



Rebecca English
and Gemma Troughton

CANARIES IN THE COALMINE

Australian Teachers
Who Homeschool Their Children

Education Studies

Collection Editor
JANISE HURTIG

LIVED PLACES
PUBLISHING



CANARIES IN THE COALMINE

Rebecca English and Gemma Troughton

CANARIES IN THE COALMINE

Australian Teachers Who
Homeschool Their Children

Education Studies

Collection Editor
Janise Hurtig



First published in 2025 by Lived Places Publishing

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive 2019/790, Lived Places Publishing expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

The authors and editor have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication, but assume no responsibility for any errors, inaccuracies, inconsistencies, or omissions. Likewise, every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. If any copyright material has been reproduced unwittingly and without permission, the publisher will gladly receive information enabling them to rectify any error or omission in subsequent editions.

Copyright © 2025 Lived Places Publishing

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 9781916704640 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781916704664 (ePDF)

ISBN: 9781916704657 (ePUB)

The right of Rebecca English and Gemma Troughton to be identified as the Authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

Cover design by Fiachra McCarthy

Book design by Rachel Trolove of Twin Trail Design

Typeset by Newgen Publishing, UK

Lived Places Publishing

P.O. Box 1845

47 Echo Avenue

Miller Place, NY 11764

This book is open access (BY-NC-ND), and the digital files are available to download for free from our website, where you will find information about the license and our open access policy.

www.livedplacespublishing.com

Abstract

While the number of homeschoolers among all demographics, in Australia and elsewhere, is growing, it is homeschooling teachers who represent the biggest change. Teachers have a unique relationship with schools and represent a marked shift in attitudes to school, as canaries in the coalmine. This book examines the reasons teachers choose to homeschool their children. It was in the individual stories of our participant teachers that a story of schools' failure to meet students' needs was found. This book challenges anyone interested in the future of education to consider the role of homeschooling in changing education for the twenty-first century.

Key words

analogous, canaries, curriculum, home education, home schooling, pull, push, school choice, stories

Warning

This book contains explicit references to and descriptions of situations which may cause distress. This includes references to and descriptions of:

- Suicidal thoughts, intentions, and actions
- School refusal
- Bullying and assault
- Ableism, discrimination, and micro-aggressions

Every effort has been made to provide more specific content warnings before relevant chapters, but please be aware that references to potentially distressing topics occur **frequently** and **throughout** the book.

Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter 1	What is homeschooling anyway? 1
Chapter 2	Our homeschooling teacher participants 37
Chapter 3	Homeschooling versus traditional school: They are not the same thing 47
Chapter 4	What do these data tell us about "school choice?" 73
Chapter 5	Why would I want my child in that environment? 89
Chapter 6	Tipping points 101
Chapter 7	Where to from here? 113
References	123
Index	137

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Turrbal and Yugara people as the First Nations owners of the lands where this book was written. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, of research and of learning. We acknowledge the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the Australian homeschooling community.

This book began as an observation, “Why are there so many teachers turning up at our homeschool groups? In Facebook groups? In homeschooling spaces?” We were particularly attuned to it as teachers ourselves living, working and home educating in Australia. What is going on in their world where teachers are pulling themselves and their children from the traditional mainstream system and choosing homeschooling as a viable option? Are these people early warning indicators of something deeper happening within the education system? In this book, we examine the reasons teachers choose homeschooling for their own children, and we also reflect on our own experiences. We consider how our own experiences of school refusal, of trauma in school, and school distress reflect and mirror the experiences of many Australian families. Our data suggests our experiences were not unique.

We acknowledge and thank the participants who gave up their time to tell us their stories. We also thank the faculty of Creative

Industries, Education and Social Justice (CIESJ) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the Community of Australian Deans of Research in Education (cADRE) for providing us with some funding and for taking a chance on a story that challenges normative schooling and asks readers to think more deeply about the role of schooling in educating the community in the twenty-first century. We also acknowledge our families who support us in this homeschooling journey and the writing process. Finally, a cuddly thank you to our pets, the miniature dachshund Peggy Peaches and schnauzer Florian, who keep us, and our children, sane.

This book reveals the fissures at the heart of modern schooling. The wheels are falling off the bus, but nobody seems to want to admit that because of the role of schools in providing a basic education, and some childcare, for young people in a community who need both parents to work to try to keep afloat in a cost-of-living crisis. These families' choices challenge dominant narratives about schooling, and their stories are even more powerful because they are teachers.

Rebecca English is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

Gemma Troughton is a sessional Lecturer in Education at Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

1

What is homeschooling anyway?

Learning objectives

1. Identify three reasons why parents might choose homeschooling and consider how they might be affected by experience in a classroom.
2. Reflect critically on what aspects of the classroom culture and environment may impact the choice to homeschool.
3. Critically examine your own experiences with students with additional needs in your classes. How would this student be affected by their parents' choice to homeschool?
4. Consider the notion of analogous education. How might it explain the choice of homeschooling?

Introduction

This book is about teachers who are parents and choose to homeschool from an Australian perspective, as both authors live, work, and home educate in Australia. While there is a lot of research in the USA, in Australia, in the UK, in New Zealand,

in Canada, and in other places homeschooling is legal (parts of Europe, parts of Asia) focused on the choice of homeschooling, questions around who does it and why, the philosophy behind it (the spectrum from unschooling to school at home) and the outcomes (particularly in the USA, questions around where homeschoolers go when they “finish” or “graduate”), there is not much on parents who homeschool. Beyond that question, we are interested in parents who are also qualified and/or experienced teachers, whatever that qualification and experience might be. There is no research on how teachers who choose to homeschool, and anecdotal and even government data in certain jurisdictions (Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023) suggest this group is growing, come to the choice of homeschooling and how they experience the choice of homeschooling with their children. In this book, we look at the ways teacher-parents who homeschool talk about that experience. We are interested in four key questions:

1. What do teachers who homeschool bring to their experience of homeschooling?
2. Why might teachers who homeschool choose a particular style that is aligned with their teaching training?
3. Our experiences of teaching and our reflexive practice changed as a result of our experiences of homeschooling. To what extent does that change reflect the experiences of other homeschooling teachers?
4. What do their decisions to leave the education system tell us about what is happening with the current mainstream system?

These four key questions lead to the need to define some important concepts:

1. What does it mean to homeschool?
2. How do we categorise homeschool?
3. What styles of homeschooling are there?
4. Is homeschooling part of mainstream education, or is it in the shadows?
5. Analogous education.

In what follows in this chapter, we address these key points. These points allow us to explore the experiences of teachers who homeschool and how they approach their children's experiences of learning.

What is homeschooling?

Homeschooling is defined as the education of the child outside of a formal institution like a school (English & Gribble, 2021). Unlike with other forms of education, such as distance education and part-time school, homeschooling parents are wholly responsible for the education of their children, and that education is independent of teachers. While they may utilise other forms of education as part of their homeschooling journey (including private tutoring, music education, sports), the parents curate the whole educational experience, and implement most of the educational experiences that are required to provide that child with a well-rounded education.

We use the term “homeschooling” here in this book; however, we acknowledge that the term is problematic. One of the problems with the term is that most registering bodies, in Australia

(Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023) and around the world (Lees & Nicholson, 2021), prefer the term home education. Home education is preferred because it conveys more of the nuance of the approach. We can also include the many varied types of education that happen in a homeschool setting, with minimal correlation to the traditional idea of the term “school.” As we discuss below, there are many alignments between other educational movements. For our purposes, we frame the discussion in relation to shadow education but suggest a new term to categorise it as analogous education, and homeschooling. However, we are using the term “homeschooling” because of its relationship to popular notions of what a home educator is and does, where the child receives their “schooling” and “education.” We use the term “school” in its older iteration, meaning “to learn;” interestingly, its original meaning was from the Greek and means “leisure.” The word also has links to multitude, which, in relation to the growth of the movement, is our little joke on the term.

The link to the Greek term, “*scholē*,” or leisure, is important in this context. Schooling, the school years, are a time when children should be given the opportunity to figure out what they are interested in, what they want to know and who they want to be. It is a time that should be a distance from economic necessity (Bourdieu, 1984) that will facilitate that discovery. However, as many researchers have noted (Luthar et al., 2020), schooling has become less and less “leisurely” over the past 30 years. With the rise in competitive schooling (Jabbar et al., 2022), competition is as much between schools as it has been between individuals enrolled in schools (Luthar et al., 2020). Along with this competition has been an increased focus on testing (Au, 2022), and

this testing emphasis has led to a decreased emphasis on experimentation (Rutkowski, 2001), on learning in innovative ways (Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2020) and has seen the curriculum shrink (Yandall, Doecke & Abdi, 2020). As two of our parents, Madeline and Cathy, said in their interviews, as well as Gemma noted in her discussion, which we will come to. For example, Madeline and Cathy both bemoaned the emphasis on academics and, in particular, Maths and Sciences, without any focus on the Arts and other subjects that their children really loved and enjoyed. There is some evidence, in our data as well as in the authors' own stories, that children who prefer to work in a creative way, and are looking for the space to draw, to paint, to sculpt and to read, are more likely to find the focus on Maths and Sciences stifling and preferred the opportunity to offer more creativity in their homeschooling settings (see also Fisher, 2023).

With this shrinking of curriculum, there has been a reduction in subjects that are not "valued," such as the Arts (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011), and even English language instruction has changed (Menken, 2008). Madeline talked about this problem in her interview. There is a distinct shift in schools and classrooms with more emphasis on subjects that have fewer creative outlets and subjects that rely on strong underlying language and number skills. Kettler et al. (2018) suggest there are benefits to creativity in the classroom, such as problem-solving skills in both the educational and personal setting. Robinson (2006) stated that creativity was as important in education as literacy, and that failure to teach the creative subjects was just as detrimental as not teaching maths and sciences. Gemma's story suggests many homeschoolers would agree.

There has also been a view that teachers are suddenly required to “parent” (Bleazby, 2011), with research (Drane, Vernon & O’Shea, 2020) suggesting young people require more time to learn skills and attitudes that were previously taught in the home. As such, there is a lot of pressure on schools to do more (Bleazby, 2011) with less (Bleazby, 2011), and parents are increasingly unhappy with the offering of their local schools (Wenham, Dinn & Eaves, 2021). School satisfaction, among parents (Hamlin & Cheng, 2020) and teachers (Smith & Holloway, 2020), has been decreasing. Violet talked about how that conundrum affected her as a teacher and how it influenced her choice to homeschool. Nobody seems to be particularly satisfied with the services offered by schools.

To explore the issue of dissatisfaction with schooling, we will start by telling our own stories of being teachers who homeschool our own children.

Rebecca’s story

I am a homeschooling mum, my children have never been to school, they just flatly refused to go. And, by “wouldn’t go” I mean, absolutely, flatly, feet-stomping, crying uncontrollably refused. My oldest child has refused school from the beginning and was the most vocal about not wanting to go, probably because it was she who would have been the first to go, and she was the one I invested the most time trying to convince to go to school. We visited so many schools in my quest to get her to go. Most of them were alternative schools; there was a one-teacher school, a community school, a Montessori school and a Steiner school. Nope, nope, nope and nope. I’m now at the end of the journey with her; she’s almost at the age where she can get herself ready to go to university and work out a pathway into

university. We are registered, as it is the law, and we've (so far) been really lucky with the registration process; I've never had one rejected. I think that's because I'm a teacher. The benefit of being a teacher who homeschools is in (1) the capacity to speak "department" in planning documents, (2) the capacity to speak "department" in reporting and (3) the capacity to see how to get into university. I have the added benefit of being a teacher educator, so my knowledge of university pathways is greater than that of many teachers.

To report, I use the proforma the department provides because I just want the process to be easy and to try to do what I can to ensure my child is able to keep homeschooling. There is a real fear in the community, which we saw during the review in Queensland that happened in 2024, and I share that fear of being refused homeschooling, even though it is my legal right as a parent to choose to homeschool any of my children.

My oldest child is the one I'll talk about. It's her experiences I'd like to explore here. I register properly and legally, and I feel that speaking of "department" in planning documents helps to make sure registration requirements are easy to meet. For example, I've always used references to literature to show how my child learns. Similarly, in the planning, I use teacher scripts to demonstrate to the department that there is an alignment between what they understand education (synonymous with school) to look like and the education my child has experienced for reporting purposes and will experience in the next year of homeschooling. I rely heavily on school language to produce the report. I have always used the codes in the curriculum, called content descriptors, to show the learning that should be achieved in the year level in the three areas of the report, English/Maths/another area of the curriculum.

The approach I have always taken is very teacherly, if more eclectic and less school-like than my experience of education as a teacher in a traditional setting. For example, while I do use workbooks, and my daughter does music examinations set by the Education Department, we only do an hour a day, and it's my child's choice when we do the work and if she proposes another way to cover content, we can do that. I have much more freedom than I would in a school where the curriculum would force my hand. My daughter talks with her friends about schooling, what they do, how they learn, what they're learning and so on, and I see it's much more casual and relaxed, more driven by her (if not in content but in time and approach) than her friends get in their schools with their teachers. Especially now that she's high school age, the kids she hangs out with, the ones who do go to school, have a completely different experience of being directed, not allowed to self-direct, than she does. And, they have to do subjects they either report hating or report finding really useless, and they often say their experiences are uninspiring and pointless. We don't have that experience.

Why do I approach homeschooling in a more "teacherly" fashion than if I want my child to have a self-directed experience? I do it because I want the reports to pass, so, by using the language of syllabuses and curriculum documents, I am desperately trying to convey to the regulator that this child is receiving a high-quality education, because I have used the curriculum documents which the department uses in their schools. I write feedback in a conversational style that would be recognisable to teachers who have engaged in moderation meetings and verification of samples in schools, and, through this approach, I hope to again convey that I am doing the school work the department prefers when they come to determine if the registration and reporting requirements have been met.

Homeschooling is a choice that my child has made. She has many friends, and all her cousins, who attend school. She has said to me in no uncertain terms that there is no way she wants to ever set foot in a school as a school student; she simply does not want to go. However, if she asked to go to school, I would send her.

For me, there are also influences and experiences in schools that I do not want her to have. For example, an aunt relayed how, in a very nice suburban school, my nephew was shown pornography on a phone that the school hadn't "taken away," and this had happened at lunchtime in the playground. My nephew was eight at the time.

As it stands, my homeschooling journey is almost at an end. She will go to a training college soon and do some study there with a view to developing a portfolio of learning that demonstrates her ability to go to university. She will be able to get a tertiary entrance score, called an ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank), through this process and get into university like a schooled student who will have an ATAR from their school learning. She also completes music exams, which not only shows learning, but also contributes to university entrance as it allows her to get to a level that will improve her ATAR. My child has made it very clear she wants to go to university and have a professional career.

I consider myself an "accidental" homeschooler, and I have an eclectic style. While I have never sent my child to school, I did not intend to homeschool. It's the choice that my child has made, not me.

Rebecca's story introduces two homeschooling categories, the accidentals and the deliberates. Far from reflecting the experiences in other countries, the focus on the child (rather than religious adherence or ideology) and the experiences in school are

likely to drive homeschool choice in Australia. The decision to homeschool is found to largely be driven by parents' perceptions of schools (as not working properly), and the child's lack of "fit" with the school, rather than in the US, for instance, where categories are much more likely to reflect parents' beliefs (see Van Galen, 1991). She's described herself as an "accidental" homeschooler and an "eclectic." In what follows, those terms are explained.

How to categorise homeschooling

There are several layers to categorising homeschooling, which we will discuss. We'll start with why people choose it, the accidentals of our author's story. Then, we'll talk about whether it's part of the shadow education movement. Shadow education is often associated with tutoring and is heavily relied on in Australia to solve education issues. It was even funded by the Victorian Department of Education in the wake of the pandemic to help get students up to grade level. Interestingly, the Queensland Department of Education's own publications tend to describe homeschooling as shadow education, in spite of it not being private tutoring (or private tutoring lite). Shadow education is used to refer to supplementary services that support, not replace, school. It may be that calling homeschooling supplemental education is a way to say it's not important or worthwhile or equivalent to schooling. We challenge that notion in the section that follows our discussion of supplemental education.

Accidentals versus deliberates

English (2021a; 2021b, 2023), in her work on Australian homeschoolers, has asserted that the majority of homeschoolers in

Australia are “accidental,” meaning that they did not intend to choose homeschooling and are choosing it as either a last resort or to heal the child with significant school trauma.

There has been much critical work in relation to the choice of homeschooling. Much of this critical conversation looks at cultural and social differences. For example, Lowden (1993) argued that the Christian fundamentalism element evident in early literature was inappropriate to the UK context. Due to the demographics of Australia’s population, it is likely that this will not apply in this country either due to declining religiosity (Hughes, 2010). Similarly, Stevens (2001) described the two groups as focusing on earth, “earth-based,” and heaven, “heaven-based.” Rothermel (2003) has argued these studies and others, including Apostoleris (1994), make a flawed case at [at or as?] a dichotomy, what is termed a “dualistic taxonomy of home education choice” between the religious and non-religious homeschool families. In their study, Apostoleris (1994) argued the choice was more about content and method than ideology and methodology; however, English (2020) has argued research shows the binary categories of choice are “universal.” Nemer (2002) suggested that there was so much convergence between religious and non-religious homeschoolers that the groups were too flexible to hold much meaning in relation to understanding the drive to homeschool. For Nemer, most homeschool families draw from both groups. Jolly and Matthews (2017) agreed, stating Nemer’s (2002) approach provided much-needed flexibility within Van Galen’s (1991) original classification.

Attempting to address this, English's (2021a; 2021b; Moir & English, 2022; English, Campbell & Moir, 2023) work in Australia has tended to categorise the homeschool choice as either accidental or deliberate. For English (2021a; 2021b), **accidentals** did not make a deliberate choice. In order to address criticisms that "accidental" suggests unserious or "foolish," she used the term to connote that the choice was "forced" on the family. By contrast, she used the term "deliberate" to describe those families whose intention had always been to homeschool, whether the intention was religious, a-religious, ideological, or any other category.

As such, "deliberate" suggested that there was a time taken to make the choice because the families could see problems before they occurred. They would have fitted into both categories of Van Galen's (1991) work, as they were somewhat ideologically opposed to certain aspects of schooling (in particular, how they managed neurodivergent students) as well as pedagogues (in that they thought school was not really an effective means of educating young people). By contrast, the "accidentals" were forced into making a choice; most were choosing homeschooling in real time as the child's experiences of schooling meant the reality of staying in school unravelled around them. For many of these families, it may be that school refusal/school can't be a factor. The accidentals were chosen in response to the child's experiences on the ground, mostly while they were enrolled in schools, which aligns with data showing the main growth in the secondary phase of learning, suggesting much of the growth of homeschooling is in the previously schooled population. These families find themselves

home educating by accident, not by design, showing they are accidental home educators. They weren't in any way ideologically opposed to schooling, quite the opposite, growth in homeschooling enrolment in the secondary, and senior phase of learning in many cases suggested they are home educating in response to schools' failure to meet the needs of the family in relation to a child's education.

Unlike accidental home education families, the other group, deliberates, were always going to home educate. These families may be both ideologically and pedagogically opposed to schools, the institutional approach to learning and the state's authority to tell their children what it means to be educated. Most of the children in these families, English (2021a) suggested, had not ever attended school, so their children had no direct experiences of schooling; rather, her work suggested, their beliefs and experiences of schooling as a child (or a teacher) led to their decision to homeschool. These families tend to demonstrate what Van Galen (1991) described as a "full ideological commitment to home education ... sometime after the initial decision to teach their children at home" (p. 67) or "believed that their children learned in unique ways that could not be accommodated by formal schools" (p. 72).

English (2021) noted how families may take on the responsibility to educate and do it all themselves and place all the pressure on themselves because all other options were found to be unsuitable or unsuccessful for their child. It may be due to the child's special education need (such as Autism), psychological need (such as trauma or anxiety), or in relation to bullying (Kuntzman & Gaither, 2013), or some other problem in schools. However, this

risk does not need to be directly felt; it may be perceived. For instance, some parents may perceive the school as a risk for their child, either because of the parents' experiences of school when they were students or because of their experiences of school as teachers, when they were teaching their own classes.

Styles of homeschooling

In Rebecca's story above, she described herself as an "eclectic" homeschooling parent to describe the learning that happened in her home. There are many different styles of learning in a homeschooling family. We argue homeschooling exists on a spectrum from highly unstructured to highly structured.

When the term home-schooling or home education is used, it encompasses a wide range of pedagogies and curricular choices that are decided on by the parent educator. Much broader than that of a mainstream approach. These choices are generally made based on a family's beliefs and opinions and are not randomly selected. The variety of styles and philosophies that are often (but not always) talked about by home-educating families, but many reject labels altogether and just say they're homeschoolers. Below, we outline many approaches (but not all) seen in the homeschooling approach. We chose to focus on those approaches most often seen in the literature on homeschooling families' choices of a style.

Traditional

This pedagogy of home learning is an approach that recreates the mainstream, traditional school day in the home. We use both the terms mainstream and traditional schooling because

different literatures use these two terms. They seem to be interchangeable and refer to school as it is stereotypically understood and would be familiar to a non-homeschooling family (textbooks, structured day, sat at a desk, key learning areas, and assessments such as national assessments for literacy and numeracy). The idea of repackaging the structure of school life in the home environment is implied by the term “traditional” homeschooling.

It is familiar. Textbooks and workbooks are what the general population grew up on... the traditional school-room approach is one of the easiest methods to implement and use.

(Suarez et. al 2006, p. 44)

The traditional learning that resembles a school day feels most familiar for both the learner and the parent educator. The initial time in homeschooling is often characterised by a “traditional” approach with parents attempting to replicate school at home; for many, that’s all they know. But it usually doesn’t last. Parents are recreating what is familiar while finding it does not work without the structure of school (teachers, principal, departments of education, the other attributes of school that make it work including bells and assemblies), as such, they tend to end up abandoning it because they are already unsure about school being effective and are already developing new beliefs around educating their child/ren. It is often in this initial phase of a new homeschool family that they start to question their own opinions and beliefs around how education should and can look for a child. From here, parent educators’ confidence grows, and they may choose to begin to explore other learning styles and philosophies.

Classical

The classical pedagogy of homeschooling refers to ancient philosophers Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. The classical method of learning attempts to emulate the ways of these great minds through a modern practice based on ancient ideas. “Young people should be taught to ask questions rather than just be given information to memorize.” (Robinson, 2013, p. 29). Home-educated students’ reasoning skills are developed in depth with the end goal of producing deep critical thinkers. To have the “ability to take part in the great conversation and make a contribution towards our common life” (Robinson, 2013, p. 198). There are three phases or methods of learning in the Classical method that make up the trivium. The child/ren move through the trivium phases as they age and develop their skills in each phase: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Once the trivium is mastered, students move onto the quadrivium – astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, and music.

Stages of the Trivium

Grammar: (knowledge) The first stage lays the foundation for language, beginning from four years through to nine years old. The home learning student will learn phonics, grammar rules, spelling rules, math facts, historical facts, scientific facts, and more. The facts build the foundation for the next stage of the trivium. It is “intended to teach the pupil the proper use of the tools of learning, before they begin to apply them to ‘subjects’ at all.” (Sayers, 1947)

Logic: (understanding) The second stage, beginning around ten years old, focuses on when a child begins to ask “why?” This is

where the home-educated child/ren begin to acknowledge and appreciate cause and effect, and develop ideas around more abstract thinking. Analysis of what is being read begins here, and thus begins critical thinking skills.

Rhetoric: (wisdom) around twelve years old, the home-educated child/ren uses both grammar (knowledge and facts) and logic (understanding) and applies them to their own unique, original thoughts.

Many classical homeschool families and programs include study of the Bible and have strong Christian foundations, referred to as classical Christian education (Arendash, 2023). Religion is generally at the centre of the learning, with the other classical topics working in harmony with the family's religious beliefs.

Charlotte Mason

To understand the practices and principles of Charlotte Mason homeschooling, we must look back to the late nineteenth century to Mason's first publication: *Home Education: The Training and Education of Children Under Nine*. Without a doubt, Charlotte Mason (1842–1923) was an educator ahead of her time. She developed an educational philosophy that spread throughout Britain and the US in the late 19th century (de Bellaigue, 2015). It is still followed today by many private mainstream schools, but more importantly, it has a large homeschool following. Mason's educational philosophy entails "three educational instruments – the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas" (Mason, 2013, p. 32). Studies include religion, literature, history, language, arts, and science, often with a nature focus. There is often also a

strong Biblical focus in Charlotte Mason, and it is used by many Christian families.

Montessori homeschooling

Children following the Montessori educational framework work at an individual pace, and there are certain values for the child to follow. The Montessori environment is calm and quiet, and offers the child a chance to learn at their own pace. While the child has most autonomy in what they choose to engage with, it is a very organised process behind the scenes. These activities are far from surface-level “busy-ness” and are designed to build and develop on previously learned skills to eventually develop mastery of that skill. Behind the activity that appears simple has been a lot of research, observation and planning. The choices in materials and lessons on offer follow a pattern that was designed by Maria Montessori in order for the child to fully develop that skill. Practical life skills are an important component of the Montessori method.

The Montessori method follows the ideas of Maria Montessori (1870–1952), an Italian physician and educator. Putting her educational ideas aside, she was, in her time, a significant advocate for women’s rights and was thrice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The Montessori method entails supporting the full development of a human being. It is a multi-faceted approach that looks beyond textbooks for learning. The room in which a child learns is set up differently from conventional ideals. In the home-school environment, the whole house can accommodate this idea. Furniture is child-sized, low, and in muted tones to reflect nature (Lilliard 2016). The materials chosen to be on display are

curated and rotated in the Montessori space, and the space is never overpacked. Children are expected to return the materials to the space just as they found it, taking care of the space as a collective.

Project and unit-based

Project or unit-based methods of homeschooling are immersive and offer an integrated curriculum approach, pushing a transdisciplinary approach whereby subjects are fully immersed within the one topic. These units and/or projects often have a real-world approach to them.

The unit study approach allows a family to be structured or flexible in their method of teaching while still covering the bases on academic subjects. Using a single theme for planning activities and lessons offers the teacher and students the opportunity to use their various interests and passions to discover, learn, and retain the subject matter (Suarez, 2006, p. 89).

These topics can be chosen by the child or family and then adapted to suit multiple age levels of learning in the one household. A depth of investigation often takes place, and by giving the child/ren autonomy over the topic, they develop intrinsic motivation to learn more. The choices are almost endless. These units can be created by the parent or bought as a package. The local library can be an excellent source for all homeschool learners, but particularly for integrated units. "The unit study method of home education has fringe benefits that go beyond teaching the 'connectedness' of things... There is a sense of family connectedness in addition to factual connectedness" Suarez (2006).

The parent essentially guides the child to the answer rather than dictating what is to be learned.

Unschooling

The term unschooling was first used by school teacher John Holt in the 1960s. The term originally described how a child learned without attending school (Suarez 2006). “Unschooling is a variation of homeschooling where, instead of following a set curriculum, children learn through everyday life experiences” (Riley, 2020, p. 19). Unschooling families do not schedule lessons or follow a program, nor do they have set assignments. Instead, they are learning through experience and life. The child often plans their own day and experiences, and the parent follows, guides and asks questions. It is therefore often interest-based and can take place at home, in a park, on the road, while travelling, at the beach, wherever learning can be explored. “Being an unschooling parent is almost like being a librarian” (Riley, 2020, p. 68). Children ask and explore, and parents gather resources to share with the child.

Steiner/Waldorf homeschooling

The Steiner or Waldorf education was designed by Austrian Philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). The role of the parent education in a Steiner Waldorf household is sculpting the environment from materials and equipment that harken back to the natural world in which the family is located through the relationships with materials and between each other in the family (Nicol, 2012). The essential principles to following Steiner’s philosophy are “care for the environment and nourishment of the senses, creative and artistic experiences, child-initiated free play, the

development of healthy will activity, protection for the forces of childhood: gratitude, reverence, wonder, working with rhythm, repetition and reverence, imitation and the child at the centre" (Nicol 2012 p14). Steiner encouraged teaching to be "creative like art" (Dahlin, 2017, p.83). Steiner focusses on where the child is at rather than the traditional age and grade-based approaches. It takes a creative approach and "in primary school, the core approach is through artistic presentation of material...which promotes engagement, inspires deep learning, and supports developing imaginations" (Steiner Education Australia, n.d.).

Families who choose to homeschool with a Steiner focus will focus on how learning can be done through craft, art, dance, drama, and creation. There is an emphasis on utilising lots of natural play products such as wool, silk, wood, cotton, etc. Modern Steiner approaches do not utilise digital technologies until high school.

Faith-based

Faith-based homeschool families are following and practising the beliefs and ideals of their own religion. Faith is embedded in home education and is the overarching theme of learning. There are many programs families can choose to follow based on their own religion, and often many social groups to be a part of that share those same principles. "Children are to grow in their understanding of the principles of the subjects they are taught and then, to be exercised in their own individual reasoning in, by, and with those principles" (Suarez, 2006).

Australian Christian Homeschooling (n.d.) offers such a curriculum planned and mapped so that "scripture and Biblical principles are

woven into the curriculum, ensuring students are not exposed to humanistic teaching which conflicts with the Bible.”

Eclectic

As mentioned above in relation to the traditionalist approach, the eclectic model often comes once homeschool families have tried a few different learning styles. One of our authors, Rebecca, described herself as eclectic because she combines a few different styles. They indirectly create a learning environment and method that is right for the child or family as a whole unit. Eclectic methods borrow from other approaches, for example, perhaps an art focus from Steiner and the methodology behind Montessori, with some unit focus as well. These melting pots of individualised approaches are unique from family to family.

Just like a grand buffet, there is a huge variety of great programs, courses, books, and curricula in the homeschool market, each of which appeals to different learning and teaching styles, family schedules, level of teacher involvement, and more. Smorgasbord homeschooling allows us to pick and choose what works best for our family.

(Suarez, 2006, p. 168).

The choices in approaches to homeschooling are vast, and therefore, when choosing to follow an eclectic mix, one has to sift through them all to find the “gems” that work for one’s own family.

Is homeschooling a shadow or analogous education?

Shadow education has been a way departments of education in Australia have described homeschooling. In their negotiations

with the community, they often describe homeschoolers as a “shadow education.” In this section, we dispute that and try to show why shadow education is not an appropriate term. Instead of shadow education, we propose a new term, which we call analogous education, because we think that homeschooling runs alongside school education and has some analogies with regular school, but is not quite the same. When parents have a child who struggles in mainstream, one of the strategies they employ is to employ a tutor and move to what is termed “shadow education” (Zhang & Bray, 2020). There can be a debate about whether homeschooling sits in the same place as “shadow education,” as many of the issues that lead parents to choose private tutoring are the same as those that lead to homeschooling. However, there are differences, in spite of governments describing homeschooling as a shadow education or a shadow homeschool movement.

Shadow education

Shadow education, as Zhang and Bray (2020) noted, has its origins in the last century, but has been increasingly popularised in the post-COVID-19 pandemic times, much like homeschooling; it’s grown with the changes we have noted post-pandemic. Significantly for this book, the COVID-19 pandemic was a point for many to turn to homeschooling as a means of ameliorating educational disadvantage, it was also a huge driver to shadow education, particularly private tutoring, as parents in both cases noted educational problems that had been hidden by their children being in classrooms for the majority of their learning. As the Australian curriculum does not allow time to go back and revisit concepts, many things may be missed. For example, in maths,

if a child is not good at times tables, they may find algebra difficult. It is the lack of a solid foundation that drives parents to shadow education (usually in the form of outside hours, private tutoring) and also to homeschooling as they attempt to make up for learning losses. At the time, schools were opening and closing doors as per government mandates, and schooling from a device became the new norm (Moir & English, 2022). It was a new time for the world and a new time for education. Gemma's child was in mainstream school prep in 2020 and felt this educational disadvantage after the school temporarily closed its doors after only six weeks. Gemma began filling in the days for her child with additional reading, number work and learning of the Arts using her teaching background to its full advantage. In other words, it is an educational disadvantage [or gap] that drives many parents to shadow education (Zhang & Bray, 2020).

Shadow or supplemental education (both terms are often used interchangeably in government documents) is instruction in subjects that "count," such as mathematics, languages, sciences or any other examinable subject. It is not additional to the school curriculum, such as music, sports, or arts. In most cases, supplemental or shadow education is not undertaken for the enjoyment of the child; rather, it is focused on academic achievement, supplementing, privately, the child's achievement in relation to university entrance and career pathways. In spite of these obvious differences to homeschooling, the term "shadow home education" and "shadow homeschooling" have started to appear in government circulars (Queensland Parliamentary Committee, 2024) in relation to the families who do not meet regulatory obligations. More on that later, but it is usually used to refer to parents

who aren't registering their homeschooling with the regulatory authority in their state or territory and are homeschooling quite literally "in the shadows."

Homeschooling and shadow education do have a lot in common. In many cases (English, 2021a), parents end up homeschooling not because they prefer it, but because it is the only choice left to them, because school hasn't worked. Much like shadow education, it is a recognition of a learning loss or an issue with learning that leads to homeschooling in many cases. As such, it may be supplemental to the mainstream or regular education system. As noted with the juku system in Japan, which facilitates a second chance to young people who've failed Japan's competitive education system, in Australia, as elsewhere (see Havik & Ingul, 2021), the lack of success in the mainstream system is the reason most families choose homeschooling. In addition to the academic issues, the child's difficulties and/or distress in the classroom can also lead to social issues such as bullying, even by teachers (English et al., 2023) because of a frustration with the child's inability to grasp concepts that have been missed or lost. Parents often pull their children out of school and homeschool them to catch them up, showing that, in many of the same terms as the juku system in Japan, homeschooling is supplemental to the mainstream system, it is a system that acts more than supplementing, rather it's a catch-all system that collects students who have not found success or not found their place in schools. As noted in recent Australian research (Dooley et al., 2023), private tutoring operates in much the same terms as homeschooling in that it facilitates a catch-up for students who were failing or falling through the mainstream school cracks.

Some researchers have criticised the private nature of homeschooling for many of the same qualities as private schooling and private tutoring. For instance, Apple (2020) noted that homeschooling families remove children from the mainstream schooling system and teach them in a way that meets their needs without any concern for the greater good of bringing children's skills to a public school. However, the private issue is not so much about the removal of young people from schools into homeschooling because of an advantage that may be provided by elite education (see Apple, 2020), rather, in much the same terms as the supplemental education suggested in the research into private tutoring, it is to supplement the education provided in schools so that all young people can experience success in schooling, even those who were refusing to attend school because of bullying (English, Campbell & Moir, 2023) or other issues that meant that school was refused (Slater, Burton & McKillop, 2022). Further, many homeschooling families use private tutoring to supplement their children's education (Dooley, 2020).

Homeschooling, like private tutoring and shadow education, is academic. Its purpose is to provide academic instruction that can lead to the same jobs and careers and tertiary study that are required by parents who choose schools. Homeschooled students are said to achieve as well or better (Ray, 2021) than their conventionally schooled peers. Homeschooled students go on to a variety of different jobs and careers (McCabe, Beláňová & Machovcová, 2021). As such, the education they experience in their education journeys does not preclude them from also accessing high-level academic achievement in tertiary education, jobs and careers. It is supplemental to the mainstream

school system in that homeschool parents step up to provide an education where schools have not been able to meet that child's educational needs. Many of these young people go back to, or enrol in, schools at some point in their journey (see Jackson, 2021). As such, in much the same ways that private tutoring acts as a supplemental, private system to assist in the academic instruction of young people falling through the cracks, so too does homeschooling. Clearly, there is some alignment between private tutoring/shadow education and homeschooling. Both have grown significantly, particularly since the pandemic. Below, we provide a different categorisation of homeschooling. However, success in university, in jobs, and in careers is rarely the goal. For example, as Kunzman and Gaither (2020, p. 304):

[H]omeschooling [continues] to challenge modern conceptions of schooling, education, and the family. Conventional categories of schooling, curriculum, and achievement will continue to blur, shifting not only participants' conceptions of education but very likely broader society's as well (Lees, 2011). **Homeschooling ... pushes us to consider ... the purposes of education more broadly.**

Analogous education

While there is some alignment of homeschooling with shadow education, it is, unlike school and shadow education through private tutoring, not focused entirely or exclusively on academics. Getting great scores on standardised tests or a brilliant university entrance score isn't the end goal of homeschooling. This suggests it doesn't belong in the category of private schooling

(see Apple, 2020) or private tutoring. We argue that homeschooling can be categorised as “analogous education.” There are some similarities to the mainstream system, but there are more differences. The outcome of educating a child for a career and academic learning is where mainstream and homeschooling approaches diverge, as mainstream education is very focused on outcomes, while it’s unlikely that parents factor outcomes so much into their choice to homeschool. Neuman and Oz (2020) compared homeschooling and mainstream education through the lens of parents who had removed their children from the mainstream system. They found that parents noted unique differences between the two systems. “Schools focus on imparting knowledge rather than teaching high-order cognitive skills, and encourage uniform, standardised, inflexible learning” (Neuman and Oz, 2020, p. 2). Homeschool offers a child-centred approach where the child works at their own pace through self-led inquiries with an interdisciplinary approach, sparking intrinsic motivation, and flexible learning options to suit the child and family (Riley, 2020). By contrast, traditional or mainstream approaches tend to expect the child to meet the curriculum, not the other way around. “Emphasis on high-stakes testing tilted the educational focus away from higher-level thinking and toward fundamental knowledge, rote memorisation of facts, and results-based learning” (Kettler et.al, 2018). With class sizes, there is one way to “learn” the content before the group as a whole moves onto the next concept suggested in the curriculum. As noted earlier, the term homeschooling is a wide umbrella term for a suite of approaches that can be applied to a child’s educational journey. By being in the home environment, adaptations to an original pedagogy or

approach to learning can easily occur to meet the child's needs as necessary. The child is not immobilised at a desk in a classroom to learn something one way only, usually from a book rather than from the real world. Neuman and Oz (2020, p. 13) argued that while both traditional mainstream and homeschooling have the similarities of educating children, they are in their own, unique category:

Homeschooling can be considered a solution to the education crisis. Furthermore, it might also be suggested that homeschooling is, in fact, a solution that is not included in either of the two categories described (within or outside the education system) but rather constitutes a unique third category of solutions to the education crisis.

As mentioned earlier, shadow education is **supplemental to** the education system (Bray 2009). By comparison, homeschooling is **an alternative to** the mainstream education system. As Bray notes in his definition, shadow education does not attempt to override or take over. It is effectively in the shadows; it sits behind the main education system. Homeschooling education does not do this. Rather, it sits alongside [the educational system] as a viable and legal alternative. However, it should be noted that the supplemental service that occurs (to the school system) when a family chooses to homeschool and remove their child from the mainstream system.

In terms of the relationship between the mainstream system and homeschooling, it can be said that homeschooling is analogous to the mainstream system in both form and function. They are

not parallel to each other, moving in the same direction but the same distance apart. They are similar in some respects, with comparable differences, analogous.

Statistics on registration and homeschooling in Australia

Regardless of the style that is chosen, home education or homeschooling is one of the fastest-growing educational choices in Australia (Moir & English, 2022). We see the growth as evidence that it is an analogous education. It is operating alongside traditional schooling, is taking students from the mainstream population (much to the chagrin of the education departments), usually from government schools, and is often a stopgap on the journey where students return to school at some later stage (see Sheng, 2024). We do not have data on how many families use each approach, as it is not collected with any statistical instrument. What we do know is that the homeschooling community is growing in all states and territories, but its growth is most noticeable in Queensland, the third-largest state by population. This state is the one in which both authors live. There has been a 20 per cent increase over the past five years, with the 2022–2023 year seeing the primary school-aged numbers (aged between 4/5 and 10/11) grow by 152 per cent to 2023. The biggest growth in the numbers has been in the secondary and senior secondary phase of learning (students aged 11/12 to 17/18), with growth in the five years to 2023 reported at 262 per cent (Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023). By the end of 2023, when the latest data was reported, there were even more homeschoolers, 11,314 (Queensland Government: Department

of Education, 2024). Interestingly, the growth is highest between Year 8 and Year 9 (51% growth) and Year 10 and Year 11 (60% growth). None of our parents talked about these ages, so we could speculate that it is when the curriculum becomes more intense (the last year of middle school/the beginning of senior), and social pressures also change.

The growth in the number of families that homeschool in secondary education, especially the change between Years 8 and 9 and Years 10 and 11, implies that the state is experiencing a large outgrowth of homeschooling in the previously schooled population. As the students were enrolled in schools prior to their enrolment into home education, they were drawn from the population who had been in schools. Or, perhaps, it may be that they are quicker to abandon schools when encountering problems, or maybe they know the likely trajectory of the issues faced by their child and how the school system may approach helping that child manage their individual needs.

Interestingly, teachers are a group whose experiences of school may make them more likely to choose homeschooling for their own children. As such, it is likely that being a teacher, and having an outside experience of modern education, may be enough to make parents, who would otherwise choose, or even prefer, for education to be delivered in a school, choose home education.

In relation to the state the authors are from, Queensland, the data is not representative of the actual numbers of home educators in that state. There are a lot more students in Queensland who are home educating than these data suggest (Euka, nd; Johnno, nd). All states and territories set their own laws about education,

which include the requirements to home educate. Each education act requires families to register their child for homeschooling. As such, if, as advocates suggest, the numbers are significantly lower than those reported, there are many families who are acting illegally when homeschooling and not meeting their obligations to report their child's education. For this study, we did not ask our participants if they were registered or not. We wanted them to be able to speak freely and not worry about the legality of their choice.

Some data, produced by curriculum providers whose business is to sell academic resources to families who homeschool, popular with parents who want to minimise their workload in homeschooling, suggest around 50 per cent of families who are homeschooling are not registered (Euka, nd) and others, who support families and do not charge for their services, so they are likely to serve a wider population of homeschoolers and also be less focused on families who use curriculum (and are probably more likely to feel comfortable and confident registering) suggest the registration data from Queensland represent only about 20 per cent of registered homeschoolers, suggesting there are 80 per cent of families (Jonno, nd) who are not legally registered in Queensland. These data suggest that the true figure of homeschoolers in 2023 in Queensland is between ~21,000 and ~51,000.

As can be seen from inquiries into homeschooling that have occurred recently (see the Parliament of Queensland, 2024; Parliament of New South Wales, 2014; Jeffrey & Giskes, 2004), homeschooling is a private choice that is legal, in part, because of Australia's long history of private educational provision

(English, 2015). In each state and territory, the same government departments charged with overseeing both homeschooling and private schools are the education department, whose role includes the management and provision of state-based education. Homeschooled children's success in standardised testing as well as in achieving university entrance was omitted from the main report (Parliament of New South Wales, 2014) but appears in the appendix of the inquiry documents (Parliament of New South Wales, 2014).

It may be that there is a fractious relationship between state departments of education, charged with managing and overseeing all forms of non-government school provision, and the non-government school options. Non-government schools are accused of taking funding away from government schools; however, there is no funding issue with homeschoolers. In Australia, homeschooled families receive no funding from the states, except for the textbook allowance given to all families with children of high school age. However, the absence of numbers from classrooms does affect funding, which is still maintained on a needs-based model which uses the number of students enrolled in each school and those students' socio-economic status to determine funding (Warhurst 2012). As such, it may be that both private schools and other private options (such as distance education and homeschooling) affect government funding models because they provide no funding to education departments, but create more work because these departments must manage and oversee these education options. Further, how teachers who choose to homeschool are implicated in this situation is yet to be seen.

Bringing it all together

This chapter has introduced the home education or home-school situation in Australia, with a particular emphasis on Queensland. It has been shown that there has been significant growth in homeschooling in the whole of Australia over the last five years. It has discussed the different styles of homeschooling and their origins. It has discussed the links between homeschooling and private tutoring. Finally, in relation to the number of families choosing it, it has drawn links to being a teacher, why teachers might choose homeschooling and the links between teachers leaving the profession and the rise in homeschooling. In addition, one of our authors' stories has been shared, beginning to reveal the experience of teachers who choose homeschooling.

There are some study points to consider at the end of this chapter:

1. Social and economic circumstances might influence families' disaffection with schooling, and it may also influence the ways that parents choose to home educate, even if they register.
2. It is interesting that there are authoritarian countries, such as China, that tolerate homeschooling while more liberal countries, such as Germany, actively disallow the practice.
3. Teachers identified the lack of creative subjects in schools as an issue, yet nobody seems to see how to fix it. If the community and teachers are aware that it's affecting students' experiences of schooling negatively, why might the government continue with its choice to privilege the more science and academic over the creative and physical?

4. Unschooling is often considered a radical option. Sudbury Valley Schools and A.S Neil's Summerhill have been taking a similar approach for a while. Perhaps the radical is not so much in the approach as in its difference from mainstream.
5. Do you think that unschooling can be fully practised in a school setting?

2

Our homeschooling teacher participants

Learning objectives

1. Consider the medium and long-term implications of the homeschooling choice on professionals' financial, social, and emotional well-being.
2. Critically examine your experiences in education and your beliefs about what makes education effective.
3. Articulate how schools' policies and practices may influence teachers who choose homeschooling.

Introduction

We interviewed twelve teachers, one of whom asked to be removed during the editing process. All twelve participating teachers were able to be registered, with the exception of the two who had since retired (but still would be eligible for registration). One had started a specialist tutoring service for homeschoolers, another had started a microschool (something we discuss below), and nine were still teaching. It was important for us not to nominate a strict definition of "teacher" for two reasons. The first reason is about who is and isn't a teacher.

In Australia, a teacher holds a qualification from a university. In addition, teachers must be registered with the College of Teachers in the state in which they want to teach. Teachers also need a certain number of years of experience to be a fully registered teacher; prior to that, they are only provisionally registered, which means that they can have their registration withdrawn more easily and, as a result, be more easily sacked from a school. We used a looser definition of “teacher” which didn’t specify qualifications or experience because the state government report, on data collected in 2023, did not specify what the government meant by teacher, so, perhaps they were simply looking at folks who had experience in schools and, as the ‘teachers’ were self-reporting, there is no evidence they were all qualified as a teacher or held a teaching degree. In our study, all teachers reported having classroom experience before choosing homeschooling. All study participants held a degree, or equivalent, that would allow them to teach in a school in any state or territory in Australia.

The second reason we did not restrict the definition of teacher was to ensure we were able to access a variety of views. If we had limited it to currently practising teachers, for example, we would not have been able to collect the stories of parents who had to resign from their teaching positions to homeschool their child (see, for example, Madeline and Sian) or had since retired (see, for example, Violet and Aileth). We also would not have been able to collect the stories of those who had started tutoring organisations or “microschools” in response to their choice of homeschooling (see, for example, Catherine).

In total, we interviewed twelve teachers, but, as noted above, one withdrew six months after data collection (see table). These teachers were from a variety of year levels; we had a balance of primary and secondary with a few early childhood teachers as well ($n = 2$). All of our teachers (100 per cent) had classroom experience and held an official degree that would have allowed them to gain registration and teach in any state or territory in Australia. Five of our teachers were still teaching in classrooms, however, we had teachers (one participant) who had established a microschool (and was teaching there), two were tutoring and others who had no current or ongoing teaching experience outside of their homeschooling, one was working as a relief teacher which means they went into schools and covered for teachers who were away sick or on leave. We also had three retired teachers. The following table provides information about our teacher cohort:

Pseudonym	Teacher experience	Still teaching?	Still home-schooling?	Location type
Sassy	Primary, literacy	Yes	Yes	City
Eloise *(withdrew)	Primary, special needs experience	No	Yes	Regional
Catherine	Kindy	No – had started a microschool	Yes	Regional
Madeline	Primary	No	Yes	Regional
Sian	Primary	No	Yes	Regional

Pseudonym	Teacher experience	Still teaching?	Still home-schooling?	Location type
Violet	High school	No, but had done tutoring	Yes (last child of four homeschooled graduates)	Regional
Aileth	EAL/D	No – but ran a tutoring business (since retired)	No (child had graduated)	City
Lisa	Primary	Yes	Yes	City
Cathy	High school	Yes	No (children went to an alternative school)	Regional
Steph	Special Education	Yes – supply	Yes	Regional
Claire (Jamie, her husband, also present in parts)	High school/ special education	Yes – distance education school	No (child had graduated)	Regional
Tara	Primary	No	Yes	Regional

Microschools, small school closures, and problems in the institutionally aligned space

It is important at this point to define microschoools (see Catherine in the above table) and identify the issues the government has with them. Microschools are not schools, but they often act as “drop-off programs” or a kind of “family day care” for homeschoolers. They range from highly informal to highly

structured and provide a care service to homeschoolers who need a break, who need help with the content their child wants to learn or who need to work (and the child needs to be supervised). Actual schools in Australia need to teach the Australian Curriculum (ACARA) or a recognised alternative (currently on the ACARA website, the only alternatives are The Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework and the International Baccalaureate) (ACARA, 2024). Schools must also ensure their financial situation is viable and has enough enrolments. In Queensland, the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NSSAB) monitors schools' curriculum offering and pedagogy as well as their financial viability. One of our participants, Catherine, had started a school while homeschooling and came up against this board. She was in the process of homeschooling again while trying to get another school off the ground.

For Catherine, there was an analogy in her "run-ins with the board" with a rural school in Queensland that was forced to close because it didn't teach the curriculum mandated by the state, and, after the principal was taken to the high court, was forced to close. There was no communication entered into, which might have shown why there was a desire for families, even 20 years ago, to have their children access an alternative model that wasn't a state-mandated curriculum and testing regime.

Currently in Australia, all schools must teach three aspects of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2024):

1. The eight key learning areas were mentioned in the legislative review into homeschooling that sought to introduce this rule for homeschoolers as well.

2. The seven general capabilities (literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, intercultural and ethical understanding).
3. The three cross-curriculum priorities (sustainability, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives).

Microschools do not undertake to teach these three areas, and that is why they are not permitted to operate as schools. As Catherine noted, it also explains their popularity with homeschooling parents and their growth. Homeschoolers are also not required to follow the Australian curriculum to the same degree as the schools do in any state and territory (even where curriculum is listed as a condition of homeschooling, such as New South Wales).

Further, in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, schools can offer part-time enrolment for children and young people at the behest of the principal. The principal can choose to either allow or not allow this arrangement, but in reality, it is rarely withheld. In other states and territories, however, school enrolment must also be full-time. Micro Schools can offer a part-time offering in states where these enrolment options are not offered, and this option is likely a big part of their appeal to parents. However, due to them not being schools, they are not able to provide a certification of completion of schooling, they cannot provide a pathway to a ranking score for university (called the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank – ATAR) and cannot receive government funding. As such, students who wish to be enrolled in a microschool must be registered for homeschooling, or they will not be complying with compulsory education requirements.

Pulling parents into homeschooling and pushing parents out of school

There were two significant areas identified in the data we collected. We categorised these in much the same terms as the marketing terms demand-pull and cost-push. In relation to this book, we saw the growing home educating population aligned with the push/pull of economic theory. These teachers' experiences inside and outside of schools were a driving force. They pushed them towards homeschooling. There were also pull forces on parents. For some parents, there was already a pull towards homeschooling, often through an existing belief that homeschooling is a suitable choice, or the pull force of seeing their child and knowing schools are not the right place for that child or a belief, through experience and reading, that schools are irrevocably damaged. In the data we collected for this book, these two terms reflected the experience of teachers who choose to homeschool.

To attract teachers to this study, we posed a request/call out on social media under a post that appeared on three different Facebook group pages about a Channel 9 story. Channel 9 is an Australian television and media network that offers news, current affairs programming, and entertainment. The story was recorded on Channel 9 News about teachers who had chosen to homeschool their children rather than send them to school; it was prompted by a TikTok piece from a teacher who'd chosen homeschooling. One of our authors, Rebecca, was quoted in that story (McPherson, 2024). Further interviews were arranged informally with contacts in the community, and we knew who the teachers

were who homeschool. There was also some snowballing, where one person would suggest another for us to interview.

All teachers were asked to talk generally about their experience, but clarifying follow-up questions were asked to ensure the following questions were addressed:

Section 1

- Why did you decide to homeschool your children?
- What was the tipping point to choosing homeschooling?
- What's the biggest surprise you had while homeschooling/biggest myth you thought was true before you started homeschooling?

Section 2

- Do you purchase curriculum materials (such as pacers) for your children?
- Why do you/don't you purchase curriculum materials?
- Where do you get your information on homeschooling from?

Section 3

- Do you do the same things or different things from what you did in the classroom? Why?
- Has this changed over time? Why do you think that is?

These interview questions reflected the four key questions guiding this book:

1. What do teachers who homeschool bring to their homeschools? (section 1)
2. Do teachers who homeschool choose a particular style that is aligned with their teaching training? (section 3)

3. Does this style change over time? (section 3)
4. Are they more likely to register with authorities than non-teachers? (section 2)

In what follows in the next chapter, we report on the pull factors that lead to homeschooling. These categories are inductive codes from the data we collected.

3

Homeschooling versus traditional school: They are not the same thing

Learning objectives

1. To question the role schools have and how fit-for-purpose they are for today's young people and today's community.
2. Reflect on the role of direct teaching experience on the choice of homeschooling.
3. Consider how the choice of homeschooling has been theorised in the past.
4. Reflect on your own beliefs about homeschooling, who does it and why, and how that impacts your beliefs about the practice, and the young people who experience it.

Introduction

The New York Times published a piece in early 2024 (Mervosh & Paris, 2024) titled "School absences have exploded everywhere." They subtitled their piece "our relationship with school

[has] become optional.” The idea that schooling is optional explains, in some broad sense, why homeschooling is growing rapidly, particularly among teachers who have the greatest exposure to schools. Interestingly, the growth is not confined just to Queensland, but is being experienced across the whole of Australia, where there are around 45,000 legally registered homeschoolers (Payne, 2024).

In the last chapters, we introduced you to our teachers, and the pull and push factors affecting their choices. We shared Rebecca’s story of homeschooling choice as a teacher and teacher educator with school-refusing children who were homeschooling. We looked at the styles of homeschooling, the legislative framework in Australia and the numbers in the country, and in particular in Queensland, where we (and many of our participant parents) are located. As we noted, there is no research on how teachers who choose to homeschool experience their choice. While there is some government data (Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023) that shows teachers are highly represented in the homeschooling population, and that this group is growing, we do not know enough about this group. The interest in teachers is, in part, because they should be highly motivated to school their own children, having their professional identity defined by schooling. In addition, they have **a posteriori** experience of schooling, having actively participated in classrooms. As such, it appears that this group choosing homeschooling in increasing numbers communicates something about mainstream education and schooling. We are also both teachers, so we have a natural interest in what our peers choose to do.

When looking at the data, we were particularly interested in what teachers might bring to their homeschools that the other families who homeschool, those who are not teachers, might not. We also wondered if they used a particular style of homeschooling, whether they were more likely to be more structured, more eclectic, more project-based, more philosophical (Montessori or Steiner), or more likely to choose unschooling. We also wanted to know if the style changed over time, as most families who are not teachers say they changed and became more relaxed and child-led over the time they homeschooled. We wanted to know if the teachers became less rigid, less structured, and more child-led as the time went on. We also, during the interview process, began to wonder if they were more likely to keep homeschooling or were just doing it for a short time, as the current research suggests happens.

In what follows in this chapter, we address these key points.

Why are teachers homeschooling their own children?

We expected that many teachers would, through their experiences of schooling in their work, have different views on school choice than non-teachers. We were looking at these teachers as a group who are, as a recent article in the media suggested (Jackson, 2024), “canaries in the coal mine.” While writing this book, there was a statewide effort by the government to change legislation that would have required all homeschooling families to implement formal, standardised, school like curriculum in their homeschool settings, and it would have mandated reporting that would have mirrored school. Our teachers noted how

the curriculum and reporting requirements in schools weren't working for actual school children, so it would never work in homeschooling. Some of the most full-throated opposition to the government's reform was from teachers.

While writing this book, the media in Australia started to get very interested in teachers who homeschool. For example, a national piece was published that described a teacher who had a popular Vlog on TikTok and was vocal about her choice to homeschool her own children. In this piece, published by Channel 9's online web-based outlet, the journalist reported, as we've noted above, that around 20 per cent of the Queensland homeschooling population are teachers. The article noted that the number of teachers who were quitting/dropping back to casual teaching/choosing to stop full-time work and work part-time had increased all around the world. The journalist identified a case study of one teacher from Perth (Western Australia).

When Warwick's "quirky and creative" daughter – who is now nine – was born, she also began to wonder how well that "inflexible" education system would suit her.

Warwick's daughter also had some special needs, with a speech impediment. On a limited budget, Warwick and her husband couldn't find a local school which they felt was right for her.

They decided to see if homeschooling would be a good fit.

Warwick's daughter began her education by attending a small homeschool co-op with eight students part-time, with Warwick also doing some of her homeschooling on days off and weekends.

Encouraged by how well her daughter was thriving, Warwick resigned from her permanent teaching position at the beginning of 2023 to homeschool her daughter, and now also her four-year-old son, full time.

Warwick, who still does some relief teaching and casual work at a local university to help boost the family's income, said she had no regrets.

"It has given me the space to de-school, and to recover from the stress of teaching," she said.

Educating her children at home had also allowed her to re-discover her passion for teaching in a creative way, Warwick said.

McPherson, 2024, pp. 7–14

This piece suggested that there were major issues in mainstream education that would have been more immediately obvious to a teacher than to a parent. Some of the issues identified in this piece were about the child not being a good fit with the schooling system. As a teacher, this former teacher, mother and home-schooler was in a different position to note the issues, to guess where these issues would lead for her daughter, and she chose to change her child's educational setting in anticipation of what she perceived to be flaws in the education system for children like hers.

In the news piece, the system was described as inflexible, and it was not able to accommodate the needs of a child with a speech impediment. This issue was evident in other stories too. Interestingly, and significantly, this point was repeated in responses from parents who responded to an inquiry into a new law covering homeschooling and listed similar issues. Around

2,000 submissions were submitted. Of the families who submitted to the review, 10% identified themselves as teachers. Their submissions were interesting and gave us a series of themes to look at in our own data. To start, let's look at some data from submissions to an inquiry into homeschooling.

Why do teacher families say they homeschool?

There's a strong relationship between the choice and school refusal/school can't/school distress/school trauma. The growth is being driven by accidental homeschoolers. "Accidental homeschoolers" is a term used to refer to a group of homeschoolers who did not set out to homeschool but were forced, by circumstance in school (such as severe bullying) or outside of the school (the child refusing to go to school) or a combination of factors, into homeschooling.

In addition to the teacher data, we also collected all the teacher submissions that were tendered to this inquiry. The submissions to the legislative review were revealing. There were 192 (10 per cent) submissions from teachers. Of these, 62 (32 per cent) submission authors cited school refusal as a reason these teachers were unwilling to send their children back to school and were homeschooling. The reasons were reflected in the Channel 9 piece identified above. Most of them noted:

- Struggling with their child's neurodivergence in schools (a finding reflected in our data, which will be reported in the following chapters);
- School refusal was a co-condition listed as a reason for homeschooling among the cohort who identified themselves as teachers (9 per cent), and the stories were harrowing.

- Of these school-refusing families, anxiety was identified as the main neurodiversity that impacted their child's school attendance (60 per cent).
- In addition, our data, which will be reported in the following chapters, found Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) (see Cathy), anxiety and Autism (see Steph) as reasons they had chosen to homeschool.

As such, it may be that 20 per cent of the population of teachers who choose to homeschool their children do so because the child has a diagnosis, a suspicion, or identifies as Autistic, including the increasingly prevalent PDA profile. Further, it may be that teacher parents who homeschool are doing so because their child is among the 60 per cent who feel anxious at school and are refusing (from the 32 per cent who were homeschooling because of school refusal).

School refusal is a pervasive issue that is increasingly impacting children's capacity to attend school, driving the growth in homeschooling (English, 2021). This finding, that around 32 per cent of homeschool enrolments are driven by anxiety, accords with research into school refusal. As Connolly, Patterson, Hockey & Mullally (2022, p. 16) have noted, the main feature of the experiences of children who school refuse is not "a "refusal" to attend school, but rather the severe emotional distress experienced when attempting to do so." As such, they argue that the label of school refusal is inappropriate; it is, instead, more accurate to describe the situation as School Distress, as it more accurately reflects the reality. This label, "school distress," might explain why these families choose homeschooling, even just for a while, so they can correct the "distress" their child feels.

This argument accords with the data collected in the submissions we read. Teacher homeschoolers revealed, in the review submissions, stories of distress and mental ill-health their children were experiencing as a result of being at school. Some of the issues identified in the submissions included:

- Behavioural concerns through childhood that the family found difficult to understand/manage, and were affecting home life more so than school life.
- Very poor engagement with education from Prep Year onwards, including not doing work in class, not being able to engage with the teachers' requests, hiding in the classroom or outside the classroom, refusing to enter the classroom and refusing to leave the car.
- Cognitive and language impairments (intellectual disability and speech and language disorders) – late recognition of the same by the schools.

One teacher–parent-reported behavioural concerns:

At times my child is unable to engage with a particular requirement so becomes at risk of disengaging and failing. This problem would increase tenfold in an under-resourced classroom environment, especially while [child] is unable to communicate and advocate for [child's] needs (communication deficits remain a lifelong challenge for autistic people).

Another teacher–parent-reported cognitive and language impairments improved at home when the child left formal or institutional education for homeschooling. They said:

We have gone from once disengaged and struggling to keep up at school, to now thriving and happy children,

children whose confidence is now slowly increasing and anxiety decreasing.

Another teacher who had chosen homeschooling stated:

We started homeschooling in 2022 after our [child] stopped eating and going to the toilet at school, after [child's] mental health had deteriorated. [Child is] autistic and has ADHD, the school could not support [child's] learning needs let alone get [child] to a point where [child] felt safe, happy and ready to learn at school.

These data showed that, if a teacher identified anxiety as a reason to homeschool, or mentioned anxiety in the submission, there was a 22 per cent likelihood they would also mention that their child had a diagnosis or suspicion of autism, and a 21 per cent likelihood the submission would also mention both Autism and ADHD. As such, there are compounding factors supporting Connelly et al.'s (2022) analysis on school refusal. Connelly et al. noted that Autism was seen in as many as 42.6 per cent of school-refusing students, compared with reports of 7.1 per cent among neurotypical students who refused school. As Connolly et al. (2022) note, citing the work of Roman-Urrestarazu, van Kessel, Allison, Matthews et al. (2021), Autism is prevalent in just 1–2 per cent of the actual school population.

We found the same in our teacher data. In what follows, our teachers' stories of school distress are reported.

The biggest push factor in the choice to homeschool

School distress, school refusal, and school trauma seem to be the biggest drivers of a push to the homeschooling movement.

Among teachers, among the general public and in the media, the issue is pervasive. Families say they find their children are either being severely harmed in schools or are refusing to go. One of our authors, Gemma, was in that boat. Her story is instructive.

Gemma's story

We (my husband, child) and I decided to homeschool after a significant negative response to traditional mainstream school. We tried numerous ways to improve the response from our child to traditional schooling and were concerned of a possible long-term or permanent trauma impact our child would have if we continued to push mainstream schooling. As parents, we knew we needed to make a change to the way we approached our child's educational future, and initially, we did not know what that change would be. We had a family member (without a teaching background) already homeschooling after trying mainstream, and while he had never considered it, he had seen the positive changes occur to those children. Therefore, my child knew the concept of homeschooling existed and what it meant due to this connection.

There was no big marker or tipping point to make our final decision, but once made, we enacted fairly quickly. The decision could be likened to a pot on the stove that continually had things added to it until it became too full. There were consultations with external health professionals who worked with us and agreed with us that change was necessary. We had begun another school year at that point and had agreed to one more term, and allowed those ten weeks to be the major indicator of our choices. We tracked the days and gathered data for ourselves, and talked endlessly about our limited choices.

The biggest surprise to our homeschooling choice is the connection between us all; it is so much stronger. I now authentically know how my child learns best, her strengths and weaknesses. We have also developed open honesty around emotions and feelings. As a teacher, homeschooling was never a choice we considered, but it became one out of necessity, and while that has some initial choice removed from us in terms of educational choice, we wouldn't want to do it any other way now. The choices are now endless in terms of opportunities and have been easy to find and navigate. While the common myth of socialisation is an easy one to bust, for me as a teacher, there are a few myths that were indoctrinated as a mainstream educator around learning.

1. *Learning does not have to be done 9–3 and 5 days a week.*
 - a. *This is where we initially started as a family unit. All of us in the household had similar ideals of how we both thought (as parent and child) of how education “should” look. In summer, we often start as early as seven and can be done before morning tea; some days, we learn academics for longer. It can ebb and flow as your family unit needs it to. Working with a small group of children or one child means the amount of work completed in a short frame of time is vastly different to mainstream school. Using my classroom experience, something that would take a whole class 40 minutes to complete takes us in the home environment perhaps ten minutes to complete.*
2. *Learning does not have to be done at a desk, sitting up straight.*
 - a. *We have done our academic learning from a desk, the couch, from the bed, outside and in the car on the way to homeschool gatherings. Our child still learns and still*

completes the required work; however, they are now able to meet their emotional needs as well and adapt their learning space to suit. Yesterday's work was completed by 10:10 a.m., and they then moved to working on a crochet project.

3. *Children have the capacity to have a voice in their learning and what they would like to learn*
 - a. *We are now at a stage where my child will request to learn something for the upcoming term independently (for example, robotics, oceanography). Initially, I chose the inquiry of learning and talked to her about it. We then worked on choosing inquiries for learning together, and they will now independently bring an inquiry request to me. This provides my child with a deep intrinsic motivation to learn, and through inquiries of learning, they access a depth and breadth to the area that could not be achieved in mainstream. We conduct either full-term inquiries or shorter half-term cycles, depending on the topic, subject connections and timeframes.*
4. *Lengthy or extended play is integral to a child's learning and should be considered part of their formal education beyond the early years.*

Play in a mainstream educational setting is about breaks – having a break from the classroom, from learning and it is usually in two small sections broken into the day (usually 15–20 minutes and a second around 40 minutes which includes eating time for both). From a teacher's perspective often, arguments break out and there is little time to sort them out on the playground, and they flow through to the classroom and then affect teaching time. In a homeschool setting play can go on for hours within a group.

I have observed that conflicts occur far less, and if and when they do arise, they can be sorted out quickly as parents are present to help nurture the misunderstandings and manage situations. The creativity in games and common goals emerges in lengthy play and sparks creative and critical thinking, questioning and reasoning and more. As homeschooling parents, we often refer to “those moments” as to why we choose homeschooling. Recently, at the end of a day out, a foam aeroplane got caught high up in a gum tree. We stayed another 45 minutes while our group decided and attempted how best to get the plane down. There was not one argument; everybody had input of ideas, and everyone who wanted to try their tactic had the opportunity to, I should add this was with very minimal adult input. Huzzah! The plane eventually caved to the children’s request and was returned to the owner. The children in that group practised problem-solving skills, creative and critical thinking, questioning and reasoning, listening and responding to other ideas and opinions – all from a simple plane up a tree! However, this opportunity only occurred from lengthy play.

I initially began my journey like many other parents wanting to homeschool, by trawling through the regulations on my state’s website. I downloaded whatever I could and got to completing the proforma. Whether it is my background in teaching or just simply my own way of thinking, I can only describe the provided proforma as overbearing. After realising I can provide my own proforma as long as I am still showing a high-quality education. I utilised my knowledge of the Australian Curriculum (developed from years of training and experience) to develop a plan. As a family, we prefer to work with inquiries where we can. Therefore, I (as the formal educator) spend the time connecting the Australian Curriculum content descriptors

for the appropriate year level together where they seem they would most likely fit together for each term.

It should be noted that submitting a year-long learning plan does come with a disadvantage. An annual plan leaves very little creative space for change as a child shows interest in an inquiry or a unique opportunity comes up. How this is overcome is by using the end-of-year report to reflect those changes that occurred. When submitting a plan to the department, I consider it a small "p" plan, changeable. Reporting these changes is simple to include with the reporting process, where necessary. There are some subjects where I know what resources I will use, such as math, and these can easily be included in the outlined plan for the year ahead. I then include other resources that I am fairly confident we will be using and how they apply. Again, I can use the end-of-year report to note any changes we made.

When deciding on resources and paid packages, we have a mix of materials depending on time and inquiry. We commit to a bought maths curriculum as this often has the biggest impact in terms of needing resources; however, I did not commit to this when we were still learning in the early years, as we required a different approach to learning. I make these decisions with a measurement of "time or money." If I have the time to sit and create something (such as a travel journal), I will create it myself using the cost of time. However, if other commitments have stretched on time and I need an inquiry such as oceanography, then I buy it and then dissect it to something more personalised; however, the research and main body of work is done, and I have saved time by using money to buy something somebody else has done. I do acknowledge the advantage that having a teacher background brings to our homeschool experience in terms of understanding the curriculum

and other documents easily; however, homeschool is not just for teachers (see ch.7).

While I noted my teaching background above as an advantage in one area, I acknowledge its disadvantage in another. The way I teach is quite different these days. I underwent a dramatic phase of unlearning (or deschooling) of what I thought to be true about education in the way one should learn. I have spoken above about the 5 days a week, 9–3 relearning. I now know one can learn at one's own pace, and I have complete faith that we will always complete the work, even if we take some time to rest. Initially, I had timetabled the weeks, the days, the hours and felt concerned when we deviated. Thoughts of "but we must...", "this was on the schedule...", "this is behind schedule now" raced through my mind, and I constantly considered where we would catch up. Now I know we have the grace and time to catch up, and it is unnecessary to plan to that degree (it is completely necessary to plan to this detail in a school setting). We have naturally begun moving to include more elements of an unschooling approach to learning. Although I think we are still very much eclectic at this point, a melting pot of pedagogies and ideas that work for us, which has been organic and unplanned, it seems to be how my child approaches a love of learning. As I write this, they are making a board game that they thought of in their mind, and they are considering the rules and objectives and characters in the game, the layout, the artwork, the size of markers in comparison to the board, the storyline, and the purpose. Neither parent asked them to do this or encouraged it; they had begun this task on their own, taking over the dining table with craft items and note paper. As a teacher, I can see they are applying and developing skills in English, visual arts, math, tech, and science. The more I let go of the rigidity

of the mainstream classroom, the more they pick up moments of these unschooled learning moments. As Dr Gina Riley's quote from the unschooling section above applies here, I am becoming the librarian to my child's mind. I want my child to love to learn, and it has taken some time for this to develop after our experience in the mainstream system, but we are moving into this space. The more time I spend away from the mainstream system, the more I see the flaws, and that makes me want better for my child. I want them to have the confidence to voice their needs (emotional and physical) in a workplace or higher learning, and socially. I believe that giving her a strong, supportive environment now, they have a good chance of this in adulthood.

Our teachers challenged the idea of “school refusal”

Like Gemma, all our participating teacher parents challenged the idea of school refusal as misbehaviour and as a choice. None of our teacher participants suggested that their child was being naughty or was misbehaving if they refused to go to school. Instead, all participants described school refusers as children who were experiencing schooling as damaging to the child. As can be seen in the story that follows, school refusal began for Catherine's family during the COVID-19 pandemic. Significantly, this refusal was also the case for Gemma. Other parents talked about school refusal as an important element of the experience of choosing to homeschool. For example, Tara (a pseudonym) noted, in much the same terms as other parents:

Over the past four years we have gone in and out of homeschooling with our last removal from school being

our final decision – we will not be going back. Our eldest child has severe school can't and we can finally see that it is not his fault, and that school cannot meet his needs. It initially started 6 weeks into prep at a state school where he attended the school my husband taught at. He began asking not to go and within days he was going to extreme lengths to not go to school – laying in front of the car so we couldn't drive away, hiding his bag, climbing on the roof and even jumping out of the car. We removed him from school after a term and homeschooled. We have over the years attempted non-traditional schools and another state school but in all cases my son suffered severe school can't and the schools answer to it was always to pop him on an iPad, so he is out of the way and not taking up time and valuable resources (staff). This year he attended his last school. He lasted less than a term before the familiar refusal set in. Initially the school was really supportive but essentially, he did not meet their timeline for improving and support was withdrawn. My normally very happy, social child was spending all his lunch breaks hiding out in a room with whatever teacher was available to babysit, he was constantly put on the iPad so he wouldn't bother the class teacher, and he wasn't learning much or making any friends. He absolutely hated it, was overwhelmed by the huge class sizes, the misbehaviour from other kids and the constant feeling that he wasn't safe.

Tara's story mirrored those of other parents. There is the familiar story of self-harm, of dangerous behaviour to avoid school and of trying multiple schools, aligning with Gemma's story. This

situation of trying multiple schools is mirrored by Steph and by Aelet. For example, Steph's daughter had severe school refusal.

She started off education at a private school, a girl's private school here, and which, weirdly enough, was the school I went to for my whole education, but I had never intended to send her there. We just when we moved – When we moved from England. We were sort of looking around, and it was the last one on my list, but we went to look and they – they really sold me on their kind of child led environment. So, I was – I was all in, and the Prep and one was great and in grade two she had the same teacher that she'd had in grade one who was amazing. She was such a good teacher. And we're still in contact with her. But yeah, by the end of grade two we were seeing the beginnings of the neurodivergence in that classroom was really not working out. The environment was just not suited to her. She was basically one of two kids in the entire cohort that had any kind of learning or attention issues. Or, you know, emotional regulation issues. So, she really stood out at that school, and they didn't – as much as they tried to support, they kind of weren't set up for it. And their academic expectations! Halfway through grade two it just went through the roof. It was like "Oh, your assessment for English this term is to sit at a table and write for 45 minutes," in grade two! So, I was like, oh, she's not gonna do that. And so, she was finding it very stressful. She was underneath the tables, running off. It even got to the point where she was, you know, putting her fingers in pencil sharpness and stuff like that, like we were really worried.

The behaviours, running away, hiding, and self-harming, were all classic school trauma or school distress behaviours identified in previous studies (such as in Connolley et al., 2021). These behaviours were also strongly correlated with neurodivergence, which previous studies have shown is strongly correlated with school refusal (Fisher, 2023). Parents in the present study linked their child's school refusal to neurodivergence.

Aeleth was in a similar situation with her son, who had a diagnosis of dyslexia. She stated:

I have 2 children. The oldest went through school all the way from year one to year 12, without any major hiccups. Number two, though, he struggled with academic learning, struggled with learning to read, learning to spell, learning to write. And initially we – we – Oh! And he hated – this noise at school, too, the frenetic noise. So, we tried changing schools. We changed schools twice and that initially helped. We went to a little alternate school that initially helped. But then eventually, around year four he fell into a hole because he still couldn't read, and he was being bullied by this stage. So, there was bullying happening and he was extremely unhappy. Suicidal ideation. And then – then, finally, school refusal. He just refused to get in the car to go to school. So – I would not have known that even that homeschool existed, except that my sister homeschooled her children, so I thought it looks like that's the only option left. So that's how we came to it.

This story shows the role of school refusal and its connection to, as with Steph, neurodivergence. Aeleth's son was dyslexic,

bullied for dyslexia, not engaged or fitting in, and that created the conditions of possibility for school refusal. The school refusal was what pushed Aelet and her husband to homeschooling, even though their other son was fine in school and was able to successfully complete his studies.

Claire's daughter also experienced serious school refusal. She was enrolled in a pre-school in the large city centre near her before Claire and her family moved to a very remote location. In that remote location, her daughter's school refusal started and radically changed her daughter's life. The school refusal was very pointed and marked, and included self-harm. The child, Theodora (a pseudonym), was in preschool so would only have been five or six years of age. Claire stated:

Obviously, it was in my heart that I really wanted to homeschool. Our eldest started school started pre-school, and she did. 6 months of preschool in [town] loved it was well balanced and happy, and everything was going well. We moved to [rural area] halfway through the year and she ended up experiencing quite severe school refusal. Things were very different at the preschool there [than they had been in the town], and she was very unhappy. She ended up with like – medical conditions related to, you know, the permanent, sore tummy, and feeling sick, depressed, and I still kept persisting. I still kept trying to push her. We got to the stage where the Prep. Teacher would have to hold [Theodora] while I tried to get back in the car and I literally couldn't get the car started before she would be sitting there in the seat next to me. She'd managed to bite, struggle, kick her way free and back onto the seat. Yep, and even

still I persisted, I don't know why, but at the very end of the year we came back down to [town], and it was the very last week of school, and we went to visit her old pre preschool and the teacher asked could [Theodora] stay for the day? We'd love [Theodora] to stay for the day. Can she stay? And I said, Yeah, sure if that's all right, like that's fine. And when I picked her up and I remember the exact words the preschool teacher said, I can't believe how much confidence she's lost in the short time you've been away. And that broke me – That just broke me. It's like if one thing I wanted was to build confident self, confident, happy kids. And that one thing just broke me. So yep, I went. I went home from there with [Theodora] and rang that started ringing around the department to find out what I had to do to homeschool that afternoon.

As this story illustrates, in line with much of the research (see Connolley et al., 2023) on school refusal, the child can be seriously and severely affected by the experience. In addition, as Fisher (2023) noted, there is no evidence that the interventions put in place by schools have any success. In the case of Theodora (and her mum, Claire), there was no success; homeschooling was the only option. Interestingly, Claire had a son whom she also homeschooled. When Theodora was in high school, she enrolled both her children in schools, but only her son stayed. Theodora lasted two and a half years before withdrawing and finishing her schooling years through college.

The stories of school refusal are mirrored in the literature, but it does not seem that the teachers were any more equipped to deal with the issue when it affected their own children.

While Aeletth was aware of homeschooling because of her sister, and Claire knew enough about it to call the department, Steph only chose homeschooling because a friend suggested it to her when they were staying with Steph and their family. While it may have been a stressful choice to make, all parents in the study ($n = 12$) reported that it was the right choice for their child.

In studies, it appears that school refusal is a consistent, chronic problem that can't be solved with a few weeks, months or terms here or there of absence, distance schooling or time away. Indeed, Connolly et al. (2022) noted the persistent nature of the absences across the school life of the child, "indicating autistic students are at heightened risk of SAPs (school attendance problems) across their school life" (p. 2). These young people also experience more interruptions to their education than do neurotypical students. The reasons for the absences, "include sensory processing difficulties, feelings of exclusion, lack of teacher understanding, and anxiety" (Connolly et al., 2022, p. 2), all mirrored the stories our teacher parents told us for this book. As such, it is not unexpected that our teacher homeschoolers would have found relief for their child by bringing them home and homeschooling them (see also Fisher, 2023). The issue that leads to the refusal appears to be the environment of the school, including the noises in the classroom, the behaviours of other students, the requirements to be social and to engage with other children all day, and potentially missing social cues as well, as Aeletth and Tara noted. As such, the factors that affect the student with a neurodiverse brain are precisely the ones that make school difficult, leading to school refusal.

Our teacher homeschoolers' stories also reflect the submission data where anxiety and Autism were significantly co-occurring and where the families experienced many absences from school. What's missing from Connolly et al.'s (2022) study, but evident in the data here, is the role of schools in enforcing absences. What we mean here is that families were forced to keep their children home from school because the child's neurodivergence was disruptive in the classroom (see Aeletth).

But what surprised us was the issue of neurodivergence being seen as misbehaviour. All of our teaching in university has included preparing pre-service teachers for the realities of neurodivergence in the classroom and explaining how it is not misbehaviour. The other surprise was the extent of a child being denied a schooling place because of their neurodivergence, seen as misbehaviour, because of how it affected the classroom, and there was no other alternative space for the child to escape to. Submitters included stories of their children who were not allowed to go to school at all because their behaviour was not manageable in the classroom. The persistent, chronic absences led to the child being so far behind the rest of their class that there was no point in going at all, as they were home more because the school refused them entry. In addition to the academic issues, the child experienced bullying because they were not coping in the classroom and frequently, the bullying led to even more disciplinary absences. For example, a submitter suggested the role of the school in failing to support their child's needs:

[my child] is Autistic, has a sensory processing disorder and severe anxiety with a speech impediment and has trouble processing multiple noises at once, especially

whilst trying to concentrate ([child] says the classroom noise is too much for [child] to bear and this has proven true at school with [child] needing to be removed from class multiple times so as not to disrupt the others). [Child's name] is an energetic child who has trouble sitting still for long periods of time.

As such, the schools appeared to be incapable of meeting children's needs. And the child's energetic behaviour made school impossible. The child was unable to stay in class due to their needs and behaviour.

Another stated:

[Child] was suicidal at school and [child's] behaviours often had me picking [child] up early or [child] being suspended from school [child] has fallen behind in [child's] learning and we are restarting from earlier year subjects.

This quote shows not only the extent of the distress experienced by young people who identify as having Autism at school, but also the role of the school in failing to support. In both cases, the school did not support the child's needs, but in the second submission, the school actively sought to remove the child from the classroom.

However, the issues raised here call into question some important issues for the community more broadly and reflect changes to the community since the COVID-19 pandemic school closures increased the number of homeschoolers (English, 2021b). They also suggest that, in an environment where teachers are increasingly choosing to homeschool their children, with up to 50 per cent of parents who engaged with an independent reviewer of

the government's homeschooling management in the education department noting that they were or had been teachers (Dunston, personal correspondence, 12 August 2024), there is a clash between what departments of education see as a suitable education for young people and what parents see as a suitable education.

4

What do these data tell us about “school choice?”

Learning objectives

1. Consider homeschooling as a solution to the “education crisis” affecting classrooms at the micro level and the wider community at the macro level.
2. Articulate how teachers might be affected by their teaching experience and how that might influence their homeschooling approaches.
3. Reflect critically on your capacity to be neutral in relation to teachers who are increasingly choosing homeschooling for their children.

Introduction

There are several important things to learn about why teachers homeschool and how they homeschool from this data. The first is that parents who are teachers are unhappy with the school system. The second is that parents who are teachers are not prepared to let the government tell them what they want to do in their homes. Now, this latter point suggests a strongly

anti-establishment approach. While that may be true for some, it's not true for the majority, and they do not behave in a strongly anti-establishment way. It seems like it's more about teachers feeling like they are professionals and are trained to know what works for a child, in homeschooling their child, and how they are able to learn. Significantly, none of them saw their choice as any different to choosing another private school and participants (such as Aeeth) noted how they'd tried multiple schools, including private schools, before determining that homeschooling was their only option.

Homeschooling as a school choice

Homeschool is one option available to parents in Australia and in many countries around the world. The practice is illegal in certain countries, such as Germany, and partially legal in others, such as China. In Australia, it is legal and facilitated in the Education Act in each state and territory. It is located in those legislative documents in the same part of the acts as those that deal with private schooling or non-government schooling. To begin, it is worthwhile explaining the Australian education system, its funding and its organisation.

Australia has a long history of education choice. All schools are funded by governments, as such, the difference between "government" and "non-government" schools are largely determined by (1) whether the school can accept extra money in the form of fees, however this point is no longer as clear cut as state schools are increasingly asking parents for money for services because they cannot fund these services on the government funding alone (Rowe, 2025), (2) which level of government provides their

funding (state or federal governments), and (3) how they are managed (by the Education Act or at arm’s length through each state or territory’s non-state school accreditation arrangements). Like families in other jurisdictions, Australian families have a “choice” about their schooling. In addition, schools are understood to be operating in a market for education. Homeschooling sits outside of the private/public dynamic. Homeschoolers receive no funding from the government, and the departments that manage their homeschool cohort must find the money to do this work through other sources paid to the department.

We acknowledge that, in spite of being managed at some level by the state and territory government education departments and education acts, homeschoolers operate partially outside of the education market in Australia. Unlike in New Zealand, where families are able to access some funding in the form of a home education supervision allowance (Ministry of Education: Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2023), outside of specialised funding to cover the costs of children’s special education needs and other National Disability Insurance Scheme priorities, there is no funding available to homeschooling families. The money these families pay in tax that would otherwise go to funding schools is not used, often described as saving the government significant amounts of money (New South Wales. Parliament, 2014). However, we reject the notion that homeschoolers are non-market players, as they participate in the education market through their decision to withdraw their children from schools, in particular, most young people who are homeschooled have been schooled at some point (see Aelet and Claire), and many participate in the ancillary education services market through

co-curricular participation (see Aurini & Davis, 2005). Our participants ran microschools and offered specialised services and advice to homeschoolers (see Madeline, who did that in a paid capacity, and Violet, who was a volunteer homeschooling advocate).

We further argue that homeschoolers are part of the education market because they are participants in the education market, even if withdrawing is a choice. No choice is neutral because all choices influence and have an impact on the wider education market. Schools are funded by the Student Enrolment Census (children who attend school on the day the census is taken); if a family chooses not to send their child to a school, that costs the school funding. Due to Australia's complex government funding arrangements that pay for almost all the running costs of all schools, government (through state funding arrangements), and non-government schools (through federal funding arrangements), all funding is tied to enrolments, so parents' choices have a political effect. The effect of this approach is that competition between schools is encouraged to fight for funding and that makes the decision of a student (or that student's family) to attend a particular school a zero-sum game, in that the money that student attracts is taken out of one school and taken to a different school, or not taken to any school as is the case with the home education cohort.

Why do people choose home education?

It is important to note, as Morton (2010) suggested, the choice to homeschool is not "one choice" or "a once and for all choice." Rather, our participants demonstrated what Morton (2010)

noted, that homeschoolers “are not a homogeneous group (in fact it is debatable as to whether the term “group” is appropriate due to their fragmented nature)” (p. 45) and that there is no more one way of doing homeschooling as there is one type of parent who homeschools. However, much of the literature on why families choose homeschooling suggests that there was a change with the pandemic, as Gemma and Claire’s story showed. Prior to the pandemic, there were some common stereotypes about homeschoolers as “social misfits”: either “tree-hugging hippies,” “religious fanatics,” or “hothousing” parents determined that their offspring should achieve academic excellence at an early age” (Morton, 2010, p.46). As early as 2015, English suggested they were related to parenting philosophies.

Other studies have suggested that changes in the educational landscape have led to increased uncertainty, and this uncertainty has led to the rise in homeschooling choice. For these studies, the trend towards home education was driven by the school closures in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to an increase in home education, which can be expected to grow in the future (cf. English, 2021). These studies found parents saw that schooling could happen from home and showed children that learning could be done at home without the ancillary stresses of the classroom, as Tara’s story showed. Significantly, even prior to the pandemic, as both Violet and Aeletth were early adopters, homeschooling from the 2000s, experiences in schools that were unpleasant led to the choice to home educate (English, 2013; 2021a; 2021b; Rothermel, 2003). Research notes that students who identify as having a special educational need (Gemma, Tara, Aeletth) may be more likely to be home educated (Green

& Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Morse & Bell, 2018; Slater, Burton & McKillop, 2022). Studies suggest parents are “forced” to home educate, as our parents relayed, when they have exhausted all other choices available in schools (Aeeth is a particular case in point). In particular, these studies identify many special education needs, with Autism being identified as a key determinant of the choice of homeschooling in several places.

Studies (Slater, Burton & McKillop, 2022) suggest that students who identify as Autistic benefit from the choice to home educate (see also Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Morse & Bell, 2018). They are more settled, experience better academic success (Lawrence, 2018; ; Slater, Burton & McKillop, 2022), and have time to visit therapists and specialists that may interfere with learning in the school day (Gribble & English, 2016). Aeeth’s story showed this experience clearly. In addition, they are not “taken out” in a homeschool setting and seen as somehow different or special needs, like they would be if they had to leave a classroom for therapies during the school day. Further, parents who choose to home educate, especially after their child who identifies as Autistic has been schooled for a period of time, also describe greater satisfaction with the experience of home education in comparison to schools (Lawrence, 2018; Slater, Burton & McKillop, 2022).

There is some international research that suggests bullying may contribute to the decision to home educate (e.g., Slater et al., 2022; English, Campbell & Moir, 2023; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023). However, with this work, bullying is one of a suite of issues a child may face in schools. Claire and Tara both described bullying in their stories. An Australian study conducted by English,

Campbell, and Moir (2023) showed that, for the small group of families who participated in their study, bullying had driven them to choose home education. It is important to note that the bullying was associated with other issues, including physical disabilities, social-emotional issues and neurodivergence. As such, while their cohort identified bullying as the main push to homeschool, it cannot be untangled from the other factors parents in the cohort faced in advocating for their children in schools. It is noted that two of the participants in that study were also teachers.

Studies have explored the experiences of children who are home educating, in particular after a period of school, as with the parents in our study, and related these to specific mental health concerns including anxiety (De Wit, Eagles, & Regeer, 2017), drug addiction and abuse (Hodge, Salas- Wright, & Vaughn, 2017), depression (Guterman & Neuman, 2017) and trauma (Lawson & Sibla, 2016). These studies have found that children are more likely to be engaged in their learning, happy and settled in a home education environment (De Wit, Eagles, & Regeer, 2017). In one study from India, specifically concerned with the unschool population, De Wit, Eagles and Regeer (2017) found unschooling to be the only way families had found to restore the lives and happiness of children with mental health conditions. They argued that experiences of anxiety and stress were reduced in India’s unschooled population. Similarly, Gemma, Tara, and Claire all reported their child was much happier and more settled, less stressed and much calmer after the homeschooling experience.

DeWit et al. (2017) also suggest there were significant advantages for unschooled children, especially those who are vulnerable to anxiety, in South and Southeast Asian schooling systems that are

characterised by rote learning, frequent high-stakes testing and a note-taking approach to teaching. They suggest the students' feelings of anxiety and depression are related to being out of control and lacking agency in a schooling system that rewards surface-level knowledge acquisition and a focus on learning that was concerned with the next step, usually a standardised test to determine university entrance, rather than interest-led learning for learning's sake. They argued that, because the experiences of unschooling facilitated safety and control over their lives, the young people of their study were less anxious and happier than the general school-age population when they were home and not learning at school. These young people's experience accords with findings from other studies (cf. Riley, 2018; Ricci, 2016; Hodge, Salas-Wright & Vaughn, 2017), which suggest empowerment and agency to choose the learning approach that suits their needs may ameliorate educational issues.

In one study, Hodge, Salas-Wright and Vaughn (2017), looking at drug use, anxiety and depression in the home-educated population, found the home-educated cohort was less likely to use drugs, be depressed or have anxiety when compared with mainstream schooled populations. Participants in our study, including Gemma, Tara, Aelet and Claire, reported their child had less anxiety after the period of homeschooling. Their work suggested that the informal networks with others in a community may be conducive to a positive adolescent experience.

They also suggest that, in spite of the heterogeneity of the home-educated population, the different learning approaches to those taken in mainstream schools, and the relationships with parents, may lead to lower levels of anxiety and depression. A relationship

was noted in Violet's and Aeeth's responses. Significantly, as Ray (2004) noted, "numerous studies, employing various psychological constructs and measures, show that the home educated are developing at least as well, and often better than, those who attend institutional schools" (p. 7).

Further studies have looked at young people who are gifted or twice exceptional and found, in line with other special education needs, that gifted young people who are home educated are more satisfied with their education (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2013), perhaps because they are able to accelerate their learning in line with their needs (Winstanley, 2009). These studies find that the students enjoy benefits from their home education, in particular because they are able to manage their learning (Winstanley, 2009), which, aligned with self-determination theory, is closely linked to academic success and satisfaction (Riley, 2018). These studies find improvements in behaviour and engagement among the gifted home education cohort in contrast with their experiences in mainstream school (Jolley, Matthews & Nester, 2013).

Previous work has tried to classify the choice using categories. Harding and Farrell (2003) have looked at the situation in Australia and found that the motivations to choose home education are generally philosophical. Harding and Farrell (2003) and Harding (2011) argue that home-educating families choose this pathway for a number of reasons. Harding (2011) argued that the reasons people home educate include religious belief, parental responsibility, concerns over quality of teaching, especially around literacy and numeracy; social development; avoidance of bullying and other negative peer experiences; and distance and additional needs. Harding (2011) classified these as decisions based

on philosophy, and this is often cited as the main reason parents choose to home educate their children in Australia, as in other countries (cf. Van Galen, 1991; Green & Hoover Dempsey, 2007).

Van Galen's (1991) work is probably the best known and most cited explanation of homeschooling choice. They argued that there were two groups of families who homeschool: **ideologues** and **pedagogues**. **Ideologues** stand in deep opposition to the notion of a public or mainstream school, so that neither a government nor a non-government mainstream school offering a standardised curriculum would suit their beliefs about what is right for their family or their children. They are said to home educate because (1) they "object to what is being taught" and (2) "to strengthen their relationship with their children" (Van Galen, 1991, pp. 66–67). This group included fundamentalist Christians who wanted their children to be immersed in fundamentalist doctrine, conservative political and social beliefs, and to reinforce their beliefs through their own choices. They tended to report believing that the family is the bedrock of society. In her discussions of this cohort, she noted that most had initially wanted or chosen a private school education for their child but had encountered problems. These problems included: (1) they could not afford to pay the fees, (2) they were unable to open their own private school even though they tried, or (3) they were unsure of the ideological convictions of their children's teachers. While many fundamentalist religious schools in Australia covenant their teachers to specific religious ideologies, it is difficult to "prove" that they do indeed follow that belief, and there have been issues with schools following that belief in line with the Australian employment law (O'Flaherty, 2023). In this group, in

Van Galen’s study, even when other options became available or when the costs became overwhelming, they continued to homeschool, preferring it to any other option available.

Building on the work of Mayberry and Knowles (1989) noted that Christian families who disagreed with the ideological intentions of the curriculum were not alone. Indeed, other, non-religiously aligned families also objected to what they saw as limitations in the curriculum, including that it was “dumbing down” the concepts to which students were exposed. They also objected to the ways schools managed the social experiences of children in the playground, a finding reflected in the work of English et al. (2023) and decided, as with the more recent English study, to home educate in order to preserve their children’s confidence and counteract bullying and other issues. These issues were noted here (Aeleth, Claire, Cathy, and Steph).

Religious parents who were identified as “ideologues” by Van Galen (1991) also had problems with the social experiences of their children in that they did not agree with their children being exposed to the secular children’s ideas in the playground. They also saw their children as persecuted by the secular institution, the secular children, and the secular teachers. It became their responsibility to educate their children in line with their beliefs, and through political engagement (Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021), they enshrined their right to home educate to provide their children with an education in line with their beliefs. Further, it aligned with biblical teachings such as Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and other scripture that supported parents’ roles in the family as Godly and above secular and legal requirements to allow governmental intervention in families, as with schools. Van Galen (1991) noted

that home education was a means of “fulfilling God’s general plan for Christian parents and His specific plans for their families” (p. 71). Furthering the political engagement of these families, Marshall and Valle (1996) argued that secular parents also believed they had a right to determine what was appropriate for their children to learn and protect their children from the harmful influences of the playground.

Van Galen’s (1991) work suggested the other group of parents choosing homeschooling were what they termed **pedagogues**. This group were said to be homeschooling “for pedagogical reasons” (Van Galen, 1991, p. 71). They were critical of schools “not so much [because] the schools teach heresy, but that schools teach whatever they teach ineptly” (Van Galen, 1991, p. 71). Significantly for this book, in this category, Van Galen (1991) found many of the “pedagogues” were also teachers or parents who noted they had a research (either formal or informal) interest in the art and science of pedagogy. At the very least, most of the parents in this cohort had read widely on child development, with many becoming involved in child-rearing-focused organisations, including the La Leche League (Van Galen, 1991). These families reportedly believed in personal responsibility, and without using the term, demonstrated a strong belief in the responsibility bestowed on them by their role as parents and by their parenting work.

Homeschool challenged their beliefs about quality teaching and learning?

It is probably unsurprising to the reader that the teachers did not homeschool in the same ways they taught school. For the

majority of our participants ($n = 11$), there was no attempt to meet the curriculum for the age level of their child, and it would be pointless to even try, as they saw their teaching experience as not being very relevant to their homeschooling. However, participants ($n = 9$) described how the experience of homeschooling had affected their teaching. Aeletth stated, "it gave me the confidence, I suppose, to go to sort of thumb my nose a bit at the – the school system, I guess." Sassy described her approach to reporting, not homeschooling, as constructing educator dialogue that is commonly used throughout the teaching community. She, and others ($n = 8$) described how their teaching credentials had allowed them to speak the school like language (of departments of education, of teaching and learning and of pedagogy and curriculum)

and, as such, were able to fly under the radar. However, their extensive knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, outside of meeting regulatory burdens, did not appear to be of much value in the prosecution of education in their homeschools. For Tara it made her think about the differences between education and schools. Tara stated:

Re-creating school at home is rarely a good idea. We have been conditioned to believe that school is the bees knees, the way children learn and what has to be done to succeed in life. It takes time to de-school and to learn to trust in learning.

Similarly, Aeletth noted that, for her, "the biggest thing for me, once we started home, schooling was letting go of being a teacher." Participants ($n = 9$) described how they could not stomach the ways schools were teaching now. For example, Claire

spoke for those participants who mentioned not being able to go back to mainstream, Claire was teaching special education, and her partner was a teacher in a distance education school, when she said:

Both my husband and I, and we went back to face-to-face teaching. And then we both desperately tried to get into [distance education schools], because we needed a full-time job that paid properly but we just couldn't stomach what's going on in face-to-face schools. So – since I homeschooled, I really don't think I could – certainly not mainstream. I'm a special ed teacher, yeah. And I find at least what we're doing in special education is a lot more student focused and so I'm okay with that. I – I would feel like a fraud to be in a mainstream class, and I still do have to teach mainstream classes ... It's a fine line we tread. It's – what's the terminology I used? yeah, I think it's selling my soul to teach in mainstream schools, because I just – I feel like a fraud. I'm doing something I don't believe in. My heart's not there. And even now, even what I'm doing it. I'm working in special needs. I'm working online with kids who are at home. Still, the curriculum – it's so screwed and the way we have to teach it, and all of the extra bits they tack on to the real task of teaching is just annoying distractions from the real focus which is meant to be the students.

Claire's experience was mirrored in other participants' experiences. Tara talked about the differences between homeschooling and mainstream. She stated:

I find what I do in the classroom is hugely prescribed by the Australian Curriculum and assessment driven. Often

there is no time to explore things deeply or ironically, we explore things too deeply and the children lose interest. If I tried to replicate school at home, I’m certain I would have a fair bit of resistance.

Tara’s response supported those of other participants. There were strong alignments with reports of realising how squashed and limiting the curriculum was (Catherine) or, as Violet’s anecdote above shows, how incapable teachers are of meeting the students where they are and meeting them and their needs every day. Others talked about how inauthentic the experience was and how bored both teachers and students were (Madeline, Sian, Cathy). Aeletth talked about the power imbalance and how that impacted students’ experiences, which Lisa described as limiting their capacity to be creative and entrepreneurial. The result was that, for all the teachers, there was no way to return to the career they loved outside of alternative offerings (Catherine, Violet, Sassy), online (Claire), or relief (Steph).

In the following chapter, we will begin to explore the teachers’ experiences of their choice to homeschool.

Bringing it all together

There are some study points to consider at the end of this chapter:

1. Our participants were unhappy with the school, but it was their parenting that had the greatest influence on what they expected to be the outcome of the choice of homeschooling.
2. There was a strong belief that schools were failing, even among our teachers who reported doing everything they

could to “fix” the school experience for the students in their care.

3. In your opinion, do families make rational choices in relation to education? Explain your answer.
4. How might the COVID-19 pandemic-19 school closures have influenced ideologues and pedagogues differently?
5. Do you think that families who are deliberate homeschoolers might ever take their children to school? What drivers might influence those choices?

5

Why would I want my child in that environment?

Learning objectives

1. Critically examine how classroom experiences affected these teachers' choices.
2. Reflect on how these teachers, who eventually chose homeschooling, were affected by parenting and how their children challenged their pre-conceived notions of appropriate school choices.
3. Identify three reasons common to these teachers' experiences that led them to choose homeschooling.
4. Compare and contrast the inside-school and outside-school experiences that led to the choice of homeschooling.

Introduction

In this chapter, we examine the pull to homeschooling. We asked the teachers what they previously thought of, or knew about, homeschooling before they began their journey and what it was that drew them to homeschool. One of our participants, Sassy,

summed up the experiences she had in schools herself as “Why would I want my child in that environment?” This phrase was seen in all the participant interviews; all teachers who participated in this study were less than impressed with the school environment and did not want their child to experience it. There were vague generalisations around behaviours and issues and policies and procedures, as well as specific instances in their teaching careers that led to them being positively disposed to homeschooling. These are outlined in this chapter.

Previous experiences with homeschool

Teachers reported having limited previous experience with homeschooling, either having not considered it ($n = \text{five}$) or thought only briefly about it ($n = \text{five}$). Two of the cohort said they had met homeschoolers either through their church (Violet) or through family (Jeni). Overall, however, they described themselves as taking school for granted, suggesting a normative belief in the primacy of education in schools, and not thinking deeply about whether school was right for their children. Most of the cohort ($n = 11$) described how, as teachers, they had previously held stereotypes about homeschoolers, suggesting they were ambivalent to homeschooling, and were not aware of the reasons families choose homeschooling.

Previous experiences in schools

All of the teachers in our study had taught in schools around Australia. Significantly, a plurality of participants had experiences in non-mainstream schools ($n = 9$), whether that was overseas

teaching ($n = 2$), EAL/D ($n = 1$), behaviour schools ($n = 2$), teaching in distance education schools ($n = 1$), Montessori ($n = 1$), special education centres ($n = 1$), or specialist literacy teachers ($n = 1$). It may be that teachers with non-mainstream education, most of whom did teach mainstream in some capacity, whether it was the EAL/D teacher who worked in a mainstream school or the distance education schools which offer a mainstream curriculum, may be more attracted to choosing something that is different from mainstream offerings, on campus, and with young people who are enrolled in a mainstream environment. However, it may also be that they have a different view of the education system than those teachers who work exclusively in the mainstream. For example, one of our participants, Sassy, stated that what she'd witnessed in mainstream was:

you know, like demanding stuff from these little 6-year-old kids about behaviour, you know, 'we're not going anywhere till everyone is standing still, standing on the line, hey?' So, the demands were like just not age-appropriate stuff.

This anecdote suggests that the curriculum, pedagogy, classroom environment and expectations were not child-appropriate, were not centred on what was achievable, and that may be why, as Sassy and Catherine noted, young children were being expelled in prep.

Similarly, others, who had worked overseas ($n = 2$), compared Australian classrooms unfavourably with their international teaching experience. To illustrate, Lisa described schools in Europe as not the same as schools in Australia, having taught across both European and Australian schools. She noted:

When I talk about it with my colleagues, I feel Australia is still raising, or like teaching children to work in a factory kind of job where you do as you are told, and you do your job and that's it. I feel we should be raising entrepreneurs, people who can think creatively, and think outside the box, and I feel you very much need to fit inside the box here to be able to fit into the schooling system. I feel like we're squashing all creativity out of the children, making them very good, very compliant little workers.

This story from Lisa also demonstrates, in line with Sassy's experiences, how the expectations were more about compliance, about good behaviour and about being quiet and obedient rather than being good learners or good students who were able to think for themselves and to add to the society in which they were based. Both these stories were about pedagogy, but they, and others ($n = 2$), also identified curriculum as a problem. For example, Madeline talked about how stifling the curriculum was to her as a teacher, so she imagined it must be really boring for the children experiencing it as students. She stated:

So, before I was in a mainstream school, I was doing applied learning with kids who were quite creative, but they were disengaged, and they came to [the special behaviour school] in year 9 and 10, and we got to be quite creative. And then we taught them in 9 and 10 and then went on to [a technical college in the state in which Madeline was based]. So, they were – it was much more of a partnership in the type of education we were doing with those kids. And we did big, cross-curricular kind of projects, but they had a lot of say in their learning.

It's like they were able to run big events, all that type of stuff, real life stuff. Then I moved back into a mainstream classroom. At that time, another school asked me – they were starting their new school – and asked me to come across as an applied learning person. But [after my experiences in the behaviour school with specialised instruction] I went into like year 7 mainstream and realised how bored I was, and if I was bored and the kids were bored, we were all bored together, and just how much basically, we were trying to just tick off curriculum, and there was no independent learning. There was no innovative learning, because what I started to realise was, in the mainstream curriculum, teachers just don't have time for [creativity and innovative learning] compared to where I was at previously in the specialised schools. It was a real eye opener for me, because I'd been in the senior and applied learning like maths methods. So, I hadn't been down in those specialised schools for a while not in a mainstream classroom, and I started to think of it through the lens of my daughter.

Again, the issue was that the mainstream was seen as lacking once the teacher had an experience outside it and came back. The experience of mainstream, particularly after becoming a parent, changed the teachers' perspectives on what was appropriate and right, and meant that they realised the schooling system was broken or not working or inappropriate not just for them and the children in their care, but also for their own child or children.

These experiences are all critical of mainstream education as it is currently practised in Australia. All the teachers in the study identified that they felt the curriculum was limiting, the experiences

were dull and boring, and the children were disengaged. None of our participants reported they were satisfied with the way the mainstream curriculum encouraged a pedagogy that was focused on outcomes, was transactional, and did not have time for relationships, which were foundational to the child's experience of education. Further, there was no correlation between what was being taught and the child's need to learn something, which came up in multiple ($n = 3$) interviews.

How do they report their experiences?

As has been previously argued (see Arai, 2000), the decision to homeschool is rarely an instant decision. We found that in our interviews here, with 92 per cent of our cohort ($n = 11$), as research has suggested (Rothermel, 2003; Van Galens, 1991), the decision to try homeschooling came after a period of schooling. In line with previous research in this field (English, 2021), families who are homeschooling are homeschooling not as their first choice, but as a decision they come to after a period of schooling. Only one of the teachers had actively engaged with homeschoolers prior to choosing homeschooling; in her case, it was in her church, and she had decided to give it a try before sending their children to school. "If the homeschool thing didn't work out," Violet was prepared to send her child to school. As it turned out, all four of her children were homeschooled. Teachers are, as Sassy described, "the canary in the coalmine" as they have dual experiences of school, both professional as a teacher and personal through their own children. This parent noted that, if they are not supportive of a system that they have signed up to as

their profession, it does not augur well for the future of schooling. Others ($n = 10$) described how things became more real for them once they decided to homeschool their own children.

In her story, Violet talked about a child who'd really affected her in her teaching career. We will call this child Amelia. Amelia was struggling in school, and her mother had approached Violet to ask her what she was going to do to ensure Amelia was able to improve. At that moment, Violet realised there was nothing she could do to ensure Amelia was successful, while this parent's concern was this one child, Amelia, Violet's concern was for Amelia and the 29 other children in the class. There was no way she could meet the child's needs in a mainstream classroom. She stated:

In year 9, I gave her a report that said something like Amelia is not meeting her full potential, and her mother came to me and said, what are you going to do to help Amelia meet her full potential and I thought to myself, even in this small private school I teach 150 kids a week. In the various classes. Amelia's class is quite a large class that has maybe nearly 30 kids in it, and it's just not possible for me to do something special for Amelia in the time and the context that I had and I didn't understand that at the time until I had my own children. It wasn't clear to me that that mother did not understand how difficult that would be for me to do. But when I had my own children, I thought, I understand Amelia's mother, she only had one child at the school and she didn't really care about all the other kids at the school, because her focus is that one child who she is committed to becoming the best you know, meeting her full potential, or whatever.

For Violet, as this anecdote shows, there were serious limitations on what a teacher was able to do, was able to achieve, was able to help with when the teacher has 30 children under her care and, in high school as Violet's experience was based, there was only three 70-minute lessons in the week in which to meet that child's needs. When there are 30 children in the class, it means that each child could hope to get, on average, seven minutes of uninterrupted teacher time in any class.

Similarly, Cathy talked about how, in her teaching experience, all the relational elements of learning were dispensed with in order to get through the curriculum in the time allotted. This relationship also extended to behavioural issues. She stated:

So, with school. There are a lot of demands. The pace was fast ... I saw, and this isn't a comment on teachers, they're all doing the best that they could, very professional, caring teachers I met. But it was the pace of the curriculum. The pace means that the kids who don't understand are left behind, and then other kids, who knew exactly what was going on, who were ahead, they were sat there with their hands on their heads, waiting for everybody else to catch up. And they were all kept separate, there was no room for collaboration, no allowance for kids talking together, mixing together unless it's a break. In one of the classes I saw, there was a child, a female student, who was being disruptive. She sat behind they pulled a whiteboard on wheels out and set her behind that so she couldn't distract the rest of the class. She was probably bored.

Again, the quote here shows how our teachers' perspectives on the issues in schools were mostly concerned with how young

people were being forced to move at the pace of the curriculum, not the pace of the child. They reported their experience was one of limited space in the learning environment to provide the opportunity for catch-up, and distractions, because the curriculum moved so fast to cover it all, were unable to be met with compassion or understanding. The young people these teachers witnessed were left to their own devices and had to learn what was being taught without the relationship with the teacher or their peers. Relationships were seen as something for break time, not the core business of the classroom. In each of these stories, the teachers relayed how their experiences in the classroom as teachers had coloured their beliefs about what was wrong with schools.

Bringing it all together

As Sassy was quoted, teachers who are parents have the dual experiences of school, both professional as a teacher and personal through their own children. They sit in the unique position of seeing a child's education from both sides. They see the system and work within it, and the whole picture. These parents then take the individual lens of that inside knowledge on education and apply it to their own child's education and experience. If we take Violet's story of trying to help Amelia, a previous student of hers and the seven minutes a week she could apply to support Amelia, and then apply this to her own child's education, Violet argued the impact the system would have had on her own child's education.

By comparing these teachers' stories to the analogy of the canary in the coalmine, there is a common link. Historically,

canaries were used down in mines to test for toxic gases that could not be monitored in a time before the technology for this purpose had been invented. Canaries were taken down into the working mine to test the air quality. Once a canary fell off its perch unconscious or stopped singing, that was used as an early danger warning system for the miners to remove themselves from the situation. (Not Your Grandfather's Mining Industry n.d.).

This analogy is applied here in this book; in fact, the title is inspired by the quote from one interviewee (Sassy). Teachers who choose to remove themselves and their children from the mainstream system are the early warning detectors that the system is in its current state. It is not new information that teachers as a whole are leaving the system. Media reports suggest that, in Australia, up to 70 per cent of teachers are considering leaving the profession in the next five years (Longmuir, 2023). However, what is relatively new is the rise in teachers removing themselves and their child from the school and choosing to homeschool. They are completely turning their backs on the system they chose as a career for both themselves and their children. They are the early warning detectors that something is amiss within the system that needs attention; they are the canaries in the education system coal mine. If they are removing themselves and their children from the system, what does this say?

The curriculum is mentioned multiple times through interviews. It is a common topic among teachers, the growth and weight the Australian Curriculum now has on its impending learners.

There are some study points to consider at the end of this chapter:

1. Our teachers were very unhappy with the standardised nature of the curriculum and the pedagogy it necessitated. They argued it didn't work for the children in their classrooms or their own children, and that this curriculum and pedagogy dynamic was influencing their choice of an education.
2. "There is limited space in the learning environment to catch up..." Perhaps the standardised, centralised, inflexible nature of the Australian Curriculum has played a role in the rise of workloads and struggling students and may also influence the workload experiences and struggles facing teachers.
3. Time was discussed as a limitation in giving Amelia the help she needed. What other factors are occurring in schools that provide a negative experience for both teacher and student?
4. What is missing between traditional mainstream and home-schooling? Is there something that could sit in between?

6

Tipping points

Learning objectives

1. Identify the main reasons families listed for choosing home-schooling in this chapter and the ones before.
2. Reflect on the parents' reasons for saying they found "joy" in the homeschooling experience. What was it about homeschooling that they agreed was the best aspect of it?
3. Consider how these parents' choices and their reflections on their experiences challenge your own ideas about what makes education and schooling effective.

Introduction

While most of our participants had some realisation that what was happening in schools was not working, there were certain events or experiences, or aspects unique to their child, that proved to be 'tipping points' for them. At the same time, there is research on what tips families into homeschooling; these data are not about teachers who choose homeschooling. One tipping point found in the literature includes neurodiversity (see Ray, 2021), which Queensland's government has found is a huge factor in the choice of homeschooling in Australia (see Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023). Another major

tipping point is bullying (English, Campbell, & Moir, 2023). For some families, the pandemic made them think anew about “control” and “appropriate care” for their child, which led to the decision to homeschool (Hamlin & Cheng, 2020). This study is the first to look exclusively at teachers. Significantly, traditional issues reported in the literature that led to the choice of homeschooling were all found in our teacher population. What is significant about that was, rather than persevere with schooling, or attempt to make school fit their child, they upped sticks and left the system to homeschool.

There is some government data (Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023) that indicates that teachers are highly represented in the homeschooling population at 20%, and that this group appears to be growing (Dunston, personal correspondence, 12 August 2024). However, this book is the first to really examine why some teachers are choosing to homeschool their own children. As such, it appears this growing group of teachers choosing homeschooling communicates something about mainstream education. If a group who’ve made their careers in schools and who are passionate about education and learning are unwilling to keep their own children in school, what does this mean for schools more broadly? And how does this impact the future of education?

In what follows in this chapter, we address three key points that were raised by the participants in their discussion of their direct decision to homeschool their own children. The first is the COVID-19 pandemic, which, while not the only reason they were homeschooling, was significant in their choice. The COVID-19 pandemic has been cited as the major driver of homeschooling; however, this

reasoning is simplistic and fails to account for the growing number of families who were choosing homeschooling prior to the pandemic (English, 2021). The second was their child coming up against policies and practices in schools that teacher parents suggested would make it impossible for their child to manage learning and thrive in that environment. Whether it was neurodiversity, boredom, bullying that wasn't managed well or a combination of factors, these teachers reported there was a specific experience that tipped them into homeschooling. A third issue was their love of homeschooling. While one participant had returned to school, this move was often not permanent. For all participants, the time spent homeschooling was remembered well and was said to have been a positive experience for their child.

Teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic around policies and procedures

The COVID-19 pandemic had many effects on the teachers ($n = 6$) in our study. For Sian, it changed their relationship to the environment in which they lived. For Steph and Gemma, our authors, it was when things went pear-shaped for their child. For Madeline, it was the school's closing that showed her what homeschooling could be like. For Catherine, the COVID-19 pandemic closures during the very early years of education were said to be setting her child up for failure. For Sassy, like Gemma, it made their children want to learn at home or not want to return to school. For Tara, the COVID-19 pandemic and school refusal were connected. For all of these teachers, as our participant Steph put it, "the year 2020 just became chaos."

Sian described how much the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and being in Victoria during the lockdowns, which were among the most severe in Australia, affected her choice. It led to a desire to spend more time as a family and for her family, her children, to spend more time in nature. She stated that the groups she was meeting and the co-operatives she was joining shared her view of the importance of nature. Sian said:

I think it's like we're in nature; every weekend, like on the beach, rain, hail, or shine. We're in the forest. We go to skateparks. Everyone's, I suppose, living a very conscious, living lifestyle which apparently started during the COVID-19 pandemic, like it was very, you know, big. During that time. That was a huge resource, because a lot of the people in that group are teachers.

For Sian, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic made her appreciate the natural environment around her much more. She lived on the surf coast and enjoyed exploring the forest around her home and the beaches with her children, who, as she noted, in contrast to schools, were now living and learning in what she described as a more natural way, a slower-paced way. She identified how aligning themselves with nature was an important part of her family's journey. Similarly, for Madeline, who lived in the same area as Sian (we do not know if they were known to each other, and the pseudonyms meant we couldn't ask), the natural pace and slowness that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed were valuable. She stated how her daughter had "experienced a version of homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she was really excited to keep learning that way. She loved it." Later in the interview, she stated, "during the COVID-19 pandemic, we're

like, we like this. We like this independence and freedom.” As can be seen from both participants, the slower pace of learning, the difference from school and the independence and freedom were important drivers to homeschooling.

Sassy, another teacher located in a regional area, had experiences that mirrored those of Sian and Madeline. She noted how the homeschooling community in her regional area had held information sessions for people interested in homeschooling after the pandemic lockdowns and school closures. Her family was homeschooling before the pandemic, but that changed her children’s experiences. They wanted to, for the first time, try something different, in this case, using textbooks. But they went back to their old ways, as it was much more suitable for their family, and focused on how the children learn:

A lot of your home education can happen at night at bedtime, when you’re doing story time and those sorts of things, you can weave in your lessons and your morals and stuff like that ... Yeah, that’s really nice. [But] I’ve never followed [a curriculum]. I will say that during COVID both my kids were like, “we wanna do a workbook!” I think, because all of our events were shut down. And I was like, “what the heck?” I spent my whole life trying to keep you away from that [textbook] rubbish. So, I ordered some, you know, textbooks, maths for example ... they probably did it eight or nine times, and then we’re like, “yeah, this is boring, it’s not fun at all.”

For Catherine, another of our teachers, it wasn’t just about the health mandates and the disruptions to learning, but how both revealed to her, for the first time, the strict pathway through the

curriculum mandated by schools, which meant teaching was unable to be flexible and adaptable. Catherine also noted the time that was wasted in schools. Again, this would not have been a shock to her, but seeing it in the experiences of her own children may have been the first time she'd really considered the issues with time-wasting and busy work.

She also started kindy during the COVID-19 pandemic. So, it was a – a bit of a rough start to school, and then you know there was COVID-19 pandemic as well. And all this time, like she was, I don't know, she was not really suited to the school system. But the penny hadn't really dropped yet because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mandates. A lot of people were doing the same thing. They were pulling their kids out of school and looking for a safer alternative model. Then, during this process of homeschooling around kids and doing this prep program, we realised it was like the scales fell off my eyes overnight. Now I just went well, we can do this so much better without the red tape, without the staff meetings, without the six hours it takes to get [through the day]. [My daughter] was, she was adamant, that that was not the place she wanted to be, and we knew we couldn't send her anywhere else.

Again, the COVID-19 pandemic was a factor, but this quote alludes to what we saw in most ($n = 10$) of the participants' accounts. The COVID-19 pandemic alleviated the school refusal for Steph's daughter. She stated:

During the COVID-19 pandemic I had her at home for 8 weeks, and we – we homeschooled for those 8 weeks,

and it had worked really well. So, I kind of had it in the back of my mind that actually it did function, and maybe it would be worth exploring. And a very dear friend of ours was staying with us. At the time that she was, you know, sort of in that middle of grade, 5 parts really struggling and having trouble with, you know, kids at school with teachers getting in trouble, like all sorts of stuff, and my friend was like, what are you doing? Why don't you just pull her out and homeschool? And I suddenly thought, look, actually, you know, what am I waiting for? Because I kind of went? Look, I'll wait until the end of the year, and I'm working, and da da, and then I just bit the bullet and then went for it. So we just yeah. It was for her benefit.

There was a strong element of school refusal in the participants' stories and in the story relayed by Gemma, our co-author. For Catherine, it was about the COVID-19 pandemic affecting and disrupting the system, but it revealed to her, "the scales fell off my eyes overnight" the scale of the time wasting ("the six hours it takes to get [through the day]"), the pointlessness of the tasks ("the red tape ... the staff meetings") which were identified as a huge factor in the school experience. Her daughter made the choice, but she stated that she knew it was not going to work anywhere else any better. For Steph, it was the realisation that there was another way, and that the struggle, the trouble with school, with her daughter getting into trouble, with her daughter being unhappy, might mean that school was not the right place for her daughter. She, like the other families reported here, identified how school refusal and the COVID-19 pandemic were deeply interlinked.

Finding joy in homeschool, in spite of its challenges

Participants reported how much they loved the experience of homeschooling in spite of its challenges – its impact on their careers, their finances and their freedom. For the parents in the study the major benefit of homeschooling was getting to spend more time with their children. For example, Sian said:

It's so vastly different, like, there's no real schedule. It's like we're in our pyjamas till 9 o'clock. And I'm like, okay, you know, we should probably get dressed, and it feels very like a slow living. It really is the opposite to school. School, to me felt like – We live 25 min from the school, so it was fast paced. We had to get there. There was this rush. And now it's a lot slower ... And then, I think, being able to just connect with them on a much deeper level like I definitely feel so much closer to both of them since I've started homeschooling, like the relationship, has just flourished so much, which I don't think I would have had this deeper connection. Had they actually done this?

Similarly, for Aeeth, in spite of her son's severe distress and unhappiness in school, the familial relationships forged through the experience of homeschooling really strengthened their bonds. She stated she learned a lot more about her son, and trusted him more, as a result of homeschooling.

Over the years as we homeschooled all the way right through to the end of, you know, till he was 17/18. I think I learned to trust him more with his own learning over the years. And I was able to let go a lot of you know, having to have strings on everything that – that he was

learning because he ended up enrolling in TAFE [the system offering certificate and pre-undergraduate learning, professional courses and trade certificates and apprenticeships in Australia] courses online and self-directed learning after a while, it took him a while to – to learn that. At first, he – he wouldn't do any homeschooling unless it was between 9 and 3, because that was his school mindset but a few years in, you know he – he would work all over. What would traditionally be the Christmas holidays. He would, if he was interested in a project, he would run with it ...

What's interesting about Aeeth's response was the simultaneous rejection and embrace of school (structure and learning). Her child was not interested in doing schoolwork or going to school, but would do something approximating "work" in school hours. It's also interesting how much experimentation and trial, and error was evident in her response. And trust. She identified how, with this trust, came a strong bond, Aeeth stated:

I would like to, I guess. Just add that I think we became a lot closer, both my husband and I. Now my husband did a lot of things [our son] ended up doing. On the days I went to work he ended up taking time off work and being the homeschooler, he did a lot of the maths and science things and the physical stuff, you know. They went for long bike rides ... and he did a lot of that kind of stuff with him. And we've both said we're probably much closer to him now in his adulthood than we might otherwise have been. And might I add, yeah, a few times since he's become an adult he said to me, "homeschooling saved me."

This very painful story, of a boy who was badly bullied and dyslexic who was saved by homeschooling, reflected the strength of the participants' positive experiences with homeschooling. Violet had never sent her children to school but chose homeschooling because the homeschooled children she'd met in her church were exactly the kinds of people she wanted her children to be. She argued:

I met one child who was well, a couple of children who were – so their father was a pastor who was coming to preach at the church, and what they did in that church was for the new preacher to give a sermon and introduce their family as a way of the church getting to know him, and then they I think, after that they voted on him. So, it's kind of a bit like a reality TV show but anyway, that was that system. But the children got to speak to the community, to the congregation for a few minutes. While they're all on stage, and the six year old stood up in front of that congregation of 200 people and introduced herself, and then, so did the 10 year old, but then afterwards, the six year old came up to me while I was having supper, and said, "What's your name?" and I said, "Oh, my name is [Violet], and what's yours?" and she said, "Oh, I'm [Charlotte]," and I said, "you did very well speaking to all those people," she said, "that's because I'm home schooled!" Blown away! And then I – I met that family. And I also started to interact with some other families in our local area who were homeschooling. And I went to some activities that they had. And I met the kids I met in particular this year five boy who was at a cooking day and I was standing, just standing by. But I was very new

to the community. I didn't really know anyone. I had my five-year-old and my three-year-old there, and they were off at some other station. I was standing beside a pizza cooking station doing pizza slices on a fry pan. And this boy, he came with his family. But he came to the door, and he looked around the room, and he came straight over to my station, where there were no other children. I thought, "Oh, he didn't go where his friends were" ... he just came to my station, and then he started talking to me like I was a regular person, asking me questions, answering my questions in full sentences, making eye contact, and he was like 11. I – I was so blown away. I thought about how I wanted my boy to grow up to be able to interact with people. Because my experiences of having interacted with children, I had led some camps for the private school boys when I was a teacher, and my experiences of those boys was that they could not look me in the eye. They couldn't communicate with me at all. Really, the only communication I had from them was actually like they would talk to their friend about, well, it felt like it was talking about me. I was sitting at their table, but they weren't talking to me. They were saying, "girls are garbage," they would say to their friend and kind of things like this, which seem to me like really inappropriate for a child to be thinking and I mean, they thought it was okay to say it when I was sitting there and like it just seemed like they just had no concept of how to interact – they didn't even have any ability to interact with a young woman at all. It was quite concerning. I thought I wanted my child, my son in particular, to be able to interact with people in a way that is appropriate

is, you know, just like treating them like a regular person.
So, it feels now when I look back like a kind of a low bar.

The ability to have an influence over their children's behaviour and life, the capacity to engage positively with their children, to be able to keep them safe and help them become productive, engaged and appropriate adults was the main advantage identified in the cohort.

Bringing it all together

There are some study points to consider at the end of this chapter:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic had many impacts globally. And it was this pandemic experience that provided the "risk-free trial" to some of our parents.
2. There are many barriers that occur within schools around support for school distress, which influenced our teacher parents' choice to homeschool. It may be that their unique, insider knowledge affected their choice and meant they saw no hope in staying on in school.
3. There is the common saying "children are resilient," but our participants did not appear to think that was a risk they were willing to take for their child.
4. The homeschool community members often discuss the term school trauma and their child/rens experience of it. From the stories in this book, what changes could occur in schools to lessen these impacts? Do you see those changes ever happening?
5. At the beginning of this book, what was your perception of homeschooling? What is it now? Has it changed? Why or why not?

7

Where to from here?

Learning objectives

1. Identify the roles of micro (school), meso (department), and macro (policy and wider community beliefs) practices on the choice of homeschooling.
2. Reflect on the notion of “isolated” and how homeschooling is about the locus of control of the education a child receives, but does not necessarily mean it is the locus of education.
3. Articulate your insights on curriculum and whether it effectively meets the needs of twenty-first century, and special needs, learners in these parents’ experiences.
4. Compare the benefits of homeschooling that are given by teacher parents with your own taken-for-granted beliefs about the benefits of schooling.

Are teachers who homeschool isolated?

Homeschool numbers are not plateauing as was predicted after the COVID-19 pandemic; they continue to rise. In 2022,

74.2 per cent (4519) of new registrations were recorded in Queensland alone, and these tended to come from children who had been in traditional mainstream systems (Queensland Government: Department of Education, 2023). By 2024, the total number of homeschoolers in Queensland was 11,314, with secondary enrolments (5,710), who are likely to have some experience of school being greater than primary (5,604) for the first time. The mainstream system in its current form appears ill-equipped to meet the needs of a growing group of young people. The Queensland Government's 2022 report from the Department of Education: Home Education Unit found two-thirds (61 per cent) of families homeschooling have a child with a disability. With this data in mind, we can ask the question: Is homeschooling a choice when there are no other options? This same report established 45 per cent of families surveyed had never intended to homeschool, with 32 per cent of those noting it became necessary for their child. It was suggested that homeschooling numbers rose through the COVID-19 pandemic (which they did) and this would plateau, and numbers would stabilise, which has not been the case. With continued disenchantment with the education system, including among the teachers of our study, it may be that homeschooling numbers will continue to increase.

The system

When we discuss the system, we are discussing the traditional/institutional/mainstream system, which data on school refusal shows is driving children and young people to refuse school (Connolly et al., 2022). There are many issues our cohort have

identified: (1) the intensity of the curriculum, (2) the lack of support and aid staffing in schools to authentically meet needs, (3) the speed in which a child is expected to learn and work through the Australian Curriculum, (4) the 'sink-or-swim' nature of the classroom environment that has developed over time and, (5) the immense pressure that is put on teachers for reporting and data collection that takes away preparation and teaching. The departure rate of teachers generally is alarming; it has been noted that "by 2025, the federal government estimates a shortfall of more than 4,000 high school teachers across the country" (Brandenburg et al., 2024). We suggest that the rise in teachers leaving school with their child to homeschool should be the early warning sign of a need for a change. The same Queensland Education Home Education Unit report from 2023 found 20 per cent of those surveyed held a teacher qualification, and just under half (46 per cent) of the participants had experience in a school environment. The experience of our teacher cohort is not isolated: it is a growing trend.

The data we collected for this study, and our own stories, suggest there are several issues in mainstream schools. The first is the reliance on curriculum as the driver of education, not the child. The second is the lack of options for part-time school and other flexible learning models. The third is that homeschooling is not just for teachers, as most homeschoolers are not teachers; we do not wish to suggest that teaching degrees or qualifications should be a requirement to homeschool. Rebecca would like to note that her husband, an artist, is a much better homeschooler than she, and Aeletth noted how her husband stepped up to help with the homeschooling in spite of not being a teacher.

The curriculum

Through the development of this book and the interviews with the candidates, “the curriculum” was frequently noted in the pejorative. It was used negatively and often appeared to be the main reason teachers had issues with the way education in Australia is undertaken in the twenty-first century. In 2014, the Australian Government reviewed the Australian Curriculum, and the feedback indicated overcrowding. At the time, the review recommended changes to tackle the overcrowding, yet it appears the changes did little to ameliorate the issues our cohort, and the rest of the community, judging by its growth, faced. In 2023, a report suggested the Australian Curriculum was the reason Australian students were behind in international benchmarks in science. The report suggested the science curriculum had “multiple examples of poor and even non-existent sequencing” (Jensen et al., 2023). The solution was to remove the curriculum’s focus on the opinions and perspectives of stakeholders and propose a focus on the details of science, with sequencing that allowed for students to build increasing skills and understanding of the complexity of scientific questions. In all cases, it is the states that mandate how the curriculum is implemented and, in the case of New South Wales, whether it is implemented at all. They wrote their own curriculum, and schools in New South Wales do not teach the Australian curriculum. Research (De Bortoli et al., 2023) has noted we are still behind in benchmarks, which is unlikely to be addressed any time soon. It is clear there is overcrowding and disillusionment with the Australian Curriculum, yet the changemakers in government seem unable or unwilling to change it.

Alternative options

The offering of genuine flexibility through alternative models which operate alongside the 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., must follow the curriculum, every day of the school year model that is mainstreamed in Australia would be a first step. In only four states can you choose part-time school, although many other schools offer an “as needs” basis under the table when the alternative is outright school refusal. While there are alternative offerings, such as “distance education” settings (sometimes with online or paper sheets posted to students), alternative schools (Montessori, Steiner are the best known). But there are also democratic schools, unaligned alternatives that do not name themselves and even Quaker schools, but all of these are limited by geography, a limitation in enrolments due to the teachers and the sites and even awareness of them as options, and homeschool.

The trend to home-based learning is likely to continue. There are some Australian schools opening with an online-only platform; however, their high school certificates are only available to those in the state (such as HaileyBury and Pangea). Alternative schools face great challenges in being registered by departments of education that administer and manage them in a climate where governing bodies make non-state school accreditation hard for those schools that do pedagogy, reporting and planning differently. Anecdotal discussions with these schools suggest it is not an easy job to get an alternative school through the hurdles of initial registration and then to maintain that registration. However, other alternatives, such

as international schools, are beginning to open and offer their services in Australia. Some offer certificates of high school education from around the world, such as GED (USA) and the GCSE and A-levels (UK). These schools aim to offer an alternative in the comfort of a home environment for the child (see, for example, the offering from Crimson Global Academy). Others offer a service whereby they help a child manage the demands of college enrolment from 15 to 21 years of age.

While we have acknowledged the issues around the Australian Curriculum, students do study a unique Australian point of view through the Cross-Curriculum Priorities. The Australian curriculum is designed for Australian students with Australian perspectives in mind (Australian Curriculum, 2024). This point leads to some questions: What happens if more international schools open and operate in Australia? Does that challenge the primacy of the Australian Curriculum? Does it begin to homogenise education? There is also an issue with flexibility; why can't all states and territories have part-time school? Why can't pedagogical differences, even where it is not aligned perfectly with the Australian Curriculum, be rewarded if parents want this kind of change in approach?

Each state and territory notes the primacy of parents' decision-making in their education acts. At what point do we say parents can choose what they like, and it does not have to align with the Australian curriculum? Or, what if parents want more part-time school, and it's not offered? How do states balance acts that mandate full-time school enrolment with the primacy of parents' choices in cases where parents make it clear they want a part-time or flexible enrolment?

Not just for teachers: A note on homeschooling

There is an important note to make about this book. While we've examined the trend of teachers removing their children from school to homeschool, the focus of the book, we strongly assert that home education is not solely for graduates of teacher education programs who hold a degree. Homeschooling can and should be accessed by parents regardless of their educational background and experiences. Parents who choose to homeschool their children have a knowledge of their child and how they learn, and a passion for education and their children's success, whatever that means for that child. Any parent who chooses a homeschool lifestyle makes sacrifices (work and finances, as well as life balances) and therefore does not make the decision lightly. It is a heavy responsibility to choose to educate your own children and take on those pressures, but it is accessible to parents beyond a teacher education experience. Therefore, it is important to note that this book does not encourage the message that only teachers should homeschool. The authors of this book suggest quite the opposite: a homeschool choice is open to all.

Positive outcomes

The teachers whose stories are reported here, our canaries in the education coalmine, were removing themselves from the mainstream system, and their children as well. They were seeking to educate their own children at home, reported positive experiences for themselves and their children, and also noted they were satisfied with their choices. It may be that, for these

children, homeschooling provides a strong and stable education that successfully leads them into higher education and adulthood. As Riley (2020) noted:

Surveys of adults who have been homeschooled conclude that homeschooling leads to more positive life outcomes, including increased college attendance, increased college GPA's, greater overall life satisfaction, and higher levels of personal competence and autonomy as compared to traditionally schooled peers (p. 45).

Riley's (2018) research compared intrinsic motivation between homeschooled students and traditionally schooled children. She argued that there are three pillars to intrinsic motivation: competence, autonomy and relatedness and all three are required for successful outcomes. The study found that the students who had been homeschooled had much higher levels of autonomy, satisfaction with their experience and competence in learning.

We have argued that homeschooling is a form of "analogous education," in that it has some comparisons to a traditional or mainstream approach (i.e., schools); however, the pathway through learning is different. While homeschool has been discussed in the literature in relation to mainstream, it is more akin to a "third way," analogous to its mainstream counterpart. Research (for example, Riley, 2018; Ray, 2021) has shown homeschooling can produce well-rounded, capable learners ready for adulthood.

The teachers who have left the system for an analogous education in homeschooling reported its success. While it may be, they have a motivation to report it as successful because of the sacrifices they have made, and being that the study was self-selected,

they may be unlikely to speak to researchers if they have had a terrible experience. The growth of homeschooling suggests it is a choice that increasing numbers of families are willing to try. The opportunities available for homeschooling children are growing with the market and include specialised instruction in English and Maths as well as ceramics, robotics, woodwork, art classes, languages, STEM sessions and physical education. There is a marketing term, “early adopters,” who are said to normalise a product or service, or an educational choice, and make it accessible to those who follow. If the community reads stories, as they did in the Channel 9 papers of teachers who homeschool in increasing numbers, it’s likely non-teachers may be more motivated to choose homeschooling, driving its growth and further normalising it in the community. As Violet implied in her interview, it made no sense for her to go to school to educate other people’s children while their own children were being educated by someone else. Why not cut out the middleman and just do the work herself?

Bringing it all together

This book has looked at the circumstances of Australian teachers leaving the education system and taking their own children with them to follow and complete a homeschool experience. Many concerns about the current state of the mainstream system were shared by the participants. Their concerns are not new, yet little is done to authentically shift Australia’s educational climate to a more positive experience. Teachers are still leaving the system in vast numbers, and homeschooling numbers continue to grow. As previously stated, we have described these teachers as the

canaries in the educational coal mine. These early warning indicators that there are serious issues to be addressed should be heeded. However, true authentic change in the Australian school system by any government is yet to be seen.

There are some study points to consider at the end of this chapter:

1. From your experience, is the Australian Curriculum (or other country curriculum) in its current state overcrowded? Why/Why not?
2. By 2025, the Australian federal government estimates a shortfall of more than 4,000 teachers. Do you know a teacher who wants to leave the system? What are their reasons? Do they align with the discussion points raised here?
3. Would an Australian national (or other country) high school certificate (not state to state) assist in more alternative schooling options?
4. Gina Riley's research on intrinsic motivation suggests there are three pillars to intrinsic motivation: competence, autonomy and relatedness, and all three are required for successful outcomes. Have you heard of these before? What rings true for the children in your life?

References

Andres Roman-Urrestarazu, R., van Kessel, R., Allison, C., Matthews, F. E., Brayne, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2021). Association of race/ethnicity and social disadvantage with autism prevalence in 7 million school children in England. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 175(6), e210054. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.0054>

Apostoleris, N. H. (1994). *An interdisciplinary investigation of home schooling* (Doctoral dissertation, Wesleyan University).

Apple, M. W. (2020). Homeschooling, democracy, and regulation: An essay review of *Homeschooling: The history and philosophy of a controversial practice*. *Education Review*, 27, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.14507/er.v27.2931>

Arai, A. B. (2000). Reasons for home schooling in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 25(3), 204–217.

Arendash, M. E. (2023). *Classical education: Origins, development, and inadequacies* (Doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Au, W. (2022). *Unequal by design: High stakes testing and the standardization of inequality* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Aurini, J., & Davies, S. (2005). Choice without markets: Homeschooling in the context of private education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26(4), 461–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690500114602>

Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC]. (1997). *The battle for state aid*. <http://web.archive.org/web/20140106061251/http://www.abc.net.au/time/episodes/ep7.htm>

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Schools: Data on government and non-government students, staff and schools*. [https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#:~:text=the%20majority%20of%20students%20were,and%20independent%20schools%20\(16.3%\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#:~:text=the%20majority%20of%20students%20were,and%20independent%20schools%20(16.3%)) [Accessed October 6, 2024].

Australian Christian Homeschooling. (n.d.). *Curriculum*. <https://www.achs.edu.au/>

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA]. (2024). *F-10 curriculum overview*. <https://v9.australianncurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview/>

Bienen, H. (Ed.). (2014). *The Montessori method*. New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315133225>

Bleazby, J. (2011). Are teachers expected to do too much 'parenting'? *Monash News*. <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/are-teachers-expected-to-do-too-much-parenting>

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brandenburg, R., Larson, E., Sallis, R., & Simpson, A. (2024). Teachers now: Why I left and where I've gone. *Western Teacher Magazine*, 53(2). <https://www.sstuwa.org.au/WesternTeacher/2024/volume-532-march-2024>

Bray, T. M. (2009). *Confronting the shadow education system: What government policies for what private tutoring?* Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Carpenter, D., & Gann, C. (2015). Educational activities and the role of the parent in homeschool families with high school students. *Educational Review*, 68(3), 322–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1087971>

Connolly, S., Patterson, K., Hockey, E., & Mullally, S. L. (2022). School distress in UK school children: Characteristics and consequences. *medRxiv*. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.03.25.22272981>

Cooper, E. (Ed.). (2004). *When children love to learn: A practical application of Charlotte Mason's philosophy for today*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

Crimson Global Academy. (2024). About Crimson Global Academy. <https://www.crimsonglobalacademy.school/au/our-school/>

Dahlin, B. (2017). *Rudolf Steiner: The relevance of Waldorf education*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

de Bellaigue, C. (2015). Charlotte Mason, home education and the Parents' National Educational Union in the late nineteenth century. *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(4), 501–517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2015.1048117>

De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Thomson, S. (2023). *PISA in Brief 2022: Student performance and equity in education*. Australian Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-727-4>

De Wit, E. E., Eagles, D., Regeer, B., & Bunders, J. (2017). 'Unschooling' in the context of growing mental health concerns among Indian students: The journey of 3 middle-class unschooling families. *Journal of Unschooling & Alternative Learning*, 11(22), 1–18.

Dooley, K. (2020). Intent and probability: Parents' use of NAPLAN-related private literacy tutoring. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 43(3), 235–244.

Dooley, K. (2023). Shadow education as sociological field. In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). *COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>

Drane, C., Vernon, L., & O'Shea, S. (2020). *The impact of learning at home on the educational outcomes of vulnerable children in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Curtin University, Australia.

English, R. (2013). The most private education: Home education in Australia. *Home School Researcher*, 29(4), 1–7.

English, R. (2021a). The accidental home educator: A new conceptualisation of home education choice. In R. English (Ed.), *Global perspectives on home education in the 21st century* (pp. 30–48). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

English, R. (2021b). Getting a risk-free trial during COVID-19 pandemic: Accidental and deliberate home educators, responsibility and the growing population of children being educated outside of school. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 12(1), 77–98.

English, R. (2023). As homeschooling numbers keep rising in Australia, is more regulation a good idea? *The Conversation*. <https://www.theconversation.com/as-homeschooling-numbers-keep-rising-in-australia-is-more-regulation-a-good-idea-217802>

English, R., & Gribble, K. (2021, October 7). Parents, studies have shown most kids have done just fine in remote schooling. Here's how to survive the home stretch. *The Conversation*. <https://www.theconversation.com/parents-studies-show-most-kids-have-done-just-fine-in-remote-schooling-heres-how-to-survive-the-home-stretch-167969>

English, R., Campbell, M., & Moir, L. (2023). Deschooling and unschooling after experiences of bullying: Five parents tell their stories. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning*, 17(33), 1–25.

Fisher, N. (2023). *A different way to learn: Neurodiversity and self-directed education*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- Green, C. L., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2007). Why do parents homeschool? A systematic examination of parental involvement. *Education and Urban Society*, 39(2), 264–285.
- Green-Hennessy, S., & Mariotti, E. C. (2023). The decision to home-school: Potential factors influencing reactive homeschooling practice. *Educational Review*, 75(4), 617–636. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2101234>
- Gribble, K., & English, R. (2016). Helping children with home education: How home education can enable good educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 7(2), 240–256.
- Griffith, M. (2010). *The unschooling handbook: How to use the whole world as your child's classroom*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Guterman, O., & Neuman, A. (2017). Schools and emotional and behavioral problems: A comparison of school-going and home-schooled children. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 110(4), 425–432.
- Haileybury Pangea Online School. (2024). *Introducing Haileybury Pangea*. <https://www.haileyburypangea.com/who-we-are>
- Hamlin, D., & Cheng, A. (2020). Parental empowerment, involvement, and satisfaction: A comparison of choosers of charter, Catholic, Christian, and district-run public schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(4), 641–670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X20937307>
- Haralambous, B. (2018). *Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework 2018: Steiner education and academic foundations* [PDF]. Sunshine Coast: Steiner Education Australia. <https://research.usc.edu.au/esploro/outputs/workingPaper/Australian-Steiner-Curriculum-Framework-2018-Steiner/99681598002621>

Harding, T. J. A. (2011). *A study of parents' conceptions of their roles as home educators of their children* (Doctoral dissertation, Queensland University of Technology).

Harding, T., & Farrell, A. (2003). Home schooling and legislated education. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Law & Education*, 8, 125–140.

Havik, T., & Ingul, J. M. (2021). Does homeschooling fit students with school attendance problems? Exploring teachers' experiences during COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 720014. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.720014>

Henderson, G. (2012, August 20). The lessons of Goulburn resonate in schools 50 years later. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/the-lessons-of-goulburn-resonate-in-schools-50-years-later-20120820-24ik2.html>

Hodge, D. R., Salas-Wright, C. P., & Vaughn, M. G. (2017). Behavioral risk profiles of homeschooled adolescents in the United States: A nationally representative examination of substance use-related outcomes. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 52(3), 273–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2016.1234218>

Holzman, F. D. (1960). Inflation: Cost-school and demand-pull. *The American Economic Review*, 50(1), 20–42. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1813460>

Hughes, P. (2010). The religiosity of youth in Australia and Thailand. *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, 1, 115–145.

Jabbar, H., Fong, C. J., Germain, E., Li, D., Sanchez, J., Sun, W. L., & Devall, M. (2022). The competitive effects of school choice on student achievement: A systematic review. *Educational Policy*, 36(2), 247–281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048211011305>

Jackson, B. (2024). Australian students being homeschooled reaches 45,000 mark for first time. <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/australian-students-being-homeschooled-reaches-45000-mark-for-first-time/news-story/aee8836bfc562faf3bc349cc6e33d2bd>

Jackson, G. M. (2021). Common themes in Australian and New Zealand home education research. In M. Gaither (Ed.), *The Wiley handbook of home education* (pp. 329–361). Wiley.

Jeffrey, D., & Giskes, R. (2004). *Home schooling*. Brisbane, QLD: Queensland Parliamentary Library.

Jensen, B., Ross, M., Collet, M., Murnane, N., & Pearson, E. (2023). *Fixing the holes in Australian education: The Australian Curriculum benchmarked against the best*. Learning First. <https://learningfirst.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/FULL-REPORT-COMBINED.pdf>

Jolly, J. L., & Matthews, M. S. (2017). Why we blog: Homeschooling mothers of gifted children. *Roeper Review*, 39(2), 112–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2017.1297594>

Jolly, J. L., Matthews, M. S., & Nester, J. (2013). Homeschooling the gifted: A parent's perspective. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 57(2), 121–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986213483140>

Kavanagh, K. M., & Fisher-Ari, T. R. (2020). Curricular and pedagogical oppression: Contradictions within the juggernaut accountability trap. *Educational Policy*, 34(2), 283–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819858261>

Kettler, T., Burroughs, N., & Russell, J. (2018). Teachers' perceptions of creativity in the classroom. *Creativity Research Journal*, 30(2), 164–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2018.1446503>

Kunzman, R., & Gaither, M. (2013). Homeschooling: A comprehensive survey of the research. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 2(1), 4–59.

Kunzman, R., & Gaither, M. (2020). Homeschooling: An updated comprehensive survey of the research. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 9(1), 253–336.

Lawrence, C. (2018). Parents' perspectives on flexischooling their autistic children. *Home School Researcher*, 34(1), 23–38.

Lawson, J. C., & Sibla, J. C. (2016). Caregiver perspectives of parenting children affected by trauma. *Psychology*, 6(7), 396–406.

Lees, H. (2011). *The gateless gate of home education discovery: What happens to the self of adults upon discovery of the possibility and possibilities of an educational alternative* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Birmingham, UK.

Lees, H. E., & Nicholson, F. (2021). Home education in the United Kingdom. In M. Gaither (Ed.), *The Wiley handbook of home education* (pp. 303–328). Wiley.

Lillard, A. S. (2016). *Montessori: The science behind the genius*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.

London Park Schools. (n.d.). *About hybrid at LPS*. <https://www.londonparkschools.com/hybrid/about-hybrid-lps/>

Longmuir, F. (2023, January 30). Australia's teacher shortage is a generational crisis the making. How can we turn things around? *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-30/pandemic-exposed-australia-teacher-shortage-students-schools/101886452>

Lowden, S. (1993). *The scope and implications of home-based education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Nottingham.

Luthar, S. S., Kumar, N. L., & Zillmer, N. (2020). High-achieving schools connote risks for adolescents: Problems documented, processes implicated, and directions for interventions. *American Psychologist*, 75(7), 983–995. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000637>

Marshall, J. D., & Valle, J. P. (1996). School reform: Lessons from the departed. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 4(12), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v4n12.1996>

Mason, C. (2013). *The original home school series*. Simon and Schuster.

Mayberry, M., & Knowles, J. G. (1989). Family unity objectives of parents who teach their children: Ideological and pedagogical orientations to home schooling. *The Urban Review*, 21(4), 209–225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01112143>

McCabe, M., Beláňová, A., & Machovcová, K. (2021). The gift of homeschooling: Adult homeschool graduates and their parents conceptualize homeschooling in North Carolina. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 12(1), 119–140.

McPherson, E. (2024, June 27). Thousands of Australian teachers are choosing to homeschool their own kids. Here is why. *9News*. <https://www.9news.com.au/national/thousands-of-australian-teachers-are-choosing-to-homeschool-their-own-kids-here-is-why/def80f3e-2ca5-498e-81f8-e45e8e9d3429>

Menken, K. (2008). *English learners left behind: Standardized testing as language policy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Mervosh, S., & Paris, F. (2024, March 29). Why school absences have ‘exploded’ almost everywhere. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/03/29/us/chronic-absences.html>

Ministry of Education: Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga. (2023). *Te whakaako ki te kāinga: Home education*. <https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers-primary-school/schooling-in-nz/home-education#support-for-families-who-homeschool-1>

Moir, L., & English, R. (2022). Unusual education in turbulent times: COVID lockdowns, home educators and the unequal opening of education in Australia. *Pacific-Asian Education Journal*, 33(1), 45–68.

Morse, M. L., & Bell, S. M. (2018). Homeschooling: A growing school choice option for meeting special educational needs. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 27(2), 156–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791802700206>

Morton, R. (2010). Home education: Constructions of choice. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 3(1), 45–56. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47446890_Home_education_Constructions_of_choice

Munkhaugen, E. K., Gjevik, E., Pripp, A. H., Sponheim, E., & Diseth, T. (2017). School refusal behaviour: Are children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder at a higher risk? *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 41, 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2017.02.003>

Nemer, K. M. (2002). *Understudied education: Toward building a homeschooling research agenda*. Occasional Paper.

Neuman, A., & Oz, G. (2020). Different solutions to similar problems: Parents' reasons for choosing to homeschool and social criticism of the education system. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(1), 37–54.

New South Wales Parliament. (2014). *Home schooling in New South Wales*. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/2128/141203%20Final%20Report.pdf

Nicol, J., & Taplin, J. T. (2012). *Understanding the Steiner Waldorf approach: Early years education in practice*. London: Routledge.

Not Your Grandfather's Mining Industry. (n.d.). *Canary in the coalmine*. Retrieved September 9, 2024, from www.notyourgrandfathersmining.ca/canary-in-a-coal-mine#:~:text=When%20we%20say%20something%20is,toxic%20gasses%20in%20underground%20mines

O'Flaherty, A. (2023, June 13). Queensland schools increase reliance on waivers for unregistered teachers to front classrooms. *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. Retrieved September 8, 2025, from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-06-13/queensland-schools-rely-waivers-increase-unregistered/102462062>

Ochi, M., Kawabe, K., Ochi, S., Miyama, T., Horiuchi, F., & Ueno, S. (2020). School refusal and bullying in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 14(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-020-00325-7>

Oliver, M. (2016). Would you give your kids a free-range education? Retrieved October 6, 2024, from www.wellbeing.com.au/kinship/parenting/send-children-free-school.html

Parliament of New South Wales. (2014). *Select committee on homeschooling*. Retrieved October 4, 2024, from www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=236#tab-otherdocuments

Payne, S. (2024). Amid a rise in the number of Australian homeschool students, these families explain why it's working for them. *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-20/homeschool-online-parent-education-children-students-australia/104362080

Permoser, J. M., & Stoeckl, K. (2021). Reframing human rights: The global network of moral conservative homeschooling activists. *Global Networks*, 21(4), 681–702.

Queensland Government: Department of Education. (2023). *Home education registrations: August 2019–2023*. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from qed.qld.gov.au/our-publications/reports/statistics/Documents/home-education-registrations.pdf

Queensland Government: Department of Education. (2024). *Performance*. Retrieved September 27, 2024, from education.qld.gov.au/schools-educators/other-education/home-education/performance

Queensland Government: Department of Education. (2024). *Registration*. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from education.qld.gov.au/schools-educators/other-education/home-education/registration

Queensland Government: Department of Education: Home Education Unit. (2022). *Parent with child/ren registered for home*

education research insight report. Brisbane: Enhance Research. Retrieved September 27, 2024, from education.qld.gov.au/schools-and-educators/other-education/Documents/research-insight-report.pdf

Queensland Government: Queensland Child Death Review Board. (2023). *Annual report 2022–2023: A report on the operations and systemic findings of the Queensland Child Death Review Board*. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2024/5724T347-DB90.pdf

Queensland Parliamentary Committee. (2024). *Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*. Brisbane: Queensland Government. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2024/5724T635-74B9.pdf

Rabkin, N., & Hedberg, E. C. (2011). *Arts education in America: What declines mean for arts participation*. Report for the National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2008-SPPA-ArtsLearning.pdf

Ray, B. (2021). Should educators promote homeschooling? Worldwide growth and learner outcomes. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 12(1), 55–76.

Ray, B. D. (2004). Homeschoolers on to college: What research shows us. *Journal of College Admission*, 185, 5–11.

Ray, B. D. (2017). A systematic review of the empirical research on selected aspects of homeschooling as a school choice. *Journal of School Choice*, 11, 118–135.

Ricci, C. (2016). The willed curriculum. *Homeschooling in New View*, 117.

Riley, G. (2018). A qualitative exploration of the experiences of individuals who have identified as LGBTQ and who have homeschooled or unschooled. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 7(1), 3–17.

Riley, G. (2020). *Unschooling: Exploring learning beyond the classroom*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Robinson, K. (2006). Do schools kill creativity? [Video]. TED Conferences. Retrieved October 5, 2024, from www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbY&t=53s

Robinson, M. (2013). *Trivium 21c: Preparing young people for the future with lessons from the past* [eBook]. Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing LLC. Retrieved from www.crownhousepublishing.com/trivium-21c

Roman-Urrestarazu, A., van Kessel, R., Allison, C., Matthews, F., Brayne, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2021). Association of race/ethnicity and social disadvantage with autism prevalence in 7 million school children in England. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 175(6), E1–E11.

Rothermel, P. (2003). Can we classify motives for home education? *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 17(2–3), 74–89.

Rowe, E. (2025, January 23). Are public schools really ‘free’? Families can pay hundreds in voluntary fees. *The Conversation*. Retrieved September 8, 2025, from <https://theconversation.com/are-public-schools-really-free-families-can-pay-hundreds-of-dollars-in-voluntary-fees-248107>

Rutkowski, L. (2001). Linda McNeil, Contradictions of school reform: Educational costs of standardized testing. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(1), 75. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011572515753>

Sayers, D. (1947). *The lost tools of learning*. Retrieved from www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html/

Sheng, Z. (2024). ‘It’s no longer for us’: Understanding families’ decisions to discontinue home education in Australia (Master’s thesis, Queensland University of Technology).

Slater, E. V., Burton, K., & McKillop, D. (2022). Reasons for home educating in Australia: Who and why? *Educational Review*, 74(2), 263–280.

Smith, W. C., & Holloway, J. (2020). School testing culture and teacher satisfaction. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 32, 461–479.

Steiner Education Australia. (n.d.). About Steiner education. Retrieved January 19, 2024, from www.steinereducation.edu.au/steiner-education/about-steiner-education/

Stevens, M. (2001). *Kingdom of children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Suarez, P., & Suarez, G. (Eds.). (2006). *Homeschooling methods: Seasoned advice on learning styles*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.

Van Galen, J. A. (1991). Ideologues and pedagogues: Parents who teach their. *Home Schooling: Political, historical, and pedagogical perspectives*, 63.

Warhurst, J. (2012). 50 years since Australia's 'most poisonous debate'. *Eureka Street*. Retrieved October 6, 2024, from www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=32230

Wenham, L., Din, I., & Eaves, L. (2021). 'I no longer trust our son's school': Parents resisting the return to face-to-face teaching. *Forum*, 63(2), 74–88.

Winstanley, C. (2009). Too cool for school? Gifted children and homeschooling. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(3), 347–362.

Yandell, J., Doecke, B., & Abdi, Z. (2020). Who me? Hailing individuals as subjects: Standardized literacy testing as an instrument of neoliberal ideology. In *The sociopolitics of English language testing*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Zhang, W., & Bray, M. (2020). Comparative research on shadow education: Achievements, challenges, and the agenda ahead. *European Journal of Education*, 55(3), 322–341.

Index

- Accidentals 9, 10, 12
- Alternative schools 6, 117
- Analogous education 1, 3, 4, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30, 120
- Anxiety (school refusal/distress) 13, 53, 55, 68, 69, 79, 80
- Bullying 13, 25, 26, 52, 65, 69, 78–79, 81, 83, 102–103
- Canaries (metaphor for teachers) 49, 98, 119, 122
- Catherine (participant) 38–42, 62, 87, 91, 103, 105–107
- Charlotte Mason approach 17–18, 125
- Child's environment 89–99
- Classical homeschooling 16, 17
- Claire (participant) 40, 66–68, 75, 77–80, 83, 85–87
- COVID-19 pandemic 23, 62, 70, 77, 88, 102–104, 106–107, 112, 113, 114, 126, 128
- Creativity in curriculum 5, 59, 92, 93, 129
- Curriculum 5, 7, 8, 19–24, 27, 28, 31, 32, 41, 42, 44, 49, 50, 59, 60, 82, 83, 85–87, 91–94, 96–99, 105, 106, 113, 115–118, 122, 124, 127, 129, 134
- Deliberates 9, 10, 13
- Distance education 3, 33, 40, 86, 91, 117
- Eclectic homeschooling 14
- Eloise (participant) 39
- Examinations; ATAR pathways 9, 42; Music examinations 8
- Faith-based homeschooling 21
- Gemma's story 5, 56–62, 63
- Government regulation 59
- Home education 4, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24, 30, 31, 34, 75–79, 81, 84, 105, 114, 115, 119, 125, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135
- Homeschooling 1–34, 37–45, 47–57, 59, 62, 66–68, 71, 73–80, 82–87, 89, 90, 94, 99, 101–106, 108–110, 112–115, 119–121, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129, 131, 132, 133, 134, 136
- Homeschooling styles (traditional, classical, Charlotte Mason, Montessori, project-based, unschooling, Steiner, faith-based, eclectic) 2, 6, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 35,

- 41, 49, 61, 62, 75, 80, 117, 125,
126, 127, 132, 135, 136
- Homeschooling teachers
(participants) 2, 38–42, 62, 63,
66–68, 75, 76–80, 83, 85–87,
89, 91, 92, 94, 97, 98, 103, 104,
105–108
- Inclusion and exclusion in
schools 68
- Joy in homeschooling 101, 108
- Legislation 49, 134
- Madeline (participant) 5, 38, 39,
76, 87, 92, 103, 104, 105
- Microschools 38, 40, 42, 76
- Neurodivergence (Autism, ADHD,
PDA, dyslexia) 52, 64, 65, 69, 79
- Parenting 77, 84, 87, 89, 124, 130
- Project/unit-based
homeschooling 19–20
- Pull factors 45
- Push factors 48
- Rebecca's story 6–10, 14, 48
- Registration (homeschooling)
7, 8, 30, 32, 37, 38, 39, 114,
117, 133
- Sassy (participant) 39, 85, 87, 89,
91, 92, 94, 97, 98, 103, 105
- School choice 10, 12, 49, 73, 74,
89, 119, 128, 131, 134
- School refusal / school distress
12, 52, 53, 55, 62, 64–68, 103,
106, 107, 114, 117, 132, 133
- Shadow education 4, 10, 22–27,
29, 124, 125, 136
- Sian (participant) 38, 39, 79, 87,
103–105, 108
- Steiner/Waldorf
homeschooling 20–21
- Stories (participants' narratives)
5, 6, 34, 38, 51, 52, 54, 55, 66,
67, 68, 69, 78, 92, 97, 107, 112,
115, 119, 121, 126
- Suicidal thoughts 65, 70
- Tara (participant) 40, 62, 63, 68,
77–80, 85–87, 103
- Teachers 1–3, 6–8, 14, 15, 25, 31,
33, 34, 37–39, 43–45, 48–50,
52–56, 61, 62, 67, 69–71, 73,
74, 79, 82–84, 87, 89–91, 93,
94, 96–99, 101–105, 107,
113–117, 119–122, 124, 128,
129, 131, 132
- Tipping points 101–112
- Traditional homeschooling 15
- Trauma in schools 11, 52, 55,
65, 112
- Unschooling 2, 20, 35, 49, 61, 62,
79, 80, 125, 126, 127, 135
- University pathways 7
- Violet (participant) 6, 38, 40,
76, 77, 81, 87, 90, 94–97,
110, 121