



Home Education

Information Sheet

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself"
- John Dewey

**"We are considering
Home Education for our family."**

**"Now how do we go about it?
What is the first step...Is it legal in Australia?"**

Home Education Network: www.home-ed.vic.edu.au

Home Education

Over the past two decades home education has become an accepted and valid educational choice for many families and the number of children being educated at home has increased steadily. Parents who choose to educate their children at home come from a wide variety of social and educational backgrounds. Their reasons are also many and varied, from those who decide before their children are born, to those who would never have considered the option had not their children experienced insurmountable problems in school.

Home education is not all smooth sailing, and has its share of frustrations and difficulties. There is no perfect solution or single best practice. In fact one of the main attractions of home education is that parents are able to work out with their children the kind of learning that suits them best. This requires serious commitment.

For those who withdraw their children from school, the thought of how to go about educating a child at home can be quite daunting. However, as parents gradually gain in confidence, the great majority find the experience worthwhile and enriching not least because they are actively involved in their children's education and have the privilege of watching their progress first hand. Parents also learn a great deal more about education. Education at home leads many parents to view learning and child rearing in a very different light.

The Law

Home Education is legal throughout Australia.

Briefly, the current Victorian laws provide for home education in that as long as you are providing regular and efficient instruction, school attendance is not required. Home educators are not required to have teaching qualifications nor to follow a curriculum.

However, a new Victorian Education Act was passed in 2006 and is expected to take effect by mid 2007. Home educators will then be required to register with a statutory authority (the VRQA) and provide regular and efficient instruction in the 8 'key learning areas' as well as agreeing to a commitment to democratic principles. An annual renewal of registration will also be required. The VRQA will have the right to review individual home educators if they have 'reasonable grounds' for concern. The keeping of some type of home education records is considered good practice and would be invaluable should you be called up for such a review.

More details are available on the Victorian-legal-situation page of our website; by phoning our information line; or emailing editor@home-ed.vic.edu.au. If you are unable to access the internet, ask for a copy of our legal information sheet which provides details of the legal requirements under both the old and new Education Acts. Legal information for other states can be obtained from <http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au/2004/04/28/the-law-in-victoria/> or by emailing editor@home-ed.vic.edu.au

How do I go about removing my child from school?

The only current legal requirement is a letter to the principal of the school stating that you have decided to home educate your child and he/she will be leaving at the end of the day, week, term, year - whatever you decide. School principals sometimes inform parents that they must await departmental approval before removing their children from the school but this is a department policy, not law. Legally you do not have to wait for permission and you do not have to contact the Department of Education.

However, once the new Education Act takes effect, you will be required to register for home education before removing your child from school. Once you have sent off an application you

will receive a registration notification within a fortnight and, if you choose to keep your child home during this time they will not be classed as truant.

What does home education look like?

There is a wide range of approaches to home education. Some people purchase a curriculum and do daily lessons. Most find that it takes a relatively short amount of time to maintain grade levels. Parents can respond to their children's individual needs and abilities and their children are able to fly ahead in the subjects they enjoy.

At the other end of the spectrum some follow a natural learning approach, allowing their children to learn what they want, when they want, in a way they want, where they want, for their own reasons. This is seen as the natural progression for children who have already learned to walk and talk in a nurturing environment at home. Parents who follow a natural learning approach trust in their children's innate desire to learn.

Many home educators undertake an eclectic mix of methods to suit their needs. They might incorporate the philosophies of Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori or Charlotte Mason. They might tackle some subjects in a highly structured manner and leave others for their children to pick up as they happen to become interested in them. For example you may choose to do daily lessons in maths and reading with afternoons spent exploring the wonders of life through books and walks in the park.

Whatever approach is taken, children invariably learn. Each home educating family finds what works for them.

Adjusting to home education

It may take time for your child to adjust to home education. A lot has been written about the transition from school to home education. This information can be found under 'de-schooling' or similar search terms in the books listed at the end of this information sheet or on the Internet

How successful is home education?

Hugely successful. Both overseas and Australian research indicate that home educated children equal and exceed the achievements of traditionally schooled children. More details of this research can be found in *Otherways* Issue 100 or on the research page of our website.

What about socialisation?

Most home-educating families consider socialisation to be one of home-education's great advantages despite the fact that you are highly unlikely to find twenty-five home-educated children of the same age congregating exclusively in the same place everyday.

Home-educating students have the time, freedom and energy to get to know people of many ages and backgrounds. They tend to socialise widely, counting adults, younger or older children and members of the opposite sex amongst their friends. They get together in support groups, go on excursions, attend camps and other group activities. Many participate in community and after-school activities such as sporting clubs, drama groups, music classes or scouts.

For a home-educated youngster, a peer group is more likely to consist of those who share the same interests, just as it does for adults, rather than those who share the same birth year.

Research has also covered the socialisation aspect of home education and can be found on the research page of our website. Some interesting articles on socialisation can also be found in *Otherways* issue 99.

Are parents qualified to teach their own children?

The short answer to this question is yes, absolutely. The best teachers for children are people who love and care about them and respect their particular way of learning. You are already your child's teacher. Consider the things your children knew, the skills they already possessed before 'education' was a consideration. How did they learn so much? Because they wanted to and you were there to answer questions, offer help and share their pleasure. This is at the heart of home education; you are simply continuing the journey of discovery together.

Knowledge is out there waiting to be found, whether in books, computers, on television, in museums, theatres and workshops, or from friends and family who have particular skills or experiences to share. If a time comes when all of these potential sources are no longer enough, there are colleges, correspondence courses and tutors.

How do home educating families operate?

Home educating families have often been portrayed as Dad going to work and Mum at home teaching the children during school hours. Some home educating families operate that way. However, dads also home educate, so do single parents, so do grandparents. Some parents each work part-time and share the care of the children. Some parents work from home. Some families who home educate a child may also have children who attend conventional schools. Others combine periods of conventional school with periods of home education. One of the many benefits of home education is that it need not be confined to school hours and this gives many families the opportunity to find flexible solutions in order to home educate in their own circumstances.

Does home education work for teenagers and can they get into university?

Yes. There are an increasing number of teenagers and young adults in Victoria who are or have been home educated. They enjoy the independence of home learning and the time to discover what they really love to do. Some attend TAFE colleges and universities; others pursue apprenticeships or are engaged in paid employment.

Many TAFE colleges offer bridging courses for people wishing to gain entry into university. Universities often have special entry schemes and some are very interested in home educated students. A wide variety of tertiary courses are available through the Open Learning scheme.

For those who wish to acquire the Victorian Certificate of Education there are a number of options. Some teenagers attend a public or private school, or a TAFE college for Years 11 and 12. RMIT has a full time VCE available for 17 year-olds and over. Some study by correspondence. For more options for older students, see our *Resources Sheet* or the teenage section of the website

Whatever path is chosen, home educated students end up with knowledge and an education that equips them well for life in the wider community and for a career in the field of their choosing.

Further Reading

Freerange Education, Terri Dowty (ed.)

Learning All The Time, John Holt

Teach Your Own, John Holt

The Unschooling Handbook, Mary Griffith

The Homeschooling Handbook, Mary Griffith

Family Matters, David Guterson

The Teenage Liberation Handbook, Grace Llewelyn

You may also like to follow up these educational writers either at your library or on the internet: Ivan Illich, John Taylor Gatto, Everett Reimer, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, Linda Dobson, Thomas Armstrong, Café Cohen, Anne Lahrson-Fisher

Websites to Explore

HEN website: www.home-ed.vic.edu.au

HEA -NSW: www.hea.asn.au

Life Learning Magazine: www.lifelearningmagazine.com

Home Education Magazine: www.home-ed-magazine.com

The Educational Heretics Press: <http://edheretics.gn.apc.org/>

The Home Education Network Inc

HEN is a non-profit support group for home educators. Its aims are to make Home Education information available to the general public and to support home educating families. It does this through its magazine, website, phone support line and local networks.

Members have the option to be included on a network list enabling them to contact other home educators in their area.

Local activity groups are also listed on webpage under support groups.

For Further Information:

email coordinator@home-ed.vic.edu.au, or leave a phone message at (03) 9517 7107.

Local contacts are also available in the following areas to offer support and information. These members, along with all those who work for HEN, give their time voluntarily to assist families enquiring about home education and offer support to beginning and continuing home educating families.

Victoria

Metropolitan area: Lyn Loxton	(03) 9431 4826
Geelong area: Margaret Anderson	(03) 5266 2058
Gippsland: Wendy Thompson	(03) 5627 5534
Ballarat area: Mike/Sandra	(03) 5342 8827
North-east area: Maeve Larkin	(03) 5767 2323
Bendigo area: Carleen Sing	(03) 5435 7323
Yarra Valley: Joanna Minshull	(03) 5962 1275
Mornington Peninsula: Lyn Wynn	(03) 5976 1124
Wimmera Area: Ginny Clark	(03) 5394 1178
Stawell/Ararat area: Frith	(03) 5356 2398
Colac: Bel, Ross & Merin Trebilcock	(03) 5235 1210
Victorian Christian: John Angelico	(03) 9544 8792

New South Wales

Hazelbrooke: Jeanette Crawford	(02) 4758 6497
St Mary's: Rhonda Pritchard	(02) 9673 3821
North Richmond: Anne White	(02) 4571 2107

Tasmania

Launceston: Virginia De Groot	(03) 6369 5284
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(Virginia is employed by the state government to support and monitor home educators in Tasmania)

Queensland

Yeppoon: Kathy Boles	(07) 4939 7630
Biloela: Anne Hills	(07) 5476 0030
Toowoomba: Janine Banks	(07) 4636 3778

South Australia

Mt Gambier: Sharee Cordes	(08) 8723 2158
Yankiilla: Beverley Paine	(08) 8558 3212

www.beverleypaine.com.au

Australian Capital Territory

Bonython: Cheryl Cooper	(02) 6288 8549
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Western Australia

Janebrook: Melinda Waddy	(08) 9255 2438
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Northern Territory

Darwin: Louise Edwards	(08) 8931 3338
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Home Educating Gifted Children

By Susan Wight, Bendigo, Victoria

Home educating is all very well, but what if your children are gifted? Won't they need the special programs only available in school? How could a parent be qualified to educate them? Don't gifted children have trouble socialising anyway, and won't home education make that worse?

School Provision

Firstly, let's look at those "special programs" in schools. In Australia there are no special schools for gifted children. There are a few "opportunity schools" and schools which compact the normal curriculum into fewer years. The competition for places in these schools is fierce and many gifted children can't get in. The schools themselves may not be the answer as the experts still can't agree on the best provision for gifted students and the whole issue is fraught with politics.

Some regular schools run gifted classes but although the gifted children are together they must still slog through the set curriculum. Some schools have "pullout programs" where gifted students gather once a week to study something more interesting or advanced but this is a set topic which the students may not even be interested in and is in addition to their class work. Most gifted children are stuck in a regular age-for-grade classroom with a teacher who has one hour's training in gifted education. Teachers spend much of their time in crowd control and struggle to deliver anything but a "one-size-fits all" curriculum. Even for a compassionate teacher, being expected to "whip something up" for an individual child is well-nigh impossible. Many students are offered more advanced work if they finish their regular work. This must seem a strange reward – more work for finishing! In reality most 'gifted programs' are extra work in one form or another.

School Problems

At the same time, school is very stressful for a gifted child. He is essentially more advanced in some area than his age-mates. Whilst this does not make him better than anyone else, it does make it difficult for him to make friends. He feels his difference but may not understand it – he just knows that the other kids don't like him for some reason and suspects that there is "something wrong" with himself. He hears the words "weird", "nerd" and "geek". Ostracism and relentless bullying are very common school experiences amongst gifted children. Sadly, some teachers are also very hostile to gifted children, seeming to take the child's prior knowledge of a subject as a personal insult and they make the lives of gifted children in their so-called care a misery. Maslow wrote that the basic human needs must be met before humans can rise to the higher levels. Safety is a basic need and in school many gifted children are unsafe and stressed. This blocks their ability to learn.

The parents of a gifted child must constantly advocate for him at school, trying to arrange appropriate provision to

alleviate his plight. The child knows that all these meetings are about himself and infers again that there is "something wrong" with him. Many parents don't tell their child they are gifted for fear of giving them a "big head" but he observes the constant meetings, whispered conversations and furtive glances. Ostracized by other children and shut out from adult conversation, he feels alone and odd. Giftedness runs in families so his siblings are his most natural companions but they are separated from him into age-segregated rooms and he is actively discouraged from associating with them. Family disunity results.

Many gifted children have asynchronous development which means they may be physically six years old, capable of maths at a twelve year old level and have a reading age of a nine year old. Emotional intensity and sensitivity are also gifted traits and coupled with asynchronous behaviour result in unbearable pressure and the child may often whine like a toddler. Ironically, although they often behave older than they are, when they act younger than their age they draw the most attention to themselves and are then labeled "socially immature" and may even be required to repeat a grade.

Their asynchronous abilities may also create difficulties if their motor skills are several years behind their verbal and cognitive skills. The six-year-old gifted child is therefore out of place in a grade one classroom but, if shifted to a class where the academic content is appropriate, may be way out of his depth physically. For example his handwriting may be totally inadequate to keep up with the work. Teachers often focus on what the child is "bad" at, which can cause the child to feel as though they are "no good at anything".

Gifted children tend to see 'the big picture' and this also makes school difficult for them. Asked to do a project on Romans, for example, they will read a stack of books but the task of processing all that information and reproducing it as a poster with a little bit of information and a few pictures is just too hard. They start their project over and over again and can never produce something they feel is truly definitive on the subject. Despite having a better knowledge of the topic than anyone else in the grade, they end up handing in a hastily scribbled page because they ran out of time and gave up on producing the perfect piece of work they envisaged. They begin failing as a result.

High achieving gifted students may come under a lot of pressure to continue performing. The stress results in frustration, boredom, depression and/or behaviour problems. Many lose their early love of learning, some are misdiagnosed with ADD or ADHD. Those who know they are gifted can end up with an attitude problem - they come to expect that something should be done for them and wait resentfully and with increasing cynicism for that to happen.

Quite apart from the stress of school, it takes up so much of their time, and many gifted school children are also

enrolled in a hectic round of extra-curricular activities in an attempt to meet needs which are not being met during school hours. Tragically, the stress of school is so great that some gifted students suicide.

Home Education

In contrast, home education allows gifted children to blossom. Gone is all that stress, confusion and bullying. They have their siblings and parents for company. Their love of learning is valued and encouraged, they can pursue their passionate interests and they can read to their heart's content. At home they don't have to produce something on paper in order to demonstrate that learning has happened. With the pressure to produce work lifted, they can enjoy learning the way they did before starting school. Gradually they begin to produce things because they want to. They are not tested and feel no concerns about what everybody else's work looks like. Often they plan huge pieces of work which will never be finished and they always start more things than they can complete but will finish more and more projects as they get older. Sometimes they don't finish things

because the task they have set themselves is far too big. On other occasions they stop before they finish a project because they have learnt all they wish to learn about it for now. They revel in the conversations home education makes possible. They also have time left over for as much thinking and daydreaming as they wish. This is very important to any child but gifted children are more likely to be introverted than extroverted and will therefore thrive on the opportunity for reflective thought. In school, their imaginative stories had to be condensed to what their handwriting could cope with, but at home they can use a computer to write stories, tape-record themselves telling a story or dictate them to mum, dad or an older sibling. A passion for story-telling is therefore not strangled by the struggle to control a pen and the fact that the pen goes so much slower than the story happening inside their mind. Hours of imaginative play also help to develop their story-making ability and passion.

Home education is accepting of asynchronization because learning that is uneven is taken for granted and it's okay to be interested in physics but struggle with scissors. At school it is considered 'weird' and 'anti-social'. Other home educating adults, who by their very nature respect children and value learning, respond

supportively to children's desire for knowledge about the world.

So are parents 'qualified' to educate gifted children? Yes! By the time a gifted child is five years old, his parents have five years experience in how gifted children learn – far more than the average teacher.

Conclusion

Schools fail gifted children and many gifted children fail school. Once out of the system, children begin to feel happy again and follow their own thirst for knowledge. All these children needed was to be removed from the system and allowed to learn at their own pace. There are no grade levels, only a world full of interesting things to learn about.

Giftedness is a difference and differences are frowned upon in school. Learning at home a gifted child is not forced into the constant, stressful company of a group of children who happen to be the same age. As home learners, they learn to deal with and befriend people of many ages. Indeed they have more access to adults generally and they enjoy the interaction this brings. The children may choose to be alone often. There is nothing wrong with time spent alone -we just live in a society which does not value it.

Nurturing gifted children (as with any children) involves responding to them appropriately and this can best be done on an individual basis at home. Far from hot-housing, home education allows gifted children not only the time to enjoy learning but to play, daydream and just be. Out of school, giftedness can be a gift instead of a problem.

This article is reproduced from *Otherways* the magazine of the Home Education Network (HEN)

There is an email support group for those home educating gifted children. You can join at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/VHSG/>



You are invited to join
Home Education Network Inc

Registration No. A0039557N

HEN Mission Statement

As home educators, we believe that children have an innate curiosity to learn and grow and, when given the freedom and support of family and friends, they will have the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

We are dedicated to raising self-motivated, broad-minded, confident, competent, independent, passionately alive people.

Home education empowers children and young adults to discover their potential unencumbered by arbitrary authorities. It promotes the love of life-long learning.

Home education provides broad socialisation through networking with a diverse group of people of varying age and social backgrounds. The Home Education Network recognises that true socialisation begins with acceptance and growth within one's own family and a naturally widening circle as children grow older. It aims to provide additional social opportunities for home educating families to encourage mutual support amongst home educating families and access to like-minded people as well as support and encouragement to enquiring families.

Statement of Purposes

A. HEN aims to make information on Home Education accessible to the general public via newsletters, website, phone and personal contacts.

B. HEN aims to support a network of contacts for those people wishing to educate their children from a home base.

Membership is for 12 months and includes a subscription to *Otherways* which is published quarterly. Members who join part way through the year will be sent back issues for that year. Subscriptions are renewable in January each year and all members receive our membership card enabling them to negotiate discounts on educational products and providing proof of home education as required. The Home Education Network has been producing *Otherways* for 25 years. The magazine contains the latest news, research, workshops and events, networking and support group information, letters from families and articles on every aspect of home education from Australia and around the world. We endeavour to inspire, inform and encourage. The Home Education Network is a non-profit support group. All activities and *Otherways* magazine are run by volunteers.

Mail to:
Home Education Network
1 Pye Street
GARDEN CITY VIC 3207

Alternatively: join online <http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au/membership/>

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ P/code _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please complete the following:

- This is a new membership or a renewal
- I would like my name, suburb and telephone number included on the Network List Yes No

The Network List will be sent out twice yearly only to those members who choose to be listed on it. Unless they choose to be excluded, all members of HEN will automatically be on the network list.

Non-members will not be supplied with this list.

Where did you find out about HEN?

- In the White Pages
- From our website at <http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au>
- Education Department
- Another home educator
- Or Other (please specify).....

I would like to join HEN (includes Otherways for this year) \$30.00

I would like to order a set of 2006 issues (Editions 107-110) \$30.00

I would like to order a set of 2005 issues (Editions 103-106) \$30.00

I would like to order a set of 2004 issues (Editions 99-102) \$28.00

or I would like to order individual back issues as listed:

Edition 99 Edition 100 Edition 101 Edition 102

Total number of backissues: @ \$7.00 per issue Total : \$.....

Edition 103 Edition 104 Edition 105 Edition 106

Edition 107 Edition 108 Edition 109 Edition 110

Total number of backissues: @ \$8.00 per issue Total : \$.....

Plus postage \$1 per backissue \$.....

• I have enclosed my cheque/money-order made payable to HEN

Total money enclosed:\$.....

Back Issues Available:

Issue 110: Nov 2006

Schooling: The Hidden Agenda - Research on Home Educating Special Needs Children - Build a Home Lab, Part 2

Issue 109: Aug 2006

Preschool Pressure - The Preschool Push - When Our Children Leave Home - Build a Home Lab, Part 1

Issue 108: May 2006

The New Education Act & Debate - Intelligence, Schools and Failure - Self-directed Education - Gifts of Home Education

Issue 107: Jan 2006 - Steiner Special

Head, Heart and Hands - Waldorf Science - High School Options for Steiner at Home - Also: Maths and Science for teenagers.

Issue 106: Nov 2005

Informal Learning by Alan Thomas, Coping with Hard Times, Learning Science Naturally.

Issue 105: Aug 2005

Commemorating John Holt's anniversary - Learning Maths Naturally - Tertiary Options - Asperger's Syndrome.

Issue 104: May 2005

Encouraging Natural Learning - Natural Literacy - Schooling and Commercialism - Reference Resources Reap Rewards

Issue 103: Feb 2005

Beginning Home Education - Are You Qualified? - Quality Time - Age Segregation is Unnatural - Prospects for home learners.

Issue 102: Nov 2004

Learning Through Play - Leisure and Education - Is It ADD? - Bullying: The Daily Grind - Is School A Dream of the Past?

Issue 101: Teenager Special - Aug 2004

Teenage Suicide and Compulsory Schooling - Older Kids leaving school - An interview with a grown home learner - Also: Home Educating Gifted Children

Issue 100 - Celebrating 100 Issues - May 2004

Overseas and Australian Research - Australian Home Education: 25 years on by John Peacock - Reflections on Life: A Different Research - People Different From Ourselves - Tolstoy.

Issue 99 - Socialisation Special - Feb 2004

The S Word - Socialisation: The Dictionary Definition - Does School Socialise Children? - A Home-made Chemistry Set - Special Needs or Just Special? - Writing Topics - Pestalozzi