PARENT HOME EDUCATORS: TEACHING CHILDREN AT HOME
A phenomenographic study

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Introduction


The role of the parent is pivotal to the success of home education (Dole et. al., 2005). However, there is very little research into the roles of parent home educators. This research project examined the roles which home educating parents assume as they educate their children. A phenomenographic approach was used to implement the study. This paper outlines aspects of phenomenography and the results of the study, enabled by this approach.

Definition of Phenomenography

Phenomenography is a research approach which allows the researcher to view the way people conceive of themselves in the context of their social setting, and how they relate the two. Ference Marton, a phenomenographic pioneer described phenomenography as an empirical study of human experience or of human awareness (Marton, 1993). Marton (1986) saw phenomenography as:

“a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them”. (p.31)

Phenomenography allocates the differences in the subject’s conceptions, or ways of experiencing a phenomenon, into categories of description. The total number of the categories of description is, according to Marton (1994b), synonymous with the phenomenon being studied, and is labeled the “outcome space” (Marton, 1994a, p.4425).

The Research Design

The research project identified the qualitatively different ways in which home educating parents conceived of their roles as educators of their children. The phenomenon studied was the ways in which home educating parents experienced their roles as home educators. The context of the study was the lived experience of home educators in their everyday lives.

Theoretical Considerations

Taking a non-dualist position, phenomenography does not consider the ontological question as to whether reality exists, to be a problem. Ulgens (1996) notes that “there is no distinction between mind and reality according to non-dualist ontology.” (p.115). It assumes that reality does exist and that all that we can meaningfully speak about is the experienced world (Marton, 1981; Ulgens, 1996). Phenomenographers seek the meaning in how others experience the world.
While reality is experienced, one’s experience is not the totality of reality, as there are others who experience reality in varied ways. A key to phenomenography is to understand how different subjects experience reality. In pursuing this goal, phenomenographers focus on the experiences, which different people have of reality, to form a conception of that reality. Such conceptions are the relationship between the subjects and the phenomenon. Ulgens (1996) modified the semantic triangle to demonstrate a distinction between theory, consciousness and reality, thus showing a non-dualist relationship between the ontological and epistemological questions. The relation between (1) consciousness and reality indicates the ontological aspect, whilst the relationship between (2) theory and reality, the epistemological. Both are connected to, and are the experience of, the same reality.

Phenomenographers are interested in the subject’s consciousness of reality as well as the subject’s articulation of reality, which is an expression of theory. Both the mental awareness and the expression of reality constitute the subject’s experience of that reality. Ulgens (1996) argues that this direct link of the subject to reality, external to the subject, differentiates phenomenography from a constructivist approach, which cannot compare observations with an external world.

The Research Project

The Sample

A sample of home educators was selected from the Queensland branch of the Australian Christian Academy, the largest home education institution in the South Pacific region. The sample was selected with the view of obtaining the greatest demographic differences of critical elements. Differences included: gender, number of parents in the home, parent education levels, home schoolers, practitioners of distance education, teacher training, income, religious belief, location, number of years in home education, number of children, ages of children, children’s past schooling experience and students with disabilities.

Discursive Phenomenography

Discursive phenomenography, which is concerned with mapping people’s general conceptions of the world arising from discourse, was used for the study. The process employed phenomenographic interviews during which respondents were asked to name
and describe their role or roles as home educating parents. Their responses were taped, transcribed and subjected to phenomenographic analysis. The process of discursive phenomenography is illustrated below.

![Diagram of the process of discursive phenomenography](image)

**Figure 2: The process of discursive phenomenography (Hasselgren and Beach, 1997)**

**The Phenomenographic Interview – A Variation**

The phenomenographic interview was the major means of obtaining data. One unexpected feature emerged during the interview process. Some interviewees chose to not only speak of their roles as individuals, they occasionally spoke as a member of a couple, using the first person, plural mode such as “we” and “us” when referring to their roles as home educators. Thus during some interviews, some individual subjects changed the subject (himself or herself) from the singular self, to the cooperative we. This practice provoked a question in the mind of the researcher, which is how many entities are present in an interview which addressed members of a partnership such as husband and wife, or mother and father. The progression of identity from the “I” to the “we” revealed an unexpected aspect of the parents’ home educating experience. It identified both a shared experience, and the expected individual’s experience from some interviewees.

The phenomenographical approach, however, eliminates the individual during the data analysis, in its search for meaning. Thus these articulations as a member of a couple, were not deemed problematic for the purposes of accurately reflecting the roles of home educators, in the pools of meaning and in the outcome space.

In view of the foregoing, the researcher changed the format of the interviews. The original research model proposed the interviewing of 27 parents as individuals. However, in response to this unexpected circumstance, 13 individuals were interviewed separately and 7 couples were interviewed together. This variation in the interview procedure did not ultimately affect the outcome space; however, it did allow parents to more accurately express their roles during the data collection process.

**The Phenomenographic Data Analysis**

Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991) outlined the data analysis process to produce a group of conceptions in an outcome space, which faithfully describes the phenomenon. The process includes: (i) familiarisation with the text of the interviews; (ii) condensation of the statements most significantly representing the emerging concepts; (iii) comparison of significant statements to determine differences or agreement; (iv) grouping of similar statements; (v) articulation of the essence of the similarity within each group of significant statements is initiated (and later developed); (vi) these groups or categories are appropriately labeled; and (vii) the categories are contrasted with respect to similarities and differences.
Following the above process, familiarisation with the text was achieved by an initial period of prolonged and repeated exposure to and immersion in the interview transcripts. Immersion in the text included the following processes: experiencing the interview; repeated reviewing of the interview tapes (in some cases up to ten times in the pursuit of clarification); transcribing the interview data; reading and re-reading of the text; personal reflection and discussion with colleagues and writing about the text. These activities were often repeated and reviewed, with the researcher being aware of, and seeking to bracket, personal biases, in order to know and to understand what it was that the parents had stated. This analysis of the data gradually saw the emergence of utterances by parents which most significantly represented the concepts which were emerging from the data.

These utterances were grouped for similarity in meaning. Ultimately, 86 different pools of meaning emerged from the data. These pools of meaning qualitatively represented many varied ways in which these parents viewed themselves as home educators. Each pool of meaning was distinguished from the other pools of meaning by a peculiar characteristic or a distinguishing quality as articulated by the parents.

Each of the 86 pools of meaning was given a characteristic label. The following is a list of some of the pools of meaning: (i) a participant in the child’s learning and life; (ii) academic teacher; (iii) life skills teacher; (iv) advocate for home education; (v) career advisor; (vi) shaper of the child’s character; (vii) encourager of the child’s gifts and talents; (viii) facilitator of social development; (ix) nurse of the child; (x) nurturer of the child; (xi) motivator; (xii) spiritual advisor; (xiii) creator of good citizens; (xiv) lifestyle pioneer; (xv) change agent; (xvi) companion to the child; (xvii) educational partner (with one’s spouse); (xviii) planner; (xix) decision maker; (xx) provider of play; (xxi) provider of real life experiences; (xxii) educational theorist; (xxiii) exemplar; (xxiv) learner; (xxv) multi-tasker; (xxvi) prayer supporter of the child; (xxvii) researcher of curriculum and pedagogy.

The labeling of the pools of meaning was continually reviewed and developed, being always referenced to the utterances and the interview data, as it was deemed vital that such labeling should remain faithful to what the parents had expressed.

Once the pools of meaning had become apparent it was clear that, whilst each was distinguished by a different attribute, many pools of meaning shared similar broad characteristics. These pools of meaning were further grouped into nine sets of related meaning, or categories of description. As was the case with the pools of meaning, the nine categories of description were each given a label. Each label reflected a conception which the parents had of their roles as home educators. This was the first attempt to nominate categories of description. These categories were the basis for forming the conceptions. The initial nine categories of description were called: (i) Teacher, (ii) Promoter of home education, (iii) Nurturer of the child, (iv) World changer, (v) Relational, (vi) Type of parenting, (vii) Overseer of the child’s upbringing, (viii) Creator of an environment and (ix) Personal.

Further reflection, analysis, iterative reading of the data, input from colleagues and presenting the data for critique at workshops, delivered changes which refined the number of categories of description to four and provided stimulus for the refinement of
the names of the categories of description. The criteria for changing the names of the categories of description was always that the names of the categories should reflect the meaning in the data. This extended, iterative process of immersion in the data, critique and adjusting the result with respect to the data, delivered a parsimonious set of categories which reflects the phenomenon of the roles of home educating parents. The four categories of description are: (i) Learner, (ii) Partner, (iii) Teacher and (iv) Agent of Change.

This group of categories of description is a group of different conceptions of the phenomenon of the roles of parents who home educate their children. The process of obtaining these categories may be summarised in the following diagram.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3: The Process from Data to Categories of Description**

**Conceptions**

The four categories of description represent the different way these parents have experienced their roles as home educators. These categories contain the conceptions which parents have of this family-based pedagogical experience. The conception is the real currency of phenomenography. It is a way that a person experiences a phenomenon. Each conception is an expression of the awareness within the cohort of respondents in a phenomenographical study. Below is a brief description of the four categories of description and of the extent of the awareness of parents, within each category.

**Category of Description 1 - The Parent as a Learner**

The home educators saw themselves as learners. Being an active learner was vital to the success of home educators, as it encompassed many facets deemed strategic to the pedagogical process. The focus of this conception was that parents had a keen awareness that they were learning and experiencing new things as they assisted their children’s learning. Various aspects of the category of being a learner included: (i) learning about
pedagogy in order to home educate; (ii) intentionally becoming a role model of learning for their children; (iii) a sense of deep satisfaction and fulfillment and (iv) that their journey of learning opened up spiritual and personal development opportunities, which they had not previously experienced.

Diagrammatically, this conception is represented in this category, with the greatest focal awareness of a parent’s role as a learner in the darker section of the diagram and the less focused awareness extending outwardly to the perimeter of the ellipse. The limit or external horizon of this conception is the “self”, as a person’s conception of oneself as a learner would not extend beyond one’s self.

**Category of Description 2 - The Parent as an Educational Partner**

Home educating parents in dual parent families saw themselves as joint partners in an educational venture. Where there were two parents present, it was seen that agreement and mutual support was vital to the family’s educational success. This conception is structured around the focus of the parent’s relationship with his or her spouse. The deeper sense of awareness concerned (i) the parent’s ongoing ability to support the other parent, this was balanced with (ii) the parent’s reliance upon the other parent for support. With (iii) both parents having different skills, interests and talents, they saw the great value in the mutual partnership with different functions, so as to strengthen the family pedagogy. The parents’ awareness of this role extended to the limit of his or her partner, “the other”.

Parents in single parent families had to deal with the parental pedagogical requirements, alone, rather than being able to look to a spouse for ongoing collegial support. Single parents did seek relationships with others outside of the immediate family to assist with educational tasks and social activities. However, this was usually not a permanent educational partnership, such as was characterised in many of the married couples.

Grandparents who conducted home education with their grandchildren, in a (iv) surrogate educational capacity, with or on behalf of the parents of the children, demonstrated a variation in the conception of a family-based educational partner.
In this case, rather than there being just two parents in the educational partnership, this variation introduced other committed family-based adults who shared the ongoing partnering role in this form of home education.

This family-based, parent as a partner, is not the same as a parent seeking assistance from other significant adults outside the family, such as sports coaches, music teachers, speech and drama coaches, youth leaders etc. All of these parents, whether in single parent or dual parent families sought this non-familial adult assistance in their home educational experience. This aspect of home education lies outside the parents’ conception of Partner in this study.

**Category of Description 3 - The Parent as a Teacher**

One would expect that home educating parents would see themselves in a teaching role. However, what marks this category of description is the great diversity of teaching roles which parents articulated about themselves. The focus of greater awareness featured around five aspects of the teaching role. These included: (i) the pedagogical aspect, (ii) the relational aspect, (iii) a nurturing aspect, (iv) organisational and (v) developmental aspects. The parents’ awareness of the teaching role was directed towards their child, who was the object of this role.
The pedagogical aspect of the category of the parent as a teacher included many variations. Parents viewed themselves as academic teachers, they felt compelled to provide a wide variety of both formal and informal learning experiences. They provided many extra curricular activities including sports, musical, artistic and social events. They strove to provide best educational practice for the child, to remediate the child’s prior poor educational attainments, to set learning in the context of real life experiences and to provide play.

The relational aspect for this category was founded upon familial functions and relationships. These included the relationships of mother, father, grandmother and grandfather. It was often expressed in the context of an underlying assumption which was that a fundamental function of parenting was teaching. These parents felt that the unique connections between a parent and his or her child required that their relationship would be pedagogical.

The nurturing aspect of the category of teacher included a nourishing supportive focus. Parents talked about providing time and attention for their child. They discussed the importance of being a conversationalist, a companion and a full time carer. Being a nurturer of the child included bringing happiness into their lives and most of all providing love to their children.

The organizational aspect included providing a stable life, maintaining family unity, protecting the child from harm, providing financial security and providing an environment conducive to learning. Parents took on the roles of decision maker, planner, overseer of the child’s education and motivator. They sought to help the child to enjoy learning and they were also dispensers of discipline.

The developmental aspects of the role of the parent as a teacher included simply raising and training the child. Parents wanted to give the child permission to be different rather than feeling compelled to follow peer trends and pressures. They sought to remediate past bad social experiences such as bullying in schools. Parents saw their role as being an influence upon the child for good. The shaping of good character and values in the child was deemed to be important. Parents also saw themselves as facilitators of the child’s social development, and life skills, as encouragers of the child’s gifts and talents and as facilitators of the child’s natural and spiritual development. These parents also had a futures perspective as they saw themselves as assisting their child’s entry into adult life, into a career path and into their futures.

Category of Description 4 - The Parent as an Agent of Change

Home educating parents saw themselves as agents of change in their local and wider communities. Because home education is a relatively new educational phenomenon, (i) parents felt that they were pioneering a new form of pedagogy and lifestyle. They had become used to being different and innovative. Several spoke about some of the difficulties they had encountered because their educational choice was not a mainstream pedagogy. This role also included home educators (ii) becoming advocates to non-home educators about the benefits of home education and (iii) assisting parents who were new to home education. (iv) Parents also felt that they were bringing change to the world by assisting their children to be both good citizens and also to be independent thinkers, who
may be able to bring new ideas to the community. They justified this thought by suggesting that because their children were not involved in the classroom-group form of education, common to most traditional schooling, that their children, after having experienced a very different type of individualized and independent form of education, may bring a different contribution to the community.

Figure 7: Category of Description – Change Agent

The four conceptions as described in the above categories of description indicate differing levels of awareness in the people who were interviewed. Below is a discussion of the theory of awareness and it relates to this study.

**Theory of Awareness**

**Structure of Awareness**

Because phenomenography deals with people articulating their experiences, phenomenographers (Booth, 1992, 1997; Bowden & Marton, 1999; Cope, 2002; Marton, 1998; Marton & Booth, 1997) have developed theory to describe a person’s awareness of their experiences. A subject’s awareness of an experience may be described as having a theme and a margin.

The theme is the focus or the foreground of a subject’s awareness of a phenomenon. Aspects which are directly related to the phenomenon are part of the theme. The theme of awareness is limited by an internal horizon, which delimits itself from other aspects of which one is aware, which are not directly related to the phenomenon in question.

The margin of awareness involves aspects of the world which are not in the foreground of the conception, but which, however, are in the background of the person’s awareness, albeit to a lesser extent (Cope, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997). The margin of awareness is delimited from other phenomena by an external horizon.

**Awareness and Meaning**

The term referential awareness refers to the meaning imbedded in the awareness. Phenomenographers (Bowden & Marton, 1999; Marton, 1994a; Marton, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997), who have developed variation theory, bring some clarity to the matter of the referential aspect of experiencing phenomena.
Variation theory suggests that one is able to derive meaning about a phenomenon as it becomes distinct from all other phenomena.

Marton (2002) explains that the ability to discern critical features of an experience is dependent upon the subject’s experience of variation. Variation enables a person to experience the object as distinct from other phenomena and thus variation enables a person to clarify the meaning (the referential aspect) of the experience as distinct from other experiences.

Phenomenographers agree that whilst it is possible to separate structural and referential awareness for the purposes of analysis, both are inseparable in the experience of the subject. As the subject experiences the object, the relationship between both structure and meaning is constituted, with neither taking priority. Each conception derived from this study represents the awareness of home educators concerning their parental educational roles. Each of the four conceptions is delimited from the rest, yet all conceptions in the outcome space are related to each other, with respect to the parents’ experience of home education.

Outcome Space

The collection of all conceptions is the outcome space in a phenomenographic study. Svensson (1995) described the outcome space as a number of categories which are related to each other in a systematised way. Marton (1994 a & b) suggested that these ordered categories would form hierarchies in the description of the phenomenon. Marton and Booth (1997) stated that the outcome space is characterised by: each category revealing something distinctive about the phenomenon; the categories are related to one another and that they are limited in number.

Akerlind (2002) highlighted that the outcome space has an empirical nature in that it is derived from the data, yet it is also an interpretivist entity as its final composition is the result of the interpretation of the researcher. In addressing this issue, Walsh (1994, 2000) suggested that it is the degree to which the outcome space has emerged from the data and the degree of researcher interpretation which needs to be examined in order to determine appropriateness of the outcome space. Bowden (2000) accepted the possibility of researcher pollution when deriving an outcome space. However, he indicated that if researchers bracket personal biases and experiences and also keep fidelity with the data, they can develop an outcome space which truly represents the phenomenon. This relationship between the researcher and the data remains a matter of conjecture among phenomenographers.

Specific to this study, the outcome space represents the phenomenon of the roles of parent home educators. This outcome space captures the meaning of the roles in which home educating parents function. Home educating parents have to be learners, those in dual parent families are engaged in an educational partnership with their spouses, they are teachers of their children and they bring change to their communities. The meanings embodied in those roles are vast and varied. The diagram below represents one way of presenting the outcome space for this study.
Figure 8: One Representation of the Outcome Space
**Hierarchy**

At this point in the analysis, it became apparent that there was the possibility that the categories could demonstrate a structural consistency, which would allow a logical ordering of the categories of description. The structural consistency emerging about the categories seemed to easily progress from the individual parent, through to the parent’s spouse, to the individual child, in the family and then to the wider community, both local and global. The roles of these home educating parents were relevant to the parent as an individual, to the parent with respect to the parent’s spouse in terms of being a partner in education, to the parent with respect to the children of the family in terms of being a teacher, and to the parent with respect to the wider community in terms of bringing change to the world. Commencing from the self, the outcome space could be organised to demonstrate a logical relevance to an expanding audience. This hierarchical organisation of categories is diagramed below.

![Hierarchy Diagram](image)

**Figure 9: Ordering of Categories of Description in the Outcome Space**

**Dimension of Variation – Parental Educational Influence**

Within the outcome space, recognizable themes or dimensions of variation may be seen to traverse some or all of the categories. The dimension of variation, whilst being common to multiple categories, changes character in each category. In this study a dimension of variation was common to all categories. This dimension of variation was the educational influence of parents.

In the role of Learner, the home educating parent would bring influence upon himself or herself by learning and thus becoming better equipped as a home educator. In a similar way that teachers undergo professional development, home educators actively sought to self educate, to satisfy their child’s educational needs.
Secondly, the parent would influence his / her spouse in the role of Partner by consulting with one’s partner, agreeing with him or her, supporting and relying upon him or her etc. This would emulate the roles of classroom teachers who bring support and influence to each other in a team-teaching environment.

Thirdly, the dimension of parental educational influence was obvious when considering the role of a home educating parent as a Teacher. The parent exerts a powerful educational influence upon the child throughout the entire teaching process of home education.

Finally, in the role of change agent, the parent becomes an influence for educational change in the wider community as he / she pioneers a new pedagogy and lifestyle; advocates for home education; supports other home educators and produces good citizens for the future. Below is a representation of the way the dimension of variation of parental educational influence may be found across all categories of description.

This outcome space may be further described in a table format as shown in Table 1 below.
### Table 1: Categories of Description Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Category 2</th>
<th>Category 3</th>
<th>Category 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partner</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
<td><strong>Change Agent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I feel it’s probably helped me as much as it’s helped the kids.” I3 - ln163</td>
<td>“It’s a partnership with Patrick, you know, it’s not just one person, it’s both of us together.” I10 – In 179-180</td>
<td>“I’m the educator” I13-ln347</td>
<td>“just last year, four of my friends, who were totally against home schooling, all started home schooling in one year.” I8 – In 209-210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m growing as a person, yes, and a teacher. Absolutely.” I1 – ln 176</td>
<td>“You can brainstorm things better when you’ve got the two of you there. … Two people, yeah! It’s like that we’re a team.” C6 – In 557-558</td>
<td>“I found that I had a role to broaden out their education in various ways.” C3-417-418</td>
<td>“the young mothers will come to me and ask for ideas and help” C7 – Lns 490-491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’ve had lots to learn, so I think I’ve sort of grown into my role, and expanded it along the years, and I’ve really … and enjoying it a lot more.” C6 – In 715-717</td>
<td>“So we saw it as a partnership. I did the day stuff and my husband was the back up” I2 ln 25-26</td>
<td>“to offer opportunity for other windows of the interest that are there; to provide greater learning experiences and to help the child to enjoy learning.” I4-lns 149-150</td>
<td>“The whole reason for educating and disciplining children is so in the future they’ll be good citizens”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“because I’m fulfilled, therefore I can give to my children” C6 – ln 822</td>
<td>Now we’re giving a picture of the husband and wife in loving one another, enjoying one another, supporting one another in the, you know, different functions. You know, there’s likely that there’s an equalness there, but there’s a different function.” C1 – In 307-309</td>
<td>“Another quite big part for me is teaching them, you know, about relationships.” C6 lns 90-91</td>
<td>“Patrick and I really wanted our children to achieve, not for the sake of achieving, but to influence their world.” I10 – 86-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m the educator” I13-ln347</td>
<td></td>
<td>“What the hell am I doing here? (laughter). I suppose, just to provide a loving and caring and nurturing environment” C5 – In 450-451</td>
<td>“At the beginning it was really tough, because where we lived, there was nobody around that we knew that home schooled” I8 – In 191-192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Meaning</strong></th>
<th>I learn</th>
<th>I am part of a parenting team</th>
<th>I teach my child</th>
<th>I bring change to the world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Foreground - Personal Development</td>
<td>Foreground – We are together</td>
<td>Foreground – I teach holistically</td>
<td>Foreground – I am doing something different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background – Self Awareness</td>
<td>Background – My child develops</td>
<td>Background – My child develops</td>
<td>Background – Difference changes the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience – Personal Journey, new experiences</td>
<td>Experience – Sharing the journey with my spouse.</td>
<td>Experience – A shared journey of teaching and learning</td>
<td>Margin - World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Margin - Self</td>
<td>Margin - Spouse</td>
<td>Margin - Child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parental Educational Influence</strong></th>
<th>I change myself</th>
<th>We develop as a team</th>
<th>My child learns and develops</th>
<th>The world is changed</th>
</tr>
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Parent home educators: Teaching children at home
Discussion

This phenomenographic study has allowed parents to articulate their own experiences of their roles as home educators. The analysis has demonstrated that there is an educational element which characterizes the entire outcome space. It overarches all four categories. It is a dynamic educational factor which is unique to parents and has a powerful effect upon the self, one’s spouse, the children and also the wider community. Being a parent brings new learning experiences and change undoubtedly. However, being a home educating parent condenses normal parenting experiences in a very focused way, bringing enhanced and new experiences to the parent, which are characteristic of home education.

This powerful educational factor, resident in of home educating parents, could be termed the “parental educational dynamic”. It is parental as it is expressed in parents in ways unique to the parent-child relationship, and it is clearly intensified by the practice of home education. The parent has given birth to the child, has raised and nurtured the child in a unique genetic, biological social and spiritual relationship. The parent has a vested interest in the well-being of the child like no other person on earth. This parental factor is quite clearly, educational. If learning is inherent to a child, then one would expect that teaching would be a quality typically found in parents. This educational factor is also a dynamic influence. The human sciences clearly acknowledge the unique and powerful role that parents play when it comes to influencing their children. In view of the foregoing, this role can well be referred to as the parental educational dynamic.

Conclusion

In the changing climates of education, home education brings a return to the family as a community of learning practice (Barratt-Peacock, 1997). Home and family-based education has been an established pedagogy among indigenous peoples for millennia (Eastman, 1971; Gangel & Benson, 1983; Good, 1962; Knowles, Marlowe & Muchmore, 1992; Parker, 1912; Radin, 1963). Home education has also been foundational to formal education settings in Australia, as early as 1788 (Barcan, 1965, 1980; Cleverley, 1971). In the modern setting, home education has reemerged as a radically new pedagogy in an environment dominated by a compulsory, collectivist educational model controlled by governments across the globe.

One of the foundational aspects of home education, that parents are teachers, can both challenge and inform this current educational hegemony. This research project has opened a previously unexamined window into the thoughts and practices of parents who educate their children at home.

The current home education movement has flourished in Australia over the past 30 years, as an underground movement, with an estimated 85% of home educating parents practicing civil disobedience, in a legal environment hostile to their educational choices (Harding & Farrell, 2003; Queensland Government, 2003). Now that governments are seeking to work with the home education movement, it is vital that professional educators, governments and the wider community better understand the role of home educating parents as bona fide educators. In a changing educational climate, it is clear that the current home education movement and parent home educators are now established features on the Australian educational landscape.
References


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