more specifically acknowledge home education as a legal alternative form of education and provide for limited regulation of its practice in the state of Victoria. Its introduction came after the data was collected and so these findings do not reflect how these legislative and regulative changes influenced both the practice of home education and professional opinion of home education. Neither does this study indicate how this new legislation has changed societal and professional attitudes and understandings of home education practices in Victoria.

The results of this study suggest that there is still significant community and professional antagonism towards, and misconceptions about, home education by government officials, professionals and the broader society, as reported by these home educating parents and students. Several of these parents spoke about the battles and misunderstandings they faced when informing professionals and extended family of their decision to educate children at home. Extended family usually became more understanding over time when they witnessed children learning happily and developing socially. Professionals in this study rarely, if ever, were aware of the prior history or eventual outcome of students leaving their institutions and so were not able to make a well-informed judgment about the efficacy of home education. At the same time, home educators were aware of overseas and Australian home education research (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Thomas 1998) indicating that home education was rewarding and successful for practicing families. Compulsory schooling was established in Victoria in 1872 (Wight 2003). Professionals were established as the authorities of formal education in both state run and various privately run institutions. Parental moves away from mainstream institutions were frequently viewed as unwarranted challenges to the established authorities and practices of mainstream institutions and established community wisdom (Jackson 1999).

10.1.2 Sociocultural Considerations

In Australia, society is generally organised around small family groups connected to various organisations of education and work and through community interest groups. Typically, Australian mainstream society has, for many years, revolved around the practice of sending children to kindergartens, preparatory classes, primary and secondary schools as major education institutional and social meeting points. Young

parents develop social networks around these organisations that may continue casually for many years. Home educating parents who have had children attending primary school mainstream institutions have been involved in these social networks. Some parents in this study found these networks counterproductive to their own social needs and values while other parents felt they missed out on this typical connection to the broader community.

The formation of home education networks were established by proactive and community minded home educating parents who took on the role of organising events for home educating families in their areas. This was a task that outgoing and determined home educating parents voluntarily provided and required significant personal organisation and time contributions. Sometimes the responsibilities for organising these events were democratically shared and in other situations it seems that responsibilities and membership were more exclusively delegated and controlled. Many of the parents in this study spoke positively of their connections to local home education networks and their sense of support both personally and for their children socially and in other ways. A few parents found they had limited access to such groups or had experienced some form of exclusion or limited support from networks in their locality. Home education networks were noted but not specifically studied in earlier Australian home education research (Lampe 1988, Patrick 1999, Reilly 2004).

Another aspect of the sociocultural differences between mainstream institutions and home education was identified in the work of Ageyev (2003). Ageyev (2003) described the individualism encouraged in the educational settings of Western nations, particularly in the United States, as distinct from the community cultures found in Russia. The community connections of home education have been described in other Australian research (Barratt-Peacock 2003). While Australian educational culture does exhibit some differences to the United States, there are many similarities and the individualised culture Ageyev (2003) described is evident in Australian mainstream education. An understanding of these differences helps to contribute to our understanding of the differences between the home education experiences of the students in this study and their experiences when entering and exiting mainstream institutions.

10.1.3 Popular Assumptions about Home Education

The Australian media (Kaastrup-Olsen 2006, Mitchell 2006, Whitehead 2007) representing broader societal views of home education, frequently asks questions about academic success and possible socialisation problems caused by perceived isolation from peers, and seeks to understand why home educators decide to educate children

at home. In this study, students were withdrawn from mainstream institutions because of the apparent inability of these institutions to cater effectively for these students' learning needs, particularly those with learning abilities other than average mainstream abilities. Most students who entered or re-entered mainstream institutions in late primary school, secondary school, TAFE and university entered with high academic abilities and achieved well unless there were known learning difficulties. Even students with learning difficulties returned to mainstream institutions and achieved noticeably better results than when they had attended mainstream institutions previously (Jackson 2007). The time spent by students with learning disabilities doing home education after mainstream institutional experiences appeared to have improved the educational opportunities of these learning disadvantaged students.

10.2 Values of Parents, Professionals and Students

10.2.1 Parents

Parents' goals were for children to be balanced, happy, have healthy self concepts and love learning so they could enter adult life competently with vertical social skills and strong academic abilities. Parental ideals included a love of life long learning, developed in real world contexts, in happy relaxed families, and connections to society. The parents in this study were naturally divided by the way their children moved between mainstream institutions and home education. When parents felt their children's needs were not catered for by mainstream institutions and removed children, the most important values described were family unity and children's individual uniqueness. When parents had children entering into mainstream institutions from home education, they appreciated professionalism, good student learning and social opportunities. Parents expressed frustration with the horizontal socialisation emphasised in mainstream institutions. These parents felt their agency, evident when removing children from unhealthy learning situations in mainstream institutions, had provided them and their children with the opportunity to overcome learning and social difficulties. This also meant that children were able to develop as well rounded students who enjoyed a love of learning. When parents entered students into mainstream institutions, especially when experiencing mother fatigue, mothers expressed a sense of failure at their limited ability to provide for their children. Even when older children entered mainstream institutions, most parents felt a sense of grief, of a time to move on, from the close family relationships they had enjoyed. They were grateful for the opportunities they had to know their children more intimately while at home.

10.2.2 Professionals

Professionals explained their goals were to develop the academic and social skills students needed to function well in society. A few professionals also discussed general programs in their schools to develop healthy self-esteem in students. Professional ideals were to encourage a love of life long learning. Professionals did not recognise agency as an important part of interactions with either parents or students although they valued student independence.

10.2.3 Students

Student goals when educated at home were to manage their learning needs and lives. When entering post-primary institutions, they sought expert knowledge and appreciated peer discussion and socialisation. Their ideals were to manage their daily learning opportunities and environment and determine their overall educational direction whether this was best met at home or in mainstream institutions. They also sought to enjoy all round healthy social relationships with a wide range of community members as well as with their peers.

There is considerable overlap in the overall values held by parents, professionals and students. However, there was variance in the focus of each participant group's ideals and goals. The main variation of values was found in each group's expectations, understanding and practice of autonomy, socialisation and the ways individuality was catered for.

10.3 Cultural Difference Between Home Education and Mainstream Education

It is important to understand the cultural features of a research project (Carspecken 1996). The cultural differences between home education and mainstream education are stark. While there are variations in the practices of mainstream institutions, there are also variations between the cultures of home educators as it is practiced in different homes and this complicates assessment of the differences in culture between home and mainstream institutions. A number of home educated students in this study felt they had no idea what to expect when they entered mainstream institutions for the first time, or re-entered after a number of years out of mainstream institutions. While these students mostly adjusted well to mainstream culture, an understanding of the distinctive culture of school would have made it easier for these students to better understand their move into this new environment. At the same time, some students also explained that even though they were told, they needed to experience the change to achieve meaningful

understanding.

10.3.1 Culture at Home

At home there were many possible variations in the way home education operated – from classroom set up with lesson plans to no fixed structure at all and no appearance of formal school work or any eclectic mix in between (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Thomas 1998). In this study these patterns and practices were evident. Family structure contributed to differences in the way these programs operated in each family, as each child was valued as a unique individual. The classroom at home was the closest in structure and design to mainstream schools. In families running eclectic programs, children were often given or chose work they completed in times and places they selected. These times ranged from early morning to later in the day. The place of study might be at a regular desk, some comfortable corner or a variety of locations including outdoors for some. Students who learnt naturally selected all topics and approaches to study. This might involve visits to libraries, contact with knowledgeable community members, and long-term research projects, but was always about the pursuit of interests (Thomas 1998). Home education research in Australia and overseas consistently indicated that families moved from more formal structures to less formal procedures over time (Avner 1992, Barratt-Peacock 1997, Hollinger 1999, OBOS 2004, Parker 1992, Thomas 1998). A number of parents indicated they had moved to more relaxed eclectic programs to better cater for student needs and interests. Parents were usually aware of their children's whereabouts, but did not constantly monitor their progress and activities, although they were available to assist when children sought help. Many students had naturally occurring quiet times allowing reflective thinking. Only one family seemed to have regular daily group study structures. Only three families, two with gifted children and one with a learning advanced student, used open natural learning approaches. One of these families also consistently used part-time attendance at a mainstream institution. The students in these families consisted of gifted, advanced learners and learning disabled students who all appeared keen to learn and pursue interests.

The connections of home educated students to broader community knowledge were earlier identified (Barratt-Peacock 2003). The students in this study felt their mainstream peers were not as well prepared with general life skills and broader community understandings as they felt they were when they entered mainstream institutions in late or post primary school. These home educated students appeared to be more knowledgeable about their embeddedness in society than their mainstream peers.

10.3.2 Culture in Mainstream Institutions

Mainstream culture was critiqued by critical theorists (Panofsky 2003, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a) and historical sociocultural theorists (Jackson 2008, Panofsky 2003, Vygotsky 1987). In this study, mainstream culture is informed by professionals' and students' comments and by my own experiences as an educator. In many mainstream institutions the structure of the classroom, the activities of each day, the organisation of groups of students and the yearly plans are fairly standard between each institution offering the same level of education. Class work is frequently set around the educational guidelines as prescribed for all curricula in Victoria by the Department of Education and Training while teachers decide particular themes and activities for classroom learning within these guidelines. Classrooms usually have similar desks and personal workspaces for each student. School playgrounds frequently have minimal features and are supervised leaving few, if any, private and personal spaces available to students. Groups of students may meet in multi-grade groups in some primary school situations but generally classes are divided by age. Students are regularly under the visual supervision of adults while in classrooms and most often while in the school grounds or when attending school events. There are generally fixed times for different activities in delegated areas. Students have very little, if any, time or space on their own away from teachers and peers and they exercise very little effective autonomy about what happens during their days in mainstream institutions. Even when students are at home, assigned homework reduces personal free time. Professionals function in roles that are clearly structured and often have little casual or regular contact with students outside of class times. During breaks, groups of students socialise within rather tightly defined yet invisible codes of behaviour.

10.3.3 Cultural Conflicts Between Home and Mainstream Institutions

In this study students who moved between home and mainstream institutions became aware of these differences even though most students did not find the transition difficult. Students noticed that at home they had a variety of freedoms they lost when they attended mainstream institutions. In institutions, they quickly adjusted to the regularities of their new environment, but did not always see their value or appreciate their existence. At home, students felt comfortable with the way they learnt, when they learnt, what they learnt, how they learnt and why they learnt. In mainstream institutions, students enjoyed their new learning environment, contact with expert teachers and class discussion times but all thought they learnt more at home than they did in mainstream institutions and in ways that were more relevant to personal needs. At home students often had fewer friends but enjoyed sharing common interests. At school students appreciated being with more people but felt their mainstream peers did

not know how to be themselves nor stand up for their own values. There was also a sense that the friendships at school were not necessarily friendships one maintained for life. The existence of these differences between the two cultures sets the backdrop for student reflection about what they valued and did not value in both types of education. Even when parents tried to carefully explain the differences between home and mainstream institutions and when students were taken to schools to see the physical layout, most students who had never attended mainstream institutions or been away from them for long periods of time found their entrance different to that which they expected. This however did not mean that transitions were difficult or the moves not valued.

Professionals noticed these home educated students could be resilient and vulnerable at the same time, showed independent learning skills, exhibited a keenness to learn and be involved, could be unaware of classroom culture, not always aware of others, enjoyed talking to adults, and some were not so comfortable with peers, while many were academically and socially advanced. These differences meant that home educated students were often in a strong position to make the transition but needed to be aware of the culture of mainstream institutions and the expectations of teachers.

10.3.4 Move Out of school

The younger students, who moved from the regulated environment of primary school to home, enjoyed the change and appreciated their new freedoms. Most settled quickly into new routines and contributed to their learning opportunities at home. Two gifted students found settling in to learning at home took time as they recovered emotionally from the scars collected when misunderstood by professionals and/or peers. Two students with learning difficulties also remembered feeling freer at home but still struggling with different learning tasks. Some students felt they occasionally missed friends at school but most students thought the negatives of home education were insignificant unless they were isolated from peers and other community contacts due to isolation or travel. A few students who experienced difficulties in early primary school and left, took time to adjust to their home environment, but showed evidence they were developing self-acceptance and gaining personal strength, value and dignity at home.

Students indicated an awareness of personality factors, personal identity and self awareness gained through their transition experiences with mainstream institutions. A number of students who moved into mainstream institutions thought their self-esteem and individuality devalued by professional and peer comparative assessment and attitudes towards them. This sense of value and individualism was an important aspect

of their transition movements between home and mainstream institutions.

10.4 Continuities and Discontinuities

10.4.1 The Continuities

In this study some of the continuities between home education and mainstream education included a number of activities common to both systems. Students were doing educational work, their learning usually involved research, reading, writing and numeracy; cognitive development; socialisation; and the educational aim of developing a suitable life career pathway.

10.4.2 The Discontinuities

There were a significant number of areas that revealed discontinuities between home education and mainstream education. At home, learning was focused on student needs and interests, while in mainstream institutions, school work was often disconnected from their interests and life world and was arbitrarily segmented. At home learning was often based on hands on learning opportunities in individualised, relationally supportive and emotionally secure learning environments. In mainstream institutions learning was teacher directed usually in large and varied learning ability groupings. The types of mediated learning opportunities were also varied between home and mainstream institutions (Jackson 2008). This included mediation by parents working alongside students more as colleagues rather than as experts in subject areas as commonly found in post primary mainstream institutions. Students reported significant autonomy about learning at home while very little autonomy was reported in mainstream institutions. Individual use of time was respected in home education while students in mainstream institutions were provided with little opportunity to manage time. At home, assessment of work was personal and according to individual ability while in mainstream institutions, students were graded according to the abilities of all other class members. There were differences in social opportunities between home and mainstream education. At home, students enjoyed strong family unity, deep interest based friendships and vertical social opportunities even though same age peer socialisation was frequently less than when in mainstream institutions. In mainstream institutions, students noted that family unity was sometimes challenged, socialisation occurred mostly in same age peer groupings (horizontal socialisation), and peer dependence was a noticeable issue. Students believed their self-esteem was higher at home and frequently lower when in mainstream institutions. They also noticed a cultural divide between the warm, inclusive, communal and non-hierarchical home environment in contrast to the

individualistic, exclusive and graded environment found in mainstream institutions.

There were distinct and contrasting cultural differences between home education and mainstream institutions. In spite of these differences, moves between the two systems of education generally occurred with little interruption or long-term disturbance to students. As to whether students benefited from careful planning for transition or not, the parents and students in this study generally reported little preparation and some students felt they just needed to experience the differences.

These were the obvious cultural differences students noticed from their transition experiences between home education and mainstream education. There were also hidden cultural differences that appeared to be equally if not more defining, particularly of home educated students when at home, and this contributed to their transition experiences with mainstream institutions.

10.4.3 Hidden Culture of Home Education

Many features of the culture of home education are widely known in home education research literature in Australia and around the world (Barratt-Peacock 1997, 2003, Barson 2006, Clery 1998, Cooper 2005, Jackson 2007, Harding 1997, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995, Thomas 1998, Thomas & Pattison 2007). We know demographic features, curriculum styles, parent reasons for choosing home education and their experiences, and student views and experiences at home. Professionals, in this study, recognised a number of beneficial qualities exhibited by many of these students. However, there is another quality that could contribute to a clearer understanding of the cultural differences between these students and their mainstream peers. In this study, it became apparent these students had high self-esteem as has been found in other home education studies around the world (Bolle, Wessel & Mulvihill 2007, Holder 2001, Lattibeaudieu 2000, Lee 1994, Sheffer 1995, Taylor 1986, Taylor 2001). There was, however, another facet to their self-esteem not identified in Australian research literature and not found in overseas research.

Fromm (1976) described the qualities of people who lived in the 'being' mode of existence versus those who lived in the 'having' mode. This being mode could be identified by the way people learnt, remembered, conversed, exercised authority, believed and loved. Lankshear (2003) also described how it was easy to identify from one's language those people who lived in the 'having' mode of existence. When the students in this study, regardless of belief systems espoused in the home, or student age bracket, were asked to describe how they viewed themselves at home and in schools,

their response was that their views of themselves at home were usually different from when they attended mainstream institutions. They felt they were of less value when in school with so many others to compare themselves with. When these students were asked to describe the way they viewed themselves while at home, students did not describe how highly they thought of themselves. At home they did not stop to think how they valued themselves because they accepted who they were without qualification. Professionals also described the way some home educated students seemed to be unaware of those around them when in mainstream institutions because they focused on what was of interest to them, demanding answers as they thought of questions and enjoying conversation with the adults in ways their mainstream peers did not appear to. Even when older students attended mainstream institutions, they thought they were able to maintain some of their personal 'beingness' as evidenced in their ability to resist peer pressure and enjoy their own company. From the language and descriptions given by and of these students the easiest way to describe the hidden culture of these home educated students is to explain it through Fromm's (1976) 'being' mode of existence.

The 'being' mode of Fromm (1976) appears to be the same or similar in meaning to the selfless mode of existence that functioned without a controlling centre as described by Varela (1999). Varela (1999) thought the image we had of ourselves as having a centre of command or control was a virtual image not reflecting the reality of how our brain functioned. Leont'ev (1978) also described personality as an incomplete system of activities that moved in relatively consistent directions to indicate general personality, but it could not be described as a fixed quality. In recent studies of the brain (Hooper 2008, Varela 1999), there is growing evidence that the brain functions in a way similar to bees in a beehive. Each part of the human brain operates and functions independently to other parts of the brain and yet in relation to every other part of the brain. It is suggested here that perhaps human beings function best in community when their activities mirror this model of activity and they are able to act independently, yet relationally and responsibly with other members of community/society. The guidelines for functioning in a healthy society appear to incorporate interconnected concepts of relationship, autonomy, responsibility and selflessness in a similar way to the way our brains function and as exemplified in beehives. If this is the case, our minds and our place in society function most effectively when each individual is encouraged to operate relationally, autonomously, responsibly and selflessly within a collaborative community. The students in this study appeared to function comfortably exhibiting more qualities of the 'being' mode of existence than qualities illustrating the 'having' mode of existence as described by Fromm (1976) and illustrated by Lankshear (2003) when they are at home. Students also exercised considerable autonomy about their learning and lives when educated at home. If this model is used to describe the culture of home as found

in these students' experiences, one can attempt to unpack the complications of their transition experiences from a different but valuable perspective.

This perception of our inner existence functioning in a way similar to a collaborative beehive is used to consider the way various forms of structures and controls might contribute to discomfort and misunderstanding, particularly for students who have been free to develop this way. This perception of how we might function will be used to consider students' development of identity, autonomy, learning and socialisation. It will also be used to inform a critique of the tensions expressed by these students and their parents in their interactions with the professionals and structures of mainstream education and found in some home education practices.

10.4.4 Identity

High self-esteem in home educated students has been reported in earlier Australian research (Brosnan 1992, Krivanek 1988) and in overseas studies (Bolle, Wessel & Mulvihill 2007, Holder 2001, Sheffer 1995, Taylor 1986). In this study, students generally reported high self-esteem. Students also reported that the way they viewed themselves when at home was different to the way they viewed themselves while in mainstream institutions. They felt they thought less highly of themselves when in mainstream institutions but that when at home, they did not consider the way they viewed themselves, because they felt they were 'just' themselves. One or two professionals in this study also thought a few home educated students sometimes had unrealistically high self-esteem. They supported this view with reference to students who held future ambitions not related to current educational achievements.

Identity theory has been used to discover the meaning students have made in other transition experiences between mainstream institutions (McLeod & Yates 2006). This study has sought to better understand the meanings parents, professionals and, more particularly, students have made of their transition experiences between home education and mainstream education.

It is accepted in this study that humans develop through a process of 'becoming' relationally within the contexts in which they find themselves and this includes relationally to the particular institutions with which they interact (Leont'ev 1978, McLeod & Yates 2006). In this study, students built identities relationally with themselves, their families and the mainstream institutions with which they were associated. The specific dynamics of each participant in this study were important but the focus of this study has been on the general themes that have arisen from these

specific participant stories. It is also accepted that individual families and particular institutions contributed to this student identity making. There were two directions to the movement of students in this study – exiting or entering mainstream institutions. The directions of movement and the reasons for transitions generally indicated the overall relationship between mainstream institutions and student identity construction.

The identity students took with them when they exited mainstream institutions was defined by the reasons they exited the system. Those students who exited school because they experienced difficulties in mainstream institutions usually revealed damaged identities, some severely so, and this was a significant reason for their exit. Students who exited the system for family reasons, such as travel, did not leave because of problems with identity development and interviews did not reveal obvious identity issues. However, in one family where the students were removed from secondary school for one year due to family circumstances, discussions with both students indicated they experienced some confusion about their identity. They valued the typical qualities of home education but were keen to return to school.

The students who entered or re-entered mainstream institutions took identities into those institutions that had been informed by their experiences at home and by previous experiences in mainstream institutions. Students who enjoyed their time at home found the transition into mainstream institutions relatively easy both academically and socially and felt they were also able to maintain their own uniqueness and values. The strong sense of self, developed at home, seemed to provide these students with attitudes of resilience, achievement and determination. A few students, who had negative experiences from their earlier years in mainstream institutions and also thought their home education experience had not allowed their full involvement in community, felt apprehension about returning to mainstream institutions. One of these students found re-entry into mainstream institutions difficult. In one instance, a student with high self-esteem entered a mainstream institution for the first time. She had difficulties in the culture of this particular institution because of a strong exclusive student clique and bullying which the administration of the school had difficulty monitoring. By moving to a different school, this student was able to assimilate easily and regain her self-esteem, resilience and determination to succeed. In home education, an apparently influential factor in the formation of student identity appeared to be the type of curriculum used by these students and how it did or did not provide for their individual learning needs and exercise of responsible autonomy.

Student self-concept, identity, self-esteem, resilience and self-efficacy were also known to be influenced by transitions into and between mainstream institutions (Adams &

Miezio 2005, Andrews, Ainley & Frydenberg 2004, Burton & Dowling 2005, Downs 2003, Ellis 2004, Ellis, Marsh, Craven & Richards 2004, Howard & Johnson 2005, Martin 2003, McGraw 2005, te Riele 2004, Tonkin & Watt 2003, Wilson & Gillies 2005). While some professionals in this study had general programs to improve student self image, they spoke little about the specific self image of home educated students except to remark that they appeared to have high self-esteem, independence and resilience. One reason parents removed students from mainstream institutions, particularly in primary school, was their concern about their children's crumbling self-esteem, whether gifted, with poor health or with learning difficulties. In this study, parents and all students reported high self-esteem while at home. When students were losing self-esteem in primary school, the exit out of mainstream saw a marked improvement in the way they viewed themselves. Entry into mainstream institutions could also challenge student self-esteem. One professional wondered if on occasions home educated student's self-esteem could be too high and unrealistic. A few home educated students also wanted to know how they compared academically with their peers.

These home educated students mostly enjoyed their time at school, when they had chosen to enter or had contributed to the decision to enter in late primary, in secondary school or post secondary school institutions. Even when forced to attend school because of lack of cooperation at home due to changes in home circumstances, one student chose to make the most of his time there. In other research (McLeod & Yates 2006) it was noted that mainstream students were 'badged' with the identity of the particular institutions they attended. These home educated students attended and valued various mainstream institutions but took with them their 'home educated student' identity. They possibly did assume aspects of the 'badge' of the particular institutions they attended. However, the comments these students made about their experiences at home, indicated that they proudly and appreciatively retained their 'badge' of being home educated students.

10.4.5 Power and Professionals

Assessment of power in participant relationships is important to critical theorists (Carspecken 1996, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a, Roberts 2003, Smith 1990, Young 2003) who promote the value of greater equality by first examining power relationships. In this study there was evidence of power differences and power shifts between the three participant groups involved.

In Australian society, education professionals are recognised by the general community

as the holders and proponents of valued knowledge. Compulsory schooling has been legislated around Australia (Jackson 1999) to ensure that students gain officially determined knowledge from education professionals. Mainstream institutions have the authority to provide certification for access to trades and tertiary qualifications. Accountability of this authority is maintained through various standardised testing and reporting procedures. This means that education professionals function in society from a position of community recognised and accepted authority. These professionals view themselves as having socially legitimated authority and do not always see the need to work collaboratively with the general community, parents and students although there is often rhetoric promoting the concept of community collaboration (Dockett & Perry 2003a,b, 2006, Gur-ze'ev 2003, Irwin 2006). Institutions and professionals in some mainstream institutions are also known to contribute to 'at risk' conditions for some students (Margetts 2003).

Given this view of official educational authority, it is to be expected that parents who choose to educate children at home would be viewed by society and professionals as challenging established and recognised authority. It is also to be expected that society and professionals would view home educated students as property owned by mainstream education. Given these official positionings of authority and legitimate educational practice, conflict of power between professionals and home educating families seems inevitable.

10.5 Participants in Study

10.5.1 Professionals in Study

In this study, the participating professionals spoke from the position of official holders of authority in education. These professionals were also generally respectful of parent rights to be involved in, and to choose, educational options for their children, including the option of home education. When first asked to describe their experiences with home educated students, professionals evaluated academic and social abilities. They concluded that home educated students generally exhibited strong academic and social abilities unless there were recognised learning difficulties and complicating background social situations not the result of home education practice. When further questioned about other qualities of home educated students they found these students often demonstrated independent learning skills, resilience and high self-esteem, unless there were identifiable difficulties not the result of home education practices. Several professionals, mostly in the primary school sector, were uncomfortable with the concept of home education and did not consider it a generally positive educational alternative

unless students had been educated with a similar curriculum to curriculum used in mainstream institutions and students were used to same age peer socialisation. Several professionals expressed their concern when dealing with home educating parents who demanded special conditions for their children's education while attending mainstream institutions. They felt these conditions were difficult or unnecessary for institutions to uphold because the particular values demanded by these few parents were atypical to the values promoted by these particular institutions. This was true regardless of the value orientations of the various institutions – whether state run or private and ideologically established.

When discussing the general features of mainstream education, a number of these professionals acknowledged there were limitations to the general effectiveness of mainstream education created by the structures and demands of mainstream institutions (Jackson 2008). These limitations included the lack of mainstream ability to cater for individual needs and abilities of students, especially students with learning differences; the artificial boundaries to learning interests created by structured curriculum; the lack of institutional flexibility to cater for different learning time frames of students; and the not always positive social environment and interaction with peers. At no point, did professionals refer to the possible negative impact of mainstream education on family life, student self-esteem or mental health nor did they refer to the financial benefits to institutions for every student enrolled. Professionals exhibited a lack of understanding of home education, typical of professional behaviour found in connection with other mainstream student transitions (Dockett & Perry 2003a,b, Irwin 2006). There also appeared to be room for professionals interacting with home educators to think and act more as 'transformative intellectuals' and as promoters of self-determination and critical change (Gur-ze'ev 2003, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a) than as institutional gatekeepers (Hunter 2001).

10.5.2 Parents in Study

In this study, the parents moved students both into and out of mainstream institutions. They also reported home educating their children because of their desire to engage in intensive parenting (Aurini & Davies 2005). Parents who moved students out of mainstream institutions reported conflict with professionals. Although some parents who entered students into mainstream institutions later than the normal initial entrance age were not always happy with their communication with professionals, they felt they were able to engage in worthwhile discussions with them. Parents who had gifted students removed children from mainstream institutions because they observed a growing disconnection with learning in mainstream institutions and social isolation

due to unsuccessful institutional attempts to cater for their children's learning needs within age segregated structures. Parents who had children with learning disabilities or health problems found children reacted negatively to school pedagogy and also felt institutional practices were ineffective or revealed professional disinterest or inability to meet particular needs. Mainstream institutional failure to recognise that 'a one size fits all' mentality (Kantanis 2000) resulting in unmet individual needs was a factor contributing to the exit of most of these students. A number of these parents expressed their deep concern for the current and future mental health of their children if they had been left in mainstream institutions. There were other parents who removed children from institutions because they felt their children were not provided with sufficient personal space and time to develop as individuals and to participate effectively in family life.

These parents reported approaching professionals in mainstream institutions, often on numerous occasions, to try and engage in dialogue about particular issues their children faced. They spoke of professionals who ignored both their attempts at communication, and specialist professional opinion about the condition of their particular children. When parents eventually spoke to relevant professionals of their intentions to remove students from mainstream institutions because of significant unresolved problems, parents found some professionals then worked to entice their children to persuade parents to leave them at school. They reported incidents of professionals who spoke derogatorily to parents about parental inability to educate children reducing a few parents to tears. One parent described the reaction of her school principal. He reported her removal of children to the Department of Education and Training in his attempt to have the children remain in his school. She resorted to legal advice and after a number of interactions was eventually left alone. The exertion of power on these parents by professionals was significant and while they left children in mainstream institutions, parents felt powerless to effect the changes they felt were necessary for the well being of their children. Freire (Young 2003) described the lack of dialogue as dehumanising. These parents were placed in this dehumanising position by professionals who held official position and power in mainstream institutions. Bureaucratisation (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a) exercised by professionals within mainstream institutions created 'hegemonic pedagogical rhetoric' that negatively penetrated the daily lives of the parents and student participants in this study (Gur-ze'ev 2003, p.21).

A few parents were also conscious of funding benefits to mainstream institutions according to the number of students in their institutions and for students attending with particular learning differences. Professionals did not refer to any funding arrangements to institutions for every child enrolled in their institutions or for catering for students

with particular learning needs.

10.5.3 Students in Study

A few of the students in this study referred to what they felt was the abuse of power by professionals and institutions contributing to their feelings of alienation and difference to their peers. This then led to some mainstream peers victimising them further. These students made it clear, that while peers contributed to their discomfort, they identified professional and institutional practice as the original contributing factor for their being labelled as different (Jackson 2007). These students expressed relief at the opportunity to leave the system, or, if initially tentative about leaving mainstream institutions, their realisation once home that there was a more effective and personally satisfying way to learn. Students, whether they had exited or entered mainstream institutions, or moved in both directions, also spoke of the restrictions or limitations on their ability to learn contextually and effectively, and function as individuals in mainstream institutions. Most students were able to live within these restrictions but found this a cost of attending mainstream institutions in ways they had not experienced while at home.

10.5.4 Conflict Situations and Resolution

Professionals

The professionals had limited personal experiences of students leaving institutions to engage in home education. Although they all had strong views about home education, the reasons for families removing students from mainstream institutions were not always known. One professional recognised that an itinerant family also had family issues unrelated to the education of the children at home. A couple of other families were reported to have removed children because of financial difficulties and/or values or personal preference differences. Few professionals knew the post mainstream histories of these students.

Parents

In spite of tense discussions with professionals, the parents in this study all thought their decision to remove children from mainstream institutions was best for their children. This decision impinged on family freedoms economically and personally but these costs were overlooked because of the benefits parents perceived for children and families. Even parents who were unsure of their own teaching abilities thought children were better off learning at home. Parents described children who were content, engaged with learning, more strongly defined as unique individuals, more connected to

family and with more life contextualised learning opportunities. Parents described their experiences with children who made the decision to enter, leave, or stay at home. A few parents expressed concern when children spoke of returning to mainstream education and recounted parental attempts to encourage careful thought and decision. The parents in this study demonstrated respectful collaboration with students both in the way they respected student decisions about engagement with mainstream institutions and towards student contributions to the daily direction of learning and autonomy.

Students

The students in this study identified the exercise of autonomy as the most important quality gained from home education. Ability to learn in the most individually appropriate ways was the second most important quality of home education. When in mainstream institutions, some students struggled with the limitations to use of time and place, learning styles, connection to learning in real life contexts and pursuit of interests. Some students felt professionals and institutional structures also set up situations identifying them as different to their mainstream peers, especially when they started their education in mainstream institutions. When students left mainstream institutions, they found they were able to learn more effectively, know family and community more holistically, and discover themselves in ways not available to them while in mainstream institutions. Students who personally chose whether to stay at home or enter/re-enter mainstream institutions also demonstrated their ability to pursue critical thinking and exercise self-determination.

Different critical theorists, such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Giroux and Freire wrote of the need for educators to encourage students to become engaged in the pursuit of critical thinking, actively challenging the status quo and seeking freedom and autonomy, from a grass roots level (Giroux 2003, Gur-ze'ev 2003, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a, Young 2003). They felt educators should be challenging the 'hegemonic pedagogical rhetoric' of the dominant educational authorities (Gur-ze'ev 2003, p21). The goals of critical theory, as understood by Habermas, were 'agency, theory, and praxis' 'love of justice, respect of difference', choice of curriculum, awareness of different cultures, proficiency in 'literacy, numeracy, and articulateness' practiced in every day lives, understanding of 'nonfoundational truth' learnt in varied situations, and an understanding of the importance of effective resistance and struggle to empower in practical and politically effective ways (Young 2003, p.118). Authority in mainstream institutions was used to exercise power and control (Giroux 2003). In this study, it became evident that some professionals attempted to exercise unhealthy power and control over parents and children who needed different care. However, it was parents

on behalf of children, and students who engaged in the critical thinking, challenged the status quo, exercised agency, demonstrated a practical love of justice, and who sought freedom and autonomy through grass roots activity to ensure their own human dignity. Parents illustrated their capacity to act as ‘transformative intellectuals,’ acting with self-determination by exercising ‘conscious and social emancipation’ on behalf of children (Gur-ze’ev 2003, p.21). There were a few professionals who actively sought engagement with home educating families and valued the opportunity to discover how they could improve and extend their own programs as a result. Other professionals referred to in this study demonstrated their comfort with the status quo and a lack of energy, recognition of, or ability to address agency, justice for all, respect for difference and a lack of awareness of different culture. This was in spite of participant professional recognition that mainstream education had significant limitations.

10.6 Autonomy

In this study parents valued children’s contributions to decision making about home education practices and fostered student input to the directions and daily working arrangements of home education programs. Parents also supported and encouraged students to make informed decisions about entry or re-entry into mainstream institutions. However, parents were most concerned that their children were learning effectively, in life and family contexts, and developing healthy self-concepts. The professionals in this study focused on student academic and social skills, commenting in passing that many of these students also exhibited independence, resilience and high self-concepts. However, all students in this study highlighted their appreciation and experience of exercising autonomy while engaged in home education. All students described their ability to make decisions about time use in their educational activities. In a few homes, regular family learning groups set limits to this freedom, but all students valued the way their use of time was respected. In most homes, although there were often core subjects, students were able to set the direction for studying topics of personal interest. A number of parents found student resistance to particular learning activities led them to seek other options and directions more suited to particular children’s interests and needs. This resistance was most evident in students who used externally provided curricula, whether ACA or DECV. Although these externally provided curricula provided for some subject choice, students found that, after time, the content of the programs did not allow the type of flexibility they felt they needed and the families concerned generally took up more eclectic curriculum better suited to students needs.

10.6.1 Professionals and Autonomy

Professionals in this study made no mention of student decision to enter mainstream institutions and discussed students' entry with parents as if it had been a parental decision. In this study, most decisions to enter secondary school and TAFE were made by the students while the rest were joint student and parent decisions. Professionals were unaware of the degree of autonomy exercised by home educated students about both the decision to enter mainstream institutions and in their home education programs. From their position of authority in education, it is expected that many of these professionals may have found this student exercise of autonomy inappropriate. A few professionals in this study indicated they felt some parents were misguided and made poor decisions to use home education, even when students performed with excellence. Professional opinion about the misguided decisions of parents to home educate students was more evident, however, in the parental encounters with other professionals, not involved in this study, who opposed their decisions to educate children at home. These professional attitudes illustrate mainstream professional attitudes to discourses different to the dominant educational discourses (Lawrence 2003).

The development of critical thinking and autonomy in professionals and students has been a long-standing theme of many critical theorists (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a). It was thought man's hope for an improved and more just life would follow only when those who were oppressed exercised enough forethought and action to seek more equitable circumstances. Critical thinking and agency, the ability to exercise self-determination, were discussed as key ingredients in this attempt to better the human condition. There was also a recognition that personal autonomy needed to be balanced with the public needs of community. What the critical theorists did not do was discuss the cognitive processes that encourage the development of these abilities. As a historical socioculturalist, Vygotsky (1987) was able to describe the way cognition in individuals developed through the use of language within society, between an individual and society, and internally through higher order thinking skills. Leont'ev (1978) explained that cognitive development occurred through language because it was the symbolic tool connecting the real objective world to the subjective world of individuals. Cognition and the fulfilment of needs occurred when there was a recognition of objective means to fulfil subjective needs. He explained that our ability to exercise the will was an internal decision that moved from the subjective state of individuals to influence the objective world but he acknowledged that there was a need for further study of what he termed 'motive' or the exercise of the 'will.' His work does, however, provide a material foundation from which to examine the development of autonomy.

10.6.2 Parents and Autonomy

In this study, the collaborative environment between parents and students allowed students the freedom to exercise decision-making skills they considered were of material benefit to themselves. When describing their pleasure in deciding when to work, they described the rewards they experienced, such as free time to engage in large personal projects of interest, as a result of managing their own time. They recognised and had also experienced their misuse of time that then left them with little personal free time. Many of these students also valued their opportunities to learn through 'doing' or 'hands on' activities. Other Australian studies (Barratt-Peacock 1997, Thomas 1998) have previously noted the prominence of conversation in family interactions. Recent further research in this area has confirmed these observations (Thomas & Pattison 2007). The students in this study valued their ability to discuss work with parents, as the need arose. Through these types of learning situations students were able to understand the direct impact of cause/effect contextually and immediately. These life experiences provided them with opportunities to experientially understand the benefits and costs of wise and not so wise decision-making, or exercise of the will, in a safe environment.

10.6.3 Students and Autonomy

The students who left school in early to mid primary school appreciated this freedom at home as they had not experienced it while in mainstream institutions. Students who entered mainstream institutions in late primary school or later reported only two opportunities to exercise any autonomy in mainstream institutions: occasional text selection and greater subject choice. Opportunities to exercise the types of autonomy they had experienced at home did not exist in mainstream institutions.

Research on the transitions of mainstream students between mainstream institutions recognised the importance of the development of critical thinking, self-determination, self-efficacy and agency (Bell, Smith & Bright 2005, Kift & Nelson 2005, Lawrence 2006, Moss, Pittaway & McCarthy 2006, Smith & Dalton 2004). In this study, students valued and professionals appreciated the independent learning abilities, resilience and self-direction displayed by most of these students. However, there was no explanation given by professionals for this consistent observation and how they might achieve this in their institutions.

The fact that these students remained in mainstream institutions would indicate that while autonomy was important, they were able to see the need to exercise it relationally to other needs. It is also suggested here that these students were conscious, even

though professionals were unaware of this dynamic, that they, the students, were free to enter or leave mainstream institutions as they felt the need. This sense of freedom is thought to have empowered these students to accept the structural and professional restrictions with the ease their lives illustrated. This sense of autonomy also appears to have empowered them to critically evaluate their learning, peer interactions, personal directions and self-image in the healthy ways that are demonstrated in this study. From a critical theorist perspective, home education provided these students with opportunities to develop those qualities sought for professionals and students in mainstream institutions where there was often a failure to achieve these goals (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a). Historical sociocultural theory should provide a useful foundation on which to further explore the development of volition, autonomy and critical thinking skills in home educated students.

10.7 Curriculum

The type of curriculum used by home educating families appeared to be a contributing factor to student autonomy, learning and identity. The three families using natural learning practices catered to gifted and learning disabled students who appreciated being able to direct their own learning in meaningful ways and they engaged in large long term projects indicating deep and enthusiastic learning motivation. Most families in this study used varying degrees of eclectic programs that ensured literacy and numeracy skills while encouraging students to follow their own interests. Although a number of families had accessed ACA or DECV programs it became evident in this research project that these students lost interest in these programs within two years and families found the move to more eclectic programs beneficial and important. Students responded positively to this change. Two students in one family who used externally provided curriculum to the end of their compulsory years of schooling, refused to continue to do further study because they felt this education was repetitive and mismatched to their needs and interests. In another situation, a professional, student and parent recognised there may have been too much parental control exercised through the curriculum. This parent changed to a more flexible curriculum with younger students.

Religious beliefs were important for many families in this study, but these beliefs did not seem to explain the tensions students experienced with their externally prepared curriculum or tightly controlled parent designed curriculum. Another explanation suggests that curriculum inflexibility and parental control of curriculum were important long-term factors contributing to curriculum mismatch with student interests and abilities. These types of programs may have initially helped students to establish study routines at home, but eventually contributed to a loss of student interest, motivation, joy

of learning and ability to exercise meaningful autonomy. The fact that students settled happily into other more adaptable programs would support the position held here that the nature of home education encourages students to work reflexively (Bruner 1987, Vygotsky 1987, Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003b) with their study programs. Students were often able to influence their learning in significant ways while at home and the type of curriculum used was important in allowing this process. Because student autonomy was the most important facet of student home education experiences, this finding does not seem surprising.

Professionals were often unaware of the nature of curriculum used in homes. This reflected similarities to professional lack of knowledge and communication typically found in other mainstream student transitions (Dockett & Perry 2003a,b, Lawrence 2003, Timperley, McNaughton, Howie & Robinson 2003). In one instance, a primary school professional, who worked with one self assessed successful home educating family, strongly expressed her disbelief that any family could successfully provide an appropriate curriculum for students without professional direction. She formed this opinion admitting she did not know the full reasons the family had chosen to home educate their children (Gee 1999). Two other professionals thought students made the transition into mainstream institutions more easily if there was compatibility of curriculum between home and mainstream institutions. DECV professionals indicated that their particular program demanded considerable use of written work. This worked well for academically achieving students but was not helpful to students who had difficulties with such high literacy demands. There were a few other professionals, however, who were keen to learn more about the contextualised learning opportunities used by home educating parents. Professional views of home education curriculum varied from little or no knowledge, from disbelief that it could be effective, to respect for the broad curriculum opportunities available to home educating families. From this study, it would appear that curriculum did contribute to the ease of transitions into mainstream institutions for some students, but there were many more students who made easy transitions without using such compatible curricula and still revealed equal or higher levels of ability to mainstream peers. Perhaps this curriculum compatibility was more relevant to students with learning difficulties. If students do want to enter mainstream institutions, especially to do their VCE, however, they need to be mindful that VCE subjects are tightly controlled by external demands not necessary in open home curriculum. At home, student autonomy over learning was important in their learning process and this was evident in home curriculum used.

10.8 Learning

There appear to be many connections between good learning models explained by historical sociocultural theorists and Australian home education practice (Jackson 2008). In this study, the learning practices of these home educators appeared to follow many of these theoretically recognised best practices.

10.8.1 Parents and Learning

Parents in this study felt they were able to support their children learn according to individual needs. Parents removed students from mainstream institutions in early to mid primary school because children's specific learning needs were not met. These children were gifted, learning advanced, learning disabled or handicapped by health problems. Some parents did not initially send children to school because they realised their learning needs were atypical to other children around them. This meant the learning needs of most students in this study were not easily catered for by mainstream institutions that provided for average student abilities, even though defining an average student is problematic. Parents of gifted students were able to provide open learning environments encouraging children to pursue large projects for months at a time. These parents rarely considered the requirements of the CSF or VELS as they felt comfortable their children were exceeding these requirements. Parents who had children with health problems or learning disabilities were able to take children back to achievable levels and then move forward according to the child's ability. Parents all noted that every child in the family learnt differently to any other child and, while challenged, they appreciated being able to cater for these differences. There was evidence some of these students did not learn incrementally in the way mainstream curriculum is frequently designed (Mahn 2003, Thomas 1998). They also enjoyed watching their children have 'aha' moments when they understood difficult subjects. Parents valued the regular opportunities to create learning opportunities out of every day events in real and meaningful contexts demonstrating their use of effective mediation to develop learning opportunities (Kozulin 2003).

10.8.2 Professionals and Learning

Professionals initially assessed two qualities when working with previously home educated students – academic ability and social skills. The professionals in this study consistently reported that the home educated students they worked with demonstrated strong academic abilities unless there were known learning difficulties or other extenuating circumstances influencing students' learning opportunities. A number of them also found these students typically demonstrated independent learning abilities,

self-determination and resilience but provided no explanation why these qualities were notable or how they might have developed outside mainstream institutions.

10.8.3 Students and Learning

The students in this study considered learning at home to be the second most important quality of their home education experience and all students commented that they learnt better at home than in mainstream institutions. These students appreciated being able to learn in ways that best suited their abilities and interests, whether gifted, learning advanced, average, learning disabled or with complicating health factors. Students particularly appreciated being able to learn ‘hands on’ or experientially. This was tied with the ability to learn in real life contexts. A number of students appreciated being able to learn through warm relationships with parents and others in one-on-one environments and receive help immediately they had problems. Other more academically focused students valued the freedom to conduct their own research and used community and library resources to extend their understanding. Those students who attended mainstream institutions in late primary and later institutions valued learning from subject specialists and peer mediation.

10.8.4 Connections to Historical Sociocultural Learning Theories

Historical sociocultural theorists described a number of learning situations that contributed to good learning (Jackson 2008). Vygotsky (1987) explained the importance of language in holistic, sociocultural settings to the development of cognition. Reflective consciousness was an important part of good learning. Mediation of learning by more informed members of the community was essential for effective development of cognitive functions and it was important for students to be introduced to overarching concepts by experts. Recognition of cognitive development through transition experiences was central to understanding overall cognitive development. Other historical sociocultural theorists furthered his findings by exploring different aspects of his work. Mediation by parents, teachers and peers were all considered important at different stages of a child’s cognitive development (Kozulin 2003, Rogoff 1990, 2003) as were the development of ‘self-regulation, representational thinking and strategic problem solving’ skills (Lidz & Gindis 2003, p105). There were important benefits from learning in meaningful contexts (Bruner 1987, Vygotsky 1997). Holistic activities were important for developing a sense of completeness because segmented work created a sense of alienation (Conroy 2003, Leont’ev 1978). ‘Emotional anticipation’ (Lidz & Gindis 2003, p107) also contributed to good learning outcomes. Adolescence was seen as an important developmental period when students pursued particular interests

passionately (Egan and Gajdamaschko 2003). Life long learning was an important goal to develop in students (Zuckerman 2003). One other sociocultural theorist (Ageyev 2003) distinguished the differences between inclusive cultures found in Russia as distinct from the exclusive and individualistic cultures of Western mainstream educational institutions. Ageyev thought educational processes were enhanced by the 'personal component' (Ageyev 2003, p446) because the loss of this inevitably led to losses in the educational process.

Professionals and Historical Sociocultural Learning Theories

In this study, professionals spoke little of any of the best learning practices described by the historical sociocultural theorists. They confirmed the success of home education in providing a strong academic program without reflecting how this might have been achieved. They commented in passing that these students demonstrated independence and self-direction (Lidz & Gindis 2003) without reflecting on how and why these students exhibited these qualities. Mediation of knowledge and context based learning were not qualities professionals discussed. Some professionals acknowledged there were limitations to the way they could connect learning to meaningful and relevant contexts on a regular basis (Conroy 2003, Leont'ev 1978). A few professionals recognised that mainstream curriculum was limited to prescribed criteria and did not allow the freedom necessary to reach the interests of all students. Emotional conditions of learning were also acknowledged but the ability of mainstream educators to ensure these conditions was not always a part of the interview discussions (Lidz & Gindis 2003). Professionals hoped their programs would encourage students to develop a life long love of learning without discussing how they were able to assess the effectiveness of their programs to achieve such an outcome (Zuckerman 2003). Some professionals in this study felt classroom structures and large student numbers detracted from their ability to provide a 'personal component' for their students (Ageyev 2003, p.446).

Parents and Historical Sociocultural Learning Theories

Parents in this study described their curriculum and approaches to learning without specifically identifying parent mediation as an important quality of their program even though it was apparent they were available and able to provide immediate and contextual mediation (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987). A few parents wondered if they were able to provide broad and important knowledge because they were not experts, while at the same time describing their personal growth through learning alongside their children as peers (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987). Parents provided warm and emotionally supportive environments, but it was students who identified this strength in their relationship with their parents (Lidz & Gindis 2003). Parents also created

conditions supporting and encouraging students to take ownership of their education and to become more self-directed often without realising the significance of what they were doing (Lidz & Gindis 2003). They appreciated being able to build learning moments on relevant real life contexts without a full acknowledgement of the importance of this type of learning situation to the overall academic achievements of their children (Conroy 2003, Leont'ev 1978). Neither did they appear to understand the full significance of providing holistic learning opportunities for their children although they appreciated the opportunities to watch their children learn this way (Conroy 2003, Leont'ev 1978). Parents sought to encourage a lifelong love of learning in their children and felt they were able to see evidence of this in their children's interests and learning pursuits (Zuckerman 2003). Parents thought they were better able than mainstream institutions to provide a 'personal component' to the educational process of their children's education (Ageyev 2003, p.446).

Students and Historical Sociocultural Learning Theories

All the students in this study made it clear their learning opportunities at home exceeded the learning opportunities they experienced in mainstream institutions in spite of a few finding the learning at home, particularly through externally provided curriculum difficult. These students appreciated learning by doing in meaningful contexts (Conroy 2003, Leont'ev 1978), and the ability to discuss and learn one-on-one with their parents (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987). They appreciated the emotionally supportive learning environments (Lidz & Gindis 2003) at home, especially when earlier experiences in mainstream institutions had challenged them emotionally. It is also interesting that the older students chose to attend mainstream institutions to access expert knowledge and found they valued discussions with peers (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987, Zuckerman 2003). Some students, as young as ten and older, enjoyed pursuing long and involved interests (Egan and Gajdamaschko 2003). A few of these who did attend mainstream institutions found it difficult to pursue these interests while in mainstream institutions because of limitations to personal time. Self-determination in learning was the most valued aspect of their home education experiences (Lidz & Gindis 2003). A number of students felt they had learnt how to learn at home and their pursuit of learning indicated that their home education experiences contributed towards a love of lifelong learning (Zuckerman 2003). Students in this study spoke highly of the ways in which their parents contributed to the 'personal component' of their educational experiences, and older students appreciated this aspect about some professionals who taught them (Ageyev 2003, p.446).

Limitations to Learning Opportunities at Home

There were some situations that a minority of students thought detracted from their ability to learn effectively at home. Three students felt parents in large families sometimes did not have sufficient time to spend with each child, or regretted a lack of immediate mediation of learning (Kozulin 2003). Two students also thought their parents' lack of expert knowledge in post primary learning situations may have contributed to lost learning opportunities (Karpov 2003b, Vygotsky 1987). These students also wondered if they had missed out on being exposed to a wider variety of career options by being isolated from the broader community (Kozulin 2003, Zuckerman 2003).

One professional identified learning difficulties not recognised by parents earlier while a child was at home. These difficulties disappeared once the child had been properly diagnosed with dyslexia and treated accordingly. Several parents acknowledged the benefits of receiving specific professional diagnosis of learning differences and problems, even though there were professionals in mainstream institutions who chose to ignore this expert diagnosis and advice.

A Need for Both Options

Researchers on mainstream student transitions (Taylor & Nelms 2006) thought it was important students had beneficial learning experiences through their transition movements. The reports of professionals, parents and students in this study indicated the transitions between home education and mainstream education in both directions provided different and beneficial experiences to these students. The greatest benefits to learning appeared to favour student exiting mainstream institutions in early to mid primary school, particularly when students were experiencing difficulties that required a closer 'personal component' and parent mediation of learning (Ageyev 2003, Kozulin 2003). Students who entered mainstream institutions after primary school also benefited from access to specialist educators and peer mediation (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987). However, the circumstances particular to each student were an important indicator of how and why transition was important and relevant to them.

10.9 Socialisation

Socialisation, in this research project, was a complex topic to analyse. The students discussed socialisation differently when discussing their experiences in home education and mainstream education. When at home, student reference to socialisation as a positive factor was less important than their appreciation of autonomy and good

learning opportunities. Nearly one quarter of home educated students talked about the positives of socialisation while at home. These students appreciated soul-mates, quality friendships, ability to stay in touch with friends and less challenging social situations at home than in mainstream institutions. Two students challenged the commonly held view that they did not have friends while learning at home. Several students commented they sometimes missed meeting larger numbers of same aged peers while at home but that this was a minor inconvenience and not a serious problem. Socialisation was mentioned as the most significant negative of home education by about one third of home educated students. Those who considered this a serious problem were students who lived in isolated areas, or who had moved from overseas or interstate. Socialisation was considered to be both the most significant positive and the most significant negative aspect of mainstream institutions. These two contrasting views were sometimes held by the same students. Students appreciated being able to meet and interact with more peers of the same age in mainstream institutions. The types of negative social experiences faced by these students in mainstream institutions included bullying, school yard cliques and differences in values.

The most obvious differences in participant values and understanding of socialisation were found between the views of parents and professionals. Parents were clear that socialisation should include student ability to mix with all age groups and people with varying interests, otherwise known as vertical socialisation (Clery 1998). When professionals referred to the social skills of home educated students they were usually assessing students' ability to mix with same aged peers and function in classroom settings, otherwise termed horizontal socialisation (Clery 1998). Students in this study sought same age peer socialisation but also valued the ability to socially mix with different aged people in ways they felt their mainstream peers were not competent. In order to come to some understanding of these contradictory experiences of socialisation, one needs to consider the types of social situations found in home education in contrast to the typical social situations found in mainstream institutions. When students were at home, they were encouraged to view all members of their communities as possible friends, regardless of age, differences and position in the community. When these students entered mainstream institutions, they described their expectations and views that teachers were part of their friendship networks. These students referred more to teachers than to peers when describing their interactions in mainstream institutions. The students viewed peers as friends, but often added that they thought they were more in control of their lives than their mainstream peers and more capable of mixing with the broader community than their peers seemed able to. They also described how they were able to enjoy their own company on occasions more easily than it appeared mainstream peers were able to do. Home educated students thought their peers were too

dependent on other peers to value their own personal positions. Student assessment of social opportunities and differences between home and mainstream institutions reflected the principles of Fromm's (1976) being mode of existence and the community focus described by Ageyev (2003).

Some of the professionals in this study noted that home educated students were able to communicate well with adults generally. A few professionals spoke, in reserved tones (Gee 1999), about the way some home educated students were competent speaking with adults. The subtle implication from these conversations was that these teachers felt the practice of home education had unwisely restricted the opportunities for students to mix with peers and this had created a social aberration. One professional described his pleasure communicating with these home educated students. In contrast other professionals seemed to regard the attempts of home educated students who sought their attention as being odd. One wonders how students in mainstream institutions can benefit as effectively as do home educated students through their frequent parent mediated learning opportunities (Kozulin 2003) and the adult 'personal or interpersonal component' (Ageyev 2003, p444) when there is restricted access to healthy friendships with the adults available to them.

Other research (Panofsky 2003) examined the relationship of teachers to mainstream students and described the ways in which some education professionals unwittingly and yet obviously created class distinctions in their classrooms based on unacceptable criteria. Ageyev (2003) discussed the difference between inclusive communities and the exclusive and individualistic cultures found in western mainstream educational institutions. It is thought that professionals in this research project work within a system that, by its very nature, functions by class creation and exclusive, individualistic culture. Teachers, unwittingly, are established as a different class of society to students. Students are ranked against each other by the grading systems established in mainstream institutions and subtle classes of difference are established between students as a result. When home educated students entered mainstream institutions from their inclusive and differently established communities, they were not always aware of these differences. Some professionals in this study described how some home educated students were not aware of classroom practices or of teacher/student boundaries. Several students struggled to understand the different social structures they encountered when they made the transition into mainstream institutions. When viewed through a perspective of power and class construction, the topic of socialisation in this study challenges conceptions of equality in mainstream institutions (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a).

Professional emphasis on assessing socialisation by student ability to mix with

peers raises some interesting questions. While it is recognised that the ability to mix comfortably with peers is an important part of social development (McGraw 2005, Ramsay, Jones and Barker 2007, Rowling, Weber & Scanlon 2005), this assessment focus seems to ignore the importance of student access to appropriate informed mediation from more mature members of society (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987). Parents were concerned about the possible and sometimes experienced negative influence of same aged peers on their children. A couple of professionals also commented that peer socialisation had its limitations (McGraw 2003). Some of the home educated students, particularly in early to mid primary school reported inappropriate social interactions with peers. These students identified mainstream structures and professional practice as the cause of these unwelcome peer interactions (Jackson 2007). What is of particular interest in this study, is the way so many of the home educated students who entered mainstream institutions in late primary school or later, discerningly described their experiences with peers identifying areas of difference (DEST 2006, Docket & Perry 2003a,b, Martin 2003, Taylor & Nelms 2006). Several students were willing to acknowledge their own personality factors in relation to their social experiences. They also explained how they were able to exercise greater discernment, self-acceptance and independence (Lidz & Gindis 2003, Young 2003) from peer pressure than their mainstream peers. They attributed this ability to work around peer pressure to their home education experiences.

Students in this study enjoyed opportunities to mix with same aged peers in mainstream institutions. However, some of these students experienced difficulties mixing with some same aged peers while in mainstream institutions. There were three ways in which these students experienced alienation from peers and included bullying, exclusion by social cliques and values difference. Some students reported bullying and exclusion by social cliques by peers and most reports of these incidences occurred in primary schools. Three of these students were gifted students and two had learning difficulties, but learning advanced students also reported bullying. All but one of these students thought the way professionals identified and treated them as different to their peers contributed significantly to their being labelled as different by their peers. The one student who did not make this association had experienced significant bullying even in a special school for students with learning disabilities. The gifted and learning advanced students noted that their entrance and achievements seemed to challenge the established positions of high achievers in their classes and this displacement was unwelcome and strongly resisted. This meant these home educated students, who were used to being accepted for who they were and valued for their abilities regardless of ranking at home, found themselves in an unenviable position once in mainstream institutions. They felt they were placed in an unfair position having to decide between continuing to achieve

or lowering their achievement and motivation to learn in order to more subtly fit into the established classroom rankings. These students did not appear to resolve this dilemma as they either moved out of mainstream institutions or moved into other more inclusive institutions. One learning disadvantaged student in primary school found she was able to hold her own academically in secondary school and did not experience bullying again.

The third way in which these students faced social negatives resulted from holding personal values different from their mainstream peers. These students came from home environments where discussions about most things with parents were common. Their values were the result of this connection and mediation with more informed mediators (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987). When they entered mainstream institutions, several students found these mediated values challenged. They felt their values were important but did not know how to manage the conflict with mainstream students who held and promoted values these students thought were inappropriate. While students resolved this tension by returning to home education or shifting schools, adult mediation was also beneficial for helping to work through these differences (Kozulin 2003). Before society and professionals label home educated students as having social difficulties, it seems important to more clearly understand what the conflicts are about and decide the types of values society and professionals wish to uphold and encourage (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a).

In this study, professionals usually found students were socially competent when they arrived in mainstream institutions and students frequently reported the move into mainstream as being socially worthwhile. Professionals recognised that some students experienced social problems and thought these were usually due to family dysfunction or family itinerancy. However, they were not always aware of the reasons for students experiencing social problems. There were, however, a few students who were socially challenged when they made the transition into mainstream institutions. Students who had entered mainstream institutions at normal entrance age sometimes experienced negative socialisation that affected their ability to mix with others later when they returned to mainstream institutions as was found in one overseas study (Krout 2002).

At home social problems for a few students occurred because of family isolation, family travel, itinerancy and lack of suitably matched peers within home education networks. Because of the way society and professionals have cut home education out of normal educational conversation, these types of issues are attributed to poor parent decisions to use home education without understanding the ways home education benefits these students and families. This does not improve collaborative and supportive

communication between different types of education and reduces the effective engagement of home educating families with supportive and inclusive mainstream practices.

A number of students and many parents brought up the topic of societal views and reactions to home educated students and the ‘problem’ of socialisation. The general home education community assessment and response to this societal perception was that it was grossly ill-informed, unfair, and unwanted. The findings in this study tend to indicate that professional and societal fixation with ‘social’ problems of home educated students is generally misplaced. What this study does indicate is the need for professionals and society to revisit and re-examine their own meanings and intentions for healthy socialisation and to proactively open effective and inclusive conversation with the home educating community (Ageyev 2003, Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1987).

10.10 Recent Australasian Research

Recently two PhD projects have been completed in Australasia – one in New Zealand (Stroobant 2006) and one in Western Australia (Reilly 2007) – that support the general findings of this project. Stroobant (2006) discussed the experiences of school refusers who moved to home education programs. Parent, students and professional views and experiences were examined. She found professionals used uncontested discourses and definitions to label school refusal behaviour as an individual problem. She redefined the ‘personal’ qualities of school refusal to identify it as a ‘social problem’ (Stroobant 2006, p246). The professionals in her study recognised limitations of mainstream practices but did not recognise that these could be basic contributing factors to school refusal behaviour. They were also often opposed to the concept of home education as a possible solution to school refusal behaviour. While the narratives of parents and students revealed some discrepancies in interpretation, she noted these students responded positively to home education as a legal and satisfactory alternative to the professionally and societally assumed ‘good and necessary’ value of mainstream institutions (Stroobant 2006, p250). Positive changes in student identities were noted when students moved to home education programs (Stroobant 2006a,b). Reilly (2007) also found students with learning disabilities achieved well using home education programs and argued for greater professional, governmental and public support and understanding for home educators and home education practices, particularly for those working with children with learning disabilities. She added that home educators used different programs to mainstream institutions providing for needed individual and flexible instruction. Any future legislation should consider the nature of the personally tailored and ever-changing programs frequently used by home educators.

10.11 Transition

This study of home educated student transitions with mainstream institutions indicates students are moving into and out of mainstream institutions at all levels and at varied times. These transition experiences appear to benefit students not only academically and socially, but also through the development of autonomy and healthy self-esteem. There are specific discourses in both home education and mainstream institutions, variations in curricula at home and hidden curriculum, agenda and expectations in mainstream institutions which are not always understood by home educated students who are not familiar with the day-to-day organisation of mainstream schools (Lawrence 2003, 2005 2006). Professional opinion exhibited a range of views about the practice of home education, however, it became evident professionals generally had a limited understanding of the meaning of home education to students and their families. At present, many educational professionals appear to operate from a perspective of education that represents a 'deficit discourse' (Lawrence 2003) assuming that all educational knowledge is held by mainstream professionals. This attitude is disempowering to both home educating parents and students and to professionals through lost opportunities to more carefully examine their own practices and beliefs. This professional ignorance of home education limits effective discussion of major educational issues from a valuable different perspective that could contribute to improvements in the way mainstream institutions function in more equitable ways for all students and families. Vygotskian historical sociocultural theories and critical pedagogies provide a useful perspective from which to form clearer understandings of home education practice and its meaning to parents and students.

Exploring the seam between mainstream education and home education through the experiences and views of home educating parents, professionals and home educated students creates an opening through which new ideas and conversation can take place – a space allowing meaningful engagement wider than the usual one-sided dialogue that occurs within mainstream educational debates (Britzman & Diplo 2003). Student autonomy is an important part of the development of a healthy democratic society. Until home educators are included in healthy mainstream educational discussions, there cannot be informed conversation about balance between parent and student autonomy and community consensuality (Young 2003). There is a need for reconciling discourse and a challenge of 'what goes without saying' (Young 2003, p125) between mainstream educators and home educators. Overseas home education research earlier recognised the need for greater dialogue between the general community, professionals and home educators (Luebke 1999, Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow 1995). The findings in this research indicate it is time for informed dialogue and reconciling discourse to

occur between professionals, the broader community, legislators and home educators in Australia.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

The transitions of students in this study into and out of mainstream institutions were generally both successful and worthwhile. The study has revealed new areas requiring further research. There are also a number of conclusions and recommendations that flow from these findings. The participants in this study were self-selected and it is impossible to know if the features of these participants are reflective of the general Australian home education population, of those who make transitions with mainstream institutions, or of professionals who deal with these transitions. It is believed, however, that this study provides a useful foundation on which to build further understandings of these transition movements.

11.1 The Participants

11.1.1 Parents

The parents in this study described the successes and benefits they experienced while home educating children. The reasons for home educating children included parental concerns for the holistic development of children within family structures, for strong academic development, social abilities, healthy self concepts, respect for individual uniqueness and a love of life long learning. The type of socialisation parents valued for their children was contact and friendship across a broad range of ages described here as vertical socialisation (Clery 1998). Many parents appreciated working with supportive and understanding professionals. Many others removed children from mainstream institutions because they felt they had no alternative. They had watched happy children become morose, lose self esteem and interest in learning, particularly when in early primary school. They attributed most of this to the way professionals had failed to listen to their comments and requests for help. Their struggles to be heard reflected the concerns for justice often promoted by critical theorists for educational professionals and students (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a).

Parent descriptions of the methods used in their home education programs generally reflected many of the positive learning practices described by historical sociocultural theorists such as Vygotsky and his followers (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller 2003, Leont'ev 1978, Vygotsky 1987). All parents thought their home education programs benefited children although some parents did experience some stress and concern about their abilities to manage their children's progress or referred to their own exhaustion from the effort they put into programs.

11.1.2 Professionals

In this study, the professionals described the mostly successful transition of home educated students into mainstream institutions, at the primary and secondary school levels in particular. Professionals described the way in which parents were generally cordial and cooperative through the transition process. They reported that students generally entered mainstream institutions with strong academic and social abilities. When there were problems academically, professionals described other mitigating factors, such as known learning difficulties as the probable cause. When professionals assessed social skills, they generally focused on student ability to mix with same aged peers and as exhibited in classroom protocols – here referred to as horizontal socialisation (Clery 1998). They also recognised that students interacted confidently with adults. When students had social problems settling into mainstream institutions, professionals described family factors such as itinerancy, dysfunction and exclusive beliefs that more probably contributed to these problems. Most professionals were accepting and supportive of home educating parents. A small number of primary school professionals expressed concern that home education was not a satisfactory form of education in spite of having had mostly positive experiences with students who entered school with strong academic and social abilities.

11.1.3 Students

The students in this study described their valuable experiences learning at home and in mainstream institutions. Most of these students had learning differences such as giftedness, advanced learning abilities, learning disabilities or health problems. All students valued their learning opportunities at home. The most valued aspect of learning at home, however, was their ability to make decisions about their education at three levels – flexibility of time, freedom to direct the content of learning and self-determination about whether to attend mainstream institutions or learn at home. They also reported high self-esteem, personal acceptance and appreciation of being able to live beyond constant peer pressure and to be their own persons. Many students valued their social opportunities at home, although some missed friends on occasions. This was not usually regarded as sufficient reason to return to mainstream institutions, however. Student reasons for entering mainstream institutions included a need to access specialist expertise and many also wanted broader contact with same aged peers. Students, whether they had started their education in mainstream institutions or entered them later, described how the social aspects of school were the most positive and most negative features of mainstream institutions. The three main negative aspects of socialisation in mainstream institutions included bullying, exclusive cliques and values differences from peers. The students who experienced these problems often

found the best way to deal with these issues was to return to home education or move to other institutions. Mentoring also helped one student work through differences in values to mainstream peers. Young students who started their education in mainstream institutions and had learning differences such as giftedness or learning disabilities identified the way professional practice and the structures of mainstream institutions had distinguished them as different from their peers as the cause of alienation by peers. They also resented the way their learning needs were unmet.

11.1.4 Comments from One Group of Participants to Another

Parents to Professionals

While parents respected many professionals, the parents in this study identified a number of areas they felt professionals could improve in their interactions with parents generally. The greatest cause of concern was a lack of professional response to parent and student concerns and requests even when concerns were supported by other professionals. They found individual student needs were poorly met, especially when there were unique needs of giftedness, advanced learner ability, learning disabilities, health problems or a combination of problems. This lack of professional response meant student self-esteem often suffered. Parents also resented the way in which attendance in mainstream institutions detracted from family time and unity and that there was no professional recognition of this dilemma.

Parents about Students

Parents recognised the decision to home educate children was their full responsibility and they were prepared to put the effort in. They recognised that sometimes students resisted some activities, but found, that when this happened, they needed to make changes to encourage students to learn within their interests and abilities. Most parents also supported student autonomy and self-determination.

Professionals to Parents

Professionals in this study were respectful of parent rights to choose the education of their children including the option of home education. They indicated most students exemplified the good educational work undertaken by parents at home. They described generally supportive and cordial relationships with home educating parents. Open communication between professionals and parents over the months preceding student entry ensured a smooth entry into mainstream institutions. Professionals expressed a number of concerns about the practice of home education. Primary professionals

in particular, felt students who followed typical mainstream curriculum made the easiest transitions with mainstream institutions. Professionals often accepted certain parent requests to cater for particular values parents requested and this was true for professionals in both state and private ideologically operated schools. However, professionals felt that some parental demands were unwarranted and created administrative difficulties and student difference to mainstream peers. One professional found parents were occasionally unaware students had particular learning differences and benefited from professional diagnosis and treatment. DECV teachers were conscious their program required significant reading and writing skills and this could cause problems to students who were not strong in those areas. Professionals were also concerned that home educated students might have social difficulties due to the practice of home education even though the students they dealt with were mostly socially competent or had social problems which could be explained through causes other than home education practice.

Professionals to Students

Professionals valued the generally strong students who entered mainstream institutions from home education. When students had difficulties adjusting to mainstream practices professionals considered the possible contributing factors to the difficulties while respecting individual students. Professionals thought student personality was a factor contributing to the success or otherwise of students' entry into mainstream institutions. Professionals were frequently impressed with the independent learning habits, resilience and self-direction of these students. There were a few students who found it difficult to adjust to same age peer contact and a couple of professionals thought this was the result of children spending too much time with adults and insufficient time with same aged peers. They also thought a few students had unrealistic expectations of their own abilities, as exhibited by their achievements and a few students did not understand typical teacher/student relationships or classroom protocols.

Students to Parents

Students were mostly happy with the strong family unity they experienced through home education. They all thought they learnt more effectively at home, regardless of learning abilities, and felt free to develop into unique and competent individuals. However, some situations caused a few students concern. Two young men, who appreciated the connection with their father working on the family farm, felt they had missed out on effective connection with community by the isolation of their property and inability to meet with social groups such as sporting clubs. They, as did two other students, also felt there were occasions when parents were not able to provide the

necessary expert knowledge or broad and informed information about career options. They, and one other student, thought their mother did not always have sufficient time to meet their needs in a large family. Students who moved from interstate or overseas also found it difficult to establish contact with new friends while engaged in home education. Three students struggled with time management once in mainstream institutions. Two students, while appreciating the worthwhile learning opportunities of home, felt parents pushed their curriculum in ways that were not always valued. Two students with learning differences and social difficulties experienced relief from hurtful pressures in mainstream institutions while at home but they felt their home educating experience did not meet all their needs.

Students to Professionals

The views students held of professionals were dependent on whether students moved into or out of mainstream institutions. Students who left mainstream institutions, particularly in lower to mid-primary school, often expressed the view that the professionals and the system of education had let them down. These students were mostly not average students. Gifted students felt their needs were not satisfactorily catered for even though professionals tried to ensure they had access to specialist classes. They found the common age-segregated classes created discrimination when their abilities did not fit within typical age defined boundaries and this unwittingly isolated them from peers. Students with learning difficulties typically felt penalised and isolated from peers because they were constantly expected to catch up work they barely understood.

Students who entered mainstream institutions after typical entry points, often in late primary or secondary school but also TAFE and university, sought access to expert knowledge and experienced teachers. They also appreciated being able to discuss work with peers and develop same aged social contacts. Some students found many of their teachers inclusive, professional and helpful. Students did occasionally discuss their disappointment with a few teachers who were not always inclusive or professional.

11.2 Overlay of Theoretical Frameworks

When the theoretical frameworks of historical sociocultural theory, critical theory and identity theory are overlaid on to these findings a number of conclusions, areas for further research and recommendations can be made.

The results of this study indicate that home education is a successful form of education,

especially for students with learning needs outside of average student abilities. Whether students started with home education programs or left mainstream institutions for a period of time, parents and students indicated students learnt more effectively at home than in mainstream institutions. The ease of entry into mainstream institutions of so many of these students appears to support student and parent' views about the success of home education. It appears there is a need for greater professional, community and societal acceptance of home education as an important and successful educational option.

11.2.1 Historical Sociocultural Theory

The educational practices of these home educating parents and students reflect many of the best educational practices identified by historical and sociocultural theorists. Parent mediation, and provisions of holistic and contextual learning are important attributes naturally occurring in home education practice. These findings are encouraging to parents and also indicate areas they can improve. It is also important for parents to realise there are times when students may need access to external facilities and specialist knowledge through contact with mainstream specialist teachers, tutors or community knowledge centres. Teenage home educated students also appreciated peer mediation of learning.

11.2.2 Critical Theory

A number of social justice issues are raised by this study. Freedom from oppression, equality, fair treatment and access to education should be available to all. In this study a number of students were excluded from a satisfactory educational program because of the limitations created by the structures of mainstream institutions and professional lack of openness, failure to collaborate or act inclusively, and the inability to think laterally. While some (Apple 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, Reich 2002, 2005) have argued that home education is exercised by parents seeking to isolate children from the broader community and this detracts from public educational resources, and equal opportunities, the findings in this study provide a different perspective. Many of these students were denied effective and equitable education in mainstream institutions. Home education ensured they were able to gain a meaningful education preparing them to later follow worthwhile careers and build successful and independent lives in society. Home education also provided a space for these students to learn and practice freedom, autonomy, agency and self-determination in safe and meaningful settings. While the critical theorists (Peters, Lankshear & Olssen 2003a) wrote to inspire better professional practice in mainstream institutions, this research indicates that critical theory values are

being effectively practised by home educating parents and their children in ways denied them in mainstream institutions.

11.2.3 Identity Theory

The development of student identity was an important topic raised in this study. From a historical sociocultural perspective, identity is individually constructed in conjunction with interactions with society in personal ways. In this study there was a difference in the way students viewed their identity at home and in mainstream institutions. In mainstream institutions students often felt less valued than when at home. While at home, students did not comparatively evaluate themselves because they felt free to be unique individuals. This type of identity was described by Fromm (1976) as the 'Being' mode of existence and which he considered to be the most beneficial way to view oneself and live in society. Varela (1999) also described the way in which modern science appeared to support the concept that individuals function best the way beehives function without a controlling centre. He thought this controlling self-centre was a virtual image that in reality did not exist. At home, these students appeared to function as part of their community in holistic ways without needing to be centrally controlled. When these students entered mainstream institutions, social controls were frequently dictated by professional practice and institutional structures so that students' identity was often challenged. Because older students had learnt to exercise considerable autonomy and self-determination while at home, they appeared to be able to cope well with the change in cultural circumstances because they maintained their sense of self-determination. These students valued their home education 'badge' (McLeod & Yates 2006).

11.3 Future Research Opportunities

In this research project, three theoretical positions contributed to interpretation of the data. These theoretical connections raised further questions about the ways in which students were developing, learning, socialising and forming self-concepts in ways that challenge many mainstream practices and accepted community knowledge.

Students valued autonomy most highly of all aspects of their home education experience. There is a need to better understand the development of autonomy in these students and this study identifies more opportunities for the development of autonomy in students doing home education than for students in mainstream institutions. The early to mid-primary school students who exited mainstream institutions spoke highly of the freedom to direct their learning once at home. Because of the overall

importance of autonomy to students in this project and particularly to early mainstream exiting students, it is wondered if this early primary school period is important for the development of autonomy. It is possible that the structural limitations and common professional practice in mainstream institutions make it difficult to identify this aspect of child development. Perhaps the development of autonomy is more important for some students at this stage and this is a contributing factor to the discomfort of these students in mainstream institutions and their satisfactory exit to home education. The study of the development of student autonomy in further research would benefit from the inclusion of home educated students, particularly students exiting mainstream institutions.

The role of home curriculum appeared to play a noticeable part in student ability to exercise and appreciate autonomy and self-determination. The use of externally prepared curriculum noticeably limited student sense of autonomy and self-determination. While these students had opportunities to exercise personal decision making at home, it is also suggested here that the importance of learning by ‘doing’ for these students gave them opportunities to experience and learn from observing cause and effect relationships. This is here thought to be the basis for making wise and informed decisions. The significant mediation provided by parents, in particular, and other more knowledgeable community members may have also contributed to these students’ abilities to develop independent learning skills, resilience and self-determination. Further research is needed in the areas of parent mediation and home education curriculum to better understand how autonomy is encouraged and discouraged by parent mediation and different curriculum types.

The ability to learn more successfully at home than in mainstream institutions was also claimed by all students. Learning in mainstream institutions is regularly researched from different theoretical frameworks including historical sociocultural theories. In this study, the results indicate that many best learning practices identified particularly in historical sociocultural research work (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller 2003, Leont’ev 1978, Vygotsky 1987) were evident in home education practices. It is suggested that further theoretical and research work should include home educated students in research samples in order to better understand dynamics such as mediation, presentation and development of scientific concepts, holistic and contextual learning opportunities, the significance of imagination to the development of volition, and inclusive learning communities versus individual learning focuses found in mainstream institutions. The experience of adolescence for these students, because of the degree of autonomy they exercised and the communities in which they lived, is thought to be differently experienced to the way adolescence is experienced by mainstream peers.

It is suggested that studies of adolescence should include samples of home educated students because of their different cultural backgrounds and the significance of autonomy when compared to students in mainstream institutions.

Socialisation for home educated students at home was different to the social opportunities they experienced in mainstream institutions. Students indicated that, while at home, they were able to connect with a wide variety of people of all ages including some same age peers, so that socialisation was not usually an issue. When access to community and opportunities to interact with same age peers was limited these students missed socialising opportunities. However, their experiences in mainstream institutions had both strong positive and negative value to them. Students valued three qualities of their home social experiences that their mainstream peers often seemed to lack: their ability to be less influenced by peers, the ability to mix with all age groups, and to enjoy their own company. Further research is needed in the area of compulsory aged mainstream student socialisation and should include a range of home educated students to consider the significance of vertical socialisation as distinct from horizontal socialisation experienced in mainstream education (Clery 1998). Studies of peer influence and personal student reflective time should include home educated students. Research into the dynamics and value of home education networks would also contribute to our understanding of social opportunities provided by these networks.

Studies of student identity formation should include home educated students, not only because these students consistently reported high self-esteem, but because of the way in which these students appeared to form identity in Fromm's (1976) 'Being' mode as opposed to the 'Having' mode of existence which is more commonly found in society and which is thought to detract from our being able to function more holistically and as truly human (Lankshear 2003). In spite of the significant cultural differences, explicit and hidden, these students appeared to make the transition into mainstream institutions with ease. The move out of mainstream for young students appeared to be beneficial for students not only academically and socially but for the development of healthier self-esteem and closer connection to family and community. Further research is needed to better understand the significance of these different learning opportunities for the development of student identity and self-esteem, and a variety of student learning needs and situations. Mainstream professionals would benefit from a clearer understanding of home education and the ways in which it achieves successful outcomes for the students involved.

While the gender balance in parent and professional discussions of students appeared to be fairly equal, the student sample was noticeably biased towards male students. The

gender difference did not appear to be a strong indicator of the qualities and general findings in this study but this is an area needing further research.

While this study found only a few instances of long-term collaboration through part-time enrolment between mainstream institutions and home educating families, the findings suggest that despite some initial difficulties, these programs were of value to home educating parents and students, mainstream students and professionals. Collaborative practices between home educating families and mainstream institutions is an area needing further research.

All students, eighteen years and older, and a few younger students had entered TAFE and/or university successfully. For most of these students, their entrance did not follow the typical pathways pursued by mainstream students. Both the university students had not completed their VCE but achieved well in university. Most students who had entered TAFE successfully did so at ages two to three years younger than the typical entry age of peers. Recently the Australian Catholic University announced that it would not be using the VCE results as the main criteria on which to assess suitability for such courses as nursing. They intended to assess community engagement, personality and personal interests as important criteria for acceptance (Smith 2008). The success of these students who entered TAFE and university through non standard routes indicates the need for further research to assess entrance criteria for TAFE and university placement and should include home educated students. It is suggested here that the success of these entries can be somewhat attributed to the development of autonomy and self-determination gained through their home education experiences. Students valued adult learning environments at TAFE and university where they were encouraged to produce work independently. Further research into non-linear pathways of education including home education is needed. Study of the use of adult learning methods in secondary school settings might also be beneficial.

11.4 Implications and Recommendations of Study

The findings in this study indicate home educated student transitions between home education and mainstream institutions are successfully occurring at all levels of mainstream education in both directions. Where there were professionally reported transition difficulties, the practice of home education was not generally considered to be the cause. The generally positive assessment of home education in this study by parents, professionals and students suggests that mainstream professionals and society need to reassess their views of home education as practised in Australia. Home education was seen here to provide strong academic skills, worthwhile although

different social experiences and important opportunities for the healthy development of autonomy and self-esteem in safe environments. The students in this study thought these qualities were best gained from home. They expressed these views regardless of the ideologies held by the families involved. It would seem that mainstream professionals could benefit from an understanding of the different cultural qualities that define home education as distinct from mainstream institutions. The different ways in which learning and socialisation are experienced at home challenge the ways in which it is typically assumed these qualities are provided by mainstream institutions. Discussion about home educating parent and student experiences could contribute to more diverse and worthwhile professional and community reflections about the direction, aims and purposes of mainstream education for learning outcomes, social experiences, student autonomy and self-direction, the nature of self-esteem, and how these qualities could be more uniformly and appropriately achieved by mainstream peers. It appears that professionals need to consider the impact mainstream practices have on family life, community and culture. There also seems to be a need for professionals to re-assess the standardisation of educational pathways that are challenged by the success of these students' use of non-traditional, non-linear educational pathways.

Recently, Government legislation and regulation governing the practice of home education (Education and Training Reform Act (Vic) 2007, Education and Training Reform Regulations (Vic) 2007) were changed in Victoria with acknowledged limited understanding of home education practice and experience in Australia (Trevaskis 2006, Personal communication). Fortunately, regulations were kept to a minimum and this appears to be essential in light of findings from this study which indicate home education functions in an important but different way to mainstream education. It provides for student needs in ways mainstream education struggles to achieve. Structured curriculum may work effectively for many students in mainstream institutions, but in this study, while there were a few average ability students, students with different learning needs benefited from less structured and more individually tailored and flexible programs. Those parents and students who did use structured curriculum, even with apparently average ability students, found them unsatisfactory for optimum home learning when used for two years or more. This would indicate that providers of structured curriculum such as ACA and DECV should consider the introduction of more flexible and individually tailored programs, particularly for students with learning differences. It would also seem important for families to have access to these types of programs but with freedom to use them with greater discretionary power. The successful use of part-time schooling by attendance in secondary school for particular subjects might also be successfully pursued through subject enrolment in DECV.

Several parents found their search for information on home education limited to ideologically directed and market driven sources and found this process awkward and unsatisfactory. It is suggested here that home education is a valid educational option catering for unique needs. As such, it is important there be specific, non-sectarian information available to parents investigating this option. For home education to be practiced within mainstream societal values and expectations, home educators need to be more accepted by and accepting of the wider community. At the moment, parents are cut out of mainstream community conversation and acceptance by the lack of informed community discussion and support. This lack of community dialogue (Roberts 2003) cannot be healthy for building strong inclusive community values. That so many parents and students in this study dealt with learning differences also suggests the need for home educator accessibility to supportive and informed specialist professional support services. It is important that lists of resources, general information, contacts, support facilities, and lists of specialist professionals and general education suppliers be available to current and prospective home educators.

Home educating parents will undoubtedly take comfort that yet another research project indicates that home education works, as has been consistently reported in earlier research work in Australia and overseas. From this study, home educating parents might more clearly understand the importance of conversation (Barratt-Peacock 1997, 2003, Thomas 1998, 2002, Thomas & Pattison 2007), interaction and constant mediation of children's learning opportunities. It should also indicate the importance of flexibility in programs used, the benefit of contextualised learning in real life situations, and support for student autonomy and self-determination. Transition literature indicated mainstream institutional students made easier transitions when they were taught critical thinking skills (Keeffe 2006, Scott 2006, Taylor and Nelms 2006). Home educating parents might find it useful to consider encouraging students to develop critical thinking skills when contemplating transitions into mainstream institutions.

Students have social needs and it is important to ensure these needs are appropriately met, but the socialisation experiences provided by mainstream institutions are not always the answer. Students also appeared to benefit from their ability to exercise discretion about peer involvement, personal space and reflective opportunities. Post primary school students benefited from opportunities to engage with various mainstream institutions as they sought and appreciated access to specialist teachers and peer discussions. Inflexible home curriculum and parental attempts to control outcomes for students did appear to cause some distress to students and three students had problems with time management once in mainstream institutions. Home education in this study worked best when respect for student autonomy, needs and interests guided the direction

of their home education programs. It is also important that parents be mindful of providing access to broad information about career choices. When entering students into mainstream institutions, it is important for parents to consider institutional values when making personal demands for particular consideration. Students should also be encouraged to understand transitions as cultural shifts and be prepared for some culture shock. However, they can be encouraged to maintain their individuality if they understand who they are and aim high.

Good transition practices found between typical mainstream institutions are just as relevant to home educated student transitions with mainstream institutions, especially if these are understood as cultural change. Collaboration with parents and students instigated by professionals is as important for home educated students making transitions into mainstream institutions as in any other type of educational transition experience. Some students who exited mainstream institutions in their early years due partially to social difficulties could benefit from specific counselling and/or mentoring as they re-enter mainstream institutions. This mentoring could also help students struggling with bullying, cliques and value differences where there appear to be factors beyond their personal experience contributing to these situations.

It is also important for professionals to consider what learning difficulties or unique needs students might have before assuming that home education created problems. To ensure good learning is continued into mainstream institutions from home education, portfolio development with the collaboration of professionals, parents and students would appear to be one useful transition tool (Fleer & Richardson 2004, Jones 2003). Home educated students were most commonly concerned about being at a similar standard to peers when entering mainstream institutions. In reality this was only a problem for one student who had recognised learning difficulties, but it is thought here that a collaboratively developed portfolio would help to ease concerns of students about this aspect of their entry/re-entry into mainstream institutions. Some forms of collaboration appeared to work more effectively than others and this is an area needing further research.

There are no hard and fast conclusions as to the most appropriate time for transitions between home and mainstream institutions to occur. This appeared to be dependent on student needs, family circumstances and self-determination. In saying this however, there were some common entry points that seemed to work well. Entrance into mainstream occurred well for a number of students at various levels of primary school if the students had used a mainstream compatible curriculum. It is suspected, however, that entry into late primary school when mainstream student friendships are

well established may be a more difficult time for some students to enter. This would include students not used to contact with large numbers of same age peers and where high academic ability home educated students might be viewed by mainstream peers as a threat to established academic ranking within classes. Entry into junior secondary school and the last two years of secondary school worked well for most students in this study. One student with learning and health difficulties thought she might have benefited from attending her mainstream institution in Year 10 instead of entering in Year 11. Failure to fit comfortably in one institution did not necessarily mean the student had adjustment difficulties. It sometimes meant there was a mismatch between the particular student and institution involved.

It is important for society to accept and support home education as a viable option and include it in mainstream conversations. Discussion of the meaning and purpose of socialisation would be a worthwhile place to start. It is also important for governments to more proactively encourage inclusion of home education in mainstream conversation as a viable educational alternative and to provide access to non-sectarian information and supportive specialist professionals. The provision of a variety of flexible learning centres could also provide needed expert and social support to students with learning differences.

11.5 Conclusion

The original research question sought to discover when and why home educated families entered or removed children from mainstream institutions. This study indicates that home educating families enter children at all levels of mainstream institutions when they have been educating children at home for many reasons. The most common reason for entering family groups of children into primary schools from home education in this study was maternal fatigue. The most common reason students entered secondary schools was that they, the students, chose to enter secondary school because they sought expert knowledge, it provided a recognised pathway to further education, and they found they appreciated peer discussion. Other parents, with students in Year 6 of primary school or secondary school often jointly made the decision for the children to enter primary and secondary school because they both felt there was access to expert knowledge which parents thought they were less able to provide. Families also thought entrance into mainstream institutions would improve student options to attain a final year score for further study and provide opportunities to mix with same aged peers. All students who entered post compulsory institutions made the decision themselves in order to gain access to expert knowledge and/or career qualifications.

Parents removed students from mainstream institutions most commonly from lower to mid-primary school because they felt professionals had failed to listen to their frequent requests for appropriate support and intervention for students who were not coping with various features of mainstream educational practice and experience. Four students asked parents to do home education or wished parents had chosen to do home education earlier because they were so unhappy in mainstream institutions. One other student chose to leave after initially choosing to attend primary school. Their academic differences, both gifted and learning disabilities meant their learning needs were not met and social problems arose linked to these differences and the ways in which institutional practices treated these children as different to the norm.

This summary provides the simple picture of the transition movements of home educated students between home and mainstream institutions. However, this study, of forty students, twenty-eight parents and seventeen professionals reveals that transition movements of home educated students are varied and complex. Students were found to be moving into and out of mainstream institutions on more than one occasion. Professionals were usually unaware of the previous histories of home educated students and of their eventual outcomes. Decisions leading to the varied movements of students were made through collaboration between parents and children in order to provide for unique and specific needs. Most students who participated in this study and many of the children of participating parents had specific learning needs such as giftedness, advanced learning abilities, learning disabilities and health complications or a combination of these factors. These needs were not easily met by mainstream institutional practices. The opportunity for parents to home educate and the opportunity to be home educated was highly valued by participants.

Through the process of this research other qualities of home education have been identified. The cultural qualities of home educated students are distinct from the cultural qualities found in mainstream institutions. Students appreciated their learning opportunities at home and felt they learnt more successfully at home than in mainstream institutions. Socialisation was a complex topic but both parents and students felt community and professional concern for home educated students' social needs was usually based on misinformation and only justified in particular circumstances. Professionals, parents and students identified high student self-esteem as a common home educated student characteristic. This study found the ways students formed self-esteem at home was different to the ways it was formed in mainstream institutions. The students in this study identified their personal ability to act autonomously through flexible learning opportunities, freedom to choose the direction and content of studies and self-determination as to whether to attend mainstream institutions or remain at

home as the most valuable aspect of their home education experiences.

Professionals, parents and students expressed similar goals for education – that education would provide students with worthwhile career pathways, connection with society and a life long love of learning. The opportunity to engage in both home education and mainstream education allowed these students to have valued and valuable individual learning experiences. This study has helped to reveal a misunderstood and little researched community. It is hoped these results will contribute to dispelling myths about home education and provide opportunities for home educated students to be more clearly understood and accepted with increased understanding and love.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Parent Detail Chart

Appendix 2 Professional Detail Chart

Appendix 3 Student Detail Chart

**Appendix 4 Interview Questions for Parents, Professionals and
Students**

Appendix 5 Parents Students' Transition Charts

Appendix 6 Family Connections to Institutions and Professionals

Appendix 1 Parent Detail Chart

Parent Detail Chart

Names	No. of Children	Description
Anita & Jake	Troy – 8 Aiden – 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer country • Contact: Through academic contact • Transition History: Recently moved both young sons out in staggered manner over term • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Eldest son suffered health problems that contributed to poor performance in mainstream, but not catered for by professionals. This led to alienation and victimisation by peers and regular crying about school. Anita felt being made into ogre by school to ensure work done • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Collected from other home educators and regular texts • Valued about H. Ed: Both boys happy and relaxed and family unity
Arlene	Three adult home educated students Arden - 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Middle metropolitan suburb • Contact: Through alternative school looking for professionals • Transition History: All 4 children had experienced regular part-time home education in conjunction with alternative schools. Some had attended state secondary schools. 3 eldest had entered and achieved at university. Youngest currently part-time in Year 11 and AYCE • Directions of Transition: Part-time in both • Reasons for Transition: Freedom to work with student interests and yet maintain contact with peers and specialist teachers • Curriculum: Eclectic – more natural learning • Teaching Materials: Whatever needed from wherever relevant • Valued about H. Ed: Students valuing life long and contextualised learning, family connection.
Brianna	Daughter Son	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer Suburb • Contact: Professional • Transition History: Son out of mainstream in Year 11 and 12 intermittently • Directions of Transition: Out and In to mainstream institutions • Reasons for Transition: Due to travel and family health issues. Also upset with narrow minded approach of kindergarten teachers to advanced learner daughter • Curriculum: Eclectic and natural learning • Teaching Materials: Regular texts and spontaneous opportunities • Valued about H. Ed: Independent thinking skills and broad experiences not provided for in mainstream institutions • Brianna was a TAFE lecturer

<p>Cara</p>	<p>Three adult daughters Son</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Country town • Contact: HEN network newsletter • Transition History: Son taken out part at end of Term 1, Year 7 because only produced a few lines of work for term. • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Struggled to have professionals take son's multiple learning difficulties seriously over 3 years • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Gained from internet, life situations, relevant material • Valued about H. Ed: Son was learning, had worthwhile learning experiences, able to learn practical life skills in life contexts • Later reported that her son had entered an interstate small country school in Year 10 satisfactorily
<p>Carol</p>	<p>Sam – 10 Brad – 8 Carl - 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Satellite suburb to country city • Contact: HEN Network • Transition History: Moved all three children out of primary school • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Many awkward situations in mainstream where eldest and gifted son's needs not catered for. Second son developed poor relationship with elder brother and family life stressed • Curriculum: Natural • Teaching Materials: Whatever needed to encourage student interests • Valued about H. Ed: Happy family, children learning happily, developing a love of learning
<p>Cheryl</p>	<p>Son 1, 2 & 3 Daughter 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburb • Contact: Referred by professional and personal acquaintance • Transition History: Had home educated children for one year and later for one term in primary school • Directions of Transition: In, out, in • Reasons for Transition: Wanted children to learn basics well and one child had negative experiences in mainstream institutions with long term implications. Another child appeared to have learning problems • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Common texts • Valued about H. Ed: Closer family life, enjoyed seeing children enjoy learning • Researched home education before taking it on but did not have support of spouse and found difficult • Medical professional

<p>Darlene</p>	<p>Duane - 21 Justin - 19 Daughter 1 Son 3 Daughters 3 & 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer Country • Contact: HEN network • Transition History: Started in mainstream, school closed, home educated till children rebelled • Directions of Transition: In, out, in • Reasons for Transition: Local school closed and did not like long bus travel • Curriculum: Externally provided curriculum for long time, but became more eclectic • Teaching Materials: ACA • Valued about H. Ed: Family cohesiveness, children learning • Nervous of developing her own programs fully because she was not a trained teacher
<p>Davita</p>	<p>Gary Vicki Daughters 3, 4 & 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban metropolitan • Contact: HEN network • Transition History: Withdrew two older children from separate private schools in mid primary, moved countries and two eldest entered into mainstream in senior secondary • Directions of Transition: In, out, in • Reasons for Transition: When felt family time was non-existent and children too pressured even though achieving well. Re-entry when students personally chose against maternal will to enter school • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Materials gathered from self-sourced places • Valued about H. Ed: Family cohesiveness, high academic achievement, impart family values • Professional
<p>Deanna</p>	<p>Daughters 1 & 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer country • Contact: Academic acquaintance • Transition History: Been in small ACA country school before moved in mid to late primary school • Directions of Transition: Out • Reasons for Transition: Children were not coping health-wise, or morally on long bus trips to school of choice • Curriculum: Externally prepared • Teaching Materials: ACA • Valued about H. Ed: Daughters healthy, connected family, contextualised learning • At the time of the interview, Deanna was negotiating with a local school principal to see if her two daughters, particularly the youngest, could attend the fun activities at the school part-time

<p>Fannie & Jake</p>	<p>Jamie - 10 Arianna - 7 Sally - 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Professional referral • Transition History: Into mid to early primary school as family • Directions of Transition: Into mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Mother fatigue, children needed friends after itinerant life style • Curriculum: Externally prepared curriculum • Teaching Materials: ACA • Valued about H. Ed: Family time, good academic possibilities • Two children were professionally assessed as having learning difficulties
<p>Fiona</p>	<p>Older son Fifi - 17</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Country suburban • Contact: Personal acquaintance • Transition History: Out of mainstream, some DECV, full-time at home, part-time at local secondary school, entrance into TAFE • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream, part-time DECV and secondary school, into TAFE • Reasons for Transition: Initially poor health and learning difficulties • Curriculum: Eclectic and some externally provided material • Teaching Materials: Some externally prepared curriculum, common texts, community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Happy child who learnt to enjoy learning in unstressed way • Fiona was the only single mum in the sample of parents and a specialist nurse who suffered chronic fatigue for many years
<p>Gina</p>	<p>Zara - 15 Son - 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Country suburban • Contact: Referred by another parent • Transition History: Out of mainstream in mid and early primary school • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream and then in later • Reasons for Transition: Due to poor reports and encouraged children to make decision when to return to mainstream. • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Common texts and community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Children becoming confident learners, socially adept, family cohesiveness

<p>Heidi</p>	<p>Son 1 Daughter 1 Son 2 Daughters 3 & 4 John - 14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban • Contact: Referred by another parent • Transition History: In parent controlled school, moved to state schools, out of mainstream, some into TAFE, youngest into late primary • Directions of Transition: Out of and then into mainstream institutions, youngest had a short break out again in Year 7 • Reasons for Transition: Unhappy with lack of parent involvement in state schools, values differences between parents and school. Youngest into mainstream because lost a friend and would not work at home • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Material from home education suppliers • Valued about H. Ed: Family cohesiveness, strong academic opportunities, non-linear pathways for students into careers
<p>Jaelyn</p>	<p>Ramona - 12 Daughter 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Close country • Contact: Personal acquaintance • Transition History: Out of mainstream, DECV, home program • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream, out of DECV after 2 years • Reasons for Transition: Professionals unhelpful with several ongoing concerns and student held back and bored • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Common texts from bookshops • Valued about H. Ed: Happy children, learning at own pace, learning how to deal confidently with social challenges, family cohesiveness • Jaelyn was a secondary school teacher
<p>Jane</p>	<p>Daughter 1 Daughter 2 Daughter 3 Son -</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban • Contact: HEN network • Transition History: Out of mainstream, DECV, home education, DECV • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream, DECV, tutors, part-time DECV • Reasons for Transition: Giftedness not catered for in mainstream institutions • Curriculum: Eclectic, some DECV • Teaching Materials: Home education suppliers, normal texts, community resources, some DECV, tutors • Valued about H. Ed: Catering more appropriately for giftedness, happier children

<p>Karlita</p>	<p>Jarratt - 21 Danar - 19 Tarun - 14 Son Son</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Country • Contact: Referred by home educating parent • Transition History: Eldest into Year 2 in mid year for one year. Second son did traineeships and working for employers in management type positions. Third son had recently entered TAFE part-time • Directions of Transition: Into and out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Son 1 chose to attend mainstream against parental advice. All decision to enter mainstream were made by students • Curriculum: Natural learning • Teaching Materials: Regular texts, life situations, material found according to students needs • Valued about H. Ed: Freedom of children to be themselves and love life long learning, independent learning, family connectedness • Gifted and learning disability teacher
<p>Kasha</p>	<p>Stuart - 13 Latisha - 10 Shana - 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Nearby town • Contact: Referred by Sabrina • Transition History: Moved primary aged students into mainstream temporarily 3 times • Directions of Transition: Into and then out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Mother fatigue initially, help school out other two times • Curriculum: Eclectic, fairly formal • Teaching Materials: Normal textbooks and other community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Close family, watching children grow intellectually, develop personal interests and develop a life long love of learning • Secondary teacher
<p>Kirsty & Lloyd</p>	<p>Brock – 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer country Victoria • Contact: Through Darlene • Transition History: Parti-time • Directions of Transition: Casual part-time in mainstream, mostly home education • Reasons for Transition: Access to schools through Kirsty's casual work • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Common textbooks and community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Health benefits for child, watching son develop academically and socially • Mother a specialist secondary school teacher working casually • Father a farmer

Liz	Gabbie - 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburb and country • Contact: Personal acquaintance and professional reference • Transition History: Into mainstream in Year 6 part-time, out for a term, into secondary for two years, changed schools and part-time secondary • Directions of Transition: Into mainstream, out and part-time • Reasons for Transition: Distance from school of choice • Curriculum: Eclectic, fairly formal • Teaching Materials: Common texts referred by teacher friends, community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Learning opportunities, seeing child achieve well • Office manager
Lou	Luke - 10 Lily - 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Inner city suburb • Contact: Christian Home Education Expo • Transition History: Out of mainstream, some contact with school for first year • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Gifted student's needs not adequately met, children unhappy at school • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Common texts and as directed by student interests • Valued about H. Ed: Seeing children happy and pursuing interests not available in mainstream, close family connection • Business woman
Rowena	Daughter 1 Daughter 2 Lana - 19 Daughter 4 & 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer country • Contact: Professional contact • Transition History: DECV for basic subjects with extra natural learning • Directions of Transition: Part-time home education • Reasons for Transition: Distance from school and learning difficulties of children • Curriculum: DECV and natural learning • Teaching Materials: DECV and community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Seeing daughters, some with professionally diagnosed severe learning difficulties succeed through to VCE and Year 12, and family unity • Specialist disability and primary school teacher
Sabrina	Daughters 1 & 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Nearby country town • Contact: Through a professional acquaintance • Transition History: Out of mainstream for one term in mid and early primary school • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream • Reasons for Transition: Children not happy, nor learning well at school, professionals not helpful • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Common texts and community resources • Valued about H. Ed: Girls unhappy in mainstream, girls learning well at home, family unity

Sylvia	Daughter 1 Mike - 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburbs • Contact: Through a casual acquaintance • Transition History: Children had used home education to start education when missionaries overseas, had attended a variety of private and state schools. • Directions of Transition: Out of mainstream – most current move. • Reasons for Transition: Daughter and son independently unhappy with mainstream experiences. Daughter in Year 11 had values clash with course requirements. Son, in Year 8 struggling with basic literacy and numeracy skills and very unhappy with school. • Curriculum: Eclectic • Teaching Materials: Had originally use ACE, Saxon Maths, Rod and Staff, and other eclectically collected material. • Valued about H. Ed: Children were able to learn the basics. Her Year 11 daughter chose to learn at home after conflict with school values. Mike struggled to learn the basics at school and was very unhappy at school. The family had lived overseas and moved between different schools in Melbourne
Tammie	Kieran - 24 Alysia -16 David - 14 Julian 12 Jeff - 10 Alex - 8 Son 6 Daughter 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer Country • Contact: Academic acquaintance • Transition History: Oldest son (Kieran) struggled in a Special School & withdrew him as daughter began schooling. Entered Daughter into a private Christian school in Year 4 because one other child sick. Entered Kieran into private Christian secondary school in Year 8. Entered David part-time after diagnosed with a very high IQ & aspergers into private Christian junior secondary school. Put four younger sons into private Christian altogether when felt stressed, but kept youngest daughter at home. • Directions of Transition: Initial move out of mainstream. Later entered children into mainstream at different times for different reasons. • Reasons for Transition: Initially son with learning difficulties struggled with learning and social problems in a special school. Re-entered younger children when felt stressed. • Curriculum: Started with AYCE. Alysia stayed with AYCE, moved to more eclectic curriculum with other children. • Teaching Materials: AYCE, Rod & Staff, Saxon Maths • Valued about H. Ed: Thought home education was the best form of education but felt very challenged providing for a number of children with significant different learning needs. Felt very upset that hadn't felt she could continue with her home education program

<p>Terry</p>	<p>Son 1 (Year 3) Son 2 (Year 1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Interstate • Contact: Interstate home education network • Transition History: Recently withdrawn two young sons from mainstream • Directions of Transition: Out • Reasons for Transition: School not catering for oldest sons' advanced learning needs • Curriculum: Eclectic towards natural learning • Teaching Materials: Relevant material from online and other sources • Valued about H. Ed: Ability to continue family excursions not possible while family in mainstream institutions
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Appendix 2 Professional Detail Chart

Professional Detail Chart

Name	Institution	Position	No. of Contacts with Home Educated Families	Experiences
Abigail	Alternative Primary School	Principal	2 girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Referred through Marielle – art tutor • History: Abigail knew of two home educated students who had previously had interactions with her primary school, but not with herself while in her role as a principal.
Adele	DECV – Primary & Secondary	Teacher	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: DECV • Contact: Through DECV teacher - Bev • History: Adele recalled working with seven home educated students during her work at DECV.
Althea	Protestant School – K-12	Senior Secondary School Co-ordinator	3 Gary Vicki Parent: Davita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer Suburban Melbourne • Contact: From Davita, Gary and Vicki • History: Althea had been involved with three families who had home educated their children. She knew Davita, and her children Gary and Vicki.
Bev	DECV-Primary	Teacher	1 Romana Parent: Jaclyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: DECV • Contact: Through DECV principal • History: Bev recalled working with one family.
Dawn	Protestant School - Primary	Principal	5 Gabbie (John) Jamie Arianna Sally Parents: Fanny & Ken Liz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Personal acquaintance • History: Dawn remembered having worked with five home educating families including Liz and her daughter Gabbie.

Helen	AYCE	Director	Unspecified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: AYCE • Contact: Direct call • History: Helen was the organiser of AYCE. She had been principal of a couple of large State Secondary Schools and had established this special flexible school program for students who, for a variety of reasons, did not comfortably fit into typical mainstream schools. She had a number of home educated students involved in her program but chose to speak more generally about her observations of home educating families.
Kathy	International School	Teacher	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Melbourne • Contact: Direct call • History: Kathy was a professor in an education faculty of an interstate university. She remembered the experiences of six home educated students with whom she was familiar.
Leon	Protestant School – Secondary School	Teacher	4 & knew 5 others. Rory Brant Gabbie John Rory Parents: (Acknowledged but not specifically referred to) Cheryl Heidi Liz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Personal acquaintance • History: Leon had worked with four students and knew of five other children who had been home-educated and who had also experienced mainstream education at some point of their educational opportunity. He had taught Brant, Gabbie, John, Robert, and Rory, and knew John's mother, Heidi as well as Cheryl and her children.

Lynden	Private Tertiary Institution	Lecturer	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Overseas • Contact: Personal acquaintance • History: Lynden was a lecturer in a private tertiary institution interstate and a personal acquaintance of the researcher. In a casual conversation he mentioned that he had taught some home educated students who had entered tertiary institution from home education and he was invited to complete answers to the interview guide questions over the internet as he was immediately travelling to work overseas. While he commented about one student who he remembered in particular, he did not elaborate his experiences with any other home educated students. This would have been explored if there had been an interview.
Lucy	Protestant School - Primary	Teacher	2 Gabbie John Parents: (Not referred to) Liz Heidi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Personal acquaintance • History: Lucy recalled working with both Gabbie and John – who had entered Year 6 in her classroom in the same year.
Marielle	Private Tutor	Tutor	5 Rory Brant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Personal acquaintance • History: Marielle, as a private art tutor had taught a few home educated students over the years as well as students from local state and private schools. She had taught art to Brant and Rory.
Nick	DECV - Secondary	Teacher	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: DECV • Contact: Through DECV principal • History: Nick had home educated two sons and was very aware of many members of the home-educating community who were associated with AERG (Alternative Education Resource Group – which had since changed its’ name to HEN – Home Education Network in Victoria). He recalled his experiences with seven home educated students he knew through his work with DECV.

Phil	Protestant Private School - Primary	Principal - Retired	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer suburban Melbourne • Contact: Direct call • History: Phil remembered working with two home educating families in his time as teacher and principal of this particular school. He had not been aware of home educated students while previously teaching in a much larger private Christian school earlier.
Russell	State Primary School	Principal	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Country Victoria • Contact: Direct call after alternative education conference • History: Russell had worked with a couple of families who had home-educated their children and was happy to continue working with these families.
Tony & Steve	State Primary & Secondary	Teachers	Tony-2 Steve-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Country Victoria • Contact: Met at alternative education conference • History: Tony and Steve were currently involved in a program which worked with home educated students on a regular but part-time basis in both the primary and junior secondary state school. Tony knew specifically of two home educated students while Steve only referred to having worked with one student. The interview occurred while these two teachers were a presentation and paperwork promoting and seeking funding for their community classrooms.
Warren	Protestant Secondary School & Primary School experience	Principal	Primary – 2 Secondary - 3 (Fifi) (Robert) (Rory) Brant Gabbie (John) Parents: (Not specifically referred to) Heidi Fiona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Outer Suburban Melbourne • Contact: Personal acquaintance • History: Warren recalled working with two families while principal of the interstate primary school. In his position as secondary school principal, he specifically recalled three families who had home educated their students at some point. Brant, Fifi, Gabbie, John, Robert and Rory had all been students in his school.

Appendix 3 Student Detail Chart

Student Detail Chart

Student Name	Age	Mother	Description
Alysia	16	Tammie	<p>Location: Outer Country</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From home to primary school (1 year) to home to TAFE</p> <p>Reason for Move: Move 1 – illness in family. Move 2 – Student wanted entrance to tertiary subjects</p> <p>Decision: Move 1 – Parent. Move 2 - Student</p> <p>Curriculum: ACA</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Hands on learning, learning in context, flexibility, family</p>
Aiden	6	Jake & Anita	<p>Location: Outer country</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Out of school to home</p> <p>Reason for Move: Older sibling (Troy) was not coping academically or health-wise at school</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom at home to learn with Dad in every day life</p>
Alex	8	Tammie	<p>Location: Outer Country</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From home to primary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Could not think of anything</p>
Arden	17	Arlene	<p>Location: Middle metropolitan suburb</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Part-time in alternative school through primary school. Attended TAFE course in Year 10, Joined AYCE for Year 11</p> <p>Reason for Move: Parent taught in alternative school and later AYCE.</p> <p>Decision: Combined parent/student decision in alternative schools. Student mediated decision to enter AYCE</p> <p>Curriculum: Part-time Alternative Schools, AYCE, Natural Learning, Semi-eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to learn what interested in, in inclusive community</p>
Ariana	7	Ken & Fannie Professional: (Not referred to) Dawn	<p>Location: Outer suburban Melbourne</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From home to primary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: AYCE</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Liked most of it, particularly that it was 'quick school'</p>

Brad	8	Carol	<p>Location: Satellite suburb to country city</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From primary school to home</p> <p>Reason for Move: Older brother very unhappy in school, and sibling relationships had deteriorated</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Natural learning</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Enjoyed learning things of interest</p>
Brant	15	Rory's Brother Professional: (Not referred to by name) Leon	<p>Location: Country suburban Melbourne</p> <p>Contact: Personal acquaintance</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From home to secondary school, return to home, return to secondary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Move 1 – parent not expert in secondary school subjects, Moves 2 & 3 – change in family circumstances,</p> <p>Decision: Parent decision</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to pace learning activities, learnt more at home</p>
Brock	10	Lloyd & Kirsty	<p>Location: Outer country Victoria</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Part-time attendance at various primary schools through mother's work</p> <p>Reason for Move: ADHD better managed at home</p> <p>Decision: Parent decision but he understood he could decide to enter mainstream institutions if he chose to</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom, learnt better than peers in similar circumstances</p>
Carl	8	Carol	<p>Location: Satellite suburb to country city</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From casual attendance in school to home</p> <p>Reason for Move: Older sibling had trouble with poor learning opportunities and poor socialisation</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Natural learning</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Family connectedness</p>
Danar	19	Karlita	<p>Location: Country</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: From home to traineeships through TAFE</p> <p>Reason for Move: Sort certification for employment</p> <p>Decision: Student</p> <p>Curriculum: Natural learning</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to learn how to learn</p>

David	14	Tammie	<p>Location: Outer Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From home to junior secondary school Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue and mother did not feel she had the expertise to provide for professionals diagnosed different learning needs Decision: Parent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Family connectedness and learning opportunities</p>
Duane	21	Darlene	<p>Location: Outer Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From home to TAFE to senior secondary school Reason for Move: Refused to do ACE curriculum Decision: Combined parent/student decision Curriculum: Externally provided structured curriculum Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to learn 'hands on' on the farm with father, and learnt more at home</p>
Fifi	17	Fiona	<p>Location: Country suburb Contact: Personal acquaintance Direction of Transition: Primary school to part-time, the Distance Education Reason for Move: Poor health and difficulties learning Decision: Parent but accepted Curriculum: DECV, then eclectic and use of community classes Valued about H. Ed.: One on one learning experiences, socialisation, knowing oneself</p>
Gabbie	14	Liz Professionals: (Not referred to by name) Dawn Leon Lucy Warren	<p>Location: Country – to country suburb Contact: Professional references and personal acquaintance Direction of Transition: Into Year 6 of primary school Reason for Move: Family moved from country to easy distance of preferred school Decision: Combined parent-student decision Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Learnt well, worked in own time and at own pace</p>

Gary	18	Davita Professional: (Not referred to) Althea	Location: Country suburb Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From mid primary school to home, from home to Year 11 secondary school Reason for Move: Move 1 – Parent though children overstretched with extracurricular school activities. Move 2 – Student wanted contact with peers and VCE qualifications. Decision: Move 1 – Parent. Move 2 – Student against parent wishes Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Contextual, deep and broad learning experiences
Jamie	10	Ken & Fannie Professional: (Not referred to) Dawn	Location: Outer suburb Contact: Professional reference Direction of Transition: Into primary school Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue Decision: Parent Curriculum: ACA Valued about H. Ed.: Learnt well, more free time
Jarrat	21	Karlita	Location: Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: Move 1 – into second semester, Year 2, Primary School. Move 2 – out of Year 3, Primary School. Move 3 – into TAFE, aged 13 – part-time welding course. Move 4 – into TAFE fulltime – aged 14. Reason for Move: Move 1 – to socialise with students at school. Move 2 – frustrated with school experiences. Move 3 & 4 – seeking expert information Decision: Student Curriculum: Natural Learning Valued about H. Ed.: Everything – especially learning and social experiences. Learning how to learn
Jeff	10	Tammie	Location: Outer Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: Into School Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue Decision: Parent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Being out on family farm

John	14	Heidi Professional: (One not referred to by name) Leon Lucy	Location: Outer suburb Contact: Professional reference Direction of Transition: Into Year 6, Primary school. One term exit from Year 7, Secondary school. Return to Year 8 Reason for Move: Move 1 – He had stopped doing work at home after losing a close friend. Move 2 & 3 due to managing unexpected stress situation. Decision: Move 1 – Parent. Move 2 & 3 - Student Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Everything. One learnt more, more free time
Julian	12	Tammie	Location: Outer Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: Into upper primary school Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue Decision: Parent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Being on family farm
Justin	19	Darlene	Location: Outer Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: Move 1 – out of Year 2, Primary. Move 2 – Into TAFE, aged 15. Reason for Move: Move 1 – School closure and avoided long bus travel. Move 2 – Hated externally prepared curriculum and following life career choice Decision: Move 1 – Parent. Move 2 - Student Curriculum: ACA Valued about H. Ed.: Own flexible time, good learning experiences, contextual learning on family farm
Kieran	24	Tammie	Location: Outer Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: Move 1 – Out of special school, mid primary school. Move 2 – Into Year 8, secondary school Reason for Move: Move 1 – Student struggling academically and socially, and asked to learn at home. Move 2 – Parent unsure of teaching specialist knowledge Decision: Move 1 – Parent and student. Move 2 – Parent decision Curriculum: Did use some ACA initially, but moved to eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Better learning opportunities, relief from poor social situations at school

Lana	19	Rowena	<p>Location: Country</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Into Year 11, secondary boarding school</p> <p>Reason for Move: To gain a VCE score</p> <p>Decision: Combined parent & student decision following moves of two older sisters</p> <p>Curriculum: DECV and natural learning opportunities</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Learnt contextually what necessary for life and ability to be own person</p>
Latisha	10	Kasha	<p>Location: Nearby country town</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Three short moves in three years of early to middle primary school – 1 term and two lots of three weeks.</p> <p>Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue and contribution to primary school</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to follow own interests</p>
Lily	8	Lou	<p>Location: Inner city suburb</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Out of end of Year 2, primary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Not sufficiently challenged at school and older brother moving out for same reason</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Being at home with Mum</p>
Luke	10	Lou	<p>Location: Inner city suburb</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Out of end of Year 4, primary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Not coping with school's advanced learning procedures and not sufficiently challenged at school. Peer discrimination as result of different academic treatment</p> <p>Decision: Parent but student pleased with decision</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Wondered why he was asked the question – he responded 'Why would I' – want to be at school?</p>

Mike	15	Sylvia	<p>Location: Outer suburbs</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Had earlier attempted short time at school, had attended a number of private and state schools. Moved out of Year 8 secondary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Not learning adequately basic literacy and numeracy skills, and very unhappy at school</p> <p>Decision: Parent decision with student agreement</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: More freedom to follow own interests in computer skills and photography, although still 'school'</p>
Mitchell	27	-	<p>Location: Country</p> <p>Contact: Personal Acquaintance</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Move 1 – out of Year 6, primary school. Move 2 – into university</p> <p>Reason for Move: Move 1 – family moved to country property away from school. Move 2 – to university to gain career qualifications</p> <p>Decision: Move 1 – Parent decision but student happy. Move 2 - Student</p> <p>Curriculum: Used ACA for one year, then eclectic program</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Flexibility and ability to pursue interests in detail</p>
Ramona	12	Jaclyn Professional: (Not referred to) Bev	<p>Location: Nearby country</p> <p>Contact: Parent & Personal Acquaintance</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Move 1 – out of end of Year 2, primary school. Move 2 – into distance education. Move 3 – into home program</p> <p>Reason for Move: Move 1 – student not challenged at school, struggling with bullying and social cliques. Move 2 – mother felt challenged by curriculum requirements of teaching children at home. Move 3 – student bored with distance education program inadequately meeting needs</p> <p>Decision: Move 1, 2 & 3 – Parent with student support</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom from bullying and social cliques, and freedom to learn at own pace in own way</p>
Robert	17	-	<p>Location: Outer suburb</p> <p>Contact: Chance meeting</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Move 1 – out of end of Year 8. Move 2 – into Year 10, secondary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Family travel overseas</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: ACA</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Flexible time, ability to pursue subjects not available in school</p>

Rory	17	Brant's Brother	<p>Location: Country suburb Contact: Personal Acquaintance Direction of Transition: Move 1 – Into Year 7, secondary school. Move 2 – out of end of Year 9, secondary school. Move 3 into Year 11, secondary school Reason for Move: Move 1 – parent did not feel they had specialist knowledge. Move 2 & 3 due to changed family circumstances Decision: Parent with student consent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom and flexibility</p>
Sally	6	Ken & Fannie Professional: (Not referred to) Dawn	<p>Location: Nearby country town Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From home to primary school Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue Decision: Parent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Own time, own space – especially more out door time, pursue interests</p>
Sam	10	Carol	<p>Location: Satellite suburb to country city Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From primary school to home Reason for Move: Struggling with unmet needs and social complications in school Decision: Parent but wanted to leave school Curriculum: Natural learning Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to direct learning through long term projects and interests</p>
Shana	8	Kasha	<p>Location: Nearby country town Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From home to primary school and home, three times Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue and to support school Decision: Parent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to learn at own pace, in own space, and pursue own interests</p>
Stuart	13	Kasha	<p>Location: Nearby country town Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From home to primary school to home Reason for Move: Maternal fatigue Decision: Parent Curriculum: Eclectic Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to pursue own interests</p>
Tarun	14	Karlita	<p>Location: Country Contact: Parent Direction of Transition: From home to TAFE Reason for Move: To learn a trade of interest Decision: Student Curriculum: Natural learning Valued about H. Ed.: Freedom to pursue own interests</p>

Troy	8	Jake & Anita	<p>Location: Outer country</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition:</p> <p>Reason for Move: Did not cope with school failure to adjust to the complications of his health problems and poor health managed by strict diet.</p> <p>Decision: Parent</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Learning in warm family environment contextually in life on small family farm</p>
Vicki	17	Davita Professional: (Not referred to) Althea	<p>Location: Outer suburban metropolitan</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Move 1 - from primary school to home. Move 2 – from home to senior secondary school</p> <p>Reason for Move: Move 1 – children stretched by extracurricular demands of primary school. Move 2 – wanted expert knowledge and social opportunities</p> <p>Decision: First move out of mainstream in Year 2 – Parent decision, Second move into mainstream in Year 11 – student decision</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Learnt more at home in real life contexts, family connectedness</p>
Zara	15	Gina	<p>Location: Country suburban</p> <p>Contact: Parent</p> <p>Direction of Transition: Mainstream to Home Education half-way through Year 4. Returned to mainstream in last term of Year 4.</p> <p>Reason for Move: First move – slow learner and not achieving in school. Second move into mainstream – wanted expert teachers.</p> <p>Decision: First move – parent decision. Second move – student decision.</p> <p>Curriculum: Eclectic</p> <p>Valued about H. Ed.: Supported learning, flexible time and place of learning</p>

Appendix 4 Interview Questions for Parents, Professionals and Students

INTERVIEW TOPICS
FOR TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONALS

1. Experience with home educated students who have entered or left formal education.
2. Views and reasons for views about the experiences of home educated students in formal education. This would include:-
 - Level of education
 - Literary and numeracy skills
 - Social abilities
 - Adjustment to formal education environment.
3. Views and Practices of Curriculum generally and as they apply to home educated students.
4. “ “ “ “ Learning Styles generally and to home educated students.
5. “ “ “ “ Home and School links generally and to home educated students.
6. “ “ “ “ Home Educated students social abilities.
7. “ “ “ towards dealing with different levels and areas of ability in students generally and to home educated students.
8. Views and Practices towards a child’s self-image and identity.
9. Definitions of:
 - Education
 - Learning/Styles
 - Time frames for a student attaining various standards of ability
 - Social Development
 - Student self-concepts
10. Evaluation of experiences with home educated students and parents.
11. Demographics:
 - Type of Institution:.....
 - Years of experience with home educated students.....

FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

1. Experiences of home educating one's child/children - positive, negative, indifferent, surprises.
2. Reasons and expectations for home educating one's child/children.
3. Reasons and expectations for choosing to enter or leave formal education.
4. Experiences of sending one's child/children to formal education:- positive, negative, indifferent, surprises.
5. Attitudes and beliefs about:- curriculum, learning styles, home and school links and socialization issues.
6. The Process of change between home and formal education.
7. Definitions of :-
 - Education
 - Learning/Styles
 - Time frames for a student attaining various standards of ability
 - Social Development
 - Child self-concepts
8. Evaluation of both the home educating and formal education experiences.
9. Personal experiences in own childhood with formal education and home education.
10. Demographics:
 - Number of Children - at home
 - “ ” “ in formal institutions of education
 - Years each child has spent at home and in formal institutions

Is there anything you would like to say in closing?

FOR STUDENTS

1. Likes and Dislikes of students of formal and home education experiences.
2. The Experience and Practice of Education at home and in formal institutions.
3. Description of the Process of Changing between home education and formal institutions:-
 - Before
 - During
 - After
4. Views of :-
 - Education - Purpose and Function
 - Learning environments
 - Learning styles
 - Social issues
 - Self-concepts
5. Evaluation of experiences of both home and formal education.
6. Demographics
 - Years and age levels of experience at home
 - “ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ in formal institutions.

Is there anything you would like to say in closing that you think others should know or understand?

Code Name:

Appendix 5 Parents' Student Transition Tables.

PARENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO MOVED FROM MAINSTREAM TO HOME EDUCATION

Name	Age/ Yr level	Curriculum	Student Movement												TAFE	Train	Uni	
			Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5	Yr6	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10	Yr11	Yr12				
Anita, Jake	Troy	Eclectic	S	S	S H													
	Aiden	Eclectic	S H															
Brianna	Boy 1	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S H	H S		
Cara	Boy 1	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	H	H							
Carol	Sam	Natural	S	S	S H													
	Brad	Natural	S H	H														
	Carl	Natural	H	H														
Darlene	Duane	ACA	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H T	S	S	
	Justin	ACA	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H T	T	T			
	Girl 1	ACA	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	T				
Davita	Gary	Eclectic	S	S	S H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	S	
	Vicki	Eclectic	S	S H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S		
Deanna	Girl 1	ACA	S	S	S	S	S	S	S H	H								
	Girl 2	ACA	S	S	S	S	S H	H										
Fiona	Fif	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	D	D	H	H	H	H	P/T	P/T	T	T	
	Zara	Eclectic	S	S	S	S H	H	H	H	H	H	H S	S					
Gina	Boy 1	Eclectic	S	S H	H	H	H	H	S	S								
Heidi	Boy 1	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	T	T		
	Girl 1	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		
	Girl 2	Eclectic	S	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		
	Boy 2	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		
	John	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H S	S	S							
Jaclyn	Ramona	Eclectic	S	S	H D	D	D	D	H	H								
	Girl 2	Eclectic	S	H D	D	D	D	H	H									
Jane	Girl 3	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S H	H	H	H	T	T		
	Boy 2	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S H	H	H	D	H	D			
Lou	Luke	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	H										
	Lily	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S											
Sabrina	Girl 1	Eclectic	S	S	S H													
	Girl 2	Eclectic	S H															
Sylvia	Girl 1	Eclectic	H	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	H			
	Boy 1	Eclectic	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S				
Tammie	Kieran	ACA	S	S	S H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S	S	W			
	Alysia	ACA	H	H	H	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	H					
	David	Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	S						
		Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H										
		Eclectic	H	H	H	H	H	H										
		Eclectic	H	H	S													
		Eclectic	H	S														
Terry	Boy 1	Eclectic	S	S	S H													
	Boy 2	Eclectic	S H															

Place	Code
Visitor	V
Home	H
School	S
Alternative	AltS
Part Time	PT
Distance	D
TAFE	T
Traineeship	TR
University	U
Work	W

**Appendix 6 Family Connections and Family Connections to Professionals
Institutions**

Student - Family Connections

M: Arlene
S: Arden

M: Fiona
D: Fifi

M: Lou
S: Luke
S: Lily

M: Tammie
S: Kieran
D: Alysia
S: David
S: Julian
S: Jeff
S: Adrian
S: Alex

M: Liz
D: Gabbie

M: Heidi
S: John

M: Sylvia
S: Mike

M: Carol
S: Sam
S: Brad
S: Carl

F: Lloyd
M: Kirsty
S: Brock

M: Davita
S: Garry
D: Vicki

M: Karlita
S: Jarratt
S: Danar
S: Tarun

M: Jaclyn
D: Ramona

F: Jake
M: Antia
S: Troy
S: Arden

M: Darlene
S: Duane
S: Justin

F: Ken
M: Fannie
S: Jamie
D: Arianna
D: Sally

M: Rowena
D: Lana

M: Kasha
S: Stuart
D: Latisha
D: Shana

M: Gina
D: Zara

S: Robert

S: Rory
S: Brant

S: Mitchell

Parents and Children

F: Jake
M: Anita
S: Troy
S: Arden

M: Carol
S: Sam
S: Brad
S: Carl

M: Arlene
S: 1
S: 2
D: 1
S: Arden

M: Cheryl
S: 1
S: 2
S: 3
D: 1

M: Brianna
D: 1
S: 1

M: Darlene
S: Duane
S: Justin
D: 1
One younger son
Two younger daughters

M: Cara
Three older daughters
S: 1

M: Davita
S: Gary
D: Vicki
Three younger daughters
S: 1

M: Deanna
D: 1
D: 2

F: Ken
M: Fannie
S: Jamie
D: Arianna
D: Sally

M: Fiona
Older son
D: Fifi

M: Gina
D: Zara
S: 1

M: Heidi
S: 1
D: 1
S: 2
D: 2
S: John

M: Jaclyn
D: Ramona
D: 2
One younger son

M: Jane
Two older daughters
D: 1
S: 1

M: Kasha
S: Stuart
D: Latisha
D: Shana

M: Karitia
S: Jarratt
S: Danar
S: Tarun
Two or three younger sons

M: Liz
D: Gabbite

F: Lloyd
M: Kirsty
S: Brock

M: Lou
S: Luke
S: Lily

M: Rowena
D: 1
D: 2
D: Lana
Two younger daughters

M: Sabrina
D: 1
D: 2

M: Sylvia
D: 1
S: Mike

M: Tammie
S: Kieran
D: Alysia
S: David
S: Julian
S: Jeff
S: Adrian
S: Alex
One younger son & one younger daughter

M: Terry
S: 1
S: 2

**Private
Christian
Schools**

Private
Christian
(K-12)
Secondary
School
Principal:
Warren

Private
Christian
(K012)
Primary
School
Principal:
Dawn

Private
Christian
(K012)
Sen Mistress-
Senior
Secondary
School:
Althea

Private
Christian
Primary
School
Principal:
Phil

Professionals

Alternative
Primary
School
Principal:
Abigail

International
K-12 School
Kathy

**Other
Educational
Facilities**

Private Tutor
Martelle

**Tertiary
Institution**

Tertiary
Institution
Linden

State Schools

State Primary
School
Principal:
Russell
Steve

State
Secondary
School
Tony

DECV
Adele
Bev
Nick

AYCE
Director: Helen

Publications:

Jackson, G. (2007). Home education transitions with formal schooling: Student perspectives. *Issues in Educational Research*, 17(1), 62-84.

Jackson, G. (2008). Australian Home Education and Vygotskian Learning Theory. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 15(1), 39-48.