A STUDY OF PARENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES AS HOME EDUCATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN

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home education, home schooling, homeschooling, distance education, home educator, parents as educators, parents, phenomenography, Queensland, Australia, conceptions, roles, parent roles

Abstract

Home education is a growing phenomenon in Australia. It is the practice whereby parents engage in the full time education of their children at home. This study used a phenomenographic approach to identify and analyse how home educating parents conceive of their roles as home educators. Data analysis presented an outcome space of the parents' qualitatively different conceptions of their roles as home educators. This outcome space exemplifies the phenomenon of the roles of parent home educators.

This thesis reports on the qualitatively different ways in which a group of 27 home educating parents viewed their roles in the education of their children. Four categories of description of parent home educator roles emerged from the analysis. These parents saw themselves in the role of a (1) learner, as they needed to gain knowledge and skills in order to both commence and to continue home education. Further, they perceived of themselves as (2) partners, usually with their spouse, in an educational partnership, which provided the family's educational infrastructure. They also saw themselves in the role of (3) teachers of their children, facilitating their education and development. Finally, they conceived of themselves as (4) educational pioneers in their communities. These four categories were linked and differentiated from each other by three key themes or dimensions of variation. These were the themes of (1) educational influence; (2) educational example; and (3) spirituality, which impacted both their families and the wider community.

The findings of the study indicate that home educators experience their roles in four critically different ways, each of which contributes to their family educational enterprise. The findings suggest that home educators, are *bona fide* educators and

that they access parental qualities that provide a form of education which differs from the educational practices characteristic of the majority of Australians.

The study has the potential to generate further understandings of home education for home educators and for the wider community. It may also inform policy makers in the fields of education, social welfare, and the law, where there is a vested interest in the education and welfare of children and families.

Publications arising from the study

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Ireland, J. E., Tambyah, M., Neofa, Z., & Harding, T. J. A. (2008, November). *The tale of four researchers: Trials and triumphs from the phenomenographic research specialization*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Changing Climates: Education for Sustainable Futures, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Retrieved February 16, 2010, from http://www.aare.edu.au/08pap/ire08373.pdf

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Statement of original authorship

The work in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature ______________________________

Date ______________________________

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Chapter 1
Introduction to the thesis

1.1 Background to the study

This study examines the roles of home educating parents in Queensland. Home educators are parents who, while not necessarily trained teachers, elect to educate their children at home instead of sending them to school. A home educating family is usually a single income family, with the mother doing most of the formal education. While home educators are not a large population, they are a significant minority who constitute a reemerging educational phenomenon. Two features that distinguish home education from traditional schooling are: (1) that the family home is the main pedagogical site rather than the school or traditional classroom; and (2) that parents perform the majority of the family's pedagogical functions.

This study researches parents' conceptions of their roles as home educators, in Queensland, Australia, a state that recognises home education as a part of its educational landscape (Queensland Government, 2003, 2004).

1.2 Significance of the study

Despite the fact that home education is gaining momentum as an educational phenomenon, there is no detailed, in-depth research into the roles of home educating parents within the family-based learning community (Dole et al., 2005).

Various Australian governments (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991, 2009; Jeffrey & Giskes, 2004; Queensland Government, 2003, 2004) have sought to create policies for home education. However, there is very little research, from the viewpoint of parents, which has been able to contribute to policy development. This study redresses the lack of empirical evidence and, by so doing, has the potential to inform government and the wider community about this little-understood educational phenomenon.

The study, as such, stands to assist home educators to better understand themselves and their roles. Having home educators, from both home schooling and from distance

education, describe themselves and their own experiences, provides an insider version of home education, which may inform both those who are experienced home educators and to those unfamiliar with home education. This contextualised description therefore serves to illuminate to the wider community the awareness that home educators have of themselves and of their roles.

Thus, the research adds new understandings of home education to the growing, yet limited literature on home education, and provides an opportunity for home educators, policy-makers and the wider community to gain insight into the phenomenon.

1.3 Defining home education

The practice of home education takes many forms. Whether referring to the Australian context or to that of other countries, the factor common to all forms of home education is that it is conducted mostly by parents in the context of the family and its usual setting is in and around the family home. Brabant (2008), defined home education in the *International Encyclopedia of Education*, noting its diversity of styles and its wide spectrum of methods, ranging from a highly structured approach, through to an informal, unstructured approach:

> At one end of the spectrum, children can be enrolled in distance education learning programs executed on a strict daily schedule; at the other end of the spectrum is a "freer" version of education called "child-led learning" or "unschooling", where the only framework for learning is the child's natural curiosity and adaptation to their environment, with parental intervention in the form of facilitation only. (Brabant, 2008, p. 297)

Thus, the term "home education" may encompass both the structured distance education model, as well as home schooling models such as school-at-home, eclectic models where parents mix and match curriculum resources and the unstructured home schooling models known as unschooling, or natural learning. Like Brabant's encyclopaedic definition of home education, the definition provided by Leslie Safran (2008), a UK researcher and home-education advocate, is "the full time education of a child in and around the home where the parents or guardian are committed to their children's education" (p. 36).

Despite such general agreement, there is inconsistency among researchers, home educators and governments around the world over the use of the terms "home education" and "home schooling". In some cases they are used interchangeably and, in other cases, not so. The terms "distance education" and "home education" are occasionally used synonymously, as are the terms "home schooling" and "distance education". While these inconsistencies may be accepted among home education practitioners and researchers, they can be problematic for policy-makers, who seek universal application for state and national populations.

For the purpose of this study, the term "home education" refers to both:

1. the practice of home schooling, where the parents educate their children in a family setting in and around their home and are primarily responsible for their child's education; and
2. the practice of distance education, where parents educate their children in a family setting in and around their home, but the children are enrolled in a school that is accredited for distance education, located away from the family home and engage in that school's educational program.

The common feature of the various modes of home education is the leading role that parents perform in the education of their children within the context of the family home. It is, within such a context, that the roles of home educating parents are investigated.

1.4 The study

The study is an in-depth investigation of how home educating parents conceive of their roles in the education of their children. The first of its kind in Australia, the study examines the qualitatively different conceptions home educators have of their roles as home educators.

The research question is:

What are the qualitatively different ways in which home educating parents conceive of their roles as home educators?

It uses a phenomenographic approach to answer the research question, within the context of the parents' everyday lives as home educators. Phenomenography is used to map "the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects, of and various phenomena, in the world around them" (Marton, 1986, p. 31). Chapter 3 of the thesis provides a detailed description of the phenomenographic approach undertaken in the study.

1.5 The researcher

It is important from the outset to locate myself, as researcher, within the context of the research. In brief, I have three levels of experience in home education: personal experience, professional experience and research experience. At a personal level, for 15 years my wife and I home educated our five children, who are now adults. We commenced home educating our children in 1986 because we wanted to educate our children in line with our Christian beliefs, using academic curriculum with a Christian worldview. As all in our family experienced the benefits and challenges of home education, we began to realise that, not only were our children receiving a sound education, but that home education was opening a way for us to grow our relationships with each other and with our local and broader community.

On a professional level, in 1994 I joined the Australian Christian Academy, Australia's first and largest home school support service, as a teacher. I was appointed Principal the following year and held this position until 2009. Between 2002 and 2008, I was also able to initiate moves to commence three nongovernment schools of distance education in the states of Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. I was also the principal of one of these schools of distance education for five years. Since 1994 I have been able to connect with and assist several thousand home-educating families in Australia and overseas.

As a researcher, I completed a master's degree dissertation (Harding, 1997) in education, on the reasons parents choose home education. Since 1997 I have written and presented key submissions to state and federal governments concerning home schooling and distance education and have made presentations at home education conferences, nationwide and internationally. These three factors have made me well known in the home education community.

1.6 Overview of the thesis

The thesis comprises six chapters. The first chapter has provided the background of the study, has also posed the study's research question, and has discussed the significance of the study and the researcher's experience in home education. In Chapter 2 the literature relevant to the study is reviewed in order to build a case for the study. It does so by reviewing the history of home education and the home education literature which refers to tension between parents and the state over who is responsible for the education of children. It refers to literature which defines the home educating family and literature dealing with academic and socialisation issues. The relevance of socio-cultural theory and role theory to this study is also discussed, as is the literature relevant to the family and to the idea of parents as educators. Chapter 3 provides a description and justification of phenomenography as the conceptual and methodological approach used in the study. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study. These include four categories or four ways in which home educators experience their roles as well as three dimensions of variation across these roles. In Chapter 5 the findings of the study are discussed, as well as some of the tensions in the parents' experience. Chapter 6 is the conclusion of the study. It presents key contributions of the study along with their significance and implications for the scholarly literature and for the field. The thesis concludes with key recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews a corpus of literature relevant to the study and, in so doing, builds a case for the study. First, it reviews the literature around alternatives to traditional schooling, with a consideration of the rights of parents and those of the state. Second, it examines empirical research around home education, profiling international and Australian studies, with a particular focus on academic and socialisation aspects of home education. The review, in the third place, provides an analysis of social cultural theory and role theory, before moving to consideration of the family studies literature. The chapter, as a whole, outlines and critiques evidence in support of home educators and their roles as being a legitimate socio-cultural site for empirical investigation. The chapter now turns to the case for alternatives to traditional schooling.

2.2 Searching for alternatives to traditional schooling

Prior to the rise of state-sponsored public schooling during the 19th century, post-Reformation education in the West used diverse formats. Europe's aristocracy often taught their children at home and the middle class in nations such as Russia and Austria could attend schools with a focus on nationalism, operated by benevolent despots. The middle class of England and the United States (US) could access private grammar schools; however, home education was also prevalent in the US. Often the lower classes in Europe were left in ignorance, although in England, charity schools and Sunday schools were operated for the poor by philanthropic Christian organisations (Clark, 1999; Meyer, 1965) and as early as 1561, Scotland had established church-based education that was free for the poor. So too, church-based elementary education was widespread across many European nations.

The rise of nationalism across Europe during the 19th century, brought philosophical, economic and social changes, which in turn saw home education diminish as a conventional educational methodology, as the West embraced the state

as the educator of its children (Blumenfeld, 1989; Brubacher, 1947; Illich, 1977; Kemp, 1971). Compulsory institutionalised schooling swept the Western world, operated by state-based monopolies. Since the 19th century and to the present, centralised schooling systems have dominated education in most nations (Good,1962; Meyer, 1965; Wilds & Lottich, 1970).

Compulsory, institutionalised, state-based education has been the subject of robust critique. Such critique has come from a wide range of thinkers, including John Stuart Mill (2009), Auguste Compte (Lenzer, 1975) and Ely (1978), who each questioned the ethics of governments sponsoring education, and the potential for education to be used as a political tool of the state. Despite their different theoretical stances, many educational theorists called for reform of state-controlled school systems, which had their origins in educational responses to the industrial revolution (Dewey, 1915; Friere, 1976, 1985; Holt, 1964, 1967, 1969, 1972, 1974, 1981; Illich, 1971; Parker, 1912; Postman, 1993, 1996; Taylor Gatto, 1992, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2007 a & b, 2009). This critique espoused another argument, that traditional schooling lacked humane and social ideals, and fell short of meeting the needs of children (Good, 1962; Holt, 1964, 1967, 1969, 1972, 1974; Kemp, 1971; Parker, 1912). Neill's (1960) view of freedom in school and Meighan's (1988) concept of flexi-schooling advocated less structure in schooling; while Illich (1971), who was affirmed by theorists such as Reimer (1972) and Huszn (1979), sought to de-school society because of perceived detrimental effects of schooling on Western industrialised cultures. The critique of government schooling from the 1960s to the 1980s provided an intellectual rationale for the search for educational alternatives, and partnered the development of the home education movement.

A more recent critique of Western education by educators (Loader, 2007; Reid & Thompson, 2003) and social commentators (Graham, 1998, 2000; Schmidt, 1999) indicated the current system of schooling is out of touch with the knowledge economy and its native inhabitants of the digital revolution. It called for a paradigm shift in educational thinking.

In the US, over the last 20 years there have been calls for educational reform. Farnham-Diggory (1990) argued that attempts at reforming the school system by imposing greater requirements such as longer school hours and stricter teacher

promotion requirements only made it more difficult for teachers to teach, and that bureaucratic resistance to stimulating pedagogy was stifling the development of students. Such practices would typically reassert traditional underperforming education systems. Lieberman's (1989) argument for greater educational choice and his *Autopsy of Public Education* (Lieberman, 1993), concurred with the conclusions of Perelman's (1992, 1993) controversial work on hyper learning, in declaring the US system of public schooling to be obsolete in the face of the knowledge and technology revolution. Sykes (1995) called for breaking the stranglehold of the educational bureaucracy. Taylor Gatto, former New York State teacher of the year and now an active critic of compulsory schooling (1992, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2007a, 2007b), argued that the state monopoly of education in Western nations has intentionally developed a generation of compliant subjects, unaccustomed to independent thought and individual creativity, who are easily managed in corporate, managerialist, economic and social structures. In his call for new educational structures, he saw parents as home educators and home education as a valid alternative to conventional school-based education.

Postman (1993, 1996) and Postman and Weingartner (1971) similarly questioned the effectiveness of schooling for the education of children. Their work expressed serious concerns over a government-controlled, top-down delivery of selected information in the guise of entertainment, via the use of technology. They argued that such selective dissemination of information undermined serious discourse about ideas. Sykes (1995) predicted that any reform that failed to wrest and transfer power over education to the learners, would fail. Peters (2003), in his influential call for institutional reform in the US, made specific reference to education, stating, "I despair of the education system more than any other part of our society" (p. 290). Peters argued that education should be mostly about a personalised approach of getting to know the child as an individual and his or her learning trajectory, rather than operating schools as factories and education as mass production. Mintz and Ricci (2010) surveyed 35 leading progressive educators, critical of traditional schooling, who sought innovative educational approaches as solutions to their own critique. Among their proposed solutions, home education figured strongly. Such critique and calls for reform, however, are not unique to the US.

In England, for example, educational researcher John Adcock (1994, 2000, 2001), a teacher in schools and higher education, argued that schools were redundant to education and, like Peters (2003), advocated for a more personal approach to children's education. Similarly, leading British educationalist, Roland Meighan (1988, 1997, 2001b), called for flexi-schooling and a new learning system to replace the United Kingdom's (UK) entrenched and outmoded system of schooling. Meighan observed that home educators were already pioneering the next learning system by re-empowering the family as an educational community and tailoring education to the needs of the individual.

In Australia, over the past two decades, schools have been critiqued for poor academic performance of students and for being anti-democratic, systemically obsolete and in need of regaining the trust of parents (Partington, 1990, 1993; Reid & Thomson, 2003; Rich, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Vinson, 2002, 2004). Beare (2010), while optimistic about the future of schooling, documented changes to Australia's education systems since World War 2, and called for further reform of Australian education. He emphasised the importance of meeting the needs of individual students, and that students now have a global outlook, which is unfamiliar to many of those who educate them.

A common feature of this critique in the US, the UK and Australia is a call for the tailoring of education to meet the individual needs of students. This has generated a climate that is ready for educational change. Richards (2000) described these developments as conducive to the emergence of a new educational paradigm and saw home education as a logical outcome of the pursuit of alternative approaches to education. The call for a different approach to education aligns with the reemergence of the home education movement. It could be argued that, by empowering parents as educators of their own children, home education removes education from the context of large institutions, makes education more flexible and tailored to the needs of students and establishes a deep familial relationship between the parent-teacher and the pupil. Potentially, it may account for many of the concerns raised by critics of modern education. For this reason, it is appropriate to investigate parents and their roles in this emerging phenomenon.

2.2.1 Home education and the law in Australia

In Australia, parents are free to home educate their children in all states and territories. Governments do not oppress home schoolers as in other nations. However, there is a tension between parent rights and state rights among some home schoolers, who do not register their children for home schooling. The question centres upon whether the state or the parents are responsible for the education of children (Harding & Farrell, 2003).

Since the establishment of compulsory, free and secular education with the *1872 Education Act* in Victoria, Australian state and territory governments gradually assumed responsibility for the education of children. This responsibility was ratified in law by the High Court of Australia in *Ramsey vs. Larsen* (High Court of Australia, 1964) and still applies. With the reemergence of home education in the decades following this decision, home schoolers in most states and territories practiced civil disobedience to state education laws with respect to compulsory school attendance. Given that government distance education was practised nationwide, that home schooling in Victoria had legal status prior to this decision, and that home schooling was growing in other states, it was only a matter of time before governments saw the need to recognise home education in its various forms.

The formal recognition of home education by Australian governments may be viewed by some as affirming parent rights. However, others argue that it enhances the powers of the state, as governments still retain the legal power to register home-schooled students and to approve their educational programs in most states and territories. It may thus be argued that, in the struggle between parental rights and state responsibility, the state has expanded its legal prerogative to be inclusive of giving parents permission to perform a family-based activity in their own homes. From this perspective, this legal struggle could be viewed as a loss of civil liberties and as an extension of state power.

In Australia, state and territory governments do not agree that education, for home-educated students, is solely the domain of the family. Each jurisdiction has its own regime for registering home-schooled students, with some states also requiring education programs to be approved. In addition, all distance-educated students must

be enrolled in schools with distance education accreditation. Thus, while parents are free to home educate in Australia, governments retain the power to sanction what parents do in educating their children, that is, they can sanction their roles as home educators.

Despite this level of government power, not all home schoolers comply with requirements. The *Home Education Review* (Queensland Government, 2003) in Queensland found that up to 85% of Queensland home-schooled students were not legally registered with the Department of Education. This widespread practice of civil disobedience indicates that a significant group of home schooling parents have been at variance with the Minister for Education when it comes to the question of who is responsible for the home schooling of children. However, many home schoolers are compliant with home school regulations, and distance educators agree to enrol their children in schools of distance education that are approved by the Minister for Education.

Whether home-educating families are compliant or noncompliant, the legal status of all families and their attitude to that status, in some way, impacts the experience and roles of the parents as they educate their children. Compliant home schooling parents must report to the state home education centre and maintain their approved educational program. Noncompliant home schooling parents face the threat of legal sanctions; and distance education parents maintain the educational program designed by their school of distance education. Whether home schooler or distance educator, the legal status of home educators can inform their roles, in various ways. Compliant home schoolers and distance educators are not under the threat of state sanctions, whereas noncompliant home schoolers are. The threat of state sanctions creates a level of stress in the lives of noncompliant home schoolers.

2.2.2 Parent responsibility or state responsibility?

There is robust debate around the authority of the family and that of the state in children's lives. The question probes the issue of who is responsible for the education of children. This debate includes home educating families; as various governments take different views on the acceptability of home education, and the many home education families hold different views on the role of the state with

respect to the education of their children. Thus, there are two considerations for all home educating families on this matter. They are the attitude of the government towards home education in the state in which a home educating family lives and the attitude of the family to their government's view on home education. These two considerations directly impact the role of parent home educators.

British social theorist, Fox Harding (1996, 1997) described the tension between the family and the state in determining the degree of control the state can exercise over the family. Fox Harding (1996, 1997) described seven different levels of state control, which range from the state taking an authoritarian position through to a laissez faire position. Fox Harding's (1996, 1997) work is relevant to home educators, as home educators hold different views on what levels of state control are appropriate for their children's education. With regard to the state's power over their children's education, home schoolers typically take either of two positions. Some see themselves submitting to registration and monitoring by the state in compliance with state law, thus admitting to a measure of the state's responsibility for their children's education. Other home schoolers take the laissez faire position, with the view that they are completely responsible for their children's education. In doing so, they ignore all state requirements and risk legal sanctions. Distance educators, in turn, take the view that they share responsibility with the state. They enrol their children in a school of distance education, which has a state-approved education program administered by registered teachers and are thus, compliant with state law. The teaching and learning, however, happen in and around the home under the direct supervision of the child's parents, in a similar manner to that of home schooling (Harding, 1997; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Queensland Government, 2003).

When considering the tension between parents and the state over the responsibility for the education of children, the Roman Catholic Church's (Lawler, Wuerl & Lawler, 1976) principle of subsidiarity can shed light on this debate. The principle aligns the competing claims of parents and state into a designated order and opposes the practice of turning "over to the greater society, of higher rank, functions and services that can be performed by smaller communities on a lower plane" (pp. 339–340). This principle is, in turn, applied to the responsibility of parents towards their children's education, positing that:

> Since the parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring, and so must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of those children (Lawler et al., 1976, pp. 341–342).

This principle affirms that decisions should be made at the lowest reasonable social level in order to enlarge freedom and broaden participation in responsible action. If an individual or small unit cannot appropriately fulfil their responsibility, the task should then be handed over to a wider society. The principle of subsidiarity does not claim that parents are the exclusive educators of their children. Rather, it supports society's responsibility to assist parents with the education of their children, when they deem to have need. With regard to education, this principle recognises the primacy of parental responsibility, in the first instance, and the responsibility of the wider society, such as the Minister for Education, in the second instance. It advocates the order and cooperation of both the social units of the family and the state, rather than either working independent of, or in opposition to, one another.

While most governments around the world support the view that schooling is appropriate for the education of children, governments differ in their acceptance of home education. In Europe, some governments take an authoritarian stance against home education; others are less intolerant, and some take a laissez-faire approach. In Sweden and Germany, for example, governments take an authoritarian stance, where home-educated children can be removed from their parents by virtue of their being home educated. This has given rise to cases of home-educating families immigrating to countries that are tolerant of home education, following government threats of custody action (Donnelly, 2009; Donnelly & Neubronner, 2009; Unruh, 2010).

A lesser level of state control exists in other nations such as Poland, Portugal and Romania, where home schooling is legal, but is regulated by educational authorities (Klicka, 2007a&b; Nordmann et. al., 2009). In some Canadian provinces, governments grant home educators financial support (Nordmann et. al., 2009). In England, recent attempts to legislatively regulate home education were abandoned, with home educators en masse, opposing the bill (Education Otherwise, 2010c). Parents in England, thus, retain the legal right to home educate and the right exists without government regulation (Education Otherwise, 2010a, 2010b).

In the US, states vary on the degree of regulation directed towards home educators (Klicka, 1999). Ray (2000) defined the degrees of regulation in three categories: low regulation, with no required contact between the state and the home educating family; moderate regulation; and high regulation. When Ray (2000) compared the degree of state regulation with academic achievement of home-educated students, he found no significant difference between students' academic scores in the three differently regulated categories. Egelko and Tucker (2008) reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, after a Californian court ruled that home-educating parents must have teaching credentials, that in any of the United States, at any time, a legislator, a policymaker or a court could make a decision that could impact the lives of thousands of home-educated students. This ruling was later repealed; however, it illustrates that the policy conditions surrounding home education in the US are subject to change, at any time.

The International Organisation for the Development of Freedom in Education (OIDEL) is an educational research institute that has consultative status with the United Nations (UNESCO) and the European Council. OIDEL's (Nordmann et. al. 2009) recent report on educational freedom, cited parent rights to home educate as part "of the freedom of education … which is a human right that characterises a democratic society" (OIDEL, 2001, p. 1). OIDEL (Nordmann et al., 2009) demonstrates the degree of control by respective governments over home education, on a Freedom Index, ranging from16 to 0, with 16 indicating maximum freedom and 0 indicating prohibition. The Freedom Index, with respect to home education, shows national governments fall between the full range of freedom and control. As the attitude of various governments to home education differs markedly around the world, the legal status of home education and the right of parents to home educate remain a matter of debate.

Home education under critque

Various theorists have expressed doubts about the rights of parents to educate their children. Monk (2003), an English lawyer, has questioned whether it is a basic human right for parents to determine the type of education in which their child engages, and cites a clash of views between the European Commission of Human Rights (which favors compulsory schooling over parent educational choice) and the

European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1953) (which allows for the rights of parents to choose their children's education). Monk (2004) saw home education as problematic and not in the public interest. He juxtaposed the parents' rights discourse with his view of a "common-sense" (Monk, 2004, p.13) socialisation discourse, which makes an 'a priori' claim to the truth that school attendance is normal. Monk claimed that the self-evidentiary nature of this truth was reinforced by silences throughout England. Monk observed that home educators see themselves as educational trailblazers, who challenge embedded educational norms. He contended that home education should not exist outside the scrutiny of the state, but rather, it should be regulated by the state (Monk, 2009).

In a similar vein, Lubienski (2000, 2003a&b), a US educator, presented a critical view of home education, arguing that there is an undefined benefit to society, derived from the compulsory state-directed education of all children. In turn, he questioned the rights of parents to educate their own children in their preferred manner such as home education. Reich (2002, 2005) took this point further, suggesting that home education presented a threat to societal cohesion and advocated for its regulation. Apple (2000, 2005), while cognizant of parent concerns about the defensiveness, lack of response and discussion in US public school systems, argued that home education may create further stratification in US society, with a "selfish and anti-public agenda" (p.269). These writers have presented the view that the role of the state is to produce a society in which there is equitable educational opportunity for all, and that home educators diminish or threaten that role in their search for alternatives to the mainstream. They have argued that the compelling interests of the parents' right to choose their child's education clashes with the state's role in education, by introducing influences to home educated children, which may differ to the state's position.

Hardenbergh (2005) challenged the views of Apple and Reich, highlighting that they espouse "the unexamined hypothesis that public schools function as the 'glue' of our society and are therefore necessary in order to promote common values" (Hardenbergh, 2005, p.98). She suggested, in the light of the perceived failures of public education, that the ideas of compulsory schooling and education should be decoupled and reexamined with a view to substantive reform, given that the West has

had 150 years of common school attendance to justify its effectiveness. Hardenbergh sought to move the debate over home education away from the arena of the rights of parents and the state, to the scrutiny of compulsory schooling and its effectiveness in providing education in the West.

2.3 Home education research

In the midst of such ongoing controversies, home education has resurged as a significant educational option in developed nations since the 1970s (McDowell & Ray, 2000; Ray, 2003, 2004; Rudner, 1999). Home educating parents choose to educate their children at home instead of sending them to school. Table 1 indicates various nations where researchers have reported the existence and development of home education. This list is not exhaustive, but merely gives an idea of where home education is active according to the literature.

Table 1: Nations where home education is developing

Australia	Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003
Belgium	Glenn, 2005
Canada	Brabant, Bourdon & Jutras, 2003; Davies & Aurini, 2003;
Chile	Glenn, 2005
Denmark	Beck, 2002
Finland	Beck, 2002
France	Petrie, 2001; Taylor & Petrie, 2000; Pizana, 2007
Germany	Petrie, 2001; Spiegler,(2003)
Iceland	Beck, 2002; Glenn, 2005
Italy	Glenn,(2005
Ireland	Petrie, 2001
Luxemburg	Petrie, 2001
New Zealand	Glenn, 2005; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998
Norway	Beck, 2002, 2006
Poland	Klicka, 2007a
Portugal	Glenn, 2005
Romania	Klicka, 2007b
Russia	Glenn, 2005
South Africa	de Waal & Theron, 2003
Sweden	Villalba, 2003
Switzerland	Glenn, 2005
UK	Hopwood, O'Neill, Castro, & Hodgson, 2007; Rothermal, 2004
US	Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2010

Mayberry, Knowles, Ray and Marlow (1995) defined home education in the US as a movement which passed through five strategic phases of development. During the

“confrontation phase” (Mayberry et al., 1995, p.13) of the 1970s – 1990s, when home educators were being legally challenged in the US, a significant body of research around the issues of the academic and social development of home educated children was conducted. This focus on developing a large body of research into the academic achievement and socialisation of home educated students in the US during this period coincided with the legal challenges to the legitimacy of home education, at that time. Segments of this early research are an important part of the home education literature and are referred to elsewhere in this chapter.

In Australia, however, where state sponsored distance education had been well established since the early twentieth century, the educational legitimacy of home education was not legally challenged; rather it was supported by the state. The lack of legal challenge to home education may in part, explain the paucity of Australian research into the academic and social development of home educated children.

2.3.1 Australian home education research

Research into Australian home education is in its early stages. Ten years ago Chapman and O’Donoghue (2000) recommended a four-pronged research agenda for home education that targeted: the reasons for home schooling, academic achievement and social development, how parents manage the home education process and the categories of parents and family characteristics. The growing body of Australian research into home education seems to be addressing this agenda. Each of these key aspects will be discussed in turn.

A number of Australian researchers have explored the reasons why parents choose to home educate (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003; Harding, 1997, 2003; Harp, 1998). Major reasons include a desire of parents to: transmit a distinct set of beliefs and values to their children; maintain close family relationships; ensure high quality academics; promote positive social interactions; fulfill a sense of parental responsibility; overcome geographical isolation; and support special educational and health needs of children.

A handful of studies have focussed on the academic achievement of home-educated students in Australia. Harding (2003) compared the academic achievement of home

schooled and distance educated students, finding no significant difference in academic achievement between the two groups. There has also been some research examining the success of home-educated students in gaining entrance into higher and further education (Carins, 2002; Harding, 2006d; McColl, 2005). These studies have reported that home-educated students have successfully gained entrance into such institutions in all Australian states and territories. Harding's (2006d) study of 438 home-educated students' post home education study pathways found that 36% entered universities to pursue bachelor degrees, 21% entered TAFE colleges to study diploma courses and 43% pursued apprenticeships and certificate courses at TAFE colleges.

Australian researchers have also explored the personal and social development of home-educated students, with students reporting that home education had positively contributed to their personal growth and self concept (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Jackson, 2007; Krivanek, 1985, 1988, McColl, 2005). Others have examined the positive and negative experiences of home-educated students (Jackson, 2007, 2009; McColl, 2005).

Other Australian studies have examined the different ways in which home educating families manage their home education (Habibullah, 2001; Honeybone, 2000; Lampe, 1988; New South Wales Board of Studies, 2004; Queensland Government, 2003; Simich, 1998; Trevaskis, 2005). Some research has focused on distance education and home schooling as varying forms of home education, comparing and contrasting both home educational methods. They reported that while there are legal and bureaucratic differences between the two types of education, when looking at what happens in the home, there are similarities between the two. (Danaher, 1998, 2001; Danaher, Wyer & Bartlett, 1994; Harp, 1998; Queensland Government, 2003). There are, however, also differences between the two, such as the high level of teacher support that distance educators receive and more rigid time schedules of distance educators compared to home schoolers. Researchers have also examined the home education of students with disabilities and the challenges they face and the benefits gain (Reilly, 2004; Reilly, Chapman & O'Donoghue, 2002).

While research into home education is still in its early stages, it is reasonable to argue that the agenda to grow a body of research literature on home education in

Australia, as suggested by Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000), has commenced and that, to date, this agenda is extending into new areas. One of the areas in which there still remains a paucity of research is the roles that parents play in home education. This study, in turn, contributes to the Australian home education literature by researching this hitherto unexamined feature of home education, that is, the roles of parents as home educators. As such, this study is the first of its kind in both the Australian and international home education literature.

The work of John Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003) bears examining as it was of particular significance to the Australian research literature in that it provided a way of conceptualising home education and its operation.

2.3.2 Australian home education as communities of practice

Barratt-Peacock (1997) defined the Australian home educating family as "a community of learning practice, being the primary constructor of reality and transmitter of culture" (p.269). His work set a framework for research into home educating families, such as this study of the roles of home educating parents (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003). Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003) drew upon three different theorists to develop his model of home educating families. First, he built upon Dewey's (1915) call to educate children using a family-based model of teaching and learning, connected to the real world under the guidance of "the best and wisest parent" (Dewey, 1915, p.3) in his "ideal home" (Dewey, 1915, pp.35–36). Dewey (1915) suggested six ways in which a child, who was actively engaged with intelligent parents, would learn at home. Second, Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003) drew upon Reiss' (1981) view of the family as the originator of explanatory systems for their children, a site for social reproduction. Third, Barratt-Peacock referred to Lave and Wegner's (1991) model of learning, situated in everyday life settings (i.e., communities of practice) rather than in a setting detached from the lived-in world. A commonality across these three sources is that they each view learning as occurring by being a member of a community. Barratt-Peacock (2003) saw the home-educating family as an expression of a learning community, developing new relationships, perspectives and attitudes with respect to their own families, and to their local and wider communities.

Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) educational model, Barratt-Peacock (2003) demonstrated that the home educating family was more than a single community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) described their communities of practice (COP) as groups who identify with a specific practice and its associated perspectives, such as a community of plumbers or another community sharing common interests. Rather than a home educating family being a single community of practice, Barratt-Peacock (2003) argued that it was a super COP as it drew upon many other singly focused COPs in the quest of home educating the children. For example, the home educating family drew its educational experiences from the family as well as from other sources such as business, sporting bodies, local libraries, TAFE colleges, church groups and various communities online.

Barratt-Peacock's (1997, 2003) work is important in the Australian home education literature, as it sets a theoretical framework for the home educating family as a community of learning practice. This study builds upon Barratt-Peacock's work in that it explores the roles of parents who are responsible for these communities of learning practice. It seeks to explicate the roles of home educators and to generate a level of detail that has not been achieved in research to date. As communities of learning practice, home educating families are focused upon learning. Academic learning is important to these families and, for this reason; an examination of the literature around home education and academic issues is relevant to this study.

2.3.3 Home education and academic issues

The academic performance of home-educated students has been the focus of considerable educational research, especially in the US. A brief review of this research is vital to this study, as it informs the notion of the educative role of home educating parents.

The international literature indicates that home-educated students are doing well, academically, when compared to traditionally schooled students. For example, early US research in the 1980s and 1990s showed that home-educated students scored well above national norms in the academic areas of reading, mathematics and language (Calvary, Bell & Vaupel, 1992; Delahooke, 1986; Frost & Morris, 1988; Alaskan Department of Education, 1984, 1985, 1986; Rakestraw, 1987, 1988; Ray, 1986,

1992, 1998; Richman & Richman, 1988; Scogin, 1986; Tipton, 1991a, 1991b; & Wartes, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990). More recent research into academic achievement of home-educated students also supports the view that they are not disadvantaged academically (Belfield, 2005; Ray, 2009 a & b; Ray 2010; Ray & Eagleson, 2008; Rudner, 1999). Each of these studies compared various aspects of the academic performance of home-educated students to that of traditionally schooled students. All of these studies demonstrated that the home-educated were doing as well as, if not better than, their traditionally schooled counterparts.

As mentioned earlier, limited Australian research has shown home-educated students are achieving appropriately academically (Harding, 2003) and have been successful in gaining entry into university and TAFE colleges after completing their senior years by home education (Harding, 2006d).

Aside from academic achievement, home education research during the 1980s and 1990s focussed upon the language development of home-educated children (Perkel, 1979; Ray, 1990; Tizard, Hughes, Pinkerton & Carmichael, 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). This early research was groundbreaking in that it demonstrated that the language exchanges between a parent and child in the home education setting, was educationally valuable. Tizard and Hughes (1984), for example, found the language of a mother with her preschool children at home to be more cognitively demanding than that of the language of classroom teachers. Overall, this aspect of the research found that the home educational environment was conducive to the language development of home educated children.

The quality of parent–child conversational interaction in the home included important features that were often missing in classroom experiences. These included temporally focused conversations about past experiences and future hopes; better language stimulus to promote cognitive development; and the opportunity for children to initiate conversations and to ask questions. In school classes, the teachers were usually seen to stem the flow of questions from individual students and to initiate questions that interested them and that often had a predetermined answer to be extracted from the student (Tizard et al., 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Tizard & Hughes, 1984).

Related to language skills, the cognitive development of home educated children was also deemed to be an important research focus during the early stages of the home education movement in the US. Research comparing the critical thinking skills of home-educated and traditionally educated students found no significant difference between the two (Oliveira, Watson & Sutton, 1994; Sutton, 1994). Similarly, Quine and Marek (1988) compared the intellectual development of home-educated and traditionally schooled students. While Quine and Marek (1988) found the intellectual development of both groups to be similar, they also found that home-educated students moved into formal thought operation earlier than their traditionally schooled counterparts. Such results confirm the view that home educated students are not disadvantaged in their educational and cognitive development.

The above findings indicate that home-educated students achieve appropriate literacy, numeracy and academic learning. They demonstrate good cognitive development and are successful in accessing universities and TAFE colleges after home education. Such findings suggest that parents, by deduction, are doing well as home educators.

In the light of such findings, Romanowski (2007) listed commonly understood academic limitations of home education. These included: (1) that home educated students lack the peer interaction of the classroom; (2) parents may lack certain resources or facilities to deliver a well-rounded curriculum; and that (3) parents may not have the ability to provide effective home education.

Upon consideration of Romanowski's list of limitations one can understand why there is a degree of controversy about the legitimacy and effectiveness of home education. However, Marsden (1996), a proponent of distance education, points out that distance education is often viewed as an inferior form of education by many who are unfamiliar with it. Similarly, Black (1992), a distance educator in the tertiary sector, described the difference of opinions about distance education between its practitioners and those who have little experience with distance education.

> "Within the community of distance educators there is a robust self-image based on the positive characteristics of access, student-centredness and quality course materials. There is, however, a lingering tendency, pervasive to the uninitiated, to regard distance education as 'second-best to classroom, face-to-face instruction' (Black, 1992, p.7)."

Though Black's (1992) viewpoint was written nearly 20 years ago, it may be argued that this perception continues to this day. The view that education outside of the traditional classroom model is problematic has raised concerns about home education among some professional educators.

The Queensland Teachers Union expressed their concerns about home education to the Director-General of Education in Queensland, the Children's Commissioner and the Department of Education (McFarlane, 2003). McFarlane (2003), a research officer for the Queensland Teachers' Union, states in the Queensland Teachers' Journal, that home educated students may be "a 'lost' group of children who are not receiving an education" (p. 8). The same statement was made in the Teachers' Union's submission to the Queensland Government's review of home schooling (Queensland Teachers' Union, 2003, p.1). The Queensland Teacher's Union (2001) cited an anonymous author, who stated that she and her siblings were deprived of an education when her mother removed them from school, under the pretense of home schooling. The article states that home schooling is child abuse, making the assumption that denying a child access to education is equivalent to the practice of home education.

Similarly, McFarlane (2004, 2006), implied, without evidence, that home educated students do not receive a quality educational provision, once away from state scrutiny, making the assumption that compulsory school attendance is to be equated with the provision of a quality education. Thus, the question of whether home educated students receive an appropriate education gives rise to the polemics of diverse views between home education researchers and some sectors of the professional education community.

Whilst this study does not seek to address the question as to whether home education is effective in terms of the academic achievement of its students, it does provide a window into how home educating parents see their experience as educators. In bringing the parents' perspective to this controversial issue, the study fills a gap in the literature, as the parents' perspective has been notably absent during various policy-forming public debates in recent years (Mitchell, 2006; Queensland Government, 2003)

Another controversial issue surrounding home education is that of socialisation. Critics of home education (see for example, Monk, 2004) question whether home-educated students are well socialised because of their absence from traditional schooling. Implied in this question is a concern as to whether home educating parents provide sufficient social opportunities for their children. This is explored in the next section.

2.3.4 Home education and socialisation

As with academic issues, a brief review of the socialisation literature is relevant to this study as it informs the investigation of the roles of home educating parents with respect to their children's socialisation.

A large body of research supports the view that home educating parents are able to provide an appropriate environment for the socialisation of their children. At the outset, however, it is relevant to ask what is meant by the term "socialisation".

American psychologist, Richard Medlin (2000), notes socialisation as social activity, social influence and social exposure. Medlin (2000) adopted Durkin's (1995) definition of socialisation from the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (1995), as: "the process whereby people acquire the rules of behaviour and systems, beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society" (p. 614). Durkin (1995) argued that the socialisation of children takes place as they participate in "daily routines which immerse them directly in the values of their community" (p. 618). Medlin (2000) noted that attending school is only one agent of socialisation, and that psychologists such as Bronfenbrenner (1989), Durkin (1995) and Gecas (1992) supported the view that any interactivity between children and other members of their community is a contributor to their social development.

Wyatt's (2008) research into why families commence and continue home educating identified socialisation as a key rationale. The reasons included students having problems in school, resistance to negative influences of peers and a desire for improved family relations. This study found that parents chose home education over school-based education in order to improve the socialisation of their children.

Many American comparative studies of socialisation involving home-educated students and traditionally schooled students have demonstrated that home-educated students do well in terms of their personal social development and the use of appropriate social skills. These included studies of: social and emotional adjustment (Delahooke, 1986); and self-esteem and self-concept (Hedin, 1991; Kelly, 1991; Kitchen, 1991; Medlin, 1994; Smedley, 1992; Taylor, 1986; Tillman, 1995).

Comparative studies of the social skills of home-educated students and traditionally educated students also demonstrated that home-educated students ranked equal to, or above accepted norms. These studies included research into: cooperation, assertiveness, empathy and self-control (Medlin, 2006); problem behaviour and social maturity (Shyers, 1992); communication skills and daily living skills (Smedley, 1992); leadership skills (Montgomery, 1989a, 1989b); family interaction patterns (Allie-Carson, 1990) and socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (Francis & Keith, 2004). These studies form the background for the current study of the roles that home educators perform in the socialisation of their children.

Other studies in Australia and the US have found that home-educated children participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities in their wider community, both with age peers and with those of different ages, in play-groups, choirs, drama groups, music lessons, interactions with neighbours, organised sports, camps, community service groups and church related activities (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, Delahooke, 1986; Harding, 2003, 2006a; Krivanek, 1988; Montgomery, 1989a, 1989b; Medlin, 2000; Rakestraw, 1987; Ray, 1994, 2003; Tillman, 1995). In addition to joining with existing community activities, research has found that home educators also tended to create their own small communities for learning and socialising beyond the family (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003; Carwile-Johnson, 1991; Chatham-Carpenter, 1994; Harding, 1997, 2003, 2006a; Krivanek, 1988; Meighan, 2001a, 2001b; Safran, 2008; Thomas, 1998; Thomas & Pattinson, 2008).

When considering social outcomes of home-educated students, Ray’s (2004) study of 7,306 adults who had been home educated for the final seven years of their schooling, presents the most comprehensive study to date. Ray (2004) found that these young adults were active social participants and contributors to their communities.

In summary, these studies of the socialisation of home-educated students indicate that home educators believe that the social development of their children is important, and that these students are not being disadvantaged socially, by not attending school.

Although Australian research into the socialisation of home-educated students is limited, it concurs with the findings of the international literature that home-educated students are doing well in terms of socialisation. Brosnan (1991) found that home-educated students reflected average to above-average child competency levels. Various researchers (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Broadhurst, 1999; Clery, 1998; Jackson, 2007; McColl, 2005; Thomas, 1998) found that home-educated students mostly enjoyed their educational experience and Krivanek (1988) indicated that they were not socially disadvantaged by their educational experience. Jackson's (2009) survey of education professionals, in schools and a tertiary institution, where home-educated students enrolled after home education, found that " home-educated students generally … made the transitions into mainstream institutions with ease both academically and socially" (p. 14). Such research also supports the view that home-educated students are able to develop well socially, and by inference, that their parents are facilitating their socialisation appropriately.

In a similar vein to the tensions surrounding the issues of the rights of parents to home educate and whether home educated children receive an appropriate education, the issue of the socialisation of home educated students is also of concern to some sectors of the community. Romanowski (2001) stated that the main criticism of home education centres on the issue of socialisation. Romanowski (2001) cited the following criticisms: (1) home educated children are isolated from the outside world and are thus socially handicapped; (2) they are seldom presented with opportunities to learn social interaction skills especially with children of their own age; and (3) they are seldom exposed to diversity of beliefs and backgrounds. Given that these are commonly held perceptions about the socialisation of home educated students, it is understandable that some in the community would express concerns about this issue.

Various articles published in the Queensland Teachers' Union's journal suggested, without evidence, that home educated students may be badly behaved and would need behavioural remediation should they return to traditional schooling (Carter &

Winch, 2001; McFarlane, 2003). Similar statements were made in the union's submission to the Queensland Government's review of home education (Queensland Teachers' Union, 2003). Such articles represent uninformed views about home education which can create unjustified myths and misinformation in the wider community.

A stronger concern about the perceived inadequacies of home education was voiced in the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, by a South Australian Member of Parliament, Rod Sawford (2004). Whilst speaking about the problem of increased truancy of school students in Australia, Sawford included home educated students in his concerns about truancy, implying that they were being educationally disadvantaged and that home educating parents may be wrong about the advantages of home education. Sawford (2004) also referred to his concerns about the socialisation of home educated students, stating with no reasoning or evidence, that "home schooled children can easily become socially inept and their performance and advancement in the workplace can be inhibited". Sawford conceded that there are families who conduct home education well; however, he stated that they would be the exception, rather than the majority.

The implied belief that home educated students are socially disadvantaged emerges as a commonly held view in the wider community (Queensland Government, 2003). However, when it is expressed without empirical evidence, by professional educators and policy makers, in positions of power, it can become a cause for concern among home educators.

It is evident from these tensions that there is need for further research into the question of the socialisation of home educated students. Whilst this study does not examine this issue, it does present the view of parents as to their roles as home educators, and in many instances the parents in this study presented their views of the importance of their role in the social development of their children. In this sense the study makes an important contribution to this issue by drawing upon the views of the home educating parents themselves.

2.3.5 Socialisation in traditional schooling

By way of contrast, there is a body of work examining socialisation in traditional schooling. One aspect of this critique is that the majority of socialisation in schooling is age-restricted, as students in schools mostly socialise with their age-peers. Boyer (1993), a US home schooling pioneer, and Thomas (1998, 2006, 2007), an educational psychologist, were both critical of the social restrictiveness of traditional schooling which, in turn, confined students to an age-peer social group for some twelve years. They concurred that this enforced age-based social limitation left school students with little opportunity to socialise with those outside their peer group. Thomas (1998) observed that the social skills needed to traverse the age-peer social hierarchies and bullying in schools may be useful for school life, but had little value in the outside world. Thomas (1998, 2006, 2007) found that the home educators he researched believed that home education had provided opportunities to positively address their children's social issues. This social limitation embedded in schooling provides a context for particular home educators in this study, who may have had their children in age-peer classrooms, for extended periods, prior to commencing home education.

A second aspect of school-based socialisation that impacts this study is the incidence of negative socialisation experienced in schooling. In Australian schools, negative social aspects, such as bullying, have become a serious social and legal matter. Bullying involves the abusive use of force or coercion repeated over time, intentionally inflicted, without provocation (Petersen, 2001). The Honourable Justice Roslyn Atkinson, Judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland (Atkinson, 2002) stated that such school phenomena heralds a litigious future for education in Queensland. Brennan (2002), a principal of a high school, listed problematic social issues in schools including: student absenteeism, teacher absenteeism, student violence, trespassers, substance abuse and uncertainty as to values. Such threat to the physical safety of students in schools has caused scholars to call for extensive research into school-based social problems (Brennan, 2002; Farrell, 2002; Rigby, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2007). Along similar lines, the information age has brought cyber bullying into school environments. Campbell (2005) identifies digital media such as email, texting, chat rooms, mobile phones and their attached cameras and web sites that are

used by students to bully their peers. Campbell, Butler and Kift (2008) stated that this problem is so serious in schools, that they are required to have cyber bullying policies in place to protect students from serious physical and or psychological harm. Campbell et al. (2008) describe it as anti-social criminal behaviour of immature youths. These negative aspects of school-based socialisation also impact the parents in this study of home educator roles, particularly if they have had children who have experienced negative socialisation while attending schools, prior to commencing home education. Such experiences can inform the roles parents play as they home educate their children, and in that process, as they seek to remedy the effects of bullying upon their children.

In summary, the socialisation literature indicates that socialisation is a priority for parents in their decision to both commence and to continue to home educate their children. Thus, it is appropriate to anticipate that facilitating the social development of children, informs the roles of parent home educators.

2.4 Socio-cultural educational approaches to home education

Many home education researchers have used socio-cultural theory as a means for understanding the way in which Australian home-educated students learn and develop (Barratt-Peacock, 2003; Dole et al., 2005; Jackson, 2008). Socio-cultural theory views human learning as based upon social and cultural phenomena, rather than being merely an individualised, decontextualised activity. Learners are viewed as culturally and socially situated in forming their understanding of the world and life. When applied to the development of a child, socio-cultural theory posits that learning best takes place in the context of what is being learned and that learning is mediated to the learner by others who assist in the learning and developmental processes. Because home education is a learning regime, situated in a family and a real world setting, socio-cultural theory presents a suitable lens through which to view this pedagogy. Socio-cultural theory therefore, provides an explanatory system for the learning that is experienced in the interaction between parent home educator and child. The major proponents of socio-cultural theory include Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978), Neo-Vygotskian theorists and others such as Rogoff (1990, 2003) and Lave and Wenger (1991). The socio-cultural aspect of

learning in home educating families is a critical feature of home education and, in turn, to this study of parent roles.

Home-educated children learning in the home and other community-based real-world settings exemplify socio-cultural learning. Dole et al. (2005), in their research into Australian distance education, cited many studies that support socio-cultural theory's "understanding of the powerful role of family, community and culture in the linguistic competence of children" (p.24). Thomas (1998), an educational psychologist and researcher of home education in Australia and the UK, used socio-cultural theory to describe how home-educated children learn. Thomas (1998) cited practices such as learning early communication skills through parents dovetailing their language with their infants (Schaffer, 1984); the use of appropriate parental language and scaffolding to promote language acquisition (Snow, 1977; Bruner, 1983); the description of conversation as pedagogy (Bruner, 1990); parent interactivity with their child (or contingency) as pedagogy (Wood, 1988) and Vygotskian perspectives on parents mediating child development, as a means of explaining how home educators teach.

Vygotsky (1978) postulated that a child progresses through various phases of development with the mediation of a parent or other competent adult. He presented the view that a child develops as a whole or integrated person through periods of progressive psychological development that includes the development of perception, voluntary memory, speech and thinking, while being mediated by the child's parents or other competent adults in the context of the child's everyday environment. The argument follows that, while compulsory school attendance reduces this learning process that is established between parents and their children at home, home education allows its continuation. In this sense, home education is an extension of the parent roles of mediation and scaffolding, with their own children, during the 12 years, when most children are separated daily from both their parents and their wider communities. The proximity between a home educating parent and their child during these years can be seen to contextualise the role of the home educator.

Imitation is central to Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky, 1997). Rather than mindless copying, Vygotsky saw that imitation required the imitator to have previous understanding of the problem to be solved and that the person could only imitate that

which lay within the zone of their intellectual potential. Vygotsky described the developmental space from where the child could function, to where he could progress with adult mediation as "the zone of his proximal development" (p.103). The child would address a problem, which he or she was incapable of solving independently, with the cooperation of an adult or competent child and the adult would assist the child to reach a higher level of development than before. Vygotsky (1998) saw the zone of proximal development as "the area of immature, but maturing processes" (p.202). In terms of socio-cultural theory, it can be hypothesised that home education could provide a greater degree of mediation in the development of children and children could receive more individualised attention than children in schools and spend more time in community-based socio-cultural settings than their school-based counterparts. In this way, home education may maximise the opportunity for situated socio-cultural learning. Again, this situated feature of home education is the context in which the roles of home educating parents are enacted.

The work of Alex Kozulin (1998, 2003), in socio-cultural learning, lends support to the view that home-educating parents are mediators of their children's development. Kozulin (1998, 2003) described the importance of a child internalising psychological tools such as signs, symbols, texts and graphic organisers, via human and symbolic agents of mediation. Kozulin (2003) juxtaposed research demonstrating the reluctance of classroom teachers to adopt Vygotskian mediation processes, for directive teaching strategies (Bliss, Askew & Macrae, 1996); with research indicating the readiness of parents to mediate in their own children's learning and development (Portes, 1991; Wood, 1999). Further, Kozulin (2003) identified Maternal Verbal Guidance (MVG) as a factor strengthening academic performance (Portes, 1988, 1991; Portes & Vadeboncoeur, 2003).

Similarly, Rogoff's (1990, 2003) work on human development as an ongoing socio-cultural process rather than just a biological or psychological process, lends further support to the view that home educators are `mediators of their children's development. Rogoff (1990, 2003) argued that a child's development is situated in social, cultural and historical contexts. She elaborated on Vygotsky's (1997) views of the interactional support of individuals or scaffolding, by competent guides, as learners negotiated their way through their zone of proximal development.

Socio-cultural views of learning require authentic learning experiences in real world settings. Davies (2003, 2009) presented the view that, for home educators, ordinary life is that real world setting. Davies has taken socio-cultural theory to a logical destination for home educators with his argument that ordinary life ought to be the curriculum structure for home education. Davies (2003, 2009) challenged the interpretation of the legal requirement that education, in England, ought to be "efficient" and "suitable" as derived from a set syllabus. Building on Taylor's (1989) affirmation of the ordinary life as a dominant conception of the good, Davies (2009) argued that, for home-educated students, these notions should describe educational experiences that uphold the good of ordinary life, rather than their being restricted to school-based education. In making this affirmation of ordinary life as the foundation of the curriculum, Davies (2009) also drew upon the work of MacIntyre (1984) emphasising quality social practices, the unity of human life and moral traditions to create a pluralistic, socially democratic curriculum.

Davies (2009) argued that a home education curriculum based on the affirmation of ordinary life as a conception of the good, would provide a suitable model for education situated in ordinary life. Davies (2009) proposed that education, mediated by parents and their ordinary lives, advances their children into experiences beyond the ordinary lives of their parents.

This body of socio-cultural work demonstrates that home-educating parents perform roles in mediated learning with their children in settings relevant to what is being learned (Portes & Vadeboncoeur, 2003). The individualised relational aspect of home educators and their children shows the contextualised socio-cultural site of home education. Having discussed the socio-cultural background to the roles of home educators, it is apt to review the literature around role theory.

2.5 Role theory

Role theory is an area of sociology that provides a useful means of understanding the activities of people within their given socio-cultural contexts. In the process of commencing and then continuing home education, parents adopt various context-specific roles that impact their lives. As such, role theory brings important understandings to this study of the roles of home educators.

In sociological terms, role theory is the study of roles in society, with human behaviour as acting out socially defined categories. Sociologists (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Flynn & Lemay, 1999; Wolfensberger, 1992) view roles as tools of analysis that help to explain what appear to be regularities of behaviour and social systems. Flynn and Lemay (1999) argued that roles are useful tools for organising concepts of social life and characteristic behaviours. In terms of this study, analysis of roles can reveal the social and educational practices of home-educating parents.

Various sociologists concur that roles are the result of expectations surrounding appropriate behaviour in a particular position (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Flynn & Lemay, 1999; Merton, 1957; Wolfensberger, 1992). For example, Merton (1957), a foundational role theorist, defined a role as “the behaviour oriented to these patterned expectations of others” (p.110). In similar vein, Wolfensberger (1992), the pioneer of social role valorisation theory, defined a role as “a socially expected pattern of behaviours, responsibilities, expectations and privileges” (p. 13). Wolfensberger (1992) elaborated that roles are learned through “a feedback loop between role expectations and role performances” (p. 13). In further defining a role, Flynn and Lemay (1999) cited Bronfenbrenner (1979) who argued that roles are not only about perceived behaviours and position, they are also about a person’s perception of a given situation and self-conception within that situation. Flynn and Lemay (1999) pointed out that roles may be life-defining and, thus, pervasively impact human experience; roles are associated with everyday living; they may be discriminatory, in that they can indicate levels of status or value in society; they may also be stereotypical if based upon gender, class, impairment or occupation. Roles may be specific or diffuse; they may be achieved voluntarily or ascribed to a person involuntarily.

Role theory is multi-faceted. Biddle (1986) noted five variant models of role theory: (1) functional role theory, built around the work of Parsons (1951), which described roles as fixed social expectations of the wider community; (2) symbolic interactionist role theory, which predated functionalism, drawing upon the earlier work of George Mead (1934) in seeing roles as socially negotiated shared norms between individuals, and developed according to needs; (3) structural role theory, which uses mathematical models to determine roles for society, rather than for individuals; (4)

organisational role theory, which looks at organisations and defines their problems as mostly role conflicts; and (5) cognitive role theory, which studies the relationship between expectations and behaviour. The theory that relates most closely to the roles of home-educating parents is symbolic interactionist role theory.

Symbolic interactionist role theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Statham, 1985) is a role theory model that is ideally linked with socio-cultural theory, as it integrates roles of individuals with the people, the interactions and the cultural settings of their everyday lives. In this sense, symbolic interactionism provides meaningful insight to the description of the roles of parent home educators, as it focuses upon how people develop their situated social roles in collaboration with others. Blumer (1969) described three basic tenets of social interactionist role theory. They include the premises that (1) people act toward others and things according to the meanings they ascribe to them; (2) meaning comes from social interaction with those persons and things and, (3) meaning is adjusted according to circumstances. Biddle (1986) described symbolic interactionist role theory as:

> The evolution of roles through social interaction and various cognitive concepts through which social actors understand and interpret their own and others' conduct … norms are said to provide merely a set of broad imperatives within which the details of roles can be worked out (p.71).

Flynn and Lemay (1999) described social interactionist role theory as accounting for "beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes; norms, contextual demands, and expectations; and identity and self-concept" (p.225). Social interactionist role theory informs this study because it allows for flexible roles that are adjusted during the course of social interaction; rather than roles that are fixed according to a set theory or social expectation. It allows for the roles of home educators to be responsive to meeting the needs of their different home-educating families; the needs of individual parents and children and it recognises that roles may change as children develop and as parents become more experienced in home education.

Social interactionist role theory is in accord with socio-cultural theory in that both acknowledge the interaction of individuals with their wider societies, in given cultural settings. For the purposes of this study, the synergy between the two provides a platform upon which to examine the roles of home-educating parents in

their everyday settings. These theories allow for the diversity among home educators to be explored and are suitable informants to this phenomenographic study, both to its social context and and to the theory of individuals performing multiple roles.

Merton (1957), in applying role theory to understanding the complexity of society, argued that a role has an array of associated roles or “role-set” (p.110). He defined a role-set as “that complement of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status” (p.110). The role-set is not merely a group of multiple roles that a person may assume. Rather, the role-set is a complex of roles associated with a person’s particular status. This study sought to understand the conceptions that home educators have of their roles as educators of their own children. Merton’s (1957) model of roles and role-sets describes a framework for understanding the multiple roles associated with adult life, yet provides a means by which to isolate a specific adult role/status, such as that of parent home educator and its associated role-set. For this reason, Merton’s work provides a structure to the understanding of the complexity of the multiple roles occupied by home educators.

In applying Merton’s (1957) work to home education it is anticipated that there may be a role-set, associated with being a home-educating parent. The diffuse role of parent has a specific role-set. Within this role-set, the status of home educator is one role or status. Derived from the role of home educator, is a role-set, which comprises the roles appropriate to the practice of home education. While seeking understanding of how parents experience their roles is the aim of this study, a potential role-set derived from the role of home educator will be significant to the outcomes of this study. The application of Merton’s (1957) work to this study is illustrated in Figure 1. At the top level of Figure 1, the role of parent is isolated from the many other roles that adults occupy. Derived from that role is a role-set of many parent roles as indicated by Parent Role #n. For the purposes of this study, on the second level of Figure 1, only the role of home educator is treated. The role-set derived from the role of home educator is found on the lower level of the diagram. This role-set is the set of roles that home-educating parents experience as they educate their children. This role-set of home educator will assist in describing the findings of this study.

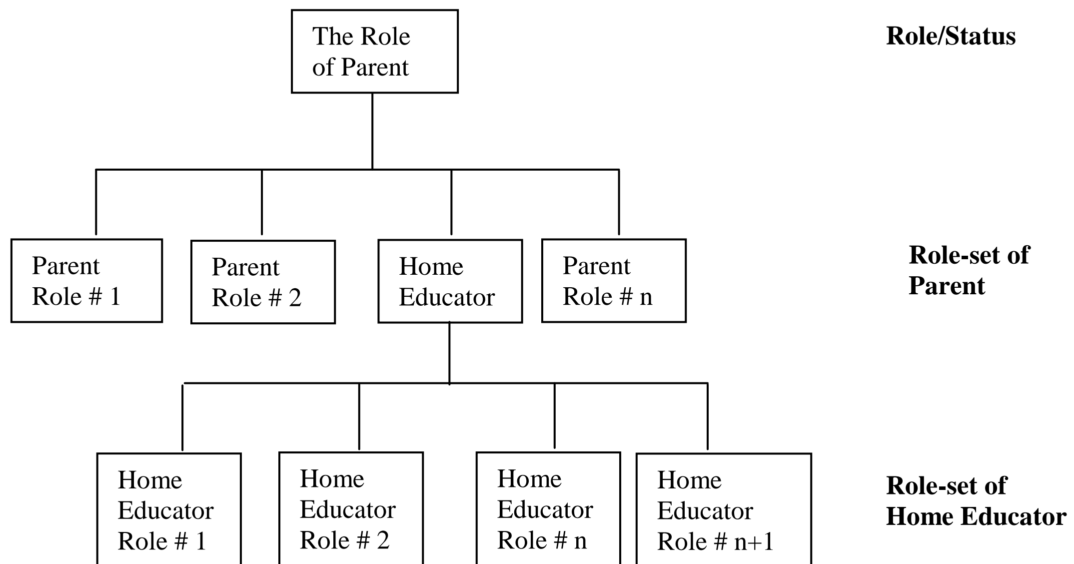

Figure 1: Application of Merton's (1957) model of roles to this study.

In summary, role theory is part of the conceptual scaffold of the study. Symbolic interactionism shows that roles of parents are socially constructed and that the meaning of the parent roles is developed through interaction between family members and the wider community. Role theory also provides a structural framework for understanding the parent roles and the subsequent roles derived from the primary roles of parent home educators.

Because this study describes how home-educating parents see their roles and practices, the family is its context. As such, it necessitates a review of the literature related to family studies.

2.6 Family studies

2.6.1 Changes to family

Changes in the structure of families in Western industrialised nations have occurred over the past forty years in Australia (Bateman, 1996; Edgar, 1992; Eichler, 1984; Gilding, 2002; Gregory, 1999; Hartley & McDonald, 1995; Hayes, 2004; Hayes, Neilson-Hewitt & Warton, 1999; Hughes & Stone, 2003; Sarantakos, 1996; Weeks, 2000), Canada (Ravanera, Beaujot & Rajulton, 2002), the UK (Fox Harding, 1996, 1997; Smart and Neale, 1999) and the US (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm & Steinmetz, 1993; Fukuyama, 1999). Social scientists (Adema & Whiteford, 2008;

Bowes, 2004; Hayes et al., 1999) have described these changes, indicating that the breadwinning father/housekeeping mother model has been largely superseded with the "dual earnership" (Adema & Whiteford, 2008, p.9) model and noting an increase in the numbers of families in the sole parent household, breadwinning mother model. Kaspiew (2007) quantitatively documented the changes to family structure in Australia between 1976 and 2006. She reported that the standard family configuration of a couple with children had reduced from 48.4% to 37%; and that there was, in the same period, an increase in couple-only families, from 28% to 37.2%; and an increase in single parent families with dependent children from 6.5% to 10.7%. Home-educating families differ from these trends. They usually present as the father breadwinner/mother educator model, with sole parent households presenting as the mother breadwinner/educator model (Harding, 2003; Ray, 2010).

Parker (2005) cites two models of marriage that parallel this period of structural change. Parker (2005) used Burgess and Locke's (1945) term of companionate marriages to refer to post World War 2 marriages. These marriages were typified by gendered division of labour between the breadwinning husband and the homemaker wife. The success of these marriages was largely measured in emotional satisfaction and Cherlin (2004) suggested this meant that the marriages were assessed by the spouses being "good providers, good home makers and responsible parents" (p.851). Moving on from companionate marriages, Cherlin (2004) described the transformation of marriages during the 1960s and 1970s as associated with a greater emphasis upon the completion of formal education, declining birth rates and greater participation of women in the paid workforce. Marriage was seen as a site for the self-development of spouses. Cherlin (2004) nominated these marriages as individualised marriages.

More than a decade ago, Australian researchers (Hayes et al., 1999; McDonald, 1995; Sarantakos, 1996) associated these changes to family and marriage with the rise of compulsory education and new economic forces emerging within the community. Similarly, UK researchers (Silva & Smart, 1999; Bathrick, 1991) supported the view that one of the main motivators in this change in relationships was economic. Bathrick (1991), a proponent of functional theory in the UK, argued that family life in the UK had been colonised by an imposed mass culture of

commercial interest which, in time, had imposed its own political and economic agenda upon the family, thus reducing the family to a consumer community. Thus, social and economic changes have directly precipitated changes to the structure of families and how family life is experienced. Home-educating families, however, usually present as a dual parent family, although lone parent families also home educate (Coalition of Homeschool Leaders of Queensland, 2003; Harding, 2003).

In the UK, Smart and Neale (1999) observed that these changes were accompanied by abandonment of functionalist family theory and that most conceptual work on the family has used a feminist theoretical framework. This reconceptualisation was accompanied by an intellectual struggle to define the new family in an "ongoing … epistemological and a moral debate about what the family *is* and what it *ought* to be" (Silva & Smart, 1999, p. 1).

Feminist theorists such as Silva and Smart (1999) saw the new family context as an opportunity for the development of women as independent individuals, thus, marking a philosophical shift from familism to individualism. This perspective viewed the individual as the central reference point and the family became the facilitating institution for personal autonomy.

Home educators, however, have viewed their families differently to these models. Rather than viewing family through an economic lens or a feminist lens, home educators have viewed family from an educational perspective (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 1999, 2003; Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlowe,1995; Meighan, 2001a, 2001b; Thomas, 1998). They have not sought the economic benefits of both spouses earning an income; nor have they sought self-actualisation through individualism and paid careers (Ray, 2010). Instead, usually the mother has chosen to forgo a paid career path and to pursue an unpaid career in the educational interests of their children. The reason for this choice is that one of the major goals of home educators is the education and development of the children of the family, rather than the self-development of the parent. Research has shown, however, that home-educating mothers claim to have derived personal satisfaction and a positive identity in their career as home educators (Dole, 2005; McDowell, 1999, 2000; Safran, 2008).

Social capital theorists, who causally link social capital to family strength (Andrews, 1999; Bourdieu, 1993), saw growing divorce rates, increased numbers of single parent families and increased participation of women in the paid workforce as symptomatic evidence of the decline of families and, thus, of social capital in the community. Hughes and Stone (2003b) explored the relationship between family and community life in Australia. They examined the view that "declining marriage and fertility rates, increased rates of de facto marriage, divorce and lone-parent families and rates of female workforce participation" (Hughes & Stone, 2003b, p.40) may not only weaken family bonds, but that these phenomena may threaten the wider community.

The idea that the weakening of family life threatens the community is known as "the family decline thesis" (Hughes & Stone, 2003b, p.41). Because families were seen as the key site for the transmission of behavioural norms (Winter, 2000), the decline thesis anticipated an association between the weakening of family life and the depletion of social capital. Hughes and Stone (2003b) saw that if family relationships are no longer held together by law, tradition and financial necessity, then "individuals must take seriously the needs and desires of the other" (p.42) which, in turn, required increased levels of negotiation and democracy in family life. While their study found outcomes that both supported and denied the family decline thesis, it was clear that strong families generate community benefits with respect to trust, reciprocity and community group membership. Home educators seek to strengthen their families partly through educational choices. However, like the rest of the community, they are not immune to marital breakdown and its subsequent disruption to family life (Coalition of Homeschool Leaders of Queensland, 2003; Harding, 2003). The creation of resilient families is of special interest to this research as home educators would claim that their goal is to create a strong family (Klicka, 2002).

The Australian family research literature has examined the notion of strong or resilient families. Silberberg (2001) cited Stinnett and DeFrain's (1985) Family Strengths Model that categorised six qualities characteristic of strong families across the world. Following similar lines, the Family Strengths Research Project identified eight qualities as family strengths. These qualities include: (1) communication, (2) togetherness, (3) sharing activities, (4) affection, (5) support, (6) acceptance,

(7) commitment, and (8) resilience. Silberberg (2001) concluded her report on this project by emphasising the importance of shared values and belief systems within families. Sharing common values enables families to develop family-strengthening practices smoothly. These practices create a sense of belonging, which in turn increases the family's resilience.

Silberberg (2001) acknowledged that family strength models are not blueprints that guarantee a resilient family; however, they can identify key family-strengthening processes that may be implemented as teaching tools and guides for those interested in strengthening families.

These studies set a context to the current home-education study, as the relationships between spouses and between parents and their children feature prominently in a study of parent home-educator roles. A review of the literature about mothers and fathers also serves to provide a context to this study.

2.6.2 Mothers' roles

In Australia, much of the social change involving mothers relates to their access to paid work (Hayes et al., 1999; McDonald, 1995; Qu & Weston, 2005; Sarantakos, 1996). Qu and Weston (2005) found that the number of mothers (in both dual parent and single parent families), in paid employment had increased significantly between 1996 and 2005. This increased workforce participation by mothers was coupled with growing demand for access to affordable and quality childcare. Gray et al. (2003) studied the participation trends of mothers in paid employment. They found that it increased as the youngest child's age increased. For example, in 2000, the employment rate of mothers with their youngest child aged 0–4 years was 42.8%. This increased to 69.8% of mothers whose youngest child was aged 15–24 years.

In contrast to this increasing trend of mothers taking on a primarily breadwinning role, home-educating mothers have taken a primarily educative role. These mothers remain in the home as their children's age increases and do not enter the paid workforce while their children are of school age (6–18) and being home educated. While this choice may present childrearing advantages, it also presents financial challenges as it allocates home-educating families to a single income. Thus, home-

educating mothers presented a variance to the growing trend of mothers entering the paid workforce.

Social security policies in Australia change when the youngest child in a family turns six, as schemes are in place to encourage mothers to prepare for or to enter the workforce (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991, 2009). Home educators have lobbied the Commonwealth Government arguing that their educational choice makes workforce participation impossible, when their youngest child turns six. In response, the Australian Government (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991, 2009) has made exceptions in this policy for parents who provide home schooling or who facilitate distance education for their children. This exemption from government workforce participation requirements, for home educators, indicates a recognition by the Australian Government of the distinct roles of mothers who home educate. Adjunct to this, the process of gaining exemption demonstrates that home educators play a role that has contributed to the shaping of law and social security policy in Australia.

Research into home-educating mothers indicates that they see their stay-at-home, educational role as difficult, yet they see it as both personally satisfying and beneficial to their families (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Green, 2006a&b; McDowell, 1999, 2000; Safran, 2008). These studies found that mothers reported deriving many benefits from home education including: a strong sense of personal satisfaction; a sense of a positive impact on both their families and themselves; reduction of stress upon the mother; new flexibility in the family; better socialisation; appropriate dealing with academic problems; developing expertise in dealing with lawmakers and a new sense of empowerment as mother-teacher (McDowell, 1999, 2000). Safran (2008) and Newman and Aviram (2003) found that mothers reported that home education had unwittingly brought them broad self-development and change of identity.

Home-educating mothers also face difficulties. Key concerns for these mothers included: concerns about their children's academic progress; completing housework; personal feelings of inadequacy; the tiring and demanding nature of the work; their children's misbehaviour or lack of motivation; being responsible for the education of their children; and being marginalised or facing social disapproval by others (Green, 2006a&b; Safran, 2008). Despite these concerns, mothers also reported that they

knew that home education was right for them and for their families and that they would continue. One could assume that, for these women, home education presents significant advantages that motivate them to pursue a demanding, unpaid occupation, which greatly differs from the activities of the majority of Australian mothers. To date, there has been no in-depth study of home-educating mothers and their home-educating roles. This study's examination of the roles of home-educating parents provides empirical evidence of this emerging cohort of educators. In order to continue an examination of family studies, the next section will outline the research on fathers.

2.6.3 Fathers' roles

The literature around fathers has explored many aspects of fathering over the past 20 years. US sociologists, Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2000) reviewed the US research literature into fatherhood. In summarising this research, they described various models of fatherhood constructed throughout history. These models included: breadwinner, moral leader and gender role model. Marsiglio et al. (2000) also identified more recent scholarly conceptualisation of fatherhood including: engagement, accessibility, responsibility, time invested, degree of involvement, and sharing helpful knowledge.

Scholars from various fields have researched fathering and fatherhood. Generative theorists have described fathering as a process of contributing or generating positive contributions into the lives of their children, in response to their needs (Dollahite, 1998, 2000; Erikson, 1982; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Snarey, 1993). Developmental psychologists assert the importance of the influence of the father in relationship with the child in the child's development (Hewlett, 1991, 1992; Lamb, 1981, 1997, 1998; Parke, 1996; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Identity theorists have studied fatherhood from the perspective of how men perceive and construct their identities as fathers (Armato & Marsiglio, 1998; Daly, 1995). Socio-cultural theorists such as Lupton and Barclay (1997) see fatherhood as a changing ontological site of competing discourses of socio-cultural processes that preclude a static identity of fathering. Doherty, Kouneski and Erikson (1998), researchers from the family systems or ecological perspective, have described the social capital that fathers contribute to the family.

Russell, Barclay, Edgecombe, Donovan, Habib and Callaghan (1999) and Lupton and Barclay (1997) have observed a change in the thinking of fathers. For example, researchers (Baxter, 2007; Berlyn, Wise & Soriano, 2008; Hand & Lewis, 2002; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Russell et al., 1999) found that while fathers once saw breadwinning as their primary role, they now see accessibility and involvement with their children, as the most important aspect of their role. This research does not imply that fathers are abandoning their breadwinning role (Baxter, 2007); however it does indicate a shift in awareness and concern. Baxter (2007) found that fathers were concerned to be involved in their children's lives and that the greatest hindrance to their involvement was their time commitment to the workplace.

The literature suggests that when fathers are involved in childrearing, children experience positive outcomes in socio-emotional, behavioural and cognitive/educational domains (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). Similarly, when fathers involve themselves in the lives of their children, the relationships between the parents are improved, and the family experiences greater cohesion and resilience (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera & Lamb, 2004).

Australian sociologists (Fletcher, 2002; Smyth & Weston, 2003) have agreed on the need for further research into Australian fatherhood. In the context of the perceived change in fathering roles from breadwinner, to significant involvement in the lives of children, this study of the home educator roles may bring a relevant contribution to the fatherhood literature, as well as to the home education literature.

A review of how parents contribute educationally to the lives of children follows in the next section.

2.6.4 Parents as educators

Central to the study is the investigation of the roles of parents as home educators. This section highlights areas where the community generally accepts the educational contribution of parents in the lives of their children. It highlights areas in which the educational activities of parents are acknowledged. It takes into account the following: an historical perspective, including parent educational practice throughout history and Christian teaching; current examples of parents as educators, including

early childhood parenting practice and home education literature; government recognition of parents as educators in various government educational documents; and educational research. This section concludes with the view that parents' status as home educators orients them to their roles as educators.

2.6.4.1 Historic views of parents as educators

Throughout history, in general, parents have been seen to be educators of their children. Historians have acknowledged parents as educators over millennia and across a variety of cultures (Duggan, 1948; Eastman, 1971; Frost, 1966; Gangel & Benson, 1983; Good, 1962; Knowles, Marlowe & Muchmore, 1992; Lockerbie, 1994; Nakosteen, 1965; Parker, 1912; Power, 1970; Radin, 1963; Van Petten Henderson, 1960; Wilds & Lottich 1970). Parker (1912) noted that parent-directed, home-based education, in many instances throughout history, was the only form of education available to common people. Thus, parents have had a place in history as those responsible to educate, prepare and assist their children to live productive lives in their own cultures.

Historically, Christianity has assumed that parents have an educational role in the lives of their children. Historians (Lockerbie, 1994; Marcus, 1956; Wilds & Lottich, 1970), theologians (Berkhof & Van Til, 1990; Morris, 1983; Rushdoony, 1963, 1985) and Christian educators (Kienel, 1986, 1995; Knight, 1980) have viewed Biblical scripture (from the Old and New Testaments) as seminal in assigning educational responsibility to parents in both the Hebrew and Christian cultures. This point was further reinforced in a statement by Pope John Paul II (1981):

> The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is *original* and *primary* with regard to the educational role of others on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is *irreplaceable* and *inalienable*, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others. (Article 36)

This statement recognises the link between education and the transmission of life. It acknowledges that familial relationship fosters education at a deep level and that education is more than an academic experience. It recognises the unique biological and genetic factors associated between progenitors and progeny for education in a

"loving relationship". Christian teaching clearly supports the view of the parent as an educator of the child.

2.6.4.1 Current views of parents as educators

Early childhood parenting practices indicate that there is an acceptance in our community that the home is a suitable environment for the education of children from birth to school age. Most children are usually in the care of their parents up until school entry. Psychologist, Alan Thomas (1992, 1994a) in researching early learning and individualised teaching as a pedagogy, found that individualised teaching assists the acceleration of learning and the development of exceptional abilities. Thomas (1992, 1998) drew upon Vygotskian perspectives to argue that much cognitive growth takes place within everyday social contexts. He affirmed (1994a, 1994b) that the complex learning that takes place from birth, facilitated by the parent, largely through purposeful conversation, is a powerful learning phenomenon, which ought not to be interrupted. The reason home-educated students are so well educated, in his view, is that this learning process is not interrupted by sending the child to school. Sending a child to school he believes, interrupts such dedicated purposeful conversational learning and individualised teaching. Thomas (1995, 1998) explored the family context of relationships, interpersonal skills and a significant reordering of priorities of children's education. This family context, he believes, is the site for a holistic education for the child.

The home-education literature supports the view that parents are educators. British educational theorist Meighan (1996, 2001b, 2005) concurred with Thomas, indicating that home-educating parents have rediscovered a pedagogy used for millennia, which despite its existence and development outside of the current educational hegemony (Meighan, 1984), has produced remarkable results (Meighan, 1997, 2001a&b, 2005). These results include the commendable academic achievement of home educators and that home-educating parents provide an appropriate environment for the socialisation of children. The mounting body of empirical evidence in the areas of academic, intellectual and social development of both, young children and adolescents who have been educated at home has been detailed earlier in this chapter. This body of literature has affirmed the home as a

valid educational environment, and home-educating parents to be effective, bone fide educators.

2.6.4.1 Government recognition of parents as educators

Various government documents in Australia have acknowledged the powerful educational effects parents and the home environment have on the academic success of children (Commonwealth of Australia, 1985; MCEETYA, 2008; Nelson, 2004; New South Wales Government, 1989; Queensland Government, 2003). For example, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs states: "Parents, carers and families are the first and most important influence in a child's life" (MCEETYA, 2008 p.10). Parents are frequently mentioned in educational documents in this way. This recognition of the educational qualities in parents further supports the widely held view that parents are educators.

2.6.4.4 Educational research recognises parents as educators

School-focussed research into ways of improving the achievements of students in traditional schooling has demonstrated that when parents are involved, especially with the academic learning of their children who attend schools, their learning is enhanced (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Eastman (1989) summarised this view by stressing that the home was the most important predictor of a child's academic success in school. She stated that:

> "Who succeeds and who fails at school is being decided outside the school, primarily by family factors. Family factors outweigh school factors in determining educational success." (pp. 19–20)

Much school-focused research corroborates the home as an effective learning environment and more to the point, that parents and parent involvement are key factors in the success of children at school. Tizard et al. (1982) found that traditionally schooled children who have parent input to their reading programs achieve superior reading results to those who have the normal school program, or to those students who just have extra teacher tuition. Research has shown that parent involvement improved both the child's reading and the child's attentiveness and attitude at school (Gasden & Ray, 2003; Jordan, Snow & Porche, 2000; National

Literacy Trust, 2007; Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997; Rowe, 1990). Researchers have found that when parents of school children assist with their children's academic learning, the children have shown improvements in cognitive skills (Desimone, 1999; Rowe, 1986); academic achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002); artistic learning; (McGilp, 1990); all stages of remedial programs (Molineux, 1993) and Mathematics (Starkey & Klein, 2000). Improvement was experienced by gifted and talented children (Strom, Johnson & Strom, 1990); disabled learners (Hanrahan & Langlois, 1988; Stevens, 1992); "at risk" students with learning difficulties (Mazur & Thureau, 1990) and school students with cultural and language differences to their school's culture (Eastman, 1992).

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) conducted a wide ranging review of the educational literature related to the impact of parental involvement in their children's education, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills in the United Kingdom. The review of the research in this field consistently showed that good parenting in the home as demonstrated by providing "a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship" (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p.4) is the key factor in the educational development of children and that "other forms of parental involvement do not appear to contribute to the scale of the impact of 'at-home' parenting" (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p.5). This review confirmed the importance of what happens in the home when it comes to the education of children. Such research demonstrates that parents can make valid educational contributions to their children's school-based education and affirms that parents are able to operate in an educational capacity with respect to their own children's learning.

Educational researchers have recognised the educative qualities in parents. Some infer that certain good parenting practices could inform good teaching practice. One of Australia's leading educators, Professor Steve Dinham, Research Director of the Teaching, Learning and Leadership research program with the Australian Council for Educational Research described good parenting as a model for good teaching, (Dinham, 2007; Scott & Dinham, 2005) directly linking parenting with pedagogy. Scott and Dinham (2005) proposed that good parenting provides a desirable model

for good teaching in schools, as it can induce positive self-concept in students. Scott and Dinham (2005) explored current models of good teaching through the lens of what is known about good parenting. Based on Baumrind's (1991) theory of different styles of parenting, Scott and Dinham (2005) described the four main parenting styles of (1) uninvolved, (2) authoritarian, (3) permissive and (4) authoritative. They suggested that warm and responsive parenting attends to building the self-esteem of the child, while also requiring particular appropriate behaviour from the child at the same time. School policy and practice, they believe, should reflect these approaches in order to achieve good results for the student. Walker (2008, 2009) an educational researcher focussed upon the overlapping spheres of home and school, argued the case that good parenting can inform good teaching practices, in similar vein to Scott and Dinham (2005). When educational researchers explore the idea that parenting can inform teaching, it is valid to suggest that parents have a definite role to play in education, and that home educators may be taken seriously as embracing an educational role.

Dole et al. (2005) investigated literacy and numeracy among early childhood distance education students and emphasised the importance of the parents' role in their children's education process.

> … the role (of the parent) is pivotal to the success of the education program. Studies have shown that the success of the educational relationship depends largely on the involvement and the enthusiasm of the home tutor/supervisor (Taylor, 1997). … most of the everyday instruction and supervision is left to the discretion of the home tutor/supervisor (Frid, 2001). This is a major reason why the interest and enthusiasm of the home tutor/supervisor is so integral to the success of distance education programs (p. 51).

Despite the key role that parents play in the education of their children, little research has been conducted into this role. Dole et al. (2005) refer to this paucity in relation to distance education, "the literature pertaining to the role of the home tutor/supervisor in distance education contexts is more scarce" (p. 51).

Thomas (1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1998, 2006, 2007, 2008), Lowe and Thomas (2002) and Thomas and Pattison (2008) researched home education and parents as home educators in the UK and Australia. This body of work has looked at both the formal and informal learning practices of home educators and highlighted the strengths of conversational learning, individualised teaching and the way learning

among home educators is set in a natural context. These researchers have argued for the view that parents are educators.

Safran (2008) studied how parents in the UK and the US adapt to their new role as home educators and how this changes them as individuals. She found that these changes occur in conjunction with their educational practices in a new social setting or home-educating community of practice. Drawing upon Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice framework, Safran (2008) found that home educators shared a "joint enterprise (common goal), mutual engagement (meeting up with others to pursue the common goal and shared repertoire (memories, stories and jokes of the community)" (p. i); and that, during this enterprise, these parents experienced a profound change of identity. Safran (2008) demonstrated that when they become home educators, "Parents begin to strongly identify themselves as home educators, and this permeates the whole of their lives" (p.206).

According to Safran (2008), home education had profound effects upon the identity of the parents, stating that

> the emotional attachment to one's children, the marginal nature of home education and the resultant continual self-development of the parents, continue to make home-educating a life dominating force, constructing and maintaining part of the identity of its participants. Being a home educator can be a powerful, challenging and deeply formative experience (p. 214).

It seems that not only do home educators practise the activities of teaching their children, but that when they embrace the role they experience deep personal change within themselves and their identities.

The current study of the roles of home educators extends beyond Safran's (2008) examination of common characteristics of home educators and how home education changes parents, to a new focus upon the roles of home educators.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to this study of home-educating parent roles. It has highlighted dissatisfaction associated with traditional schooling, in particular since the mid 1970s, the time when the home education movement began its reemergence. The literature surrounding the tension between the rights and

responsibilities of parents and the state associated with home education was reviewed, noting that Australian states and territories are seeking to accommodate these new educational developments, within a regulated framework. The literature referring to home education was explored with reference to the small body of Australian research as well as the international research dealing with the academic achievement and socialisation of home-educated students. The review of the literature concerning social-cultural theory provides assistance with the understanding of the context of home education, a context that is an educational feature of home education. The literature surrounding role theory highlights the way the roles of home-educating parents are socially constructed and provides a means by which to view the complexity of the multiple roles that home educators experience. Finally, the review of family-based literature sets a background for the roles of mothers and fathers who home educate and brings into focus areas of our society that already recognise the educational qualities parents display as they interact in the lives of their children.

Having set the study of the roles of home educators within the context of the literature the next chapter will discuss the phenomenographic research approach adopted in the study and the methodology.

Chapter 3
Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the qualitatively different ways in which home-educating parents conceived of their roles as educators of their own children. The phenomenon studied was the roles of home-educating parents, in the context of their lived experience as home educators. A sample of 27 home-educating parents was drawn from Queensland home educators associated with the Australian Christian Academy and with the Australian Christian Academy School of Distance Education.

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. It gives a rationale for the use of phenomenography as the methodological approach for the study and describes the approach in detail. It also outlines the research design, data collection and analysis and presents the study's outcome as four categories, representative of the phenomenon. The chapter concludes with important methodological considerations such as rigour, reliability and validity and provides an overview of key ethical issues in relation to the study. The personal pronoun will be used throughout Chapter 3 when referring to the researcher.

3.2 A qualitative paradigm

This section of the chapter describes the relevance of the qualitative paradigm to the study. It refers to the need for the study to be free of prescribed theories and templates and explains the appropriateness of phenomenography in this context.

In the late 20th century, the long established logical positivist, scientific, empirical research paradigm was challenged, by an emerging interpretive paradigm, characterised by a naturalistic phenomenological approach to research (Burns, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; LeCompte et al., 1992). While quantitative methods are focussed towards measuring observable data and answering narrow questions (Creswell, 2008), the qualitative research approach, found within the interpretivist paradigm, is "based on a recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential 'lifeworld' of human beings" (Burns, 1994, p. 11). It

focusses on real people and their experiences, in context, in an endeavour to understand descriptions and meanings of events (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Akerlind (2005c) highlights some of the more specific advantages of the qualitative approach, including the ability:

> … to develop an understanding of the concepts of intersubjectivity, multiple interpretive perspectives, relational meaning, co-constitution of meaning, thick and thin descriptions, intentionality, lived worlds, shared journeys and defensible knowledge claims (p. 64).

Because this study was directed toward the experiences of real people in their natural settings, the qualitative paradigm was considered as most suited for the task, which was to explore a phenomenon quite distinct from most Australian educational practices. Andrewski (1972) and Freyerabend (1988) warn that if a sociological research approach is not free of preset assumptions and methodological templates, genuine inquiry may be inhibited. With this in mind, I sought a framework that would allow the research to reflect the experiences of participants in a re-emerging educational movement that differs from the status quo.

The phenomenographic approach provided the methodology that would feature the views of subjects about their experiences as home educators and that would allow the presentation of new understandings of an under researched educational community.

3.3 The choice of phenomenography

Given a wide range of qualitative research methods, one important task of the researcher is to select the research method that best suits a particular study. While phenomenography shares some features common to other qualitative research methods, such as grounded theory, case studies and content analysis (Trigwell, 2000b), it offers distinct characteristics that make it an appropriate method for a study of the roles of parent home educators.

The aim of this study was to understand the qualitatively different ways in which parents experience their roles as home educators. The study required an approach that would generate differences rather than similarities. The key feature of phenomenography is that it looks at the qualitatively different features of a phenomenon under examination (Marton, 1992a&b, 1993). This focus on variation

highlights the qualitatively different ways in which people may experience a phenomenon. The advantage of giving attention to variation is that all experiences expressed in the data gathering process, no matter how different, nor how frequent, are valued equally. Attention to variation of experiences presents the opportunity for the study to be inclusive of varied practices, which may have been overlooked if a different research method had been implemented (Trigwell, 2000b). Phenomenography recognises that people experience a phenomenon in various ways and is therefore, appropriate.

Methodologically speaking, phenomenography availed this study with an open, explorative method of data collection and of data analysis (Akerlind, 2005c; Svensson, 1997). This method lends itself to the emergence of findings based upon the views of the subjects, rather than to researcher-driven or theory-driven results. These open, explorative methods also allow for unexpected or complex views to emerge during data gathering and analysis. Because the study explores a form of pedagogy that is not commonly practised in the community, unforeseen views may emerge in the data and contribute to the final results. This study needed a methodology that would accommodate unexpected or less commonly held views of education; phenomenography provides that needed flexibility.

Cherry (2005) highlighted another advantage of phenomenography in that it brings a high level of rigour, or trustworthiness, to understanding the meaning of the text and that it is a strongly reflective practice that is “particularly appropriate for engaging with complex, controversial or deeply held issues and viewpoints” (p.62). While other qualitative methods are rigorous, the level of rigour that phenomenography brings further confirms its appropriateness for the study. The next section provides a description of the phenomenographic approach.

3.4 Phenomenography: An overview

The phenomenographic research approach identifies the conceptions of reality that are experienced by individuals (Svensson, 1997). It seeks to relate the knowledge and experience of an individual to the world that he or she inhabits. The phenomenographic approach allows the researcher to view the way people conceive of themselves in the context of their social setting, and how they relate the two

(Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Hazel, Conrad & Martin, 1997; Marton, 1981b, 1988, 1994b, 1996; Trigwell & Prosser, 1997). Ference Marton (1993), the pioneer of this research approach, described phenomenography as an empirical study of human experience or of human awareness. 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 represents the different conceptions or ways of experiencing a phenomenon, in various categories of description. The composition of all of the categories of description is the outcome space and is, according to Marton (1994b), representative of the phenomenon being studied.

Marton and Booth (1997) define a phenomenon as the summation of the ways of experiencing something. They argued that a phenomenon is constituted by two factors: (1) the situation or immediate experience that is "experienced with a … context, a time, and a place" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.82); and (2) the phenomenon of the accumulation of all other experiences, prior to or following after the given situation, which are related to the phenomenon. They argued that both "situation and phenomena are inextricably intertwined in experience" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 83). In focussing upon the phenomenon of the roles of home-educating parents, this study sought to access the summation of those experiences that home-educating parents have of their roles as educators of their children.

Phenomenography is an empirical, nondualist, qualitative research approach used to identify the perceived relationship between the research participants and their lived experience (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Hazel, Conrad & Martin, 1997; Trigwell & Prosser, 1997). It is an empirical research approach, as it presents its findings from data rather than preconceived theory, and it is nondualist, in that it presumes unity between the subject who experiences the object in the world and the object that is experienced. Phenomenography views an experience as "an internal relationship between the subject and the world" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 122).

The relationship between the person and some aspect of the world is, according to Marton (1993), the most distinguishing feature of phenomenography. This relationship, which is known as a conception, is the primary feature sought by the

phenomenographer. An example of a conception from this study would be where parents conceived of themselves in the role of teacher. Phenomenographers distinguish between conceptions and categories of description. They believe that people have an understanding of something, which accounts for their conceptions and that the researcher captures the way of understanding those conceptions by means of assigning conceptions to categories of description.

Marton (1993) also enumerates other distinguishing features of phenomenographical research. Phenomenography focuses upon variation. This focus looks at the differences, rather than the similarities, in the way in which people experience or understand a phenomenon and it is this focus on variation that distinguishes it from other forms of qualitative research. Phenomenographic methodology offers an open explorative method of data collection, usually in the form of the phenomenographic interview, the development of categories of description and the interpretive analysis of data (Svensson, 1997). Phenomenography seeks during this process of the discovering categories of description, to detect the underlying meaning of phenomena experienced by people (Entwistle, 1997).

Phenomenography emphasises the supra-individual level, rather than the individual, when examining variation. During data analysis, the views of individuals are absorbed into a collection of similar views of other individuals. This supra-individual view is a collective viewpoint, which comprises the many similar views of individuals from the cohort of participants (Akerlind , Bowden, & Green, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997) This collective view is found in a category of description, which is derived from phenomenographic data analysis. Ultimately, the collection of all categories of description forms the phenomenographic outcome space, which is the desired result of a phenomenographic study.

In summary, Akerlind et al., (2005) indicate that the following features are the outcomes of the majority of phenomenographic studies:

- A description of the outcome space as prose and or graphic format
- A detailed elaboration of the categories of description
- A detailed analysis of the relationships among the categories

Given the stated advantages and the features of phenomenography, it is important to address some of the key ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding this research approach.

3.4.1 Ontological and epistemological assumptions of phenomenography

Phenomenographers employ nondualist ontology, assuming that there is only one world, rather than the often proposed two worlds of the subjective inner mind and the objective world outside of the person (Bowden, 2005; Marton, 1992b; Marton & Booth, 1997). Marton and Booth (1997) argue that:

> The world is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as internal relation between them. There is only one world, but it is a world that we experience, a world in which we live. (p. 13)

Phenomenographers take the constitutionalist view of knowledge, arguing that knowledge is constituted by individuals as they experience phenomena, in context, in the world (Marton & Neuman, 1989), rather than the constructionist epistemological view, that knowledge is constructed in the mind, independent of external reality (Crotty, 2003). Crotty (2003) explained the constructionist view, arguing that the person is separate from the world, that both the person and the world are independent of each other, and that humans must construct knowledge of the world, for themselves in a social setting, stating,

> … all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

In upholding the constitutionalist view of knowledge, Marton and Booth (1997) argued that experience is constituted by both the experiencer of the world and the world that is experienced, stating, “Experience is constituted between person and world, reflecting both, and that is why we repeatedly state that it is an internal relationship” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.164). Phenomenographers thus affirm the unity of these constituents, highlighting that there is always a relation between subject and object, and that the two are not separate, but that they are both constituents of an experience (Johansson, Marton and Svensson, 1985; Svensson, 1997). Marton (1992b) states, “There is only one world, a really existing world that

is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings" (p.2). It is these different experiences of the world that explain the differences in knowledge that humans have. Marton and Booth (1997) explain how an experience is a unifying relationship between the subject and the world. From this viewpoint, they state that experiences are nondualistic and are

> located neither in the subject nor in the world, being neither psychological nor physical, being neither mind nor matter, experiences do comprise an *internal relationship* between the subject and the world, and that is their fundamental characteristic: An experience is of its essence *nondualistic.* (p. 122)

The nondualist position does not consider the ontological question as to whether reality exists, to be a problem. The phenomenographer assumes that reality does exist and that we can meaningfully speak about the experienced world (Marton, 1981a; Ulgens, 1996).

Phenomenography's object of focus is people's varying conceptions of some aspect of the world. A conception is an experienced relationship between a person and the world. Because one important aspect of a person's conception is knowledge, phenomenography's ontological assumptions about conceptions and experiences are often synonymous with its epistemological assumptions (Ulgens, 1996). This means that phenomenography's theory of experiencing the world and that of knowing the experience are inextricably linked (Svensson, 1997; Ulgens, 1996). Thus, the epistemological position of phenomenography is dependent upon how a subject experiences the world. Phenomenography relates knowing a phenomenon and experiencing the phenomenon in a relational unity.

For the phenomenographer, variation is the key to knowing phenomena. Marton (1996) assumed that individuals and their varied experiences are foundational to phenomenography, "individuals are seen as the bearers of different ways of experiencing various phenomena, and even as the bearers of fragments of differing ways of experiencing various phenomena" (p. 187). Marton and Booth (1997) argued that, because there are many individual experiencers of phenomena in the world, there are varied ways of experiencing the world, as each experiencer of a phenomenon experiences it in his or her own unique way. Phenomenography is, thus, based upon the assumption that there are varying ways of conceptualising the same phenomenon. This aspect of phenomenography justifies its fundamental orientation

to searching for variation. Marton and Booth (1997) argued that a collection of as many varied aspects of phenomena as possible, enable phenomena to be discerned and known. Thus accumulating and analysing and varied experiences of a phenomenon, enables that phenomenon to be known.

Phenomenographers also operate on the assumption that participants are able to understand and conceptualise the phenomenon in question and that they have a communicable awareness of it. Without the ability to conceptualise, it would be impossible for a person to experience the phenomenon. Without the ability to communicate their experience, it would be impossible to describe the phenomenon. Svensson (1997) indicated that these two assumptions are foundational to phenomenography.

The ontological and epistemological aspects relevant to phenomenography inform a key perspective that a phenomenographical researcher must assume. Because the researcher's focus must be upon the experiences of the subjects of the study, rather than on the researcher's interpretation of a phenomenon, he or she adopts a second-order perspective during the course of a phenomenographic study.

3.4.2 Second-order perspective

The phenomenographic approach takes a second-order perspective with respect to the subject-object relationship and the research data. Gerber (1993) explained that a second-order perspective means that the researcher is interested in what the subject indicates to be his or her conceptions of their experience of the phenomenon; whereas, in a first-order perspective, the researcher examines and interprets aspects of the phenomenon from their own viewpoint. A second-order perspective views the phenomenon through the eyes of the subject rather than the researcher's eyes. In taking the second-order perspective in this study, I focussed upon gathering, analysing and reporting the subjects' experiences of their roles as home educators, rather than giving my interpretation of their roles.

The phenomenographer achieves a second-order perspective by focusing the phenomenographic interview so as to gain the subject's description of their experience of the phenomenon. However, this perspective is not limited to the

interview, as Marton and Booth (1997) indicated the second-order perspective is to be employed consistently throughout the research project.

> It is the perspective that has to be adopted when the research problems are being posed, when material is being gathered, and when the analysis is being done. It means taking the place of the respondent, trying to see the phenomenon and the situation through her eyes, and living her experience vicariously. At every stage of the phenomenographic project the researcher has to step back consciously from her own experience of the phenomenon and use it only to illuminate the ways in which others are talking of it, handling it, experiencing it and understanding it (p. 121).

The others-centric approach of phenomenography resonates with the requirements of this study. The subject's experience or conception is the currency of a phenomenographic study, rather than the views of the researcher. Laurillard (1993) indicates that the second-order perspective is the phenomenographic feature that gives voice to the participants and that makes phenomenography a democratic approach to research. By adopting this perspective, the researcher allows the data from the subject to speak for itself, and, in turn, it allows for the emergence of research findings that are generated from the subject's experiences.

3.5 Nature of experience

Phenomenographers seek to understand what it means to experience different phenomena. They seek the meaning in how others experience the world and assume that the experiences of people in the world can be meaningfully discussed and described (Marton, 1981a; Ulgens, 1996). One person's experience is not the totality of the reality, as there are others who experience the world in varied ways. Phenomenographers seek to understand how different subjects experience the world in their different ways. In pursuing this goal, they focus upon the experiences that different people have of reality and on the formation of their conceptions of that reality. Such conceptions are the relationships between the subjects and the phenomenon.

In exploring the nature of experience, Ulgens (1996), modified Ogden and Richards' (1989) semantic triangle (Figure 2). In their classic work *The Meaning of Meaning*, Ogden and Richards (1989) demonstrated that experience formed the relationship between reality, thoughts about reality and the symbols that humans make to

represent reality. Ulgens' modification of this triangle assisted him in demonstrating the philosophical foundations of phenomenography. Ulgens (1996) argued that for the nondualist, experience was the unifying factor between a person's awareness of reality (consciousness), their discourse about reality (theory) and the reality itself.

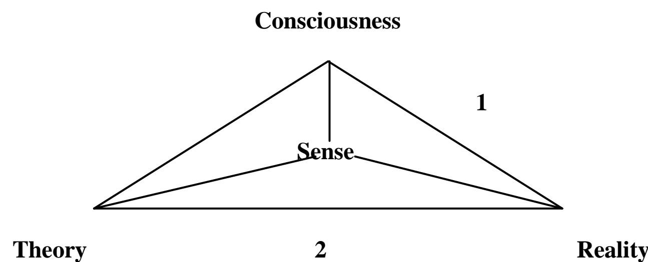

Figure 2: The relation between the ontological (1) and epistemological (2) aspects of experience (Uljens, 1996).

He demonstrated how a person's experience is constituted by their awareness of a phenomenon (consciousness), their ability to articulate the phenomenon (theory) and the phenomenon itself (reality). Sensory experience (sense) unifies all three. Thus, Ulgens (1996) supported the nondualist position of phenomenography, demonstrating that one's consciousness of reality (#1 the ontological problem) and their ability to know and articulate their reality (#2 the epistemological problem) are both located in the person's experience.

Ulgens' position that the awareness of reality, the expression of reality, and the reality itself, constitute the subject's experience of that reality supports the phenomenographic view that a conception or way of experiencing something is not a mental entity, but rather it is an internal relationship between the person and the world.

Marton (1994a) stated that this way of experiencing a phenomenon is a way of delimiting an object from its context and of relating it to other contexts or to the whole. Ways of experiencing phenomena have a "what" aspect to awareness, which relates to the object experienced and a "how" aspect to awareness, which relates to the act of experiencing, as described in the structure of awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997).

A key to understanding the nature of people's experience of phenomena is to explore their awareness of phenomena. In its attempt to determine the meaning within people's experience of phenomena, phenomenography addresses a theory of awareness.

3.6 Theory of awareness

Marton and Booth (1997) stated that a person's capability of having an experience is to be found in his or her awareness. A person's "awareness is the totality of her relatedness to the world" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.163). Forming a conception of a phenomenon involves seeing, thinking, reflecting and experiencing. It includes the delimitation of the phenomenon from the surrounding context as well as the discerning of the various elements of the phenomenon itself (Marton & Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1995). Each of these activities is experienced by a person in their awareness.

The theory of awareness describes two aspects of a person's awareness of the phenomena that they experience. These are the referential and structural aspects of awareness. The referential aspect of awareness pertains to the meaning embedded in the person's awareness as they experience phenomena. The structural aspect of awareness is a way of describing what is in focus in the foreground of awareness and secondly, what is backgrounded in their awareness, as they experience phenomena.

Phenomenographers agree that while it is possible to separate the referential and structural aspects of 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. They dialectically constitute one another with neither taking priority over the other. Marton and Pang (1999) described the relationship between meaning and structure as the subject experiences the object, in this way: "Structure presupposes meaning and in reciprocal meaning presupposes structure. We cannot imagine these (structure and meaning) other than in relation to each other" (p. 5). The referential and structural aspects of awareness are now discussed in more detail.

3.6.1 Referential aspect of awareness

For a phenomenographer, the referential aspect of awareness refers to the meaning in the person's awareness, as they experience phenomena. The meaning is embedded in the data of a phenomenographic study (Marton 1994a). Phenomenographers, who have developed variation theory, bring some clarity to the matter of the referential aspect of experiencing phenomena (Bowden & Marton, 1999; Marton, 1994a; Marton, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997). A person is able to derive meaning about a phenomenon as it is delimited or becomes distinct from its surrounding context. Marton (2002) explains that the ability to discern critical features of an experience is dependent upon the subject's experience of variation. Variation enables the subject to experience the object as distinct from other phenomena and thus variation enables the meaning of the experience to be clarified in his or her awareness.

In order to clarify the importance of variation in understanding meaning, Marton and Booth (1997) presented the example of a person looking at a deer in the woods. As the viewer discerns the critical differences between the deer and the surrounding trees, bush and grass, the deer becomes clearly visible to the observer. The key to clarity is discerning the variation between the deer and the woodland setting.

3.6.2 Structural aspect of awareness

Marton and Booth (1997) state that "it is impossible to experience anything in total isolation" (p. 97). They observe that all experiences are situated in a context. Thus, a social context surrounds all experienced phenomena. The structure of awareness describes the different degrees of a person's awareness of a phenomenon, and the different contexts and settings of that experience (Booth, 1992, 1997; Bowden & Marton, 1999; Cope, 2002; Marton, 1998, 2000; Marton & Booth, 1997). That which is immediately relevant to the phenomenon is the focus of the person's awareness, while that which is less relevant but still related to what is in focus, provides a background or context to that which is focus (Marton, 2000).

Drawing on the work of Gurwitsch (1964), Marton and Booth (1997) defined that which is in the foreground of awareness as the theme, and they divided that which is

in the background of a person's awareness into the thematic field and the margin of awareness.

These three differentiations describe the varying degrees of a person's awareness from: (1) that which is the focus of the person's awareness (theme), to (2) that which is somewhat relevant to what is in focus (thematic field), to (3) that which provides a background to what is in focus (margin). This structure of awareness is represented in Figure 3.

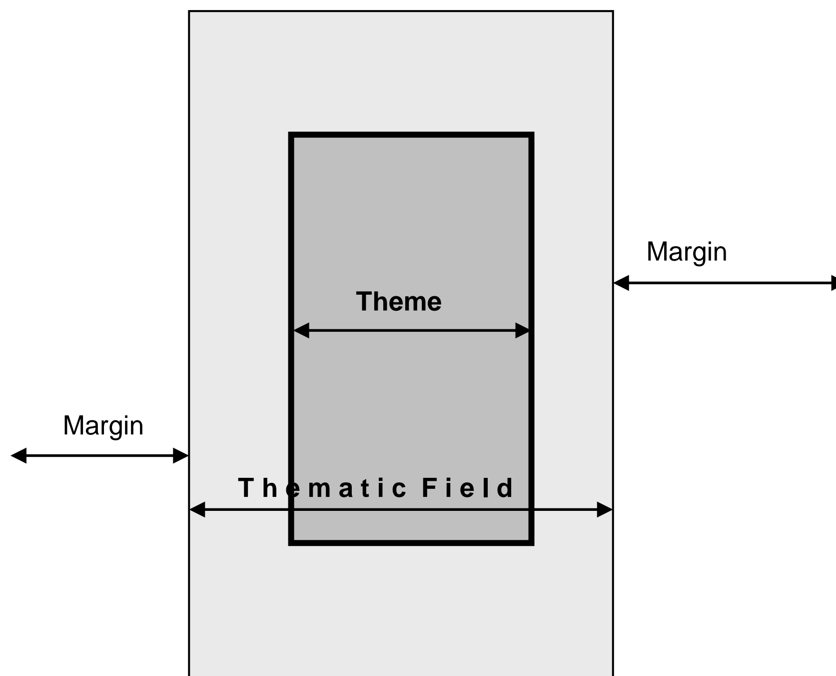

Figure 3: The Structure of Awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997).

3.6.2.1 The theme

Marton and Booth (1997) described the theme of awareness as the object of focal of awareness. It is what is central in the awareness of the subject when experiencing the phenomenon. Whatever is directly related to the phenomenon is part of the theme and may be referred to as being within the internal horizon of a person's awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). To illustrate this feature, an example of a theme in focus, would be the text and its immediate meaning that is being currently read by the reader of this thesis.

3.6.2.2 The thematic field

The thematic field includes aspects of the experienced world that are related to the object. The thematic field contains the immediate context in which the theme is embedded. It is co-existent with the theme in focus; however, it is not central to the person's awareness, at that time. To continue with the example, the thematic field of the reader of this thesis would be issues related to the subject of this text, but not in the actual text. These may include what the reader has personally experienced of matters such as the nature of awareness, the nature of experience and understanding.

3.6.2.3 The margin

The margin of a person's awareness is that which is not directly related to what is in focus, yet it may, in some way, hold some form of spatial or temporal relevance in their awareness. Marton and Booth (1997) note that the margin includes "all that which is coexistent with the theme without being related to it by dint of content or meaning" (p. 98). In referring again to the example of the reader of this text, his or her margin of awareness may include the room in which they are sitting, their personal health or an upcoming appointment. The margin stretches out indefinitely in space and time, progressively further from that which is in focus. The margin is also simultaneously in a person's awareness with that which is in focus and with the thematic field, however, it is in the periphery of that person's awareness. Both the thematic field and the margin are considered by phenomenographers (Marton & Booth, 1997) as constituting the external horizon of awareness.

The structure of awareness provides a way to better understand the varying degrees of a person's awareness of a phenomenon, which may co-exist simultaneously, while experiencing the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). Ulgens (1996) points out that this structure of awareness, of what is in focus and what is backgrounded is stable; however, the content of what is in one's awareness is not stable, as what one is aware of changes continually.

The next section of this chapter provides a description of the key features of the phenomenographic research approach.

3.7 Key features of the phenomenographic approach

The key features of phenomenography are: conceptions, categories of description, the outcome space, dimensions of variation, discursive phenomenography, bracketing, the phenomenographic interview and the phenomenographic data analysis. These features are described in this section.

3.7.1 Conceptions

As discussed earlier, phenomenography seeks out the human conceptions of a phenomenon. A conception encapsulates the relationship between the subject ("the experiencer") and his or her experience of engaging with the phenomenon ("the experienced") in the world. It refers to the meaning embedded in this relationship (Ekebad & Bond, 1994). Marton (1994a) described a conception as a way of experiencing something or as a way of being aware of something. This awareness is an internal relation between subject and object, which in turn forms an intangible unity. Bruce (2002) expressed this internal relation diagrammatically (Figure 4).

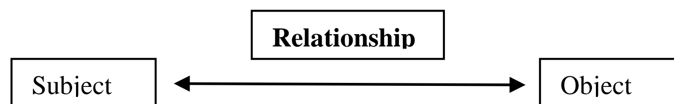

Figure 4: Graphical representation of a Conception (Bruce 2002).

Marton (1993, 1994a) provided an apt example of a conception from the field of numeracy. One might be aware of the number seven in a variety of ways. The person's experience of seven may arise from the way one experiences the number of fingers on one's hand in different patterns such as 2 + 5 or 4 + 3 and so on, or it may come from a specific experience of the number in one's life or from other experiences of the number, such as personal reflection. The result of such accumulated experiences produces an awareness of "sevenness" as an aspect of the person's numeracity. This is the person's conception of seven and sevenness.

Bowden (2000) cautioned that a person's conception is not static, but may change over time as she or he continues to experience the phenomenon. Akerlind (2005b) supported this view arguing that because a person's conception is reliant upon context; as the context changes, the conception of the phenomenon will change. Thus, while the conception is relevant to the individual and the experienced context, at the time of the interview, it may vary at other times.

In the search for meaning in this study, I sought the subjects' conceptions of their roles as home educators. In order to achieve this, my focus was continually upon the view of the parents. A parent's conception of his or her role as a home educator is the way in which they experience the roles. It is the internal relationship between the parent and their roles. As the parents expressed their views of their roles, these conceptions were allocated to categories of description, during the data analysis.

3.7.2 Categories of description

Categories of description are collections of the conceptions that have emerged from the data, which have been grouped together according to their similarity in meaning. Svensson (1995) described the categories of description as classes or summaries of the descriptions of the content of the different conceptions expressed by individuals in the study. Furthermore, after a process of abstraction, reduction and condensation of the data, and comparisons of meanings, the category of description is formed by the researcher on the assumption that "conceptions may be described in terms of their reduced content" (Svensson, 1997, p. 168).

A category of description may be comprised of several conceptions. Bowden (2000), O'Gorman (2007) and Sandberg (1995) hold similar views regarding the possibility of multiple conceptions being allocated to a category of description. In this particular study, there were many instances where different individuals communicated different conceptions that were allocated to the same category of description. For example, many parents described the different ways in which they experienced their roles of teacher. Some referred to teaching academic content, while others referred to planning a learning experience for their children. Both of these were different ways of experiencing the role of teacher and were thus allocated to that category of description.

A category of description may also contain key elements. These key elements of a category of description are further variations in the meaning found within a category (O'Gorman, 2007). For example, in the category of teacher, in this study, there were four elements, each one expressing varying aspects of the role of teacher. They were the relational aspect, the organisational aspect, the developmental aspect and the pedagogical aspect of the role of teacher. A category of description is ultimately constituted by the conceptions within it, which, in the case of this study, are grouped according to similar qualities.

There is a discussion among phenomenographers as to whether categories of description are constructed or discovered (Walsh, 2000). Walsh asks the question "Are the categories already present in, and constitutive of the data, so that the purpose of phenomenographic analysis is to allow the categories to emerge progressively as the analysis proceeds? Or, are they a construction which the researcher imposes?" (p. 20). This question juxtaposes the views that categories are either constituted from the data alone or are the work of the researcher. For the purpose of this study, I took a co-constitutionalist view, advocating that while the data is part of the subject's relationship with the phenomenon, an experience from which conceptions emerge, the categories, structure and outcome space are discovered and developed by the researcher. In terms of the study, this view admits the relationship between the parent and their experience of their home education roles as well as the relationship between the researcher and the data, as constituting the categories. Thus, the categories of description are co-constituted by both their emerging from the subject-object relationship and discovery by the researcher.

Bowden (2000) and Sandberg (1995) stressed the point that conceptions are different from the subsequently derived categories of description and that earlier phenomenographic literature failed to make this distinction. Bowden (2000) noted that some phenomenographers have used the terms category of description and conception interchangeably. While the conception refers to the relationship of the participant to the object of the study, the category of description refers to how the researcher sees the participants' conceptions. Thus, the conception is the product of the participant's relationship with the object and the category of description is the product of several participants and their relationship with the object and the

researcher’s relationship with the subjects’ conceptions, which the researcher eventually labels and categorises. All categories of description of a phenomenographic study constitute the outcome space for that study.

3.7.3 Outcome space

Obtaining the outcome space is the aim of a phenomenographic study. The outcome space represents the phenomenon under study. It is comprised of all of the categories of description and demonstrates the logical relationships between the categories of description. Svensson (1995) described the outcome space as a number of categories that are related to each other in a systematised way. Marton and Booth (1997) argued that the outcome space is characterised by each category revealing something distinctive about the phenomenon and the relationships between the categories and that the categories are to be few in number. Marton (1994a) suggested that often there are five or six categories of description that comprise the outcome space of the phenomenon. Limiting the number of categories to a few reduces the possibility of the overlapping of meaning between categories and challenges the researcher to assign the categories to reflect the critical differences that distinguish one category from another.

There is conjecture among phenomenographers as to the structural nature of the outcome space. While Marton (1994a & b) and Marton & Booth (1997) suggested that these ordered categories would form hierarchies in the description of the phenomenon, other phenomenographers (Akerlind, Bowden & Green, 2005; Hazel, Conrad & Martin, 1997; Pramling, 1995; Sjostrom & Dahlgren, 2002) have disagreed, indicating that an outcome space of a phenomenographic study may be constituted by categories of description, which, though logically related, are not necessarily hierarchically aligned.

Akerlind, Bowden and Green (2005) contend that phenomenographers have frequently misunderstood the structural nature of the outcome space when insisting that a hierarchy of categories represents superiority of degree among categories. Rather, they hold that hierarchy can also be understood in terms of inclusiveness, in that some categories are inclusive of others. While phenomenographers agree that the nature of the relationships among categories may vary, they point out that there must

be structural relationships among the categories of some kind, as this is a critical feature of phenomenography. Akerlind, Bowden and Green (2005) explained this point by stating that the end result of a phenomenographic study is an outcome space, not an outcome. The term outcome space, by its nature, implies structure and association among the included categories of description. Thus categories of description in an outcome space will be structurally related.

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. For example, the structure of the relationships in the outcome space is subject to the determination of the researcher. It is more than likely that the structure of the outcome space will go beyond what is present in the data, yet it must not contradict the data. In addressing this issue, Walsh (1994, 2000) has suggested that it is the degree to which the outcome space has emerged from the data and the degree of researcher interpretation that needs to be examined in order to determine appropriateness of the outcome space. This relationship between the researcher and the data in the outcomes of phenomenographic research remains a matter of conjecture among phenomenographers.

Bowden's (2000) pragmatic perspective of "developmental" (p. 3) phenomenography is purpose-driven towards the research being precipitative of change in the world. He accepts that a researcher may bracket biases and, thus, avoid researcher pollution. He seeks fidelity in the individual's conceptions and commensurability with the interpreted outcome space. By differentiating between the terms conceptions, categories of description and outcome space, Bowden acknowledged that the product of the interviewee (the conception) and the product of the researcher (the categories and the outcome space) are not the same; however the latter ought to be consistent with the former. Thus, the outcome space and the categories are the product of the researcher, while the conceptions are from the subjects. The key to the value of the outcome space is ensuring the faithfulness of the researcher's constructs, to the constructions of the subjects.

Bowden (2000) acknowledged that there may be secondary relationships between the researcher and the phenomenon and between the researcher and the subject during

the processes of a phenomenographic study. However, Bowden argued that these relationships should not be analysed and included in the rest of the data analysis. Such additional analysis would introduce unnecessary complicating factors, which would detract from the main focus of the study, which is the conceptions of the interviewee, not the experiences of the researcher. Bowden (2000) thus advocated that these secondary, researcher-based relationships should not be included in a phenomenographic study.

3.7.4 Dimensions of variation

Within the outcome space, Marton and Booth (1997) defined recognisable themes or dimensions of variation, which may be seen to traverse some or all of the categories of description. A dimension of variation, while being common to multiple categories, changes character in each category. Thus it can both differentiate one category from another as well as link the categories together by a common theme. A dimension of variation represents variation in the awareness of the subject, as he or she experiences a phenomenon.

Pang (2003) described the development of dimensions of variation as a second face of variation in phenomenography. The dimensions of variation are a second way of looking for differences in the categories of description. They are themes found in each category, which express an expanded view of that theme, in each category. They have been identified as expanding themes of awareness (Akerlind, 2005a), in that they are consistent themes throughout the categories of description, with different applications in each of the categories. This trans-category, expanding theme links the various categories of description and establishes a second level of difference between the categories, which is quite distinct from the differences that the categories themselves identify.

Akerlind (2005a) affirmed that dimensions of variation become more apparent during the latter stages of the data analysis. As the meaning of the respondents becomes clear and the categories of description become stabilised, the structural features become apparent. The structural aspects of the outcome space further enhance the meaning. In this way, both meaning and structure illuminate each other. Thus, the dimensions of variation demonstrate the interconnectedness of the meaning

and the structure of categories of description. Despite this interconnectedness, Akerlind (2005a) advocates the separation of both the meaning and the structural aspects, for the purpose of analysis, so that the reader can come to terms with the complexity of the data.

Akerlind (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) emphasised the importance of ensuring that the structural aspects of the outcome space are true to the data. She warned the researcher to avoid making the data comply with a predetermined requirement. Rather, Akerlind sees the dimensions of variation as key themes, emerging from data analysis, logically linking the categories of description in ways that are characteristic to the phenomenon being studied. In short, the dimensions of variation add to both the structure and the meaning of the outcome space. In this study several key dimensions of variation, common to all categories became apparent in the later stages of the iterative analysis.

3.7.5 Discursive phenomenography

Hasselgren and Beach (1997) indicated that phenomenography can be developed in different ways and that these different ways each possess different features. They identified five different modes of phenomenography. These are: (1) experimental phenomenography that acquires data from experimentation; (2) discursive phenomenography, which mines the discourse of participants; (3) naturalistic phenomenography, which collects data from natural situations; (4) hermeneutic phenomenography, which uses texts not generated phenomenographically as data; and (5) phenomenological phenomenography, which asks the subjects to explore what is happening in their minds, and this is used as data.

Because this study sought the views of parents about their lived experience as home educators, discursive phenomenography was deemed to be the most appropriate. Discursive phenomenography is concerned with mapping people's general conceptions of the world arising from discourse. Discursive phenomenography may be used to explore any experienced phenomenon. It is not necessarily linked to the examination of the phenomenon of learning only, as was the case of many early phenomenographic studies. For this reason some phenomenographers (Marton, 1988; Saljo, 1994) have labelled discursive phenomenography as one aspect of what is

known as “pure phenomenography” (Saljo, 1994, p. 22). As the name suggests, discursive phenomenography “is born of phenomenographic discourse” in that it uses discourse “to produce expressions of conceptions which can be analysed phenomenographically” (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 197). The discursive phenomenography process involves a recorded conversation or interview between the subject and researcher; the transcription of the recorded interview; the compiling of data in terms of differences and similarities and the subsequent analysis of the data groups and the emergence of conceptions, which are then allocated to categories of description, which in turn, are allocated to the outcome space. Hasselgren and Beach (1997) have outlined their understanding of the processes involved in discursive phenomenography as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: The processes of discursive phenomenography (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997).

When employing discursive phenomenography, the phenomenographic interview is the usual approach to gathering data. Some of the features of the phenomenographic interview will now be discussed.

3.7.7 The phenomenographic interview

The phenomenographic interview is the major data gathering instrument of phenomenographers, even though it is not the only tool available to phenomenographers (Bruce, 1994a; Marton, 1988). The interview brings greater understanding of a human phenomenon because it allows the interviewer to explore a person’s experience through a transactional process of interaction that takes place between interviewer and interviewee (Akerlind, 2005c, Burns, 1994; Creswell, 1994; Keats, 2000; Minichello et al., 1995; Tessier Barone & Young Switzer, 1995).

The phenomenographic interview shares many qualities with other forms of interviewing, yet it retains certain distinctive features. Bruce (1994a) outlined the distinctive features of the phenomenographic interview as being its specific aim, its

focus, the role of the interviewer, the design of the interview and the implementation of the interview.

The aim of the phenomenographic interview is to capture the variations in people's experience or their conceptions of the phenomenon studied. It is not focused on the person, the context under study, nor on the world, but on the person's conception of their world, and how the person relates to that world. Because the phenomenographer's aim is to describe the variation of the same phenomenon that occurs between different subjects, it is vital that each interview is focused upon the same phenomenon. In order to capture the variations within the phenomenon, the phenomenographic interview is to impose no restriction upon the interviewee. The phenomenographer however, imposes restrictions upon himself or herself, such as the practice of bracketing, which will be discussed in the next section.

Bruce (1994a) recommended that all questions posed during a phenomenographic interview should lead the interviewee to discuss how they perceive the phenomenon. Bowden (1996) stated that the questions may vary in style, but they must be consistently focused to drawing out the ideas of the interviewees about the chosen phenomenon.

Bruce (1994a & b) outlined the following principles that characterise the phenomenographic interview. They include: bracketing, description (as opposed to explanation), horizontalisation (ascribing all descriptions with equal value), open ended questions and a tapping into of the subject's lived experience. Bruce stated that the interviewer's role is:

- to see the phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective
- to identify the meaning being ascribed
- to identify what is being focused on in order for that meaning to be experienced
- to obtain descriptions of the phenomenon
- to obtain examples and comparisons
- to reach the internal and external horizons of the interviewee's experience
- to confront and pursue areas of confusion

- to probe for analogies
- to encourage reflection on experience (Bruce, 1994b, p. 3).

The phenomenographic interview enables the researcher to approach the subject and to then later analyse the data from a second order perspective. One of the key features of the phenomenographic data gathering and analysis processes, which supports the second order perspective is bracketing.

3.7.6 Bracketing

Ashworth and Lucas (2000) noted that phenomenography must be "grounded upon the lived experience of the research participants" (p.297). Phenomenographers have stated that the methodological requirement of bracketing is central to achieving the subject's view of the phenomenon, rather than that of the researcher (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Bruce, 1994a). Ashworth and Lucas (2000) indicated that the likelihood of maximising the gaze upon the subject is dramatically increased if the researcher intentionally brackets personal presuppositions and knowledge of related theory; and secondly, if the researcher seeks to engage or empathise with the interviewee's lived experience.

Ashworth and Lucas (2000) listed several kinds of presuppositions that must be bracketed by a researcher. These include: (1) earlier research findings; (2) pre-given theoretical structures or interpretations; (3) the investigator's personal knowledge and belief; (4) specific research techniques; and (5) a desire to explain the cause of certain experience. A prerequisite of bracketing is that the researcher can articulate and separate his or her own assumptions from the responses of the research participant.

The importance of bracketing, however, is not intended to negate the researcher's experience in the field being studied. Akerlind (2002) suggested that a researcher's experience of the researched phenomenon may not be a liability; rather, it may be an asset. Akerlind (2002) noted that phenomenographers (Booth, 1992; Marton & Booth, 1997; Trigwell, 1994, 2000; Uljens, 1996) believe that researchers with a sound experience of the phenomenon bring a greater likelihood of the research achieving an outcome space relevant to the phenomenon. Akerlind (2002) stated:

"the more common view is that the greater the researcher's knowledge and varied experience of the phenomenon, the better their ability to constitute a logical and meaningful structure to the outcome space" (p. 11). Thus with regard to this research project, my experience in home education, appropriately bracketed, was seen to be advantageous in providing a benchmark by which the interview, the analysis and the results were kept relevant to the phenomenon. Bracketing is particularly important during the interview, as this phase of the phenomenographic approach provides the data for the study.

3.7.8 The phenomenographic data analysis

With the development of phenomenography's philosophical and theoretical framework over recent years, general principles for conducting a phenomenographic data analysis have been developed. Phenomenographers have written detailed descriptions of various phenomenographic data analyses (Akerlind, 2005d; Bowden, 1994; Dahlgren and Fallsberg, 1991; Dall'Alba, 2000; Irvin, 2006; Marton, 1986; Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser, 1994). They demonstrate a general agreement about the essential principles of the analysis process; however, some implement significant variations in their application of the phenomenographic analysis. These generally agreed upon principles and some variations are described in this section.

The data analysis is set in a context that focuses on variation. It usually consists of four phases, which are (1) mining the transcripts for meaning,; (2) discovering and developing categories of description; (3) discovering and developing a structure of awareness; and (4) discovering and developing the outcome space and the relationships within it (Akerlind, 2005 a & c; Marton & Booth, 1997). While these phases of analysis appear to be distinct for the purposes of description, the reiterative nature of a phenomenographic data analysis requires a researcher to conduct and to repeat the activities within these phases, at any time during the analysis. This reiterative principle of visiting and revisiting the data and the sorting and resorting of results, with respect to the data, is one of the most important features of a phenomenographic data analysis.

Akerlind (2005a) described this reiterative feature as a continual process of focusing upon the parts and upon the wholes of the data analysis. For example, for transcripts,

the researcher focuses upon key statements (the parts) in the light of the whole transcript (the whole). For a group of similar data, the researcher focuses upon a single element (the part), but relates it to the pool of data (the whole) in which it is located. The process of ranging between a focus upon the parts and the whole during the analysis is of particular assistance when seeking to discover the structure within the outcome space. The following section will describe the four processes of mining the data for meaning and the discovery and development of the categories of description, the structure of awareness and the outcome space.

3.7.8.1 Mining the transcripts for meaning

The researcher seeks familiarity with and meaning from, the interview transcripts, during a reiterative process of reading and reflection upon that data. During this process, key utterances or quotations of interest, relevant to the phenomenon studied, are detected in the transcripts. They are then selected and allocated to a pool of quotations, on the basis of their relevance to the phenomenon (Irvin, 2006; Marton, 1986).

Akerlind (2005d) highlights that one important point of variation between phenomenographers is how much of the transcript should be used. Marton (1986) and Marton and Booth (1997) advocated for selecting key excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate conceptions and to allocate them to their pools of quotations, while Bowden (1994) and Dall'Alba (1994) used entire transcripts, and allocated them to draft categories. Both variations in approach have potential strengths and weaknesses. The excerpt approach allows for multiple, key aspects of the transcripts to be used in the analysis; also the use of smaller excerpts of data does make the data analysis more manageable. However, using excerpts from the transcripts does harbour the possibility of decontextualising the data. The whole transcript approach maintains the contextualisation of data; however, it may encourage a focus upon the individual rather than the group and it may also facilitate the loss of less emphasised, but equally important key aspects of the phenomenon, in the pursuit of one major meaning within a transcript.

3.7.8.2 Discovering and developing categories of description

The next phase of analysis involves the allocation of quotes in the pool of meaning, into classes based upon similarity. The researcher analyses the utterances and groups them into several classes. The classes are determined by both their relevance to the phenomenon and their differences with respect to each other. In some cases an utterance may be allocated to more than one class, if it indicates different conceptions (Akerlind, 2005a). This discovery and development process is a refining aspect of the analysis that ultimately leads to the first draft of the categories of description.

During this phase, the emphasis of the analysis is no longer upon the individual and the individual's transcript. At this point the project takes a collective or group focus, as relevant quotes or transcripts about various experiences are gathered from many individuals and are grouped into different classes, based upon their similarity. The classes (parts) are defined by their differences with respect to their relevancy to the phenomenon (whole) and the utterances (parts) within the classes (whole) are grouped according to similarity, with respect to a distinct aspect of the phenomenon.

Here, the researcher seeks the meaning common to all utterances within each class. This meaning is the defining factor of the class. While it is true that the emphasis of the analysis has taken a group focus, the reiterative process, continually returns the researcher to the individual interview transcripts for comparison with what is emerging, so as to maintain faithfulness to the participants' communications of their experiences of the phenomenon (Bowden, 1994). Thus, as Marton and Booth (1997) indicate, the data has two contexts in which to be examined, the individual context and the collective or group context.

Through this reiterative process and its associated continual sorting of data, the categories of description begin to become apparent from the data. In this sense, the researcher discovers the categories, as the data is continually mined and revisited. As the researcher implements this development process, while continually referring back to the original data, the categories begin to take on a distinct identity, which is faithful to both the data and with respect to the phenomenon. The descriptions and the names of the categories are also tested and appropriately adjusted against the

data, as necessary. Both the development of the categories and their descriptions tend to occur simultaneously during this discovery process.

The challenge for the researcher at this stage is to manage a large amount of data and to derive findings from it that are true to the data. Walsh (2000) highlighted the potential problem of researchers imposing their views onto the findings and discusses the ongoing phenomenographic controversy as to whether the researcher constructs the categories or whether the categories emerge from the data. Similarly, Akerlind, Bowden and Green (2005) in their discussion about whether the data analysis should be conducted by an individual researcher or by a team, point out that too much consultation by a researcher, with his or her colleagues, may result in an outcome which is "more socially constructed than grounded in the data" (Akerlind, Bowden & Green, 2005, p.89). The continual reference to the data and the researcher taking on an attitude of self-awareness are safeguards against researcher pollution (Sandberg, 1997).

3.7.8.3 Discovering and developing the structure of awareness

During the process of discovering and developing the categories of description the subjects describe their awareness of the phenomenon. As discussed earlier, the focal feature of the category of description, or theme, becomes apparent, during the data analysis. This theme is the object of the subjects' focal awareness (Marton, 2000). Marton noted that the theme of a person's awareness is set in a context or background of experience, which is relevant to the theme, known as the thematic field. By referring back to the data, the researcher is able to discern statements that are relevant to the theme, and which support the theme and thus derive the thematic field of the subjects' awareness.

In similar manner, the thematic field of awareness is also set in a much wider context that is either vaguely or not related to the theme. This is known as the margin of awareness. The margin of awareness extends beyond anything that is even vaguely related to the theme and the thematic field. Marton (2000) noted that the theme, thematic field and the margin of awareness are experienced simultaneously and in widely varying ways in people's awareness. The researcher's focus during the discovery of the theme, thematic field and margin, must be that these features of the

structure of the subjects' awareness are derived, empirically, from the data (Akerlind, 2005a).

3.7.8.4 Discovering and developing the outcome space

After much adjustment during the earlier phases of the analysis, a fairly stable set of categories of description begins to emerge and the researcher is able to address the outcome of the analysis as an entity in itself. Because the categories have come from the same data set and they relate to the same phenomenon, phenomenographers assume that there are relationships between the categories. These relationships give rise to a structure among the categories within the outcome space. Further exploration of the data, with respect to the outcome space allows the researcher to discover and describe a structure of relationships that exist between the categories of description. This aspect of the analysis may indicate a hierarchy among the categories (Walsh, 2000), although this is not always the case, as some outcome spaces have nonhierarchical categories of description, whereby the categories may take the form of branching structures (Akerlind, 2000d, Jaidin, 2009; Pramling, 1995).

The outcome space may also demonstrate another form of differentiation known as dimensions of variation. Dimensions of variation are themes that are found in all categories but that are expressed differently in the categories. They both link and differentiate the categories within the outcome space. As the researcher continues to seek for meaning in the outcome space and to relate the parts to the whole, both within the categories and within the outcome space, these underlying themes begin to emerge. The discovery of these themes usually occurs towards the end of the data analysis and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the outcome space.

Akerlind (2005a) highlighted a concern when constituting the structure of the outcome space. While there is a logical relationship between the elements of the outcome space, the logicality must not detract from the evidence of the data. Thus the constitution of these elements must also be empirically derived. Akerlind (2005a) indicated that there must be a balance between both the logical and the empirical nature of the constitution of the outcome space.

Various review activities such as reliability and validity checks are implemented during this phase and form a further part of the refinement process (Akerlind, 2005d). The categories of description tend to stabilise toward the end of the analysis, as the researcher becomes more confident that they reflect the researched phenomenon and the meaning within the data presented to the study.

The final results of a phenomenographic analysis, known as the outcome space, may be presented in different formats; textually, in table format or diagrammatically. The outcome space is representative of the qualitatively different ways in which the participants experience the phenomenon. This section has presented the key distinctives of phenomenographic data analysis. The next section describes the research design of the study and its implementation. It also includes how the four processes of data analysis described above, were applied to this study.

3.8 Research design

3.8.1 Discursive phenomenography

As mentioned, discursive phenomenography was used in the study to give a voice to the parents who participated in this study. This form of phenomenography allowed the home-educating parents to express the ways they experienced their roles as home educators.

3.8.2 The participants

Researchers of home education in Australia (Hunter, 1994; Queensland Government, 2003) and the US (Ray, 1990, 1992) have indicated the difficulty in locating and/or contacting the total population of home educators. The decentralised nature of the cohort does not lend itself easily to census. Fear of intervention by educational bureaucrats and legal sanctions have motivated some home educators to avoid any exposure of a public nature (Harding, 1997; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Hunter, 1994: Queensland Government, 2003). However, as the researcher, I have familiarity with, and a high profile in the home education movement. This gave me access to home-educating parents who are ordinarily difficult for the non-home educator to locate.

The sample drew from two large Christian home education organisations, the Australian Christian Academy and the Australian Christian Academy School of Distance Education. Unlike many home educators in Queensland, who operate in a decentralised manner, home educators in these two organisations are quantifiable and contactable. This accessible group of home educators provided a ready source for researching parent experiences. It is admitted, that because both organisations have a Christian ethos, that a religiously minded view could be seen to be overrepresented. However, it is also acknowledged that religiously minded people have occupied the current home education movement globally, in significant numbers, since its inception in the 1970s (Carper, 2000; Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow, 1995; Ray, 2009b) thus, it is reasonable to deduce that a significant proportion of participants would be religiously-minded. Carper (2000) notes that while dissenting Christians comprised the majority of home educators in the early stages of the movement, dissenters from other faith systems such as Islam and "romantic liberalism" (Carper, 2000, p. 17) are likely to bring a growing diversity to the home education movement. Furthermore, it is also acknowledged that the latest census figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) indicate that 63.9% of Australians align themselves with Christianity in some form, 5.6% with other religions and 18.7% with no religion. Thus because the home education movement is populated by a significant number of Christians and because this is also true of the Australian population, accessing this study's participants from two of Australia's largest home educational institutions, both of which have a Christian ethos, was appropriate.

On the one hand, accessing these institutions presents an advantage, as it would represent the Christian home education cohort adequately; on the other hand, the researcher did not seek non-religiously minded home education groups. However, it is important to note that both the Australian Christian Academy and the Australian Christian Academy School of Distance Education have no religious requirements for affiliation, and that both admit families that are not Christian, non-religious and also families from religions other than Christianity. Thus, I do acknowledge both the advantages and the limitations of drawing upon these education organisations for the sample.

I sought subjects from the two major sectors of the home education movement in Queensland, from both the home schooling sector and from the distance education sector. In both sectors, parents conduct the majority of the pedagogy and this is done mostly in the private family home. Both sectors are thus practising parent-facilitated education from their family homes; however, there is a philosophical difference between the two sectors. Home-schooling parents see themselves as being fully responsible for the education of their children (Harding & Farrell, 2003), while parents whose children are enrolled in a school of distance education view their home education as a partnership between the home and the school of distance education (ACASDE, 2005). The significant difference between the two, is that distance educated students have a greater contact with professional teachers from the school than home schooled students, who may choose to access teachers if necessary.

Including parents from both home schooling and from distance education enabled the research to be inclusive of both home educational modalities. As far as the researcher is aware, this is the only home educational research project conducted in Australia that has purposefully included families from both home-based education modalities. Because the focus of the research was upon parent roles and not upon the style of home education, accessing participants from two different sectors was not viewed as problematic. Rather, it added to the diversity of the participants; a desired feature of a phenomenographic study.

A further limitation of the study was that the sample did not include home-educating parents who chose an informal education methodology as their main educational practice. These parents do not use a formal curriculum for their children's education; rather they rely on their children to direct their own learning (Meighan, 2001a; Lowe & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Pattinson, 2008). While all home educators practise informal education of some kind, informal home-educating families usually exclude a formal approach to education and largely rely upon incidental and in-depth conversations and the pursuit of the child's interests as the means to appropriate education (Thomas & Pattinson, 2008). These home educators are known as natural learners or unschoolers. While the limited research into home education methods in Australia (Coalition of Homeschool Leaders of Queensland, 2003; Harding, 2006a), indicates that this methodology is used by a minority group of home educators, their

numbers suggest that they are a significant minority. The *Coalition of Home Education Leaders of Queensland Survey* (2003) indicated that 12% of respondents to a state-wide survey were natural learners, and a similar survey in Victoria (Harding, 2006a) indicated that 17% of respondents were natural learners.

The research was an examination of the roles of home-educating parents. It was not an examination of parents' religious practices, nor was it an examination of types of home education methodology or curriculum choices. The roles of parents who home educate may be explored outside the religious, the methodological and the curriculum choices of parents. The two different groups approached would provide sufficient diversity to suit the aim of the study, which was to examine parent roles. The next section deals with how the research cohort provided sufficient diversity for the study.

3.8.2.1 Diversity across the sample of participants

Bowden (1996) emphasised that the underlying purpose of a phenomenographic study should be a constant reference point in determining its methodology. The selection of interviewees is one aspect of the study that should be shaped by the purpose of the study. Random sampling and the use of standard variables such as socio-economic status, or gender may not deliver the widest possible range of experiences of the phenomenon to be studied using the phenomenographic approach (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Bowden (1995, 1996) highlighted the need to be selective when choosing subjects for interview, so as to maximise the opportunity to gain the greatest possible diversity of views from the interviewees.

My involvement in the two peak bodies, assisted with the recruitment of the interviewees. My intention was to contact parents who may best represent the widest cross-section of home educators within these two institutions and to thus, provide a better opportunity to achieve an appropriate outcome space, which would reflect the widest possible variation of parent home educational experiences. The following factors were considered in determining the selection of suitable participants, from among these Queensland home educators:

- Gender — male and female

- Location — suburban, regional and remote
- Structure of family — dual parent, single parent, grandparents and other
- Main formal educator — mother, father, both or other
- Formal education level of the parents
- Teacher training — not a trained teacher and trained teacher
- Employment of parents — full time, part time or none
- Income of non-full time educator, of full time educator or both
- Number of years as a home educator — experienced and novice
- Number of children who are home educated and who are not home educated
- Ages of children
- Religion — religious and non-religious
- Children's past school experience — attended school and not attended school.

These selection factors provided a variety of contrasting characteristics, which yielded a wide range of variation in parents' conceptions of their roles as home educators. Potential respondents were contacted by letter and invited to participate in a survey and an interview. One hundred and nineteen families responded to this request and provided their demographic information as listed above. After collating the demographic information, I was able to select a sample of interviewees that reflected a wide demographic diversity. Appendix A indicates graphically, the demographic data of these 119 dual and single families, representative of over 220 respondents, and the extent of their diversity with respect to the above mentioned variables.

In order to obtain the greatest divergence in characteristics from the pool of potential interviewees, I selected four parents who lived a considerable distance away. Each of these parents presented distinct variations that would enhance the diversity of the group of interviewees and I sought their participation despite their considerable distance from me.

Hazel, Conrad, and Martin (1997) criticised the lack of women participants in many phenomenographic studies, and that the phenomena being researched may not be conducive to the inclusion of women. The demographic data gathered for this study, confirms the findings of other Australian studies (Coalition of Homeschool Leaders

of Queensland, 2003; Harding, 1997, 2003, 2006a) that mothers constitute the vast majority of full time home educators. A sample of home educators that excluded women or minimised the number of women participants would be inappropriate to the phenomenon being studied. The researcher engaged both home-educating fathers and mothers in the sample. There were 15 women and 12 men interviewed for this study, thus, gender under-representation of women was not problematic.

Conversely, because the phenomenon being researched was the roles of home-educating parents, it would have been inappropriate to have over-represented women and to have under-represented men in this study. The study required a balance of mothers and fathers. The demographic data gathered for this study (See Appendix A — Home Educators' Survey), which indicates that the majority of home-educating families surveyed were two parent families, also supports the need for a balanced representation of men and women. Further to this, the outcomes of the study indicate that home-educating fathers, while they are not usually full time educators of their children, do play a significant role in this educational practice. The various roles of fathers, as demonstrated in the data and in the outcomes of the study, include but also range beyond that of formal pedagogy, and are a key feature of the study.

The broad diversity of the demographic attributes of the participants lends itself to gaining a diverse outcome space as a result of phenomenographic analysis. The value of this study is that it has captured the traits of home-educating parents, giving the reader a window into how home educators see themselves and their daily educational roles.

3.8.3 Bracketing in the study

The process of bracketing one's personal experience of home education is a vital aspect of a phenomenographic study. As researcher, I was committed to bracketing my experience of home education. As mentioned earlier, I am an experienced home educator, having home educated, with my wife, our five children over a period of 15 years. I was the principal of the Australian Christian Academy, the largest nongovernment home schooling institution in Australia, for 15 years, and for five years I was the principal of the Australian Christian Academy School of Distance Education, a registered nongovernment school of distance education, in Queensland,

Australia. I have been a conference presenter at home education conferences in Australia and overseas for an extended time. I have also completed prior research into, and written about home education (Harding, 1997, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2008; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Ireland, Tambyah, Neofa & Harding, 2008).

I sought to bracket my experience and knowledge in the field of home education by identifying it and by keeping it separate from the responses of the subjects. I intentionally bracketed personal presuppositions, theories and experiences, during the interviews and data processing stages of the study. In order to bracket my experience of home education, during the interview process, I intentionally maintained an attitude of segregating and divorcing my experiences of home eduation from the interview process. This detachment of my experiences for the purpose of research was inclusive of my family-based experiences as well as my professional and research experiences of home education. Rather, during all interviews, I intentionally directed the focus of the interviewee to the research question, thus eliciting the interviewee's experiences of their roles as a home educating parent. I did not lead the interview in any other direction. The resulting data was thus, a report of the interviewee's experience, rather than that of the researcher's.

In the same vein, during the data analysis, I intentionally maintained a similar attitude of segregating my experience from this process, thus utilising bracketing throughout the analysis. I practiced bracketing during the analysis by not imposing an interpretation based upon my experiences upon the process or upon its outcomes. I sought the meanings within the data, rather than from my experience. As the meanings and categories emerged from the data, I constantly re-referenced the findings to the data to ensure faithfulness to the experiences of the parents.

The aim of the bracketing exercise during the data gathering and analysis stages of the study was to clearly hear the responses of the home educators, rather than to pollute the data and the findings with my experience. It is important to note, however, that my experience of home education was valuable prior to the interviews, in developing empathy with the research participants. Similarly, my experience of home education was of value after the interviews and data analysis, as leading

phenomenographers (Booth, 1992; Marton & Booth, 1997; Trigwell, 1994, 2000; Uljens, 1996) agree that a phenomenographic researcher with a sound understanding of the phenomenon studied provides a check as to the relevance of the research findings to the phenomenon being studied. This was arguably the case in this study.

3.8.4 Pilot study

Interview questions were discussed and formulated with a group of phenomenographers at Queensland University of Technology at a series of phenomenographic workshops. They were then referred to the supervisory team and relevant research communities as a check for communicative validity (Akerlind, 2002, 2005d) as explained, later in this chapter.

The first interview was regarded as a pilot interview. It was taped and transcribed. The results were discussed with the supervisory team and a group of phenomenographers to ensure that the interview was not researcher-led and that it elicited what the study required. There was no attempt to categorise any of the data from this interview.

During this interview, one unexpected feature emerged. The interviewee chose to not only speak of his roles as an individual. He occasionally spoke as a member of a couple, using the first person, plural mode such as "we" and "us" when referring to his roles as a home educator. When using these plural modes, he had referred to several cooperative roles with his wife, as well as referring to the individual roles that pertained to him. Without prompting, the subject had changed the subject from himself, to a corporate entity, to that of him and his wife. Thus, during the course of the interview, this father had, from time to time, changed the subject from the singular self, to the corporate "we".

This practice provoked a question, which is: How many entities are present in an interview that addresses 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 the individual parent's experience, which was expected by the researcher, as well as the unexpected shared experience of the couple. The nature of this phenomenographic

study was an examination of the roles of home-educating parents. I had expected that there would be two parental perspectives, the mother's perspective and the father's perspective, both of which would deliver data during the interviews. However, the unexpected feature that the corporate "we", delivered to the study was a third perspective, the experience of combined or corporate roles among home-educating parents.

After consultation with the supervisory team, also referring the issue to the pioneer of phenomenography, Professor Ference Marton and presenting this methodological anomaly for critique at an international phenomenographic symposium (Harding, 2005b), it was determined to treat this form of response as valid. Marton (Professor F. Marton, personal communication, Dec 30, 2005; Jan 7, 2006) supported the view that separate interviews of couples would add a valuable variation to this study, stating that the couple unit could be viewed as a "natural unit" in the context of this study. What had emerged in the early stages of data gathering informed and shaped the methodology for the rest of the study, as this unexpected anomaly provoked a change to how the interviews were conducted. Bowden (1995) presented the view that research should not be limited by predetermined methods but rather that research methodology should suit the research project, enabling it to take its own shape. Thus the unexpected variation that emerged from the first interview enabled the researcher to reshape the methodology and to admit a variation to the methodology, which would enhance the study. Phenomenography is predicated upon a search for variation in meanings, and the transcript of the first interview demonstrated that the references to "we" and "us" delivered data that was distinctly different from the references to "I" and "me"; yet this variation was wholly consistent with the goals of the study. As such, it was necessary that the "we" responses be included in the data set.

In order to recognise the couple parent entity as well as the individual parent entity, I modified 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 individually and 7 couples were interviewed together, resulting in a total of 20 interviews. Seeing that many phenomenographical studies have used between 10 – 15 interviews (Dahlgren, 1995, Trigwell, 2000a) in order to gain an acceptable description of a phenomenon, it was

determined that 13 individual interviews would deliver sufficient individual parent responses, and would not jeopardise the study. By asking 14 husbands and wives to be interviewed as seven couples, a different feature was brought to the study. This new feature allowed parents to speak either as individuals or as couples, as they deemed to be appropriate. The experience of the first interview had informed and brought change to the method for the rest of the interview stage of the study.

3.8.5 Conducting the interviews

I conducted all of the interviews myself, as I wanted to maintain procedural consistency throughout all interviews and I wanted to gain the greatest possible familiarity with the interviewees and the data throughout the data gathering and analysis processes. All interviews consisted of one question, which was addressed to all subjects. Where necessary, questioning probes were used to draw out detailed descriptions of parent roles or to return interviewees to the topic in question.

The key question presented to the subjects during the interview was, “What is your role, or roles as a home-educating parent?” This question was the simple stimulus for all interviews. The rationale for the question was that it should allow the interviewees the maximum freedom, to answer in any way they saw as relevant. Because the sample of interviewees was selected to maximise demographic differences, giving them the maximum freedom to express themselves in answering the key question would assist to establish critical variation in the response data.

Akerlind (2005c) emphasised the importance of the interviewer not introducing any ideas to the subject, nor of leading the subject during the interview. The intention of the phenomenographic interviewer is to follow only those ideas introduced by the subject and to develop a repertoire of follow up prompts (Akerlind, 2005c) that allow the subject to expand on what they have already elicited. Thus, during the interview process for the study, if a subject mentioned a role and was either too brief in description or was unclear in their explanation of the role, I would ask the subject to explain their point further for clarification.

During some interviews, I noticed that some subjects tended to move significantly away from the topic of their role as a home educator. In order to return the subject to

an issue relevant to the study, it was sometimes necessary for me to quote some words spoken by the subject, earlier in the interview, and ask for further explanation. This technique of referring back to a point, using the words of the subject as a reference, rather than the words of the interviewer, allowed the interview to be refocused to the topic of study, while avoiding the interviewer leading the subject in terms of the content discussed. It also maintained the second-order perspective during the data gathering and analysis processes. Another technique that helped to preserve the data from interviewer pollution, was bracketing.

As detailed earlier, during the interviewing process, I assumed an attitude of purposely setting aside or bracketing my personal perspective on home education in order to focus upon the subject’s perspective. The subjects were free to discuss anything they wished to discuss, relevant to the topic of study; however, I was limited to leading the conversation only to the extent of keeping the interviewee to the topic of the roles of home-educating parents.

During the seven couple interviews, I commenced each interview by addressing an individual spouse using the same question as for the individual interviews. I would pursue topics raised by the individuals, relevant to the study as necessary, as in the case of the individual interviews. When one parent seemed to have finished expressing their view, I would ask if they had anything more to add. I would then ask the second parent the same question about his or her role in the same way as I had done for their spouse.

Either spouse in a couple was free, at any time, to interject, or to add comment regarding any role that was being discussed. At times, the original interviewee would refer to the other, for confirmation of a particular point. If the second spouse began to dominate during the first spouse’s interview, I would redirect the question to the first spouse, or quote what the first spouse had said, asking for clarification, in order to regain the direction of the original interview. This co-contributive process often enriched a description of either an individual role or a couple’s role. I was careful to ensure that both spouses in a couple had equal opportunity to adequately express their views of their roles. To ensure that all interviewees had been given full opportunity to express their views, towards the conclusion of the combined interview, I asked them if they had anything else to say. This allowed the

interviewees a final opportunity to reflect and to add further comment or enhancement as they deemed necessary. On several occasions, after the interview had been formally concluded and the tape recorder had been turned off, subjects continued to converse on the topic, and I was compelled to turn the tape recorder on again and to sometimes ask an interviewee to repeat what he or she had said. These addenda were also included in the original interview transcripts.

One mother who was involved in a couple interview, had written down some thoughts the evening before her interview, and submitted the written text to me, after the interview, although she did mention the same issues during the interview. Her written text was included in the typed transcription of that particular interview and was ascribed to that mother.

Four parents were contacted and interviewed by telephone, as they resided a considerable distance from me. They were deemed to be important participants in the study as they each had distinctly varied demographic characteristics. I conducted the phone interviews using the same techniques as had been employed in the face-to-face interviews. Each of these phone interviews were recorded, in full, using a speaker phone facility and each of these phone interview recordings were transcribed in full, in the same way as the face-to-face interviews.

Unlike the face-to-face interviews, however, I found it necessary to employ an extra technique during the phone interviews. Because I was not in the same room as the interviewees during the phone interviews, I found it necessary to make extra verbal inputs over the phone to maintain connection and to grow empathy with them during their interviews. These sounds included sounds such as “uh huh” and “okay” and similar sounds, as deemed necessary. I was careful, however, to avoid sounds that may have been interpreted by the interviewee, as affirming sounds, so that the interviewee would not think that I was encouraging the interviewee to continue speaking about a topic or pursuing a point, beyond their level of interest, and thus leading the interviewee along a path of thought, not relevant to them, via affirming responses.

During the transcription process, I allocated pseudonyms to all interviewees and to all persons mentioned in the interviews, so as to protect the privacy of individuals. In

order to reference data from interview transcripts, I devised a simple coding system. All transcripts were coded with an "I" to signify an interview of a parent as an individual, or with a "C" indicating a couple interview. Secondly, each interview was allocated a number identifying it with the parent(s) being interviewed and thirdly, every line of each interview was also numbered. Thus a reference to a quotation from the data such as C6, 407-409, would refer to couple interview number six, lines 407 to 409 of the transcript. Having obtained and organised the data, I proceeded to the phenomenographic analysis.

3.8.6 Conducting the phenomenographic analysis

3.8.6.1 Immersion in the data

I achieved familiarisation with the text of the interviews by engaging in a period of prolonged and repeated exposure to and immersion in, the interview transcripts. The steps I took involved:

1. experiencing the interview
2. repeated reviewing of the interview tapes (in some cases up to ten times in the pursuit of clarification)
3. transcribing the interview data
4. reading and re-reading of the text
5. personal reflection
6. discussion with colleagues
7. grouping the data to categories
8. writing about the data
9. presenting the data at phenomenographic workshops for review
10. presenting the data at education conferences.

Immersion in the data was ongoing and iterative. I was constantly seeking to be aware of, and to bracket, my personal view of home education, in order to discover and to understand what the parents were meaning in their responses. The analysis gradually saw the emergence of meaningful quotations, which most significantly represented parent conceptions that were emerging from the data.

3.8.6.2 Emergent collective awareness

My original expectation of the interview process was that the respondents may likely present two viewpoints, that of the mother and that of the father. However, as mentioned earlier, the unexpected feature that emerged during the interview process was a third, corporate parental entity. This third parental entity provided a combined parental perspective and contributed different significant utterances to the data set. It did not detract from the study because the phenomenographical approach reduces the data during the data processing stage to variations of the experiences of the phenomenon. Phenomenographic practice requires that individual subjects are lost during data processing, as the researcher focus is upon the experiences that were experienced, rather than any one experiencer. It is this reductive data analysis, which places an emphasis upon the search for meaning, irrespective of individuals.

Just as individual parent experiences were reduced to the collective home educator experience, the experiences from the seven couple interviews of both parents together, were also reduced to the same collective of experienced roles. Thus, irrespective of whether the roles were experienced by couples or by individuals, after the analysis, only the roles remained. As a result, the articulations as a member of a couple, were not deemed to problematic for the purposes of accurately reflecting the roles of home educators, rather, they brought an enrichment of new, combined parent roles, which may not have been otherwise included, to the data set, had all interviews been restricted to individual interviews. Thus the choice to restructure the format of some interviews by interviewing 14 parents as 7 couples, rather than as 14 individuals, added a new dimension and a formal methodological recognition of how the parents viewed themselves in their educational experiences. While this variation to the interview procedure did not negatively affect the outcome space; it did allow parents to more accurately express their view of their roles during the data collection process, and so delivered a better data set for analysis. Insights from these couple interviews will be discussed later in this chapter.

While phenomenography requires that individuals are to be lost and the experiences are to be retained during the reductive data analysis, the data from individuals is nonetheless important. Svensson (1997) and McKenzie (2003) highlight that individual cases and vignettes are important for describing the meaning in a category

of description, in greater detail. In the following chapter, where the findings of the study are presented, quotations have been used to illustrate the parents' conceptions of their roles. These quotations provide support for the inclusion of a conception in a category of description. The quotations are thus an important part of the presentation of the findings, for the purpose of illustrating meaning within the categories of description; however, they are not intended to be representative of a person, as the individual disappears during a phenomenographic analysis of data. Rather than an individual being presented in a category of description, Marton and Booth (1997) and Akerlind, Bowden and Green (2005) indicated that the categories and the outcome space are representative of a collective mind or supra-individual. This approach allows the category of description to become more than just the sum of its parts.

Akerlind et al. (2005) also indicated that a single interview transcript may reflect several phenomena. They state:

> Any one interview may address a number of phenomena, both deliberately and accidentally. Consequently, the same transcript can be read searching for ways of experiencing different phenomena. (p. 85)

Thus the findings chapter of this thesis sometimes uses a particular quotation a second time, to illustrate a different aspect of the parents' experience as a home educator. All of these processes, however, contribute to an outcome space that is focussed upon a collective expression of the roles of parent home educators, rather than upon those of any individual parent. Wherever there is a reference to participants and their families in this thesis, all names have been changed to protect their privacy.

3.8.6.3 A description of the data analysis

Akerlind (2005a) has indicated that there is a lack in the phenomenographic literature of concrete descriptions of how phenomenographers conduct their analysis. The following section contributes to the literature a description of the methods used for this study. Figure 6 presents a graphical summary of the major milestones of the data analysis.

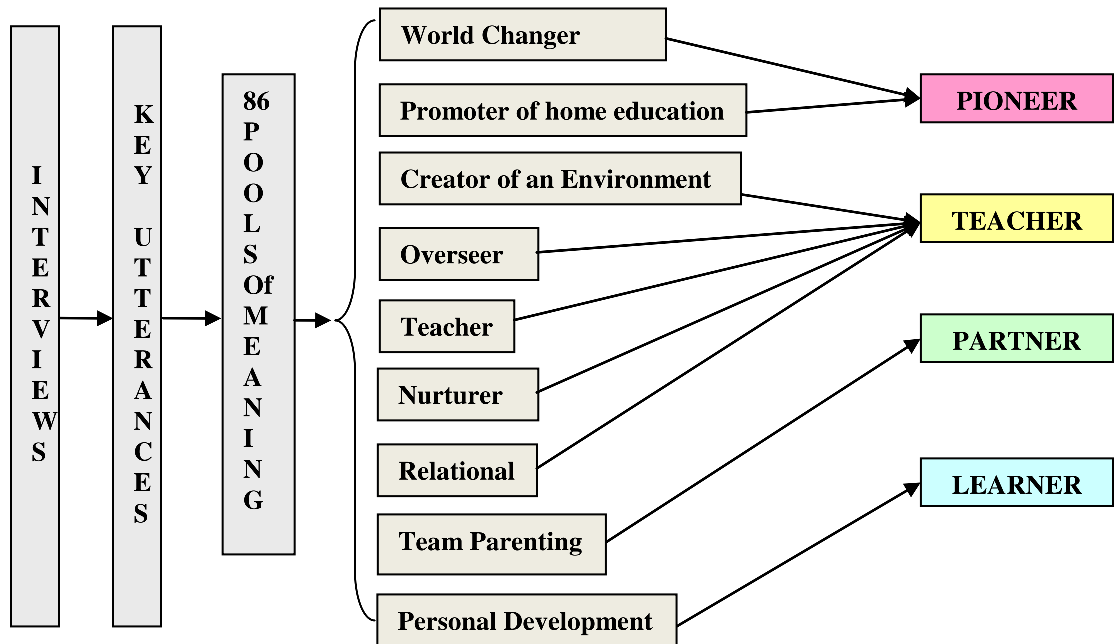

Figure 6: The process from interview data to 9 draft categories to 4 categories of description.

3.8.6.3(1) From interviews to key utterances

From the interview data, I sought to discover any key utterances that referred to any parent home-educating role. I highlighted these key utterances within the transcripts and also allocated them to a general pool of key utterances, which indicated a parent role. I then analysed this pool of key utterances, in order to group the utterances into pools of similar meaning.

3.8.5.3(2) 86 pools of meaning

Ultimately, 86 different pools of meaning emerged from the broad pool of key utterances. The 86 different pools of meaning represented many different 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 distinguishing feature as articulated by the parents.

Each of the 86 pools of meaning was given a characteristic label. The following is a sample of some of the characteristic labels allocated to various pools of meaning: (1) a participant in the child's learning and life; (2) academic teacher; (3) life skills teacher; (4) advocate for home education; (5) career advisor; (6) shaper of the child's

character; (7) encourager of the child's gifts and talents; (8) facilitator of social development; (9) nurse of the child; (10) nurturer of the child; (11) motivator; (12) spiritual advisor; (13) creator of good citizens; (14) lifestyle pioneer; (15) change agent; (16) companion to the child; (17) educational partner (with one's spouse); (18) planner; (19) decision-maker; (20) provider of play; (21) provider of real life experiences; (22) educational theorist; (23) exemplar; (24) learner; (25) multi-tasker; (26) prayer supporter of the child; (27) researcher of curriculum; and (28) researcher of pedagogy. The labeling of the 86 pools of meaning was continually reviewed and refined, and consistently referenced to the key utterances from the data and to the interview data as full interview transcripts. Once the 86 pools of meaning were established, the process of developing categories of description was commenced.

3.8.6.3(3) Categories of description

As the pools of meaning emerged, it was clear that while each was distinguished by a different attribute, various pools of meaning shared key 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 labeled. Each label reflected the conceptions that the parents had of their roles as home educators, as located within the category of description. The categories were labelled: (1) Personal development, (2) Type of parenting, (3) Relational, (4) Nurturer of the child, (5) Teacher, (6) Overseer of the child's upbringing, (7) Creator of a family learning environment, (8) Promoter of home education, and (9) World changer. This was the first attempt to nominate categories of description and was, thus, also the first draft of the outcome space for the study. Further refinement of the category labels resulted in the first set of categories, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Draft 1 of the Outcome Space

Categories of Description
Personal Development
Team Parenting
Relational
Nurturer
Teacher
Overseer
Creator of an Environment
Promoter of Home Education
World Changer

The primary purpose of the phenomenographer's construction of categories of description is to communicate the meaning of what the subjects had expressed. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) emphasised that, when determining categories of description, the meaning within the data should be given preference over a search for structure between the categories. Similarly, Akerlind (2005a) advised that structure should not be sought during the early stages of the analysis while the meaning is being clarified. For this reason, I focussed my attention during the early stage of the analysis, to the formation of the categories according to the meaning conveyed, rather than searching for structure and relationships within and between categories.

Some phenomenographers have allocated individual interviewees and their full transcripts to categories of description (Bowden, 1994; Dall' Alba, 2000). They have operated from the assumption that there is a single meaning embedded within each transcript. While this approach may suit certain studies, it was not applicable to this study. During the early stages of this analysis, it became clear that individual interviewees could experience being a home educator in many different ways. The many varied experiences of the parents were assigned to different pools of meaning, which in turn, could be assigned to several categories of description. Akerlind (2005a) affirmed that individual subjects may experience a phenomenon in varied ways, advising the researcher that it is "important to be open to the possibility that more than one way of experiencing a phenomenon may be represented within one

transcript" (p. 118). In this study, it was common for a single interviewee to contribute to several or, in some cases, to all of the final four categories of description. Thus a single person may have experienced all of the roles of being a home-educating parent. In this way, yet again, the requirements of the research project shaped the methodology of the study. The allocation of data from an individual's transcript to several categories was another aspect of the analysis that highlighted one of the major characteristics of phenomenography, that the individual is lost during the process of searching for different ways in which people experience phenomena.

3.8.6.3(4) The structure of awareness within the categories of description

Within each category of description, the role that was immediately relevant to the phenomenon was the focus of the parents' awareness. For example in the category of teacher, parents presented their various experiences that were immediately relevant to teaching their children. The many aspects of the theme of teacher were in the foreground of their awareness as they described these experiences.

However, parents also described other experiences that were not immediately relevant to their current experience of teaching, but which were somewhat related to their current role and provided a context for it. This context for the theme in their focus is the thematic field of the person's awareness. The thematic field for this role is the other three roles of the parent home educator. They were the learner, the partner and the pioneer. These three roles provided the context for the role of teacher and helped to influence how these parents viewed and shaped their current roles as home educators.

Marton and Booth (1997) discussed a third aspect of awareness that they called the margin of awareness. The margin is not directly related to the theme, but is coexistent with the theme and the thematic field. In the margin of parent awareness for the role of teacher, parents included many different experiences that they have had in their past with teachers, both positive and negative experiences, when they were at school or how their own children were treated at school by teachers in a class or by student peers in class or in the playground. The margin may also include the parents' home, and other physical surroundings. It may include anything that is

simultaneously experienced but unrelated to the theme. The margin of awareness extends beyond anything that is at all related to the role of teacher, but is co-existent with that role.

3.8.6.3(5) Refining the outcome space

At this point of the analysis there was, over an extended period of time, a developing outcome space that was open to review and refinement. This refinement process included: further reflection, analysis, iterative immersion in the data, input from colleagues, presenting the data and outcomes for critique at phenomenographic workshops, at an Australian educational conference (Harding, 2008; Ireland, Tambyah, Neofa & Harding, 2008), to experts in the home education field and to home educators, who were not involved in this study's interviews, at home education conferences at various capital cities around Australia. During this refinement process the number of categories of description was reduced from the original nine categories, to five categories and then to four categories of description.

The reduction of the number of categories to five then to four involved a process of combining categories that represented similar meanings. This was done after a series of workshops, where a group of phenomenographers were asked to work with these nine categories to group similar categories together while keeping distinctly different categories separate. I considered the suggestions of this group during the process of finalising the categories. For example, the categories of teacher and nurturer of the child were grouped together and the categories of promoter of home education and world changer were also grouped together. Such reductions were made only after reference to the data, to ensure that such processes were not the product of speculation, but rather that they were true to the meaning within the categories. It is interesting to note that the final draft of the outcome space only contained one category label from the initial draft that is the category of teacher. Other categories that were present in earlier drafts of the outcome space were merged into categories of similar meaning and the titles of the categories were refined and adjusted to better reflect the meaning of the parents.

For the second draft of the outcome space, the nine categories were reduced to five. The reduction of the categories to five was done on the basis that

phenomenographers agree that the number of categories ought to be few in number (Marton & Booth, 1997) and that the reduction was appropriate to the meaning in the data. Table 3 presents the second draft of the outcome space.

Table 3: Draft 2 of the Outcome Space

Categories of Description
Personal development
Parenting team
Pedagogue
Creator of a learning environment
Contributor to the wider community

The process of reducing the number of categories of description, ultimately to four, is also appropriately in keeping with Marton and Booth's (1997) indication that the number of categories of description in an outcome space should be few rather than many. Table 4 presents the final draft of the outcome space.

Table 4: Draft 3 of the Outcome Space

Categories of Description
Learner
Partner
Teacher
Pioneer

3.8.6.3(6) Structural features of the outcome space

During the examination of the initial outcome space, it became apparent that there were structural relationships both between the categories of description and also within them. A key point in the data analysis was the emergence of the first theme that was relevant to all of the categories of description. This theme of expanding awareness across the categories of description is known among phenomenographers as a dimension of variation (Marton & Booth, 1997). The theme that initially emerged from within the categories and across the categories was theme of influence. It became evident that the parents saw themselves as influential in each of their home-educating roles.

This theme became apparent after the first draft of the nine categories of description. The categories were grouped in the following manner with respect to the theme of a sphere of influence. For example the category of personal development appeared to directly relate to influence upon the self, the category of nurturer related to influence upon the child and that of promoter of home education directly related to the parent bringing influence to the broader community. Table 5 illustrates the dimension of influence with respect to the nine categories of description of the first draft of the outcome space.

Table 5: Draft 1 of the Outcome Space with the Dimension of Influence

Categories of Description	Spheres of Influence
Personal Development	Self
Team Parenting	Spouse
Relational	Child
Nurturer	Child
Teacher	Child
Overseer	Child
Creator of an Environment	Family
Promoter of Home Education	Community
World Changer	Community

The dimension of variation of influence was common in the awareness of parents as they described their roles. This theme expanded relationally and socially through the categories of description commencing with the parents bringing influence upon themselves as they learned and changed themselves, through to their bringing influence upon other family members through relationships and pedagogy and then their influence was brought to the wider community through various changes they introduced to others outside of their families.

My awareness of the dimension of variation of influence provided clarification for the combining of some categories of description. It became apparent, when analyzing the nine categories with respect to the dimension of variation of influence that some categories with the same spheres of influence could be amalgamated into a single category. An example of this was the amalgamation of the categories of “promoter of home education” and “world changer” into the category of “contributor to the wider community” in the second draft of the outcome space. In this way, a dimension of variation assisted in the formation of the next draft of the outcome space. The second draft of the categories of description following the reduction process is indicated in Table 6.

Table 6: Draft 2 of the Outcome Space with the Dimension of Influence

Categories of Description	Spheres of influence
Personal development	Self
Parenting team	Spouse
Pedagogue	Child
Creator of a learning environment	Family
Contributor to the wider community	Community

Further analysis saw further reduction of the categories. One example of this reduction process involved seeing the categories of Pedagogue and of Creator of a learning environment as being related to the parents’ teaching activity. Thus, it was decided to combine these two categories and label the category as Teacher. This refining process did not alter the meaning within the data but it did assist in delivering a parsimoniously allocated outcome space that was clearly linked by the

dimension of variation of influence. Furthermore, the iterative analysis process also provided stimulus for the refinement of the names of the categories of description. The criterion 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 stage of analysis delivered the following labeling of the categories of description as a representation of the outcome space. Table 7 indicates the final draft of the outcome space with the dimension of variation of influence.

Table 7: Draft 3 of the Outcome Space with the Dimension of Influence

Categories of Description	Spheres of influence
Learner	Self
Partner	Spouse
Teacher	Child
Pioneer	Community

Later in the data analysis, two other themes of expanding awareness emerged, as a result of ongoing iteration in the immersive analysis process. These were the dimensions of example and spirituality. Parents consistently referred to both themes of example and spirituality throughout the interview process. When the emergence of the categories of description was becoming settled, these themes became apparent in different ways in each category.

The theme or dimension of variation of example took the shape of the parent being a role model of a learner, in the category of learner. For the category of partner, parents saw that their educational partnership and their marriage provided an example of cooperation to their children. The parents saw their whole lives as being a demonstration to their children and so this was applicable to the category of teacher. They were also being examples of a new form of education to their communities.

Table 8: Draft 3 of the Outcome Space with the Dimension of Example

Categories of Description	**Example of …**
Learner	A learner
Partner	Cooperation
	marriage
Teacher	wholistic lifestyle
Pioneer	family-based education

The dimension of variation of spirituality took on a theme of the personal spiritual development of the parent, in the category of learner. It took on a sharing of spiritual values relevant to the family's education in the category of partner. For the category of teacher, the dimension of spirituality meant parents communicating their core values with their children and as pioneer, the parents sought to share their core values with their communities.

Table 9: Draft 3 of the Outcome Space with the Dimension of Spirituality

Categories of Description	Spirituality
Pioneer	sharing spiritual values
Teacher	teaching spiritual values
Partner	agreed spiritual values
Learner	learning spiritual values

3.8.6.4 Elements in each category of description

During the data analysis process, I grouped the pools of meaning within each category of description into classes of related elements, in order to better manage the data. While all of the data allocated to each category was relevant to that category, it become evident that the data in each category could be further grouped into classes of similar meaning. These groups of similar meanings or elements within each category are various aspects of that which is in focus in each category of description. The grouping of the data into these elements assisted in providing further understanding of the conceptions that parents had of their roles, within each category of description. The process of nominating elements within the categories involved

identifying the critical differences of meaning within each category of description and grouping that data into groups of similar meaning. The result of this process is illustrated on Table 11, located in Chapter 4. It is important to note that these elements were aspects of the category of description, with an identity that was consistent with the category. However, within that identity there was sufficient variation to allow each to emerge and be recognised as distinct entities within each category of description. These elements will be further described in the following chapter.

3.8.7 The outcome space

The processes of examination of the data and the creation of the pools of meaning, the categories of description with their elements and the dimensions of variation, gave rise to the resultant outcome space. This extended iterative process of immersion in the data, and of allowing the data to shape and define the categories of description, delivered a set of categories of description, which in turn reflected the phenomenon of the roles of home-educating parents. As the categories of description stabilised, the outcome space stabilised. At the end of the analysis the outcome space was constituted by four categories of description, which are: (1) Learner; (2) Partner; (3) Teacher; and (4) Pioneer.

The categories are logically related to one another, as they are derived from the cohort of respondents who all experienced the common phenomenon of parent home-educating roles. Observation of the roles in the outcome space demonstrated logically expanding roles of parents, which commenced with the self and extended, socially, to the parents' wider community. The first category, that of learner, is applicable to the individual parent; the second category, the partner, is applicable to the wider relational sphere of the parent's partnership with a spouse or another significant adult. The category of teacher is inclusive of the parent's children, and the category of pioneer is applicable to the parent's wider social community.

This outcome space, constituted by categories of description, represents the qualitatively different experiences of the phenomenon of the roles of parents who home educate their children. The four categories of description represent the different ways in which these parents have experienced their roles as home

educators. These categories contain the conceptions that parents have of this family-based pedagogical practice. Chapter four provides a detailed description of the study's outcome space and its four categories of description.

3.8.7.1 Couple interviews

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the data-gathering process included seven couple interviews in addition to 13 individual interviews. While this data was allocated to the collective of conceptions of roles with the rest of the data during the analysis, it is worth referring to some key features of the couple data. The following discussion highlights the differences that emerged during the data analysis, from this variation in the research method.

The seven couples who were interviewed together introduced the "we" factor in their explanation of their roles. They used this terminology to describe 268 instances of what they considered to be combined roles rather than individual roles as home-educating parents. The frequency of the occurrence of a role in the data analysis is irrelevant in a phenomenographic study, as each difference is valued equally. In similar vein, individuals and, in this case, couples are not in focus in a phenomenographic data analysis, as the researcher seeks variation in meanings rather than experiences specific to individuals or couples. A brief discussion of insights derived from this alternative approach in the interviews, is provided in Chapter 4.

3.8.8 Research rigour

This section addresses the issue of the trustworthiness of the research process and of its outcomes. Burns (1994) stated that the reliability and validity of qualitative studies should not be approached in the same way as they are approached in quantitative studies, because of fundamental differences between paradigms.

Questions regarding the rigour of a qualitative study revolve around whether the study can be trusted and the results can be believed. Ulgens (1996) describes a trustworthy phenomenographic study as one where the research outcomes correspond with the subjects' experience of the phenomenon studied. With the strengths and limitations of the phenomenographic approach in mind, it is fair to say that the rigour

of a phenomenographic study is in its ability to faithfully reflect the human experience of the phenomenon being studied.

3.8.9 Reliability

Akerlind (2005d) drew upon Guba (1981) and Kvale (1996) to define reliability from a qualitative research perspective as “reflecting the use of appropriate methodological procedures for insuring quality and consistency in data interpretations” (p. 331). She advocates that research reliability in phenomenographic studies is achieved by the researcher maintaining an attitude of interpretive awareness throughout the entire research process from design to data collection and analysis.

Sandberg (1997) describes interpretive awareness as the researcher acknowledging and explicitly dealing with his or her subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it. Sandberg rejects interjudge reliability as being effective in establishing research rigour in a phenomenographic study, as it separates the researcher’s results from their original procedures in obtaining the data. Cope (2002) supports this view, noting that the background and experience of every researcher is different and thus their relationship with given research data would be different. Similarly, each researched circumstance is set in its own context, no circumstance is entirely reduplicable. In this vein, Sandberg (1997) believes that interjudge reliability introduces methodological and theoretical inconsistencies that are incompatible with phenomenography. Sandberg (1997) thus argues that interpretive awareness, the identifying, controlling and checking of the researcher’s personal interpretation of the data, will assist with the reliability of a study.

In achieving reliability through interpretive awareness, Sandberg (1997) draws on Kvale’s (1991) notions of perspectival subjectivity and Ihde’s (1977) work in phenomenological reduction. As a result, Sandberg (1997) advocates that the researcher will limit researcher pollution by using an epistemology of intentionality which means that the researcher intentionally commits to be as faithful as possible to the subjects’ conceptions of reality. Sandberg (1997) explains it this way:

> … the researcher must demonstrate how he/she has controlled and checked his/her interpretations throughout the research process: from formulating the

> research question, selecting individuals to be investigated, obtaining data from those individuals, analysing the data obtained and reporting the results. (p. 209)

Bowden (2005) supports this view, stating that maintaining a constant focus upon the requirements of the study, assists in delivering a reliable and trustworthy outcome.

In line with Sandberg's (1997) recommendation to achieve interpretive awareness and reliability, I intentionally bracketed my experience of home education and oriented myself toward the phenomenon of the parents' experiences of their roles as home educators during all stages of the study. This included: the formation of the research question, the design of the study, the selection of the sample, the gathering of data, the data analysis, the construction of the outcome space and the reporting of the results. Second, I sought to describe the experiences of the parents, with no attempt to explain the experience. Intentional self-orientation towards description and avoidance of explanation provided a safeguard against the introduction of theories and experiences that were beyond the experiences of the participants. Third, in the search for meaning, I treated each experience with equal importance. All experiences were deemed to be valid, simply because they existed in the view of the participants. Adopting this attitude precluded my interference with personal judgements and gave full weight to all experiences of the participants. Fourth, by searching for the structural features of the outcome space, I was committed to finding the basic meaning of what was under investigation, until the outcome space was stable. Once again, this threw my focus upon the participants' experiences rather than other sources of information. This process also further indicated the stability of the outcome space. Finally, I intentionally focussed upon what the participants conceived as their reality, I sought their views as to their experiences of their roles as home educators.

Burns (1994) suggested that a helpful litmus test for reliability and validity would be to refer the research results back to the interviewees. Bowden (2005), however, saw this position as problematic for phenomenographic studies as it does not recognise that the outcomes of a phenomenographic study lose the views of individuals, in favour of the collected experiences of a group. Thus individuals may not validate outcomes that do not specifically reflect their personal contributions, but which reflect a collective outcome. Thus, I did not ask for interviewee feedback, but rather,

in the quest for reliability, I sought for dialogic reliability, that is “where agreement between researchers is reached through discussion and mutual critique” (Akerlind, 2005d, p. 331). Adopting this process of dialogic reliability, I sought feedback and advice from a community of phenomenographic researchers to confirm that my processes were in accordance with the phenomenographic approach. Such consultations took place at monthly meetings with phenomenographers, at various seminars, workshops and at an international phenomenographic symposium. These times of collegial dialogue, where my research methods were scrutinised and discussed by phenomenographers and subsequently refined, all contributed to the development of research methods that were reliable and faithful towards both the phenomenographic approach and the phenomenon of the parent roles as home educators.

Bruce (1997) reiterates the importance of the researcher’s orientation and the communicability of results, stating that reliability is dependent upon a “demonstrable orientation towards the phenomenon, a conformity to the phenomenon and upon the communicability of the results” (p. 210). This study was continually oriented to both phenomenographical theory and practice and towards the phenomenon of the experience of parent home educator roles.

3.8.10 Validity

Akerlind (2005d) notes that research validity is usually demonstrated by the outcomes of a study actually reflecting the phenomenon being studied. Drawing upon Ulgens (1996), Akerlind (2005d) states, however, that for the phenomenographer, validity refers to how well the research outcomes “correspond to the human experience of the phenomenon” (p. 330). The communicability of results in a phenomenographic study is deemed to be a vital validity check among phenomenographers (Akerlind, 2005d; Bruce, 1997; Kvale, 1996). In checking the validity of the research, phenomenographers agree that the results of the research need to be both communicable and pragmatic.

3.8.10.1 Communicative validity

Communicative validity refers to how persuasive the researcher's findings are with respect to the phenomenon being studied (Akerlind, 2002, 2005d; Kvale, 1996; Marton & Booth, 1997). While it may be admitted that the research outcomes could be interpreted differently, the communicative validity check explores whether the researcher's interpretation is defensible. Akerlind (2002, 2005d) notes that the research methods and the final interpretation, in particular, need to be deemed appropriate by the relevant research community. In a process of communication and feedback, the question of the validity of a study may be subjected to appropriate critique by the appropriate community (Akerlind, 2005; Kvale, 1996).

The outcomes of this study were scrutinised by various groups of experienced academics, and researchers in the field of education who challenged whether the study was indeed probing the phenomenon in question. This ongoing process of critical scrutiny caused me to continually refine my processes and to ensure that they were in line with both the topic in question and the phenomenon of the roles experienced by parent home educators. Akerlind (2002) points out that the research community is not the only community able to provide a check on validity. Other members of the population may also provide appropriate checks. I sought the scrutiny of a two groups of teachers from two schools of distance education, in Queensland and in Western Australian, and the opinions of leaders in the home schooling and distance education sectors in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. These teachers and leaders were continually in touch with home educators. Further, the results were presented at several home education conferences and at teacher education conferences in the states of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. The feedback at those events mostly confirmed that the results of this study were consistent with their views of what the roles of parent home educators would be like.

3.8.10.2 Pragmatic validity

Pragmatic validity refers to the usefulness of the research outcomes to both the community that was researched and to the wider community (Akerlind, 2002, 2005d; Kvale, 1996; Sandberg, 1994). Kvale (1996) defines the knowledge derived from a

study as being useful if it allows people to perform effective actions. While it is too early to predict how the outcomes of the study will be used, one aspect of usefulness may be its capacity to inform policy makers as to the complexity of the roles of parent home educators. Over recent years, it has been evident that both the Australian Government and the governments of all Australian states and territories have been legislating about home education in both formats of home schooling and distance education. For example, a state government review is occurring in Victoria at the time of writing. Home education, whether it is home schooling or distance education, will be an ongoing topic of review for policy-makers.

As stated in Chapter 1, most educational legislation and policies are conspicuously negligent in substantively referring to home-educating parents, as bona fide educators. This study may provide useful insights for educational policy makers, into the roles that home-educating parents experience.

3.8.10.3 Transferability

While selection of interviewees is reflective of a wide range of demographic diversity within the home education community, the results, however, are not generalisable to all home educators. Ray (1992) acknowledged that while one may present a summary of traits of home educators, it is unwise to generalise about home educators, as each home-educating family is different.

> Generalization in this area leads to a paradox. An attempt to homogenize home school families in order to understand them may lead a person further from capturing the richness of the many dimensions that are so much a part of the home schooling community. (p. 4)

The diversity of each home-educating family excludes and defeats the purpose of generalisation. Marton and Booth (1997) add to this from a phenomenographic perspective, by indicating that awareness in people, is continually changing as experiences are enhanced by changes to what is in focus, as diverse constituent thematic fields are brought into awareness and by what is relegated to the margin of one's awareness at various times of awareness. Thus, on the basis of the diversity among home educators and the ways that their awareness changes over time, generalising the results of this study to all home educators is inappropriate.

This study's findings are relevant to the sample of participants involved in the project, at the time of interviewing. It cannot be claimed to be representative of all home educators and it is evident that the awareness of parents will change. However, the nature of the study's outcome space holds value as a description of the diversity of the experiences of home-educating parents. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the outcome space, it may be possible to extrapolate it to other similar groups of home educators. An outcome space should reflect the widest possible diversity of experiences of a phenomenon. Thus home-educating parents similar to the ones in this study may deliver a similar outcome space, if engaged as participants in a phenomenographic study of their roles.

3.9 Ethical issues

Confirmation of full ethical clearance was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee (See Appendix C for Ethical Clearance). Obtaining ethical clearance required my compliance with QUT's research ethics arrangements and the *QUT Code of Conduct for Research*. Further to this, I was required to comply with the standard conditions of ethical clearance, relevant State / Territory and Commonwealth legislation and the policies and guidelines issued by the NHMRC and AVCC (including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*). I also gained clearance from the governing body of the Australian Christian Academy and from the Australian Christian Academy School of Distance Education, to proceed with this study.

All respondents were invited to participate in the research on a voluntary basis. They were informed in writing of the rationale and purpose of the research. They were also informed, in writing, of a means of querying the ethical conduct of the research. Respondents were assured that their anonymity would be maintained, and identity not linked to the data.

Potential research participants were asked to request, in writing, that they be included in the interview process. Interview participants were contacted and arrangements were made for the interview to be held at a time and location convenient to them. The identity of all participants has remained confidential and each has been assigned a pseudonym thus guarding the anonymity of all participants and their children. Each

interview participant will have a summary of the findings of the study mailed to them at the conclusion of the examination process.

All data has been treated confidentially as per standard ethics protocols for the treatment and storage of data.

3.10 Chapter summary

This chapter described the research methodology for the study. It has presented the case for the selection of phenomenography as an appropriate methodological approach to use in order to collect and analyse the data that would suitably answer the research question. The conceptual framework surrounding phenomenography was presented along with a description of its key features and their application to the study. The research design has been discussed and a detailed account of how the study was conducted has been provided. The chapter concludes with assurances that the processes followed during the study have given attention to the rigour required of such research, with a view to arriving at findings that are trustworthy.

Having outlined the study's research methodology, the next chapter describes the findings of the study in detail.

Chapter 4
Findings

This chapter is a presentation of the findings of the study. The findings represent the qualitatively different ways in which home-educating parents experience their roles in home education. The chapter presents the findings and proceeds to describe the outcome space and its categories of description. The following chapter, in turn, discusses the findings in depth.

4.1 Outcome Space: An Overview

The outcome space, as mentioned in Chapter 3, represents the phenomenon under study. It consists of all of the categories of description, each of which reveals something distinctive about the phenomenon and it demonstrates logical relationships between the categories.

The outcome space of the study of the roles of parents who home educate their children consists of four categories of description and three dimensions of variation which both link and differentiate each of the categories. The outcome space is represented in Table 10 and described in detail throughout this chapter. In Table 10, the categories of description are demonstrated with respect to:

1. their referential aspect, indicating what is the meaning of each category;
2. their structural aspect, referring to that which is in focus, or the theme and that which is backgrounded or the thematic field and margin of each category; and
3. the three dimensions of variation.

Table 10: The Outcome Space

	Category 1 LEARNER	Category 2 PARTNER	Category 3 TEACHER	Category 4 PIONEER
REFERENTIAL ASPECT (*Meaning of Category)*	Parent learns new things so as to educate his/her child	Parent is a member of an educational partnership	Parent teaches his/her child	Parent brings change to his/her community
STRUCTURAL ASPECT				
Theme	Learning about home education	The Partners' home education relationship	Relational aspect	Advocating for home education
	Learning about education in general	The Partners' home education activities	Organisational aspect	Supporting other home educators
	Learning about their children		Developmental aspect	Reconceptualising education
	Learning academic content		Pedagogical aspect	Reconceptualising family life
	Learning spiritual lessons			Producing good citizens
Thematic Field	Partner, Teacher, Pioneer	Learner, Teacher, Pioneer	Learner, Partner, Pioneer	Learner, Partner, Teacher
Margin	Parents' past learning experiences	Parents' experience of marriage and cooperation	Parents' experience of their own teachers and parents teaching them	Community expectations and laws
Dim. of Var. 1. Educational Influence	Development of self	Development of educational relationship	Development of the child	Development of the community
Dim. of Var. 2. Example	Example as a learner	Example as a partner	Life example	Example in education & lifestyle
Dim. of Var. 3. Spirituality	Personal spiritual growth	Agreed spiritual values	Spiritual mentor to the child	Sharing spirituality with the wider community

4.2 Categories of description: An overview

Data analysis enabled the researcher to construct an outcome space that is comprised of four categories of description of the roles of home-educating parents. These are the roles of:

1. learner
2. partner
3. teacher
4. pioneer.

The categories of description describe the qualitatively different ways in which home educators experience their roles. In brief, in the role of *learner*, home educators saw themselves as having to learn a range of things in order to commence home education and also to maintain and improve their educational practice. As a *partner*, they viewed themselves as being in an educational partnership, usually with their spouse, in order to facilitate home education. In the role of *teacher*, parents viewed themselves as conveying to their children a suite of knowledge and skills, both formally and informally; and as *pioneers*, they saw themselves as bringing positive change to their families and communities because of their involvement in home education. Figure 7 illustrates the outcome space.

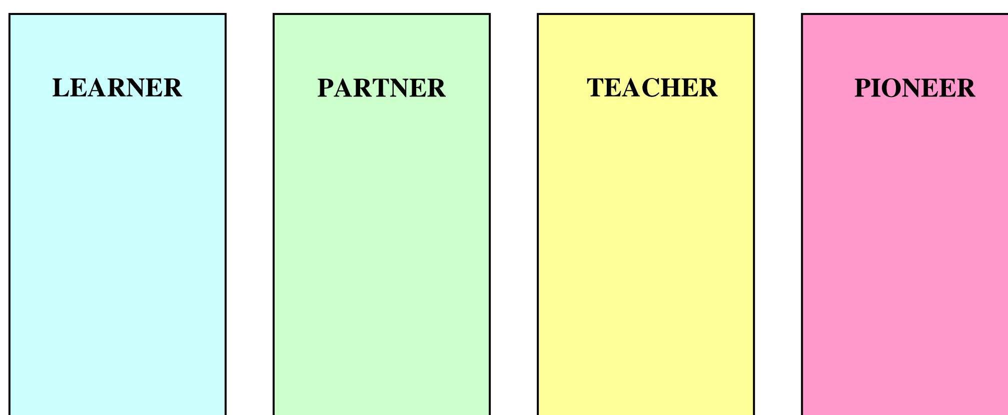

Figure 7: The Outcome Space featuring the four categories of description.

The categories of description are not represented in a hierarchical format; nor are they presented to emphasise degrees of merit. Rather, the categories of description represent the roles that parents see as theirs, without priority or emphasis, as part of their experience of home education. The categories, however, do demonstrate a logical progression as to how the parents see their roles impacting themselves and others. This progression of the social impact of the parent roles ranges from the individual learner, through to the education partnership of spouses, to the children in the family and finally, to the wider community.

4.2.1 The elements within each category of description

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the conceptions referred to in each category of description were able to be grouped together, within the category. As groups of similar conceptions, they were nominated as elements within each category. These elements were sufficiently distinct from each other to be recognised as such; however, they were also each descriptive of their particular category, in order to be a member of that category. The elements residing within each category are listed on Table 11 and they are also part of the more detailed presentation of the outcome space, shown previously, in Table 10.

Table 11: Elements Within Each Category of Description
Category of Description 1 — The Home-Educating Parent as a Learner
Elements of the Category of Description:
• Learning about home education
• Learning about education in general
• Learning about their children
• Learning academic content
• Learning spiritual lessons
Category of Description 2 — The Home-Educating Parent as a Partner
Elements of the Category of Description:
• The relationship between the partners
• The activities between the partners
Category of Description 3 — The Home-Educating Parent as a Teacher
Elements of the Category of Description:
• The relational aspect
• The organisational aspect
• The developmental aspect
• The pedagogical aspect
Category of Description 4 — The Home-Educating Parent as a Pioneer
Elements of the Category of Description:
• Advocating for home education
• Supporting other home educators
• Reconceptualising education
• Reconceptualising family life
• Producing good citizens

4.3 Parents' Awareness

The outcome space describes the awareness that the parents have of their roles as home educators. Their awareness is characterised by a referential aspect and a structural aspect.

4.3.1 Referential aspect of parents' awareness

The referential aspect pertains to the meaning of the parent role in each category of description. The meaning contained in each category is exemplified in and intertwined with the structural aspect of the parents' awareness of their roles.

4.3.2 Structural aspect of parents' awareness

There is a structural aspect to the parents' awareness as they experience their roles. The structure of awareness describes the different aspects of a person's awareness of a phenomenon, ranging from that which is in focus to that which is in the background. The structure of the parents' awareness includes that which is in focus, in the foreground of their awareness, as they experience their roles, that is, the theme of awareness; and it also includes that which is in the background of their awareness, that is, the thematic field and the margin of their awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997).

The theme of each category of description relates to the role of the home educator, which is in the focus of the parents' awareness, as they experience that role. The thematic field includes that which is directly relevant to the role. It includes the other three parent roles, which are not in focus when the parent focuses upon one particular role. Thus, while one role is in focus in the theme, the other three roles recede to the thematic field of the parents' awareness, yet they are simultaneously co-existent with the role that is in focus.

The margin of the parents' awareness refers to their awareness of experiences that are not directly relevant to the role, but are in some way related to it. The margin includes parents' awareness of experiences that have indirectly contributed to, but are not directly related to the focussed theme or the thematic field of each category. These experiences are in the background of the parents' awareness as they

experience their roles. Figure 8 illustrates this general structure of the parents' awareness with respect to the theme, thematic field and margin of their roles.

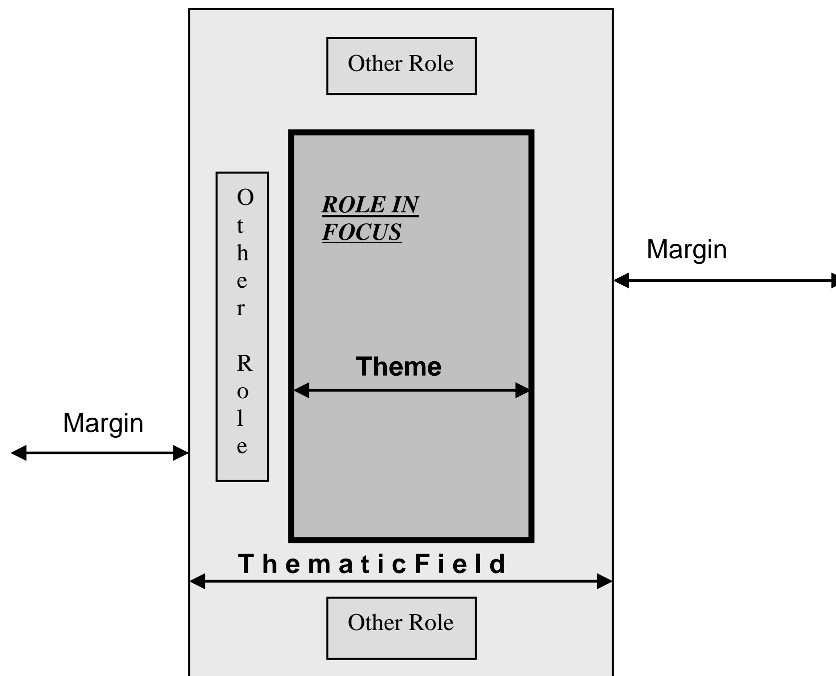

Figure 8: The structure of parent awareness for a role as a home educator.

During the time when a parent is focussed on one role, the other three roles are not the focal point of their awareness. When the other three roles are not in focus, they are not lost in their awareness, as they are still part of the home-educating experience. The other three roles form a context of the role in focus and in the background of awareness at that time, in the thematic field of awareness (See Marton & Booth, 1997). For example, when a parent refers to his or her role as a teacher, the roles of learner, partner and pioneer are not in focus, as they are not the theme of the parent's awareness. The other three roles, however, are in the background or thematic field of the parent's awareness, simultaneously with the role that is in focus, in the theme of their awareness. Further to the background of the parent's awareness, beyond the thematic field, lay past experiences that are not central to the role in focus (yet they may be somewhat related to it), in the margin of their awareness. While the thematic field and the margin of awareness are simultaneously present with that which is in focus, it is important to note that they occupy a lesser degree of awareness, merely providing a context for that which is in focus. This is true for each of the four categories of description.

4.4 Dimensions of variation in the categories of description

Three dimensions of variation are also identified in each category of description. A dimension of variation is a recognisable theme that exists in all categories of description. The dimensions of variation in this outcome space demonstrate expanding themes of awareness through each of the categories of description. They are the dimensions of: (1) educational influence, (2) example, and (3) spirituality. These expanding themes of awareness commence with the self in the category of learner, and extend across the parent's spouse and children in the categories of partner and teacher, to their wider social context and beyond, in the category of pioneer. These dimensions of variation provide links across the categories of description and they also help to differentiate each category from the others. Figure 9 presents a diagram of the outcome space that includes the three dimensions of variation.

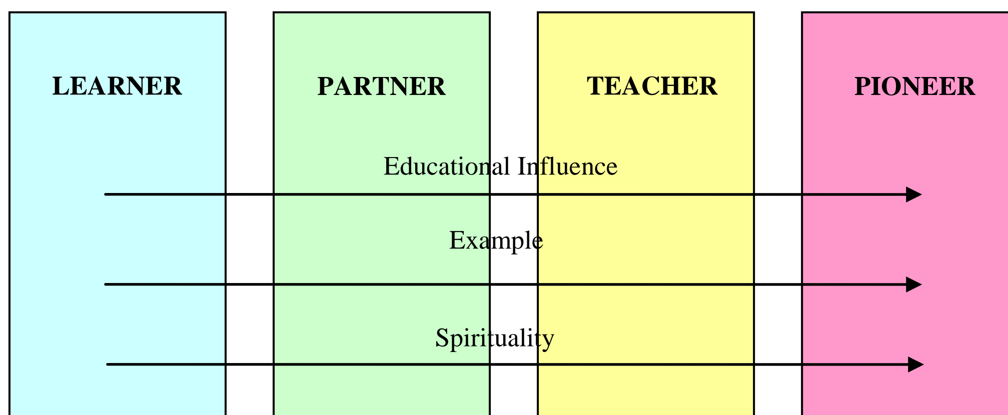

Figure 9: The Outcome Space with the dimensions of variation.

The dimension of variation of educational influence was evident in all categories. As learners, the parents saw themselves as influencing themselves. As partners, they brought influence to their spouse in negotiating and growing their relationship. As teachers they influenced their children every day; and as pioneers they saw themselves as bringing positive influence to their communities.

The dimension of variation of being an example meant that these parents saw themselves as under the gaze of others. As learners, they had become exemplars of

the importance of learning to their children. As partners, they saw that their relationship with their spouses was under the scrutiny of their children as they learned about marriage and cooperation from them. As teachers, they were aware that their lives in general, were continually before their children, seeing themselves as constantly teaching, by how they lived their lives. As pioneers they saw themselves as examples to the wider community, of a new type of family lifestyle and of a different type of education.

Similarly, the dimension of variation of spirituality was expressed differently in each category. As learners, parents saw themselves as growing in their faith due to their experience of home education. As partners, they worked with their spouses to arrive at shared spiritual values that were relevant to their family's education. As teachers, they saw themselves as communicating their spiritual values to their children; and as pioneers, they saw themselves as communicating their values with the wider community.

Table 10 also demonstrates the dimensions of variation in the outcome space and they are discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter.

4.5 Categories of description in detail

This section describes the four categories of description in greater detail. Each category represents a qualitatively different way in which the parents see their roles as home educators. Particular attention is also given to the referential and structural aspects of each category of description. The referential aspect refers to the meaning within the category of description and the structural aspect refers to that which is in focus and to that which is in the background of the parents' awareness as they experience their roles (Marton & Booth, 1997). That which is in the parents' focus in each category of description is the theme of the parent role. The focussed theme of each parent role is divided into critical elements that are variations within each role. These elements provide an organisational structure for the focussed theme of each role. While both the referential and structural aspects of each category of description are inextricably linked, they are, however, separated in this section for the purposes of analysis. The three dimensions of variation of educational influence, example and spirituality, introduced earlier in the chapter, are also discussed in greater detail with respect to each category.

Selected quotations are used to illustrate the various conceptions which parents have of their roles. Because some quotations illustrate more than one conception, they may be used a second time in order to illustrate a different conception.

4.6 Category 1: The home-educating parent in the role of a Learner

In this category of description, home educators see themselves in the role of learner. This role has both a referential and structural aspect, which in turn, denotes the meaning of that role. Figure 10 indicates the category of learner in the diagram of the outcome space, highlighting the elements of the focused theme in this category.

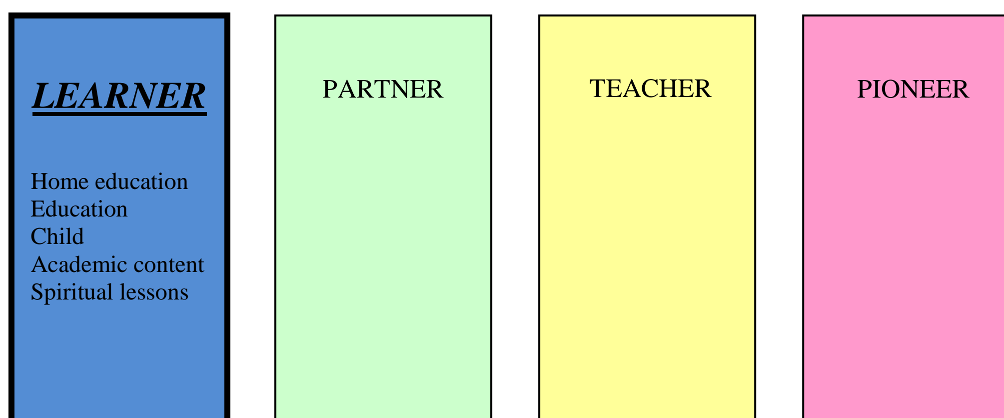

Figure 10: The category of Learner in the Outcome Space.

4.6.1 Category of Learner — Referential aspect

The category of learner describes how home-educating parents experience their role as learners, with respect to their practice of home education. The referential aspect of this category of description is a description of the meaning of the role of learner. In this category, home educators see themselves as learners who are engaged in an extensive learning process, for the purpose of educating their children. This process of learning equips them to both commence home education and to continue and to improve as home educators. When home educators see themselves as learners, they create and maintain the knowledge platform for their family's educational experience.

When home-educating parents are aware of themselves as learners, the parents' primary focus is upon their own learning. The focus of their awareness is not on their other home-educating roles of partner, teacher and pioneer. Rather, when a parent is focused upon the role of learner, their other roles are experienced simultaneously with what is in focus, but are in the background of their awareness.

Learning, for these parents, is viewed as an ongoing, personal, developmental experience that has enabled them to initiate and to maintain their educational practice. Parents see themselves as having to learn many new things prior to, at the commencement of, and during their experience of home education. The primary focus of the parent in this role is upon the self and one's personal growth. The

category of learner features the distinct role played by the home educator in equipping himself or herself to practise home education. Without this role, home education would not occur in a family.

4.6.2 Category of Learner — Structural aspect: Focus and background

In this section the structural aspect of the category of learner is described in terms of the theme, thematic field and margin of the learner's awareness. The theme of awareness is that which parents have in focus as they experience the role of learner. The thematic field and the margin of awareness are backgrounded during that experience. The structure of the learner's awareness is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 11.

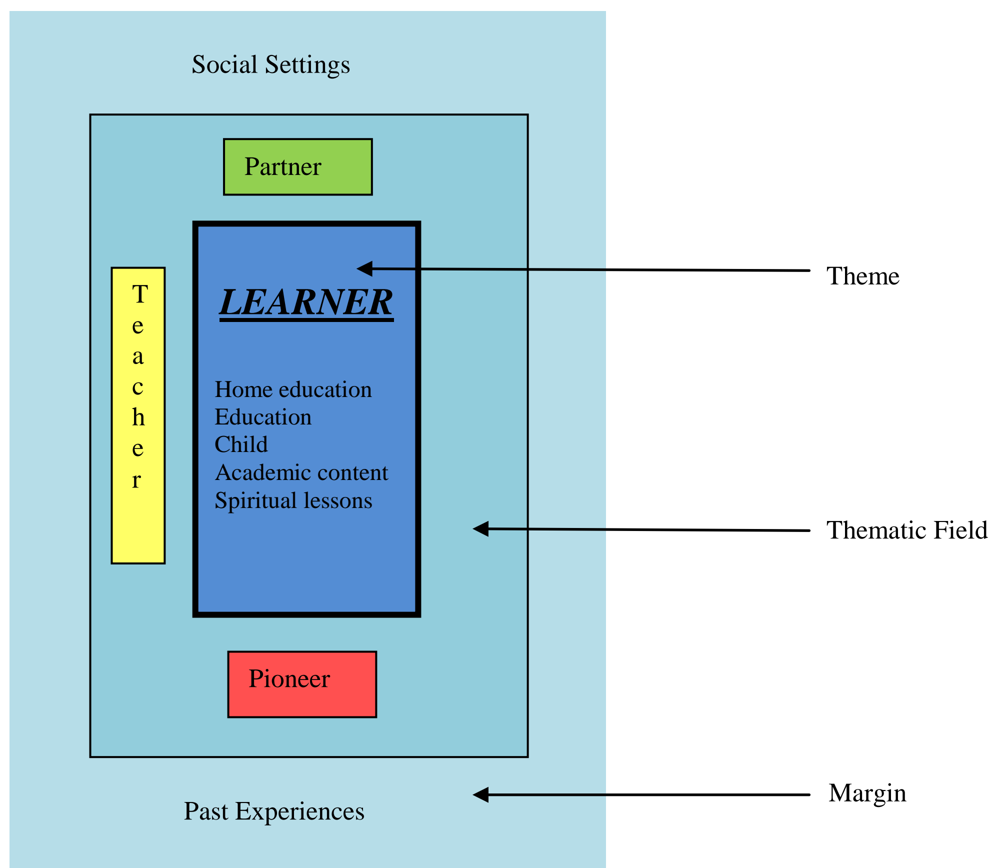

Figure 11: Structure of awareness of the Learner.

4.6.2.1 Structural aspect: Focus of the Learner's role — The Theme

In the role of learner, home educators focused upon learning about topics related to becoming and continuing as a home-educating parent. As parents described their view of their role as learners, they referred to the following elements of the role: (1) learning about home education; (2) learning about education in general; (3) learning about their children; (4) learning about academic content; and (5) learning about spirituality. These elements are different aspects of the theme of this category of description. A detailed description of the theme of the role of learner, as organised by the elements of the theme follows.

4.6.2.1(1) Learning about home education

Parents indicated that when they took on the responsibility to educate their children, they saw themselves as entering new fields of learning, fields not necessarily experienced by other [non-home-educating] parents. These learning experiences could later impact the education of their children. The decision to home educate brought responsibilities for them to be purposeful learners, learning about home education, a form of education that was not widely known. They had to research home education with a view to applying their knowledge to their own families.

One mother of four, with 12 years of home education experience, described when she first started to learn about home education.

> Okay, once you read up on home schooling, and I was presented with everything that is so good about it, I realised that really, we don't have a choice. You know, that is the only choice to go. Once you're convicted, you know, in your heart? And then, I get very passionate about it. I'm like that in things in life actually. I discover new information and I get excited if it's something I believe in and am passionate about. (C6 — 54–58)

A father of five children, who was a principal of a school, had been home educating with his wife for more than nine years. Initially, he reluctantly attended a home education seminar, with his wife. What he learned at the seminar, and subsequent to that experience, helped him decide to become a home educator.

> So we simply had to keep our eyes open and see. Laura (*his wife*) saw firstly the whole aspect of home schooling, and she found out that at *" Church"* There was a home schooling weekend on … And we could see the PACEs (*curriculum*) and all of that sort of stuff and how it connected together. But I

> suppose that Laura was worried about me being a professional teacher and having gone that route and ahm, if it doesn't happen in a classroom, it's just not happening, so she might have been worried or at least she recognised that I might have had some misgivings if not some complete objections to the whole idea. But it was in a conversation on the way home from there, that she said to me "What do you think?"
>
> And I said, "We should home school Les, Peter and Naomi" (I9 – 34–36; 38–45).

This father observed that home educators had to learn about a new form of education and embrace a new mindset if they were to succeed. He said that home education creates its own challenges within the family that requires a "different mindset" (I9, 152) and "that the ones that don't think it through, don't last" (I9, 156). Thus, as a professional educator and administrator, he had to learn about a totally different form of education in the process of becoming a home educator.

Some parents even saw the need to learn about home education in a legal sense, in order to deal with opposition they encountered from established educational authorities who were not accustomed to this relatively uncommon form of education.

These parents saw themselves as embarking upon an extended journey of learning when they began home education, a journey that would continue for many years. This role of being a learner was seen as a necessary requirement of, as well as a positive outcome of the experience of home education. Having committed to learning about home education, these parents also had to deal with different areas of learning. One of the necessary areas for their learning was the very broad field of education.

4.6.2.1(2) Learning about education

Becoming a home educator not only required these parents to learn about home education, they also had to learn about education more broadly. Parents found themselves having to explore different educational theories, practices and curricula in order to decide what type of education practices they would implement.

Parents saw that such engagement required a commitment to deep thinking, extensive reading, attendance at conferences and curriculum fairs, searching the internet and libraries, consultation with experts and ongoing discussion with both fellow home educators and traditional educators in formal and informal social

networks. One mother had almost completed a Bachelor of Education degree, while home educating her children, in order to enhance her educational knowledge and practice.

Parents explored different types of educational methods and curriculum they would use. They had to decide whether to use a structured or unstructured approach, or a combination of both, and whether their curriculum materials would include text books, self-instructional materials, online resources, a combination of each of these or no formal curriculum at all. Some parents had children, who had attended school and had not been successful there, and now had learning deficiencies. These parents had to learn about remedial education in order to assist their children. Some parents also reported having to do research in order to assist their children who had special educational needs (such as learning disabilities) or for children who had development disorders such as autism or Asperger's syndrome. These parents had the added responsibility of finding specifically tailored educational programs for their children.

One couple, who had previously sent their older children to state schools, and who had home educated their three younger children for 10 years, described how they had developed a much broader understanding of education since their decision to home educate. Because they and their parents had attended state schools, they initially defaulted to state schooling for their children. As they explored the broader field of education, they learned that there were many alternative methods and curriculum approaches for them to examine before selecting one for their children.

> Mother: Well we were just stereotype parents, stereotype people. We went to state school; our parents had been to school. We went to school within the state system, our children went to school in the state system … and so we only knew just that one, that one — attitude.
>
> Father: Yes I guess home schooling has opened our minds to recognise that there are a vast number of alternatives to the state education system, which we either we didn't know about, or we just simply didn't take any notice of. We'd never heard of unlearning, or whatever the proper name for it is. Which at first seems weird, but when you look into it you realise that there is a reason for it. We knew almost nothing about home schooling. We didn't realise that there was all different sorts of curricula available. We didn't realise that there was a large, a minority, but a large minority support for it. We didn't realise that there were alternatives in education within a schooling, within a building situation, like Montessori and other things like that.

> Father: So we now realise that education is not restricted to just a schoolroom of a building owned by the Queensland Education Department. There are so many alternatives.
>
> Mother: And nor is it just restricted to the schoolroom that we have set up in our home either, that it is much broader than that (C7, 239–253; 260–264).

They have since learned that education is much broader than even their own formal learning program. Like many other home educators, their learning journey had enhanced their view of education.

A mother of six children aged from 16 years to 5 months and who had been home educating for six years, described how her learning about education had contributed to her personal growth. As she taught the sounds of the alphabet, she was also learning about being a teacher and the need to be patient as her son learned at his own pace.

> [Laughs] With a lot of, ahm we spent a lot of time with him. We went through all of the, you know, like we just, ahm reinforced all the sounds, a lot of patience, I guess. Yes, so as I was learning as a teacher, about patience, and just persevering with him, that's come across into my personal life. (I1, 214–217)

Learning to become a teacher was seen as an experience that required parents to make changes and to develop personal qualities, such as patience, which was deemed to be necessary for their roles as home educators.

One mother, who was a single parent home educating her son with learning disabilities, sought to learn from professional special education teachers in order to meet his needs.

> I've had to ask a few of the teachers at the special school how they would approach it, so that we don't overload him, but he still takes the information in. (I3, 304–306)

These parents saw the need to learn about educational theory and methodology. Because their educational choices would directly impact their own children's current and future learning, they had a vested interest to learn about education and to be committed to thinking about, and pursuing their own learning. Their learning journey required them to learn to think about education and to learn to think like an educator.

4.6.2.1(3) Learning about their children

The learner role also required parents to learn about their children. Many parents mentioned the need to observe and to learn about their children's personal characteristics and learning needs in order to develop an individual educational plan for them. In order to achieve this, they had to learn about their children's physical, social and educational characteristics. One father of three teenage children had been a home educator for 14 years. He talked about how he had observed and learned about the different temperaments and academic work habits of his children and how these observations had informed the manner in which he and his wife approached the education of each of their children, differently.

> Father: You see your kids' temperaments, you see how they get into the work, you see how some of them just float through the work and it's not a worry. The other ones want to daydream. You see their strong points and [laughs] their weak points, you know? Which normally a teacher would only see.
>
> Interviewer: And this is, you are saying, the role of a parent?
>
> Father: Yes. Well, it helps you understand your kids better. I look at my kids' temperaments and their natures and all three are different. And you sometimes see it come out in their schoolwork the way they approach it, the way they do things. One of them you have to push, push, push. The other one you don't have to push. So you get to see their different natures, eh? I know one will battle and struggle and try to do it perfectly. Another one won't try to do it. (I3, 197–209)

Similarly, a mother of two teenage girls spoke about observing and thus learning about the development of her eldest daughter's thinking capabilities.

> Because, I've, in particular, I've noticed, my eldest daughter has really gone through some changes this year. She's matured a lot in the way of her thinking. (C2, 344–345)

Home education enabled these parents to spend extended periods of time with their children, in ways that were not experienced by most parents. In so doing, they learned about their children's educational needs, as individuals. What they learned, affected how they conducted their children's education. They were able to make continuous reflective assessments about their children's personal development and this often resulted in their making adjustments to their educational activities.

As parents observed their children's particular characteristics and engaged in the minutiae of the daily educational program, they were, at times, also aware of their

child's future. Operating with a future perspective, the home-educating parent thinks about the child's post-schooling career and educational pathways. A couple who had been home educating their seven children, for 13 years, realised that they had to learn about these post schooling pathways, as their children grew older. The father stated that, as a couple, they needed to look to their children's future, and prepare them for study and careers after home education. In order to do this they had to ask their children about their vocational strengths and interests and then learn or "find out" about that particular study or career pathway.

> Well, you just ask them questions, you've asked them and just see what their strengths are and then you've just got to ask them what sort of things would they be interested in, what sort of things would you like to have a go at? And be willing to again, support them in to trying to pursue certain maybe careers or ahm occupational interests or hobbies, whatever it is, just try to say okay, well let's get the thing up and find out if we can do a correspondence course on such and such (C1 71-76).

This father also talked about the different study and career pathways he had explored in the process of helping their daughter into a career path. Hilary is their eldest child, so this was their first attempt to negotiate vocational education and post schooling pathways. Career guidance was an unknown field to these parents and thus, their learning curve was steep. He had explored work experience opportunities, and the field of post-schooling courses such as TAFE college courses and traineeships.

> Father: Hilary was at the library, well, she had, we tried to do a bit of work experience first, to be involved with doing some things in the library, and then that, I thought that was acceptable, … So we got her involved with a school [work experience] experience, which then led into a part time job, which then gave an opportunity to support her there, and then there was an opportunity on top of that to get a traineeship. She applied for that, didn't get it, but at the same time, she was still able to do a business management TAFE course. (C1, 84–91)

As their children grew older, these future-focussed responsibilities challenged the parents to learn things that were usually in the domain of professional career advisors. Future-focussed educational decisions, especially for older students, were addressed with reference to the child's interests and talents; as well as the availability of employment and college and university study options. Thus, as a part of their new role as educator-learners, parents had become students of their own children, in order to assist them in choices that they saw would affect both the child's present learning experiences and the child's future post-schooling career path.

4.6.2.1(4) Learning academic content

Another more obvious aspect of being a learner was that parents were learning about the academic content in their family's educational program. Parents had to learn new knowledge and skills in order to teach their children. They had to be familiar with the content of academic subjects as they engaged in their children's academic learning processes. Many parents mentioned how they were enjoying the experience of reengagement with the content of academic subjects such as mathematics, literature, information technology, poetry, drama and science. One father described some learning experiences that he and his wife had enjoyed.

> Father: I feel it's probably helped me as much as it's helped the kids. I think from home schooling, it's an angle you should remember that maybe and think about that, I think it's been as good for Claire and I as it has been for the kids. It hasn't been a one-way street. I think that Claire and I have grown. Claire's gotten a lot cleverer. She was always pretty well educated. But she's had to keep up with the maths; I think (*laughs*) and schooling. And I think that hasn't done her any harm and because when the kids had to do their computer concepts, and start their typing certificates or, Claire was on there, plonking away on the computer too. So, I think that, you know that it's maybe something people don't see. But when you home school it helps parents to keep up with their children. It helps you, ahm, stay a bit younger.
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean by, 'It helps you stay a bit younger?
>
> Father: Oh you've got, you've got, just living in the house, when you're doing your schoolwork and ahh, they want to go into a play, or read a poem, they are not reading it to a teacher. They have to read it to you, so you have to laugh and go along with them when they want to do a clowning act or … (I3, 162–179)

A mother referred to how home education had reawakened her own experience of learning. She mentioned her learning, and sometimes relearning, elementary academic subject content. As a mature learner, she referred to her experience of learning and appreciating this material at a deep level. She said that she would apply this deepened understanding, which she gained while teaching her older children, to when she teaches the same topics to her younger children.

> I certainly went to university, so I sort of had, you know, quite a bit of education, but, ahm, I've learned heaps and heaps and heaps teaching the children, and things that I thought I knew … I've learned afresh. … and gotten deeper meanings, and understanding of ... and it's interesting, with what I've learned from one, I can then apply that sometimes, how I approach something for one of the others. (I1, 151–163)

This mother's experience was typical of many parents who reported that home education had improved their knowledge of subject content and this, in turn, contributed to their own development as home educators.

4.6.2.1(5) Learning spiritual lessons

Many parents expressed that their role of learner in home education had a spiritual base. They noted that home education had presented them with a journey of learning about themselves and their practice of faith. These spiritually oriented parents saw home education as an endeavour that would require divine assistance. The spiritual aspect of the parent-learner role was evidenced by parental expressions about their having faith in God as a source of strength to home educate, by obeying Biblical directions about how to raise and educate their children and by praying to God about matters they were uncertain about, such as financial resources, specific problems a child might have and the vocational and lifestyle pathways a child may take. In seeking to genuinely practise their religion, these parents experienced their role as learning to co-operate with God in raising their children. They expressed that they would place their trust in God, who would, in turn, assist them in their role as home educators.

One mother described how she and her husband have learned much about their own spirituality during their home education experience, as a result of "different situations that come up".

> Well our Christian walk with the Lord has grown … So we've grown in our walk with the Lord together, which was really special. … And so that's developed enormously. Ah so between then (*when commencing home education*) and now, we have grown into maturity, not only in our parenting, with different situations that come up, but also in our Christian walk. (I10, 100–107)

One key area in which parents saw themselves as learning to exercise their faith in God was the family's financial position. Having "sacrificed the second income" in order to home educate, some of these parents saw themselves as learning to trust God to provide for their material needs. One father of four, who had been a home educator for 12 years, described how home education had directly contributed to him learning about his faith, when it came to his family finances.

> The home schooling environment does teach you in Christian faith. … We've sacrificed the second income. … But even the financial one, just sticking with that for a while, it ahm, like, we have never been without. There's been times where we've had little, relative to Australian and New Zealand standards, and that we've always got by. And in the past few years, especially, God's blessed bountifully. But it hasn't been through ahh, and this is where it really gets down to faith. It hasn't been through any real endeavour that Holly or I can attribute to ourselves. It's just been, it's clearly been to my thinking anyway, God's working and God's blessing us, and it's been in His hands. (C6, 848, 860–869)

Furthermore, spiritually oriented parents were also learning to place the direction and form of their home education into God's hands. The same father explained how he has been learning to exercise faith:

> And I think, that's what it's taught me, is to put things in God's hands, and home schooling has assisted in that, because we haven't been trying to take control of that. You know, we haven't been trying to put the reins in our hands and steer every direction that we want our children and ourselves to take. … Whereas, I think home schooling has helped us realise that if you're going to do it properly, you've to let God fill those areas for you. You know, He fills, He supplies you the people in your life. He supplies, provides for you financially, He provides for you, just in so many areas, I can't think, too many explicitly, but when you could go out, and you could try and get them yourself, that you say, 'No, we want to focus on doing this properly, therefore, we're not going to cut corners, God will provide.' And He does. And I'm not just talking about financially, He does in many ways. (C6, 869–873; 896–902)

Thus, home-educating parents saw that they were learning spiritual lessons as a part of their journey of learning as home educators.

When couples were interviewed, they referred to themselves in the role of learner. A brief description of how couples viewed their experiences of that role follows.

4.6.2.1(6) Learner — Insights from the couple interviews

The responses from the couple interviews are integrated into the above focus or theme of the learner role. However, as indicated in Chapter 3 there were some distinctives which emerged from the interviews, when subjects referred to "we" in the role of learner, which are worth mentioning briefly, as they demonstrate the value of interviewing couples as well as individuals.

In the category of learner, couple respondents talked about their initial ignorance of education in general and of home education specifically. Some described their surprise upon learning about some of the values taught in schools, which were

contrary to their family values. Couples talked about learning together and engaging in a decision making process together, which included making the decision to remove their children from school to commence home education, and how they would do that. They also described how they observed and learned about their different children and how they learned, as couples, how to best address each child's needs individually. Couples described how they purposely learned together about emotional health and relationship development and then sought to assist their children's emotional development. As they experienced home education, some expressed pleasure as they became aware of unexpected benefits derived from their educational choice. These couple-focussed experiences of the role of learner presented variation which enriched the data set of that role.

Having described what was in focus, it is now appropriate to look at the context of the focussed theme. When home educators hold the role of learner as the theme in the focus of their awareness, it is important to realise that their experience of that role does not occur in isolation. It is embedded in a context or a background, known to phenomenographers as the thematic field.

4.6.2.2 Structural Aspect: Background of the Learner's Role — The Thematic Field

The thematic field of a person's awareness includes that which is directly relevant to the theme or focus of awareness, but which is not in focus (Cope, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997). It is the immediate context that surrounds what the person has in focus, at the time. When home educators were are aware of themselves in the role of learner, they experience this role in the context of their wider home education experience. This context includes their other three parent roles of partner, teacher and pioneer. Thus, when the role of learner was in the parents' focus, the other three roles of partner, teacher and pioneer receded to the background of their awareness, to the thematic field of the parents' awareness. These other backgrounded roles provided a setting for the role that was currently in focus. Thus, a parent who is experiencing the role of learner may realise that the purpose for his or her learning experience is to become a better teacher or partner or pioneer. The parent's focus upon being a learner is set in the wider home educational context of the thematic field, which includes being a partner, teacher or pioneer.

One mother demonstrated this structure in her awareness, in that the reason she had focussed upon learning about a particular topic was so that she could teach it to her daughters. Her learning was going to enhance her future teaching. "Because we kind of study up on these things ourselves and teach the girls" (C6, 407–409).

In this case, the parent's role of learner is in focus, while in the context of another role, that of teacher. Thus while the role of learner is in focus, the other three roles are backgrounded in the thematic field. Beyond the thematic field of awareness lay a broader and more general context of awareness in the margin of a person's awareness.

4.6.2.3 Structural aspect: Background of the Learner's role — The Margin

The margin of a person's awareness provides a wider, backgrounded context to that which is in focus, than that of the thematic field. It is much broader than the theme and the thematic field. The margin of awareness coexists with the theme in focus and the thematic field of the role. It may be somewhat relevant to that which is in focus, but it is not directly related to it. The theme and the thematic field of the learner were thus coexistent with the broader context of the parents' own learning experiences in the past, as adults, adolescents and as children, in the margin of their awareness.

For example, one mother of seven children referred to how she had learned from her own mother, how she ought to spend quality time with her children. Home education had become the way she had put this idea into action.

> … but also that I had a good mother. So that made me think well this is a parallel there, to be a good example, and a good role model for your children to follow, just, you, can't downplay it. So my mother had time for me, she loved me, she went out of her way for me and made me feel special. She was a good example for me. I can at least be that to my children. (C1, 347–352)

Experiences in the parents' past, while not directly related to the thematised role immediately in focus, were nonetheless formative and thus contributive to the role of learner, by providing a temporal context, ranging back in time, to influence their present role.

Thus the margin of the learner's awareness lay deeper in the background of their awareness, beyond the thematic field. The margin provided the context for the

focussed theme and thematic field of the learner. While these backgrounded learning experiences were not directly related to their role as a home education learner, they did provide a contributing factor to their home education role of learner. Such backgrounded experiences also included the parents' experiences of learning while at school or other institutions of learning. These learning experiences contributed to their current capacity as parents, to be learners in the field of home education. The background of their awareness as a learner, as described in the thematic field and the margin of awareness, provided the context for their focussed role.

4.6.3 Dimensions of variation

The category of learner included three dimensions of variation which, while they appeared in other categories, had distinct characteristics for this category. Figure 12 illustrates these dimensions of variation and highlights the category of learner, in the outcome space.

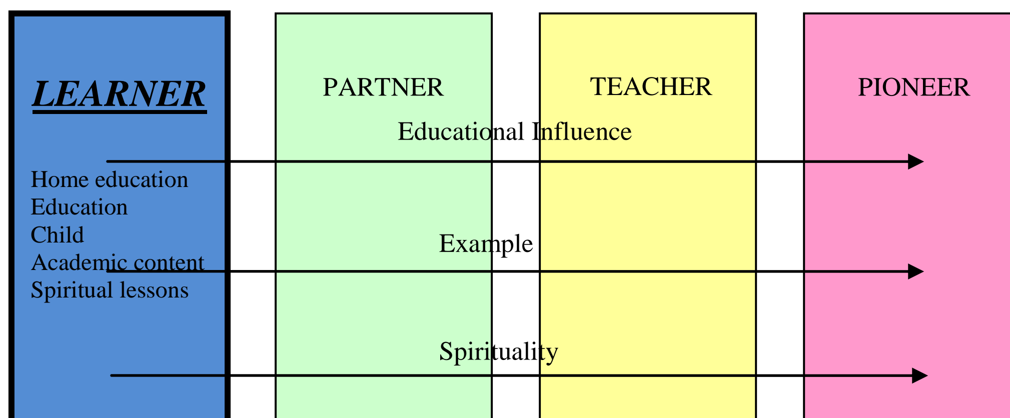

Figure 12: The category of Learner and the Dimensions of Variation.

4.6.3.1 Educational influence

The dimension of variation of educational influence for the role of learner was characterised by the personal development of the parent. As parents learned more about home education, education, their children, academic content and spiritual lessons, they brought influence to themselves via new knowledge and subsequently

changed themselves. They became influenced by their own learning of new things. This learning process enabled them to become both knowledgeable and equipped to be educators of their children. For the role of learner, this dimension of influence applied to the individual parents as they embraced new and deeper learning processes and new topics of learning. This educational influence made the parent the beneficiary of his or her own learning, in a process of change and personal development, as a home educator.

4.6.3.2 Example

The second dimension of variation is that of example. Home-educating parents saw themselves as examples to their children as learners. In the role of learner, the parent presented himself or herself to the child as an adult role model of being a learner. One couple decided to learn new skills in art and crafts so that their children would commence learning those skills. As a result of participating in this process of learning so that his children would learn, the father stated:

> We've discovered new things about ourselves … and explored whole new avenues that we probably would never have attempted. (C2, 255–260)

As a result of these parents' example of learning new skills in crafts, their daughters commenced learning various crafts including knitting, cross stitch and papier mache. The girls developed these skills to a level where they eventually entered their work in district craft competitions. Other instances of parents as examples of learners included to the learning of music and of spiritual lessons.

From the time prior to the commencement of home education and during the process of home educating, the parents were engaged as learners. This learning provided an example important to a home educational setting, as it could be argued that the example of the parent as a learner set a tone for the children's learning.

4.6.3.3 Spirituality

These parents also expressed a spiritual dimension as learners. One of the features of the learner's journey was its connection to spiritual beliefs. Spiritually motivated learners saw learning about spiritual matters as part of their spiritual life. Spirituality was part of their personal learning and development. Similarly, learning about their

children and about how they would educate their children was viewed by many parents as part of their religious duty or a spiritual activity.

4.7 Category 2: The home-educating parent as a Partner

In this category of description, home educators saw themselves in the role of partner. This role has both a referential and structural aspect, which in turn denotes the meaning of the role. Figure 13 indicates the category of partner in the diagram of the outcome space, highlighting the elements of the focused theme in this category.

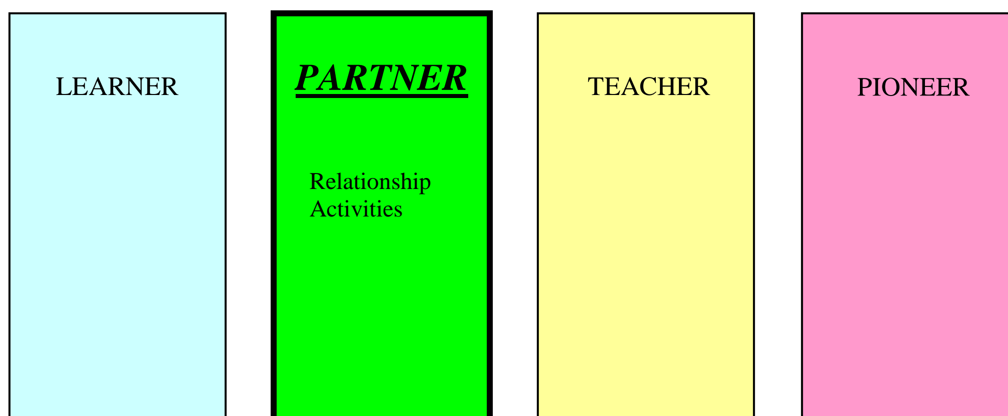

Figure 13: The category of Partner in the Outcome Space.

4.7.1 Category of Partner — Referential aspect

The category of partner describes how home-educating parents experienced their role as partners in education, with respect to their practice of home education. The referential aspect of this category of description is a description of the meaning of the role of partner. In this category, home educators saw themselves in an educational partnership, which created the relationship between the parents or with other significant adults, which facilitated their child's education. While the idea of a partnership is applicable to their marriages, in a general sense; in terms of this study and its data, the role of partner primarily applied to the working educational relationship between home-educating spouses, which in turn, does include their marriage relationship.

This educational partnership included both individual and shared roles. Each of the spouses in the partnership had individual tasks and responsibilities and as a couple they also shared some tasks and responsibilities. This educational partnership embodied a shared relational journey. During this journey, each spouse contributed knowledge, skills and resources that enabled home education to take place. They agreed upon what activities each would undertake and their commitment to those tasks. This partnership lasts as long as the parents home educate their children.

This role is about the creation and maintenance of a home-educating team. Unlike traditional education that is reliant upon centralised, government and non-government institutions, home education is usually built upon a familial partnership between husband and wife. This educational partnership is small enough to be flexible and to meet immediate and changing needs of family members, yet stable enough to work toward long-term educational goals for the future.

The partnership first involved both the self and how the self could contribute to the partnership, and second, it involved the other spouse or other significant adult educator and how they could combine in their shared educational endeavour. When focussed upon their roles as a partner, the parents' primary focus was not directly upon their other roles of learner, teacher or pioneer. These other roles were backgrounded and not in the focus of awareness; rather, these other roles were simultaneously co-existent in the background of their awareness. Seeing themselves as partners provided the means and the infrastructure upon which these parents based their family's educational experience.

The intention of the role of partner was to create a family infrastructure that would facilitate the family's home education practice. Each partner contributed to the educational partnership by bringing different knowledge, skills and resources to the partnership and agreeing to use them for the strengthening of the partnership. The development of this partnership was critical to creating and maintaining the family's home education experience.

4.7.2 Category of Partner — Structural aspect: Focus and background

In this section the structural aspect of the category of partner is described in terms of the theme, thematic field and margin of the partner's awareness. The theme of awareness is that which parents have in focus as they experience the role of partner. The thematic field and the margin of awareness are backgrounded during that experience. The structure of the partner's awareness is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 14.

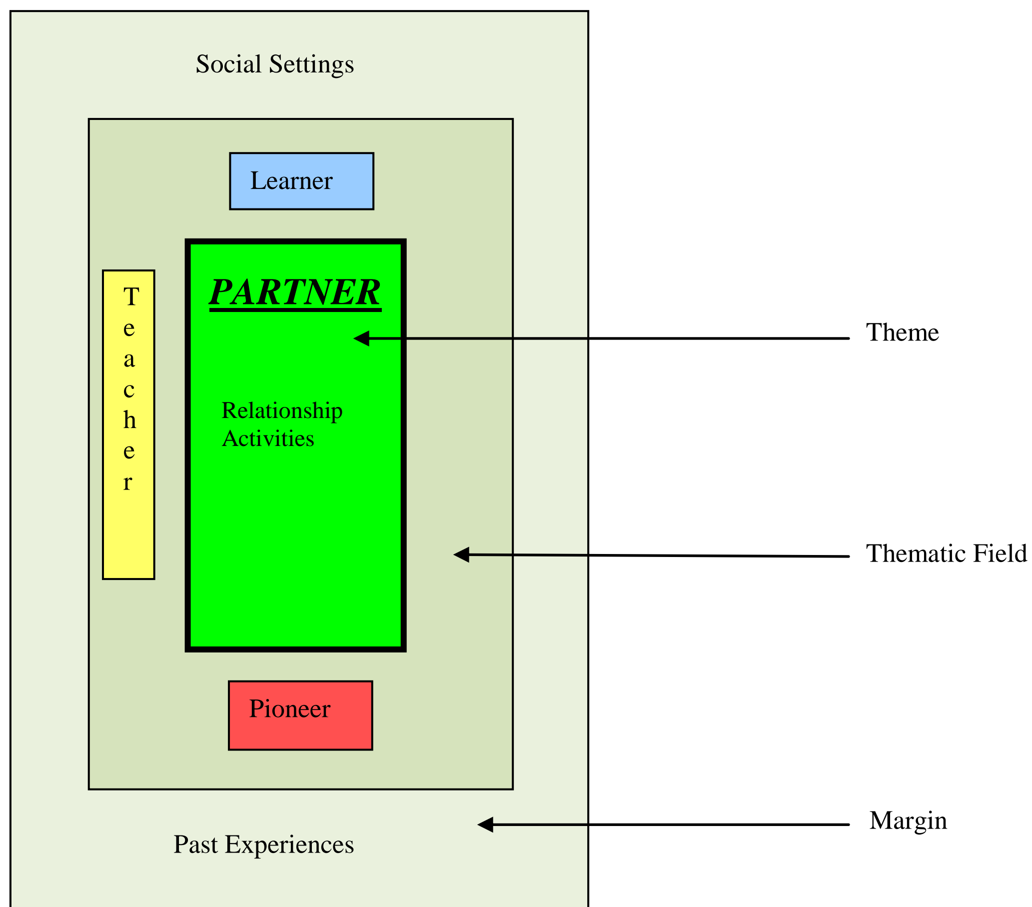

Figure 14: Structure of Awareness of the Partner.

4.7.2.1 Structural Aspect: Focus of the Partner's Role — The Theme

In the role of partner, the focus of the parents was upon the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the relationship of the educational partnership. As parents described their view of their role of partner, they referred to two elements of the role, which related to matters that were critical to their experience as a home educational

partner. These elements were: (1) the relationship between the partners in the partnership and (2) the activities that the partners carried out in order to educate their children. These elements were different aspects of the theme of this category of description. A detailed description of the theme of the role of partner, as organised by the elements of the theme follows.

4.7.2.1(1) The Partner's home education relationship

For the category of partner, the parent's focus was on their relationship as partners in their educational endeavour. Parents saw their relationship as being foundational to the successful operation of their educational program, with each partner having to perform different functions. Their relationship was seen as pivotal in facilitating their pedagogy.

The structure of the partnership was based on existing family relationships. Usually this involved a married couple. However, some families formed their educational partnerships based upon different relationships. Some parents drew upon their own parents for educational assistance because of their health limitations, or because they were a single parent family. Thus the pre existing family relationships became the basis for establishing educational partnerships.

One mother described her educational partnership this way:

> It's [home education] a family thing, and it starts with husband and wife … and the strength that I don't have, and there are many, my weaknesses, they're ahm, they're overcome largely by his strengths that he adds in. That's Stephen. But it's as we work together, you know, we can sort of compensate for each other's strengths and weaknesses. (I1 – 537–542)

Another mother, having home educated her two sons for nine years, described her partnership with her husband, and placed a particular emphasis upon the importance of academic achievement as a goal of their educational partnership, stating, "But we saw it as a partnership, like that. But it was mainly about giving them a high standard of literacy and numeracy. I think that would be my summation of it" (I12, 28–30).

A father of seven children described his educational partnership as being a loving mutually supportive relationship with his wife. He saw that in this relationship each of them brought different functions to their home education.

> … a picture of the husband and wife loving one another, enjoying one another, supporting one another in the, you know, different functions. You know there's likely an equalness there, but there's a different function. (C1, 309–311)

Another father, who had been home educating their four children for 12 years, described how he and his wife made decisions about the costs and benefits of commencing home education. They decided that they would agree as to how they would commit the time and resources of their family to home education.

> We've said, "All right, this is going to sacrifice our time, our energy and the things that we are capable of doing, if we want to do this the way we want to do it". But it hasn't been something we've lost in, we've only gained from it. (C6, 873–876)

In terms of the structure of their relationship, most couples saw the husband as the overall leader in the home, having the responsibility for the direction that the family would take; while the wife was often seen as being a support to her husband and a facilitator of shared family goals. Several described this aspect of their relationship, using traditional schooling terms such as the husband being like a school principal and the wife being like a head teacher. One mother of two teenage girls, described the relational aspect of her educational partnership with her husband this way:

> Like Phil's the head, but I've got to back him up because I am with the girls all day … I sort of, I suppose put it into practice, whereas Phil can say it and can lead it, but I actually get to do it on a day-to-day basis, because I am with the girls all the time, whereas he's not. (C2, 24–25; 27–29)

In similar manner, a father described his educational partnership with his wife, comparing it to administrative and teaching roles in a traditional school:

> Oh I'm just a coordinator and a supervisor. Together we're a team just like in the school, you've got a teacher and somebody who does the coalface work. And if Paula is sick or something, I can just take it on because we work together. (I5, 298–300).

These parents often compared their educational partnership to the relational structure of staff in schools when describing how they must cooperate in planning, decision making and the administration of their education at home. However, because of the fact that these parents were usually married and their students were their children, their educational partnership was based upon much closer relational ties than the relationships within schools.

It was notable that the husband and wife relationship was often seen as distinct from, but integrated with, the corresponding mother and father relationship. The husband and wife relationship was much about leadership and decision making in the educational partnership, whereas the mother and father relationship was more about the parent to child relationship as experienced in the family's expression of pedagogy. Both the marital (husband–wife) relationship and the parenting (parent–child) relationship were characterised by different elements that enabled families to practice home education. A co-operative marital relationship was seen to be necessary to facilitate and enhance the home education experience, whereas a fractured marital relationship could make the home education experience more difficult to manage.

One father, a home educator for 14 years, described his marital relationship and the parenting relationship he and his wife experienced with their children, as being foundational to their educational experience. Rather than using a schooling metaphor, he simply described their partnership in family-based terms.

> But it's just so much better if Mum and Dad are there, you know and supporting them. I don't know, I suppose it sounds very traditional, but I feel that my role in the Christian home schooling was just to complete the circle. It was something that we did as a husband and wife. It was something we did as a mother and a father. It was something that we did to make the family a complete unit. (I3, 61–66)

One family had involved the children's grandparents in this educational partnership. Thus the partnership comprised of the two parents and the two grandparents.The grandparents were the primary educators of their grandchildren because the mother of the children had a chronic illness and was unable to sustain a consistent educational input. This family had combined their resources in order to build a large house on several hectares, which housed four generations of their family. The children's grandparents were experienced home educators. They had previously home educated their own four children, and were now home educating two of their grandchildren. The grandparents were alert to limiting their roles as grandparents and teachers. They were aware about not overplaying their educational roles and usurping the relationship between the children and their biological parents. The grandfather described some of the similarities and differences between home educating as a parent and home educating as a grandparent.

> Grandfather: I'd say more similarities than differences. See the child, as a grandchild, they'll love and respect you as grandparents. And we don't want to take the role of parents. We still have to instil in them the fact that they are … the role of parents, whichever way, whatever they may do or accomplish or whatever, our role as a teacher/grandparent is still really just a teacher. But you have a totally different span. (C4, 392–396)

This family's intergenerational relationship had added an extra layer of parenting to the home educational partnership. Because of the mother's serious health problems, the family had shaped a different model of the home education partnership to the traditional one, by including the grandparents in order to meet their educational needs.

In single-parent families, there was no dividing of the roles of leader and support between two spouses. Both roles fell to the custodial parent. The inability to share responsibilities with a spouse placed a greater responsibility upon the single home educating parent, given that such responsibility would have normally been shared by two parents in a dual-parent home educating family. Thus single parent home educators do not have the benefit of a spouse as an educational partner. The various partner roles which most dual parent home educators allocated to each other, must be embraced as much as is possible, by the single parent home educators. This places a greater burden upon the single parent home educator, who has no spouse to give assistance and share tasks and responsibilities.

One single parent had home educated her 11-year-old son John, for one year. John has Asperger's syndrome. He has difficulty with normal social functioning. John's mother shared some aspects of that responsibility with her parents. Her parents were her educational partners. She described how on a fishing day her son had difficulty understanding her father's sense of humour.

> We took John fishing and mum asked me if I had worn my dressing gown yet and at the same time Grandpa said, had we been fishing? and as a joke Grandpa said did you wear your dressing gown fishing, did mum wear her dressing gown fishing? And John thought about it so hard, that he came to the conclusion that fishing was boring, that I needed to wear my dressing gown 'cause I'd fall asleep. And he didn't understand that two questions had been thrown at us, so Grandpa had decided to put them together and make a joke out of it. He needed to find the reason for it. (C1, 268–275)

Even though she did not have a spouse with whom to share her educational responsibilities, this single mother was able to function well as a home educator.

Single parent home educators are sometimes able to draw upon partnering resources from their extended families and their wider social networks. In this instance, the mother was drawing upon her parents for assistance with her son's education, and upon her son for assistance with the domestic care of her daughter.

One mother in a dual parent family described her educational partnership, but in doing so, contrasted home education in a shared partnership with the responsibility of home educating alone as a single parent, in this way:

> And one of the things that I'm truly, truly blessed in, is that I have a really wonderful husband, as I said, that, one other time, I do a large amount of the academic side of it myself. But Sam [her husband] still contributes, but to have that support and to have that firm backing, is just, that's just wonderful. I take my hat off to single mums and dads who are home schooling. You know, to do it by yourself, without that … but to be single and not have that, you know, sounding relationship to start with. You know where you can sort of bounce off each other and just have that support and encouragement that's readily available, that would be very difficult. (I1, 527–531; 532–534)

Whether the family educational partnership was between dual parents, single parents or intergenerational, the role of partner was based upon familial relationship. These relational aspects within a home-educating partnership facilitated the educational activities that charactise home educational practice.

4.7.2.1(2) The Partner's home education activities

Home-educating parents embraced particular activities in order to facilitate their home educational experience. The most obvious features of their functioning were the (1) accessing of financial resources (usually through employment), (2) pedagogical activity and (3) domestic support. Whilst these features do also simultaneously intertwine with other roles, they are highlighted here because of their link to the role of partner.

The financial viability of the home-educating family usually saw the husband as the primary income earner, while the wife was most often the one engaged full time in pedagogical activities, rather than contributing a financial income. The key factor in the financial viability of the family was that most couples had made the decision to become a single-income family in order to home educate their children. In some families, however, parents chose to share the responsibility of earning the family

income. Seventy per cent of families in this study's initial sample declared that the main formal educator was not in paid employment, while 24% indicated that the main formal educator had part-time paid employment. Thus the financial viability of the family, rested largely upon the parent who was not the main formal educator. This was usually the father. Similarly, the educational viability of the family rested largely upon the parent who spent the majority of the time with the children. This was usually the mother. This allocation of the tasks of deriving an income and of being the full time educator was one of the most predominant characteristics of the home educators' partnership.

Single parent families were particularly challenged financially, as the responsibility of generating the family income as well as the responsibility for pedagogical and other duties fell to the lone parent. Inevitably, this left the single parent family in a lower socio-economic bracket.

In terms of pedagogy, the wife usually assumed the majority of the educational functioning, with the husband usually taking the secondary or support role. While both partners usually claimed to play differing pedagogical roles, it was the wife who most often took on the majority of formal teaching. It was clear, however, that the husband also took an active role in the pedagogy, usually by his complementing what the wife did not or could not do. Some of these activities included music, science or building projects. The nature of these activities usually depended upon the knowledge and skills of the parent in question.

Other families shared both the formal education and the income earning responsibilities between husband and wife. A home-educating mother with ten years experience described how she and her husband shared both the pedagogical and the financial responsibilities.

> And by the time Elise started Grade 1 with ACE, I had been offered 20 hours [of paid employment] a week and we needed that, because we were struggling financially, so we decided we would educate Elise together. So Len [her husband] took on the morning where they would do a lot of work, I would do one PACE [a unit of academic work] in the afternoon, after I got home from work. (C7, 87–91)

Another mother who had been home educating for 15 years described how her husband contributed to the pedagogy after work.

> Like I could have them doing some work in the day and Paul (*her husband*) came home at night, he could then maybe do with them, maybe a bit of science and maths with them at night. (C3, 303–305)

Couples reported that they would support each other with regard to consistency of family management and the discipline of their children. One mother described how she and her husband mutually supported each other in sharing the responsibility for discipline in the family.

> Well we have to do that [share disciplinary matters] because he is not there during the day. He does, yeah, he oversees, ah if they've had to have discipline during the day, and ahm, you know, we share about it at night time and so the child knows that dad knows, and [laughs] ahm and he'll go from there, that it was necessary and why it happened and just reassure them that we love them and that sort of thing. (I 10, 223–227)

Parents found various strategic means of supporting one another. One father, who had been a home educator for 12 years, saw one of his roles as providing a change of family climate most days. He saw an important part of his role was to deliberately inject a fun element into the home environment upon his return home from work. For the children, this would provide a contrast to the more academic focus his wife had created during the day. However, this recreational aspect of the father's home-educating experience also made a valuable contribution to the couple's educational partnership, which directly affected his wife. When he engaged his children in light-hearted activities, this provided his wife with a much-needed break after spending all day with the children.

> When I come home, and it may be because I have come home so I'm not as familiar, but I'm more the fun element to the kids … but, I think that's important, to come home, and to give Holly [his wife] a break, and really play with the kids. (C6, 467–468, 473–474)

These parents saw that each spouse provided their family's educational partnership with different advantages and functions.

Thus, in terms of an educational partnership, home-educating parents saw themselves as combining (1) the attributes of their relationships as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and grandparents and (2) their functional activities, whether they were financial, educational, decision-making or in support of each other.

This partnering relationship was the basis for the family infrastructure that enabled the family to operate as an educating unit. The infrastructure of the educational partnership was usually based upon the relationship between the mother and the father. Their relationship determined their ability to work collaboratively towards the family's educational activities. Thus the relationship between the parents and the functioning of their home-educating partnership was interdependent and determined the educational activities, and the means by which the family operated.

When couples were interviewed, they referred to themselves in the role of partner. A brief description of how couples viewed their experiences of that role follows.

4.7.2.1(3) Partner — Insights from the couple interviews

The responses from the couple interviews are integrated into the above focus or theme of the partner role. However, as indicated in Chapter three, there were some distinctives that emerged from the interviews when subjects referred to "we" in the role of partner, which are worth mentioning briefly as they demonstrate the value of interviewing couples as well as individuals.

In the role of partner, couple respondents expressed many shared roles and experiences. In summary, couples referred to being united in their commitment to articulating their values, establishing home education as their family's pedagogy, being initially frightened of the responsibility involved in home education, their combined decision making processes, the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, their acceptance of a lower financial status, and the challenges of the behaviour management of their children. As couples, they also expressed how they worked to maintain their relationship with each other, how home education is very demanding, how they have to laugh at their vulnerabilities and that they realised that their time spent with their children is limited and thus extremely valuable. They saw their responsibility to their children was to do the very best for them, and also that they had a responsibility to the community to raise good citizens. These couple-focussed experiences of the role of partner presented variation which enriched the data set of that role.

Having described what was in focus, it is now appropriate to look at the context of the focussed theme. When home educators hold the role of partner as the theme in the focus of their awareness, it is important to realise that their experience of that role did not occur in isolation. It as embedded in a context or a background, known to phenomenographers as the thematic field and the margin of awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). These will be described in the next section.

4.7.2.2 Structural Aspect: Background of the Partner's Role — The Thematic Field

The thematic field of a person's awareness includes that which is directly relevant to the theme or focus of awareness, but which is not in focus (Cope, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997). It is the immediate context that surrounds what the person has in the focus of awareness, at that time. When the home educators were aware of themselves in the role of partner, they experienced this role in the wider context of their home education parenting experience. This context included their other three parent roles of learner, teacher and pioneer. Thus, when the role of partner was in focus, the other three roles of learner, teacher and pioneer receded to the background of the parents' awareness, to the thematic field of their awareness. The other backgrounded roles provided a setting for the role that was currently in focus. Thus, a parent who was experiencing the role of partner may have realised that his or her partnering experience would be set in the context of their learning, teaching or pioneering roles. The parent's focus upon being a partner was set in the wider home educational context of the thematic field, which included being a learner, teacher or pioneer.

By way of example, one mother in a blended family described her home educational partnership with her husband. As she described the partnership, she referred to how it facilitated their teacher's role, which included extra-curricular activities and the discipline of the children. She described her focussed role of partner using a different role, that of teacher, as a context for that description.

> So we saw it as a partnership. I did the day to day stuff and my husband was like the back up. Both in, he was the fun parent for extra-curricular activities but he was also the heavy weight balance when there was extra discipline needed. But we saw it as a partnership, like that. (C12, 25–28)

The thematic field of a partner was contextualised by the other three parent roles that were coexistent with the theme or focussed role. As parents experienced their role as partner, the other three roles receded to the background of the parents' awareness in the thematic field. However, beyond the thematic field of awareness lay a broader and more general context of a parent's awareness in the margin of the person's awareness.

4.7.2.3 Structural Aspect: Background of the Partner's Role — The Margin

The margin of a person's awareness provides a wider, backgrounded context to that which is in focus, than that of the thematic field. It is much broader than the theme and the thematic field. The margin of awareness coexists with the theme in focus and the thematic field of the role. It may be somewhat relevant to that which is in focus, but it is not directly related to it. The theme and the thematic field of the partner were thus coexistent with the broader context of the parents' own experiences of marriage and cooperation, in the margin of their awareness.

For the role of partner, the margin consisted of the wide context of the parents' experience of marriage. This experience was not limited to their own marriages; it also included what they had experienced in their own parents' marriage. The margin also included what the parents saw as a good marriage, from a theoretical perspective. Further, the context of their partnership coexisted with the assumptions and expectations from within their wider community. These included assumptions such as home educators may be overprotective of their children and an expectation that most households should be dual income households, and that the role of an unpaid full time home-educating parent may be seen as unproductive. Thus, the parents' experience of marriage, their theoretical knowledge of an ideal of marriage and their perceived community expectations inhabit the margin of their awareness as they experience the role of partner.

A father referred to his theoretical idea of what a marriage should look like as a background to describing how he and his wife operated in their educational partnership. This idea was based upon his understanding of marriage from a religious perspective.

> 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. … And they [their children] get to see a little bit about Christ and His church, in the family environment with husband and wife. And ahm, so that's basically, you know, that the husband loves his wife, as Christ loved the church, and as you go through the Scriptures you'll know that, what it's all about. And that's what you've got to present. You've got to present that to your children, because that's what glorifies God. And that's really, hard for some people to understand, but [*laughs*] it's a biblical pattern of what life and family, husband and wife, marriage is really all about. And that's, we're just, we're just, reproducing and reproducing, you know, the function of the wife and mother, the function of the husband and the father. (C1, 309–320)

One mother referred to her childhood experience of family dysfunction and her grandparents' marital problem, which negatively affected her and subsequently, the early years of her own marriage. This formed the context for her resolve to improve her marriage relationship, which, in turn, backgrounded the educational partnership that she now shares with her husband.

> We come from quite a dysfunctional family. And I've done a lot of reading and healing since my early twenties, to overcome emotional pain and emotional, yeah, scarring. And just going through the healing recovery and healing and growing as a person. Because, my parents tried to do their best with what they could, my mother comes from a divorced home and so it was a, they loved me very much, but still I come off as an adult quite ahm incomplete, emotionally I think, and so that kind of caused problems at the beginning when we were married because I was expecting him to fulfil me emotionally, whereas it didn't work like that. … Like please there are many examples. I mean, my parents were extremely controlling people and they wanted me to, they wouldn't allow me to express my feelings. … So obviously we are trying not to do that that way, because my parents were like that, so I'm really trying, well we both are trying to, well especially me because that was more my part, so I'm talking about me. (C6, 92–99; 123–124; 128–130)

These examples of theoretical beliefs and previous experiences of family relationships formed some of the context for parents creating their own educational partnerships.

Parents were also aware that there was a common expectation in their communities that most families should have both parents in paid employment. Paid employment provides a second income for many Australian families. However, the parents in this study typically, had only one income or two part time incomes on which to live, so that they could have one parent involved in the full time education of their children. These families were well aware that their educational choice had allocated them to live in a lower socioeconomic level than most families in their communities. The

partnership of home-educating couples usually looked very different, economically, from that of non home-educating couples.

This partnership distinctive brought with it, social pressure as well as economic pressure. Participants indicated that the idea of a mother staying at home full time, to educate the children, often attracted misunderstanding or disapproval from members of their communities, who expected that both partners in a marriage should be employed in the paid work force. This social expectation upon the parent who did not earn an income was seen as being difficult to deal with, emotionally. Home-educating parents took the view that paid employment was not the only way to contribute positively to their communities, and that theirs was an important contribution to society that was not always acknowledged in the wider community. The background of the parents' awareness as a partner, as described in the thematic field and the margin of awareness, provided a broad context for their focussed role.

4.7.3 Dimensions of variation

The category of partner included three dimensions of variation, which while they appeared in other categories, had distinct characteristics for this category. Figure 15 illustrates these dimensions of variation and highlights the category of partner, in the outcome space.

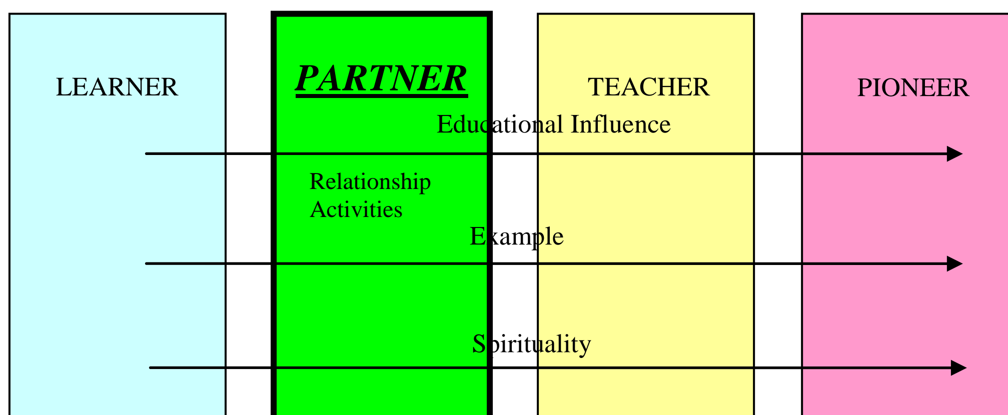

Figure 15: The category of Partner and the Dimensions of Variation.

4.7.3.1 Educational influence

Educational influence as a dimension of variation in this category occured as the parent influenced his or her spouse by informing, discussing with, consulting with, agreeing with, supporting and relying upon him or her. This relationship established the family infrastructure for decision-making, team-teaching and mutual support. One father referred to how his wife influenced him to agree to commence home education:

> I suppose, being the husband, I had sufficient nous to listen to what my wife was saying, to listen to what she was saying, because that was coming out of her perception as the mother in the marriage. And it [the decision to home educate] was a little bit of a snowball from there. (I9, 28–30)

This dimension of influence applied to each partner in the partnership. A partner could influence himself or herself as to how they behaved in the partnership. This was clearly illustrated by the cooperative attitude and the roles that respondents had adopted within the home education partnership. However, this dimension varied with the dimension of influence in the prior category of description, as this influence was not only directed to oneself to create personal change and embrace personal tasks, it was also directed to one's spouse in the creation and maintenance of the couple's educational partnership. Influence directed toward the spouse in the partnership was actioned by discussion, consultation and decision-making between partners in the educational partnership. In this way, the influence was a two-way influence, as either partner could influence the other spouse and thus influence the working partnership. Thus, the dimension of influence shaped both partners in the educational partnership and it shaped the partnership itself.

4.7.3.2 Example

The dimension of example also applied to home educators in the role of partner. As a partner, these parents saw themselves as examples to their children, of cooperation between individuals, in order to achieve a task. They also exemplified to their children both a model for marriage and a possible educational model. One father described it this way:

> Now we're giving [to their children] a picture of the husband and wife in loving one another, enjoying one another, supporting one another in the, you know, different functions. (C1, 309–310)

The dimension of example in this category of partner differed from the dimension of example in the previous category, in that the partnership was the example, rather than the individual learner. Both spouses and any other significant adult in this educational partnership provided an example of people cooperating in order to achieve a goal. More specifically, the parents saw themselves as providing a model of marriage to their children.

4.7.3.3 Spirituality

The dimension of spirituality in the role of partner was also clearly indicated. Parents often spoke about spiritual factors that couples experienced in their educational partnership. These factors included spiritual issues that affected their decision-making, their agreement as to family values and ongoing family lifestyle decisions. One father, referred to how he and his wife have had a shared spiritual experience as home educators, saying, "That's an indirect thing, that home schooling, it's increased our faith" (C6, 836), as he referred to various ways that their home educational experience facilitated their learning of spiritual lessons. A mother indicated how she and her husband had grown both spiritually and as parents: "We have grown into maturity, not only in our parenting, with different situations that come up, but also in our Christian walk" (I10, 106–107).

While dimension of spirituality in the category of learner featured the individual parent, in this category of partner, the dimension of spirituality also affected the couple, who shared common values and sought to grow as a couple, in the context of those values. The dimension of spirituality for the educational partnership of home educators incorporated a shared experience for each couple.

4.8 Category 3: The home-educating parent as a Teacher

In this category of description, home educators saw themselves in the role of teacher. This role has both a referential and a structural aspect, which in turn denotes the meaning of the role. Figure 16 indicates the category of teacher in the diagram of the outcome space, highlighting the elements of the focused theme in this category.

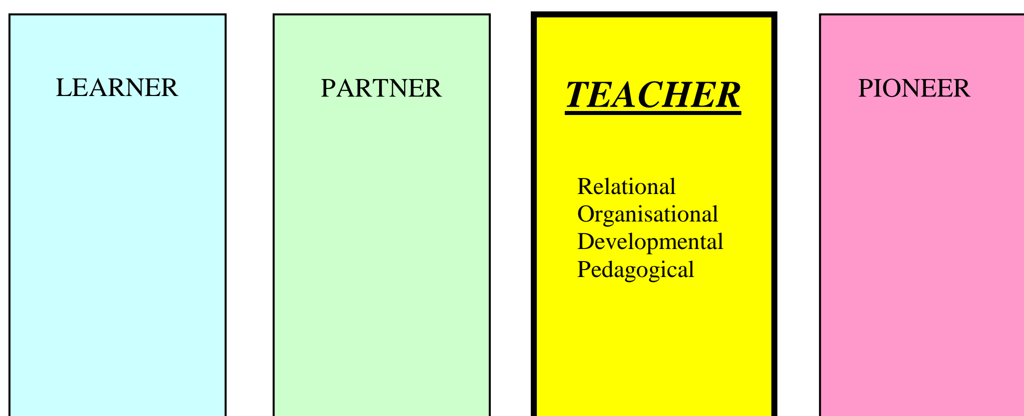

Figure 16: The category of Teacher in the Outcome Space.

4.8.1 Category of Teacher — Referential aspect

The category of teacher described how home-educating parents experienced their role as teachers, with respect to their practice of home education. The referential aspect of this category of description is a description of the meaning of the role of teacher. In this category, home educators saw themselves in the role that is considered as foundational to the phenomenon of home education. Seeing themselves as teachers was the central feature of the home educator's educational experience with their children. The home education movement and the practice of home education are predicated on the rationale that parents are teachers. This role is primarily about the parent teaching his or her children a particular suite of knowledge and skills, including the pedagogical aspects of the family's educational experience. Not restricted to mere delivery of academic content, this role is characterised by the parents' many and varied formal and informal experiences of teaching their children.

In this category, the focus of the parent was on their experiences of teaching their children. The focus was not on the parents' other roles of learner, partner or pioneer.

These other roles, while co-existing simultaneously with the role of teacher, were backgrounded as the parents highlight how they see their experiences as a home educator, in that role.

4.8.2 Category of Teacher — Structural aspect: Focus and background

In this section the structural aspect of the category of teacher will be described in terms of the theme, thematic field and margin of the teacher's awareness. The theme of awareness is that which parents had in focus as they experienced the role of teacher. The thematic field and the margin of awareness were backgrounded during that experience. The structure of the teacher's awareness is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 17.

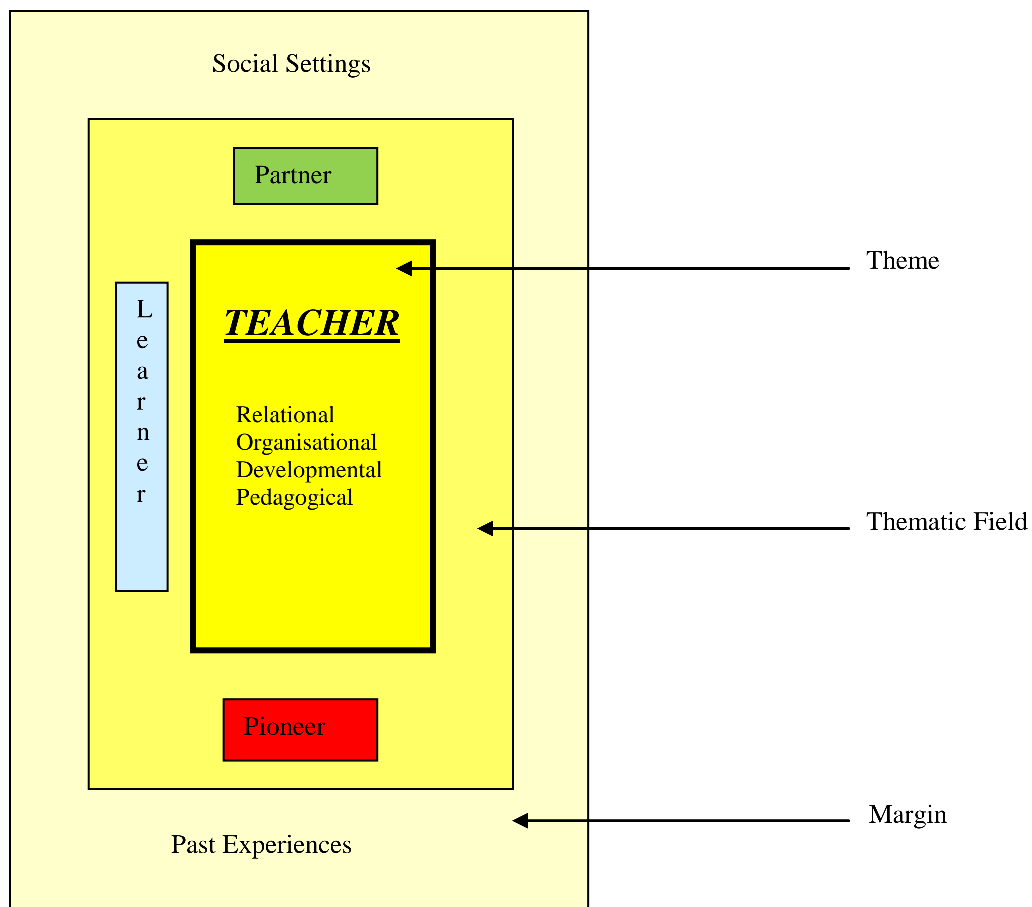

Figure 17: Structure of Awareness of Teacher.

4.8.2.1 Structural aspect: Focus of the Teacher's role — The Theme

The purpose of the home educator's experience as a teacher was the facilitation of the learning and development of the child. This learning included, but was not limited to, academic knowledge. It also included learning about life and how to live.

As parents described their view of their role as teachers, they referred to the following elements of that role: (1) the relationship between the parent and the child, (2) the organisational aspect of being a home educator, (3) facilitating the development of the child and (4) the pedagogical aspect of being a teacher. These elements are different aspects of the theme of this category of description. A detailed description of the theme of the role of teacher, as organised by the elements of this focussed theme follows.

4.8.2.1(1) The role of Teacher — Relational aspect

The relational element of the role of teacher referred to the way these parents viewed their familial relationships as being foundational to the quality of their teaching experiences. The relationship between the parent and the child was an important key to the role of teacher. These relationships were typically that of mother and father to the child, but were occasionally grandmother and grandfather to the grandchild.

These parents saw that their biological relationship with their children had generated a unique teaching role in a way that could not be replicated by another adult. Effectively, home education had allowed these parents to extend and enhance their parenting experience beyond that of non-home-educating parents. Like all parents, they had a vested interest in their child's wellbeing; however, they differed from the rest of the community by choosing to take the responsibility to teach their own children by committing a greater amount of their own time and energy to the task. A mother described how she saw this relational vested interest, emphasising that her teaching role with her children was far more comprehensive and relationally based than the teacher–student role typically found in traditional schooling. She emphasised the educational value of the parent child relationship; that the mother has a stronger bond with a child, and a stronger desire than a teacher to see her child succeed and that this was motivated by motherly love.

> Mother: Because ahm [deep sigh] our relationship is totally different well, with the child is totally different to a schoolteacher and a child's relationship. Because we have such a stronger bond, and we have such a stronger desire to see them achieve, haven't we, as parents?
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean, by "our relationship"?
>
> Mother: Well, that's a big one. How we interact, how we ahm, communicate, how we respond one to another. … Well, because I am his mother, I love him dearly. I love him more than probably anybody else apart from his father and certainly, God before us, but, I mean, a teacher, whilst they may develop an affection for the child, never has that motherly love for the child, so it doesn't have the same, real yearning for them to do the best that they can, to do, to become all that they can be.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Mother: So that's the motivation, isn't it? That's the motivation as a home-schooling mum, parent.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, so the relationship is a very important aspect of your functioning?
>
> Mother: But, well, it's the beginning point, isn't it? It's why we home school in the first place. Oh, no, [pause] yes it is. It's because of our love for them and our love to do what we believe God has instructed us to do. … So it is because of those relationships that we do, [pause] we are home schooling parents. (I1, 255–263; 277–286; 315–322)

Parents often stated that their role was to provide love to their children. This same mother summarised this relational aspect of her role as a teacher, with a statement that intertwined education with a loving relationship, in this way: "I'm the educator, and I guess, just to show love." and "We give love to them" (I13, 347, 365).

A father described the importance of his familial relationships to the family's educational activities in this way:

> Well, often just being there, as the father, being there is showing an interest. … It's reaffirming to them that what they are doing is not just something that ahm they are doing out of ahm, I don't know quite how to put it, but, when somebody is supporting you, it means that they are like-minded. Ahm when I go and share things with them … I don't know, I suppose it sounds very traditional, but I feel that my role in the Christian home schooling was just to complete the circle. It was something that we did as a husband and wife. It was something we did as a mother and a father. It was something that we did to make the family a complete unit. And that's what homeschooling is about. (I3, 20; 39–42; 65–66)

Another mother, having home schooled her seven children for thirteen years, described her views on the importance of the role of her husband in the enhancement of her children's learning opportunities.

> I just think that that's what I see as my goal as being a father and I know I just thought that, because we home school, you have far greater opportunities to put all those things into practice that you want to, because you are not only a father, but you are a home school father. So you just have that opportunity. It's so much greater and intensified. And probably, speeds up the process (*of learning*), a little. (C1, 23–27)

Further, she viewed her teaching role as an integral part of her experience of motherhood. She felt that all mothers are teachers and that home education simply enhanced her teaching role.

> But the first one I'd like to make is, I was saying my role as a mum that, to me, takes in being a teacher, because I believe every mum is a teacher of their children, right from day one, of course. You're teaching them little things you don't realise. Someone said actually, at the camp on the weekend, "So what curriculum did you use to teach your children to speak?" You don't do you? You just teach them to talk. … I know we are leaning towards being a home schooling mum, a teacher to your children. So I said my role was to be a consistent stabilising influence. I think that's the greatest thing they need. And you can go on and on. I could make a great list, but I think to be a consistent, stabilising influence. And by that I mean, I wrote a few examples.
>
> When they have questions, I help them find answers. When they are distracted, I refocus them. When they are worried, I reassure them. When they achieve, I congratulate them. When they want to explain something, I listen. When they are excited, I'm happy for them.
>
> To be that consistent, stabilising influence I have to be there for them; physically present, mentally available, spiritually ready, willingly approachable, cheerfully enthusiastic, utterly devoted. (C1, 117–121; 123–134; 404–410)

This mother's view was that the parent-child relationship incorporated an inherent teaching role and that home education allowed her to take advantage of it.

Some parents saw themselves as being a companion to their children, thus developing their relationship. One mother spoke about her and her husband being with the children, constantly. "You take them with you. They are always with you … yeah; he [the child] always follows Preston [the home-educating grandfather] around" (C4, 247, 250). This aspect of the [grand] parent child relationship was an expression of a mutually enjoyable companionship. As children spent extended times

with their parents, they grew their relationship. Another mother referred to the amount of time she spent with her children and how she enjoys that relationship:

> So it's not just a nine till three thing that they do at school, it's all the time … at the moment, it's just about being there with the children. Ahm, like I said, I took the children on and that's what it is. I absolutely love being there with them all the time. (I6, 387–388, 403–405)

These parents viewed their relationship with their children as being foundational to their experience as teachers. Their relationship was based upon their biological, emotional and familial connection. They saw that their parent-child relationship was much stronger than the relationship between a schoolteacher and student, and that this relationship gave them and their children an educational advantage.

4.8.2.1(2) The role of Teacher — The organisational aspect

The organisational aspect of the role of teacher refers to the way in which home-educating parents provided the opportunities and infrastructure for their children's education to take place. Initiating and maintaining any long term teaching and learning environment requires much organisation and establishment of infrastructure. The organisational aspect of being a home-educating parent focussed upon (1) organising the family's home environment to be suitable for the child's learning, and (2) organising the family's pedagogy.

4.8.2.1(3) Organising the home environment

Organising the family routines included many aspects of ensuring stability in the home. Pivotal to the enterprise was the parents' desire to home educate. It was then incumbent upon them to provide and thus organise a suitable environment that would be conducive to learning. One aspect of the parents' role important to organising and establishing a full-time learning environment included providing a stable life and family unity. One father summarised this organisational aspect of his role as providing "a harmonious environment, and a stable and safe environment for my family to work in" (C5, 14).

Parents emphasised their commitment to family unity. This meant bringing the family together as much as practicable to live and work together, in order to create

their desired educational context. One couple described how they had intentionally sought to organise the family so as to achieve this type of family unity. The mother saw that home education had provided for family unity in a way that traditional schooling could not. She described how she saw the traditional school system separate her from her children and her children from each other during the school day. This was despite her best efforts to be involved in her children's education in a school where her husband was the principal.

> When we took them to school, ahm, I'd be going to three different directions, with teachers telling me what I had to do for the rest of the day, basically. You know, tuck shop and reading and excursions and all of that sort of thing. And so they were all going off in their different directions. And I kind of thought, I don't want to do this for the next twelve to fifteen years. … I really wasn't content with the routine of school, pulling us apart and pulling us in all different directions. (I10, 41–45; 49–50)

She went on to say that home education allowed her to "keep the family a family, instead of being ahm, fractured, in different classrooms and different areas of their lives" (I1, 10). She felt that home education had allowed her family to experience a new sense of unity, describing it this way: "We grew into a close knit family because the family wasn't fractured going off to school and going different places, so we became closer" (I10, 18–20). Her husband described how their commencing home education was instrumental in reunifying his family.

> Everything gets, generally is less fragmented … that fragmentation disappears, and there's a reunification process happens. It happened to us, so that Les [a son] said to us after a month or so [of home education], that something like, 'Peter is my brother and I've been living with him for the past eleven years, and I'm just getting to know him' … And I put that down to the fragmentation of the family [due to schooling]. They weren't really having relationship. They might have been living in the same house with the same parents, but brother to brother, there was no sibling relationship. … So there was a reunification happening. (I9, 109, 111–118, 120)

The parents stated that their children needed an environment conducive to their children's learning and development and that it was their responsibility to organise it and to provide it. One father who had been home educating his three children with his wife for 15 years, described it this way:

> The role was providing for her [his daughter] an environment that was conducive to the way so that she could operate properly; and she needed something that was more relaxing. (C3, 249–251)

Having seen how certain elements of their children's school environment were detrimental to their academic learning, both he and his wife gave their views on what elements were necessary for them, in order to establish a good educational environment in their home, which would be conducive to their children's learning. The elements that they saw as necessary for a good learning environment included: a peaceful atmosphere with little stress; an emotionally healthy environment; a learning context where the child had some control of learning; a safe environment, free from bullying; a loving, caring and nurturing environment; and the provision of appropriate physical facilities and resources. They believed that removing their child from an emotionally damaging environment at school, which they perceived had caused stress and illness in their child, was just as important as providing a positive learning environment. They made the following comments about the importance of providing a healthy environment for the nurturing of the child.

> Mother: Interestingly enough, within a few days [of commencing home education], we took on the role as, active in the role as nurturers and protectors; we took her away from the stressful situation [in school]. We suddenly found we had a healthy, happy child again. (C3, 201–203)

> Father: The role of creating an emotional situation where a child can feel comfortable, happy and then learn. … And why would anyone want to stay somewhere where he felt uncomfortable? I mean you'd be stupid to stay there. (C3, 313–314, 324–325)

A major organisational issue for these families was their financial resourcing. While it is mentioned elsewhere among the dimensions of variation, it is also an important organisational part of the teacher role. Organising the division of labour and, in particular, the financial resourcing home education was critical to how a family would achieve its educational objective. This sample of home educators reflected the same financial status as do the majority of home educators, in that most of them are single income families. They had foregone the opportunity for the family to have two incomes, so that one parent could dedicate their attention to the full time education of the children. Two fathers, made the following comments about the importance of their role of providing sufficient financial support in order to facilitate their children's education.

> Father #1: Also to have generated enough income in the things I do to give options. So we can actually take Daniel out and do different things and visits to places of learning. (C5, 15–16)

> Father #2: my role also is to provide for their needs, to be a provider. (C1, 12–13)

The most obvious financial consequence of their choice to home educate was that most home-educating families operated at a lower socio-economic level than most dual income Australian families and many mentioned that, for them, it was a financial sacrifice. Another father elaborated about how he and his wife's choice to home educate was a financial sacrifice that assigned their family to a lower income level, as a single income family:

> You do make sacrifices when you choose to home school. Probably, most practically, financially … we've sacrificed the second income. (C6, 837–838, 860)

Despite the lower income level, these families felt the sacrifice was worth it when considering the positive outcomes they observed in their children. Financial constraints, which usually accompanied the choice to home educate, often meant less money and forgoing certain costly activities deemed by the parents to be non-essential.

4.8.2.1(4) Organising the family's pedagogy

Organising the family's pedagogical practices was also highlighted as being an important part of the role of teacher. Providing the opportunity for the child to be educated at home was in itself a major pedagogical decision, which is not attempted by most Australian families. The decision to do so was often seen as a pivotal redirection of the family's lifestyle. One father described the process of arriving at the decision to home educate after spending an extended time investigating the matter.

> So I mean it's not a decision which we made sort of overnight. It was something we investigated. We tried, we talked to different families. So I see that as my role. So I sort of got the information and had to make that decision. (I5, 115–117)

This decision was the first in many new lifestyle and pedagogical decisions the parents would make in order to home educate. They would also have to choose what type of educational program they would implement. Home education could take the shape of being formal and structured or less formal and unstructured or a mixture of

both. The parents would plan and oversee the entire course of the child's education, in much the same way that a school principal or a school's head of department would act. One father described this organisational factor in terms of supervising and directing his children's education.

> Because if they fall behind I could actually instigate something. I was in control. I was able to say what you just need to do a bit more work here or, if they weren't doing some sport I could add some extra activities. So and because of the self-paced system, you know, you can do that. If he was in school, he would have just lost all that. It's such a hard word (laughs) but it is, you are able to actually make the mould or direct your children into a much better, ah future, I think. (I5, 177–182)

For this father, having the control of his four sons' education for seven years, meant that he could make adjustments to their educational program according to their needs. While it required much work, he believed that it provided them with good outcomes.

While home educators organise their teaching roles in different ways, characteristically, the mother usually supervises the majority of the formal pedagogy. This may be conducted at the kitchen table or at desks in a designated room. Home education allows for flexible learning time frames that can be made to suit the family lifestyle, though most kept what would be termed as regular school hours, days, terms and years.

Many parents needed organisation skills to remediate gaps in their children's learning, when transferring from school to home education. One mother who had been home educating for six years, described how she had to assist her son with some foundational learning, which he missed while at school, until he "caught up" to what she believed to be his chronological grade level. In his first six months of home education, she saw his learning improve rapidly, as he worked to catch up to his academic chronological grade level.

> When we first started home schooling, ahm, Jeff started in year… he's a December baby so he started a year later than other children, ahm and he caught up. You know, like six months within, I don't know, a very short period of time, and then he sort of levelled out, but he just was never allowed to really do, achieve (*in school*), what he really could achieve (I1 306-310).

The flexibility of home education allowed her to organise her son's educational program so that he could revisit work he had not learned while at school, complete it and move on with work appropriate to his stage of learning. For this mother, the organisational flexibility of home education had enabled her to adjust his work program and the time he spent learning, to suit his personal learning needs.

Similarly, another mother explained how the flexibility of home education allowed her to organise her son's learning experiences to suit his ability to learn. Because her son has learning challenges, at times she reduced his work requirements and allowed him to have extra time, when necessary, so that he could understand his work.

> But if we, you know, I mean we don't push. I think he's actually a little bit behind in his PACEs [units of learning]. But we don't push, we make sure that he gets them done, and if we have to spend the whole day on one or two pages, we do that so that he's got that set in his mind, so that if we just went over it, he would forget it. Because they really do need to have it implanted in their head to be able to carry it through. … Yeah, so it's very important that you know he does spend the time on it and he does understand it because, once he knows it he does have wonderful recall. I could ask him, a few months down the track and he will bring it up straight away. He doesn't really need to think about it. (I6, 329–333, 336–339)

This flexibility of home education, in allowing the parent to adjust their children's work programs and the amount of time spent on a learning experience, allowed parents to progress with their children's learning at a rate that was suitable to their varying abilities to learn.

Finally, parents found that there was a need to establish order, routine and discipline to function effectively. Order included organising appropriate learning experiences, adequate resources and a designated learning area. Routine referred to the regular and appropriate use of time, while discipline referred to utilising positive reinforcement processes and negative consequence outcomes relative to the child's learning and general behaviour.

By controlling the organisational aspect of their home education, parents perceived that they had gained a distinct advantage that allowed them to arrange their home education in the form that most appealed to them, their families and their lifestyles. Taking on this responsibility, however, also brought significant challenges to the parents, as they realised that they had to provide many educational experiences,

which most parents have delegated to traditional schooling. One mother saw her organisational role as a planner, she stated that she was “A planner really. An ideas person, and a planner” (I12, 124). She described some of the educational experiences she organised in her role as teacher.

> We went out a lot. We went, we would, part of education, I felt, was going to the beach, and looking in rock pools, and for things and learning about the world around you. It was playing a lot of sport and learning how to get along with people in a team. It was going to art galleries, going to museums. But also just experiencing going out with play groups and really a rich variety of friendships and activities, we would go on train rides and we would go on bus rides, just for the sake of doing those things because I wanted them to see a lot, do a lot … and enjoy it, with me, as a family. (I12, 111–117)

Without organising skills, her educational program would not have worked in her view. She summed up the organisational aspect of her program in this way, “I think the only thing I am trying to say is I had to be fairly organised” (I12, 129). Another father stated, “I also try and organise activities so David does various activities, so I'm the coordinator I guess” (I5, 27–28).

The organisational element of the role of teacher delivered to these families, the features of an environment suited to learning and the daily routines of education in their homes.

4.8.2.1(5) The role of Teacher — The developmental aspect

The developmental aspect of the role of teacher refers to the way the parents saw themselves as facilitating the personal development of their children. Parents stated their goals for their children’s personal development in both (1) general terms, and in (2) specific terms.

When addressing their role in the general development of their children, parents referred to being responsible for the general raising of their children, facilitating the child’s development, taking a future perspective in addition to their current perspective by preparing their children for entry into and success in adult life.

When addressing the development of their children in specific targeted areas, these parents saw themselves as influencers of their children in the following ways: shapers of their character, assisting in the development of their values, giving them

permission to be different from expected norms, remediators of past bad experiences, facilitating their social development, encouraging their particular gifts and talents, being a career advisor to their children and being a spiritual mentor.

4.8.2.1(6) Developmental aspect — General

When describing how they facilitate the general development of their children, these parents often described their roles in terms that have no specifically demonstrable outcomes. They described their roles in general terms, such as nurturing, raising, guiding, and training their children as well as just being available to them.

One father stated that in the early phase of their young daughter's home education experience, both parents "took on the role as, active in the role as nurturers and protectors, we took her away from the stressful situation [at school]. We suddenly found we had a healthy, happy child again" (C3, 201–203). He did not seek to explain anything specific about this distinct change but just saw his daughter's return to being generally happy, as an important outcome of their family's home education.

Another father described his wife's educational role as being the "nurturing rock". He used this very general metaphor to describe her role. In the context of what he said, he was not referring to any specific function. Rather he was talking about how her presence and availability to their son brought stability to him, while he was away from his family, at work. He stated it this way: "Nurturing rock. You're [to his wife] the rock, the whole foundation of this home schooling experience you know, is based on. You are the constant for Daniel [his son]" (C5, 413–414).

One mother described the general aspect of facilitating her children's development using the general idea of raising her children. She saw this aspect of her role in this way, stating, "Oh I just feel that my role is to raise my children the best as I can. I do feel that it's our responsibility and not someone else's" (I14, 16–17). This mother, who had been home educating for one year, expressed the need to allow for the natural development of her young children in statements such as allowing the child to be a child. This comment was set in the context of her view that young children in schools were being confined to a desk and chair for a significant part of the day and

were being pressured to do what she saw as unnecessary amounts of academic work, rather than experiencing fun and the joy of life on a daily basis.

> They [schoolteachers] make kids do things and they get in trouble if they don't. And they're made to grow up a lot faster than what they should. So I just feel with homeschooling, you're allowed to be a child, and have fun and not spend six hours a day sitting there doing schoolwork and then having to come home and do more schoolwork and have too much responsibility (I14, 33–37).

Another mother summarised her role in facilitating the development of her children in general terms, this way: "Okay, well I suppose my role, first and foremost is ahm, you know, to be normal, things a mother does, you know, nurturing and nursing and training and all of that sort of thing" (I10, 6–8). Another mother saw the need for her children to develop in general, as individuals. While she had come to the view that schooling may inhibit their development, she also saw that she had to be careful not to restrict their development, herself. She stated that she wanted them to become "their own personality".

> I'm basically guiding them. I feel like I'm guiding them. So they're becoming they're own personality, they're becoming they're own people. Ahm, you know, they're not just becoming me, if you know what I mean. (I11, 39–42)

In considering their child's development, the parents focussed upon the present as well as the future. They discussed their roles as facilitating their children's future and were concerned about their entry into adult life in the "real world". These concerns were motivated by a desire to see the child succeed in the future. This same mother described it this way:

> So I see myself really as a helper. Like I am there to help them achieve what they want to become out of life. So that's what I say to them. (I11, 32–34)

Another couple emphasised their view of the importance of giving their sons permission to be different rather than having to conform to group expectations. They saw this as being important for their sons' general development and that it was one way to future success in life.

> Mother: What we also wanted was to show the children that it was okay to be someone who didn't grow up in the bulk. And that those who succeed are very often those who don't. … It's those who are outstanding and willing to do something and be someone a little bit different, who can do things. Some successful people I'm reading about at the moment are all people who did something a bit different. They did something a bit different. I mean George

> Mueller did very, very different things. … And we want each of them *(their children)* to realise that they don't, but just performing isn't going to help them. You know, just for the sake of fitting in.
>
> Father: I think for some people, but, that's what they need. But I just think for our children being free of that is important. (I5, 194–195, 197–208)

These parents saw that home education gave their children the opportunity to develop as individuals, without the pressures of age peer requirements and group conformity. While the general development of their children was important to these parents, they also saw that they had a role in the development of specific attributes.

4.8.2.1(7) Developmental aspect — Specific

Parents were aware of specific aspects of their children's personal development which they believed required their attention. These included: character and values development, problem behaviour, attitudes to learning, social development, confidence, the development of individual strengths and spirituality were specific areas that parents targeted. Parents wanted to influence their children's character development and to guide them to adopt and develop values that they deemed to be appropriate. One father, who had been a home educator for eight years, emphasised the importance of good character development for his two teenage daughters.

> One of the big things that we learned very, very early was that it's not about the academic qualifications, it's all about character. We are interested in how the child's character develops ... and as her character develops, her love of learning is growing (I7, 49–53).

He saw a direct link between the development of good character in his daughters and a development of their love of academic learning.

Dealing with behaviour deemed to be wrong was as important as targeting good behaviour and character development. One mother described a period when she dealt with her son who had been cheating in his academic work. She used this learning experience to assist him to learn what she saw as better values.

> And I think that it actually teaches them better values because, they're getting it in real life experiences. I basically we sort of, you know, to a degree, we let them carry on with their wrongful things that they are doing. And then eventually, it comes around where they realise in themselves that it's wrong. So they've developed their own personality and realising that it is wrong, rather

> than you're just with a big stick saying that it's wrong … with what happened when he cheated, like that whole aspect of cheating, we actually did lots of work around that then.… Yeah, I guide them making the right choices. Now I guide them, but I don't direct them. I don't feel that I direct them, if you know what I mean. I guide them I feel. I guide them through the right choices, by making wrong choices. You know what I mean? You know? I allow them to ahm basically, follow what they are doing, and when they do make the wrong choices, I suppose you're there then, to explain, you know why it happened and basically guide them back on track. You know, of going the right direction, if that makes sense. (I11, 129–134, 149–150, 258–264)

As part of their child's education, many parents sought to address what they deemed to be problem areas in their child's personal development. The parent would observe a weakness or problem with the child and then address it and thus assist in the child's personal development. Specific weaknesses that were mentioned included emotional and relational issues. One father indicated that his son had become disillusioned whilst at school and that he had lost his love of learning. To this father, this was a deeper problem than an academic problem. He wanted to remediate this problem and felt that home education would provide a solution for his son.

> I wanted to pull him out of that, and work out a better way for him to rekindle the passion, the fire, for learning; put a fire back in him that made him want to learn. The ultimate goal of any teacher is to reach inside their students and turn on that switch that makes them desire to learn. (C5, 319–322)

Similarly, a home-educating couple, of 10 years' experience saw the need to remediate several issues in their teenage son's personal development. They found that home education assisted in this process of remediation. The mother spoke about her son's loss of his love of learning while at school. She saw that her task was to restore that love of learning. After home educating him for a few months, the couple saw a marked improvement in him and, as a result of that positive experience, decided to also home educate his younger sister.

> Mother: And I think when we saw with home schooling with Chris [their son], how happy he was [after engaging in home education], he became industrious again with his studies and he, the year before, when he was at [name of school] he got 10% for one subject that he was good at. And so we got him back and we realised well, this home schooling is very valuable and we chose it for Elise [their youngest daughter]. (C7, 328–331)

Restoring a love of learning was not this couple's only concern. They also sought to restore their broken relationship with their older son as a part of their teaching agenda. The parents recounted that they had lost their previously good relationship

with their teenage son. They felt that his attending school had contributed to this problem, and they tried home education as a means of restoring their relationship with their disillusioned son.

> Mother: He wouldn't talk to us in the morning, he wouldn't talk to us in the afternoon and he had always been a really easy child to get on with, very inquisitive, and you had to watch him, and guide him, but a happy bubbly person. And we lost him. We didn't know why we were losing him, everything we tried didn't work. We sat down with pencil and paper one day to try to get out of him what was wrong and he just grunted at us. So it was an awful, awful time and then he refused to go to school. We found home schooling, and by that September well by the July, we started, pulled him out of school in April in Easter, and by the July, we had our son back. He was happy and talking to us and we hadn't had that for a long time.
>
> Father: Well we didn't really pull him out of school, did we?
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> Mother: No, he wouldn't go back to school (C7, 349–361).
>
> Mother: I guess at that we've always seen our role as wanting the, doing the best for our children, and we were really frustrated in fulfilling that. And when we saw that with the aid of home schooling, we were able to fulfil that role again, and have a friendship with our son again, which we'd always had, and also have the role of seeing him grow, and enjoy study again was wonderful to us (C7, 367–371).

These parents had found home education had contributed significantly to restoring their son's positive personal development and to restoring their broken relationship. Thus, to them, home education was more than a matter of academics; it had assisted with the development of their son's attitude and character.

Building emotional health in the child was also mentioned as part of the targeted development of home-educated children. One mother, who believed that she had needed to build her own emotional health, after her traumatic childhood, researched and actively taught her own children about developing emotionally.

> We [the parents] come from quite a dysfunctional family. And I've done a lot of reading and healing since my early twenties, to overcome emotional pain and emotional, yeah, scarring. And just going through the healing recovery and healing and growing as a person. Because, my parents tried to do their best with what they could, my mother comes from a divorced home and so it was a, they loved me very much, but still I come off as an adult quite ahm incomplete, emotionally I think, and so that kind of caused problems at the beginning when we were married because I was expecting him to fulfil me emotionally, whereas it didn't work like that. So teaching the children to be emotionally healthy and helping them to be emotionally healthy and we start breaking the cycle from our past and teaching them to be emotionally healthy is quite important to me as well. And teaching them about

> relationships. They would be like two separate things. Being emotionally healthy and ahm, having great relationships. (C6, 92–103)

Parents did not only focus upon the personal development of their children. How their children related to others socially was also seen to be an important developmental aspect of their role as teachers.

Home educators saw the social development of their children as one of the most important features to be addressed specifically in the development of their children. In stressing this importance, one mother, who was an experienced classroom teacher, saw her role as being like “guideposts” in the social development of her children. She stated:

> And, so that was just on one level, on the educational side of things. The other side, the big side, I thought, was the social side … if you get a child and surround them with a lot of positive stuff that they know, as best you can, that trying to be the guide posts of what is reasonable procedures and fair behaviour, they've got a measuring stick for when they’re older. And, you know so anyway, the social thing was really important to me; probably actually, before the issue of academic achievement. (C3, 48–49, 77–82)

These parents saw that socialisation issues, which included developing good social practices and relationships and the avoidance of damaging social contexts, was vital to the development of their children. In the role of teacher, parents had a direct role in teaching appropriate social behaviours to their children. They saw that good socialisation included influencing the child from within the family as illustrated in one mother’s comment “just teaching my child how to behave” (I14, 106), as well as providing opportunities for the child to explore relationships outside the family context, as stated in another mother’s description of “friendships that we’ve made along the way” (I12, 211). Furthermore, parents noted the importance of protecting the child from damaging social contexts such as ongoing bullying in school settings, which several of their children had encountered, while in attendance at school.

These parents emphasised that a loving, nurturing environment was vital to healthy social development. The home context featured in their comments as being a key to this process. One mother had listed many community and sporting social activities in which her three children had participated, during her 15 years of home education. However, she emphasised that their family home environment was the most important element in her children’s social development.

> But I don't know that it [the social activities conducted outside the family] was the be all and end all; all that effort. You know what I mean; I still think that the building blocks of the character really, I think, come from parents who teach their children right and proper behaviour and reasonable thinking and reasonable confidence, and conflict resolution. I mean that we were very core in all of those, which I will leave for an outsider to judge, I won't say whether we went good or bad at that but we were very core at teaching that. (C3, 97–103)

Parent facilitation of the child's social development also included intentionally shielding the child from harmful influences. One home-educating mother, whose daughter had not been to school, made this observation when referring to her daughter's social development: "She's not picking up all the negative characteristics that a child shouldn't have to be around" (I14, 26–27).

Similarly, another mother saw that her children needed to adopt her social values rather than what she saw as the negative social values of others, stating, "And I'd much rather them have our influences, like our Christian values and our moral values and our social values, I suppose, too" (I10, 70–71).

Home educators' experience of the role of teacher in the area of social development was not limited to experiences in the home context. Parents looked to give their children diverse social experiences in varied social settings. These included connecting with different types of people and with people of different ages in their communities. Parents actively sought varied social experiences for their children including (1) providing opportunities for casual employment with retailers and trades people; (2) connection with community groups such as aged peoples' homes, churches, sporting clubs, local councils and libraries; (3) participating in community based projects such as MS Readathon and 40 Hour Famine; (4) visits to utilities such as fire stations and water purification plants; and (5) visits to cultural centres such as museums, theatres and orchestral presentations. Below are some of the comments parents made that included some of these activities.

> Also to encourage her with activities outside of direct schooling. Social activities with other home schooling students, such as ice skating, choir practice, other social activities just encourage her to keep those up. … and the speech and drama (C7, 6–9; 471).

> Choir, and tambourine and again music and other music events and things like that (C2, 435–436).

> Whereas when he came into home school, you know, I remember he went off over there somewhere, and went on the water slides, and then the leadership camp with another lot of people and he got just a really broad range of interactions (I5, 150–153).

> We went out a lot. We went, we would, part of education, I felt, was going to the beach, and looking in rock pools, and for things and learning about the world around you. It was playing a lot of sport and learning how to get along with people in a team. It was going to art galleries, going to museums. But also just experiencing going out with play groups and really a rich variety of friendships and activities, we would go on train rides and we would go on bus rides. (C12, 111–116)

Parents reported that they connected with other home educating families in groups for (1) social gatherings such as attending bar b ques, theme park outings, leadership camps, family camps, and (2) group educational activities such as choirs, drama groups, art lessons, sports days, music groups, seminars, conventions and eisteddfods.

Expanding the child's social skills and experiences was a key facet of the parent's role in facilitating the child's social development. A father, who had been a home educator for seven years, saw that when his son attended high school, his connection with the same group of age-peers for several years, was a positive, but a limited experience. He stated that home education had given his son the opportunity to develop relationships with people from a more diverse background than when he attended school. He made particular reference to the importance of exposing his son to a wider social age range while home educating, and contrasted that with his son's limited social experience with his age-peers while at school.

> The group of friends they had in high school [while home educating], or in homeschooling were a lot more widespread so they were mixing with people from 10 to 18. Whereas in school they were just going through with that same crowd all the time. They don't sort of interact, in fact it's almost, you know, much harder because the ones up above ostracised them and the ones down below look up to them, whereas in homeschooling they all mix together. So it really created a sort of a different social atmosphere for them. And especially for Simon that's a very social sort of person, it was great because it meant he sort of spread out a lot more rather than being very focused on one sort of peer group. He was very much sort of, not a gang, if you know what I mean, very tight knit group of people whereas once you came into homeschooling, he was able to branch out and … met a lot of different people. So it sort of really, smoothed him out a little bit [Laughter] (I5, 124–134).

Another mother, who had been home educating her 10- and 8-year-old sons for two years, referred to their specific social development with respect to overall

confidence. She saw that one son had lost his confidence in approaching people due to some negative experiences while at school; whereas her other son who had not attended school, has confidence to approach people socially. She felt that she was a better facilitator of her sons' development of confidence, than teachers in school and that her home was a better site for this, than school.

> Well like I said, with Mark, there was a cue, like you could see it. Like I said, when he was little, you know, I mean, like, he was such a robust little boy, he was just, everyone, and then when he went to school, he just completely changed and then if you'd seen him now, he's going back to the way he was.
>
> And like my little one, well he basically never went to school. And he's very much like Mark. And he's never changed. He's stayed on that track, you know, he's the same as Mark, really confident, and he's been like that all the way. You know, like he's just never changed. So you can sort of see, that, because he didn't go to school, his personality hasn't deserted. Like, you know, and he is so full of questions, like he'll just go up to anybody and he wants to learn, where, ahm, where, Mark was like that but then you know he got changed because a couple of times there, when he did, you know, put up his hand and asked a question, he basically got embarrassed because — oooh, oooh, he answered a question, do you know what I mean? He got embarrassed because they sort of said, oh you know, 'That's silly.' You know, that sort of thing.
>
> So that, basically, he lost that confidence to actually go up and talk to people. And where he's getting it back now, where Caleb, he's just, and everyone comments, they can't believe how he's just so eager to learn and so full of questions, you know, like he, he's not frightened to ask. Where I believe Mark would have been like that (I11, 225–242).

The mother's contrasting of her eldest son's process of developing confidence at home, loss of confidence at school and recovery of confidence at home; with her youngest son's experience of ongoing developing of confidence and his not having attended school, helped to form her view that home education would be suitable for both her sons' personal development. It was a common view among parents, whose children had attended school prior to home education experience, that the institution of traditional schooling had created negative outcomes for their children.

One couple, whose son had learning disabilities, stated that they had to withdraw him from his school because he was being bullied. They thought that if he were to remain in that environment, he would continue to be bullied or else he may, in turn, become a bully in order to survive. Both of these outcomes were unacceptable to the parents, who wanted a positive social environment for the development of their son.

> Mother: To me, the nurturing environment is a loving caring environment, where there's more positives than there is negatives. Which was something that we certainly found was not the case at school. It was always a hundred percent more negative than positive. Ahm which was a bit upsetting really, because kids deserve the right to be able to exist without being constantly badgered,
>
> Father: The biggest thing they told us when we took him out and home schooled him was socialisation. "You're going to lose all the socialisation." The thing is that we choose how we socialise. We don't wait for the playground to teach him that, teach him how to be a superservient person who is just under the hammer; which I thought that most playgrounds teach anyway. They teach them to be depressed. … You can learn so much better if your mind is not absorbed with struggle and surviving with getting away from the bullies or becoming one, to survive. I become one at school to survive. And I didn't want that for my son.
>
> Mother: We didn't want him to have to become a bully in order to survive. But that was basically what the school system was saying, - Thou shalt become, if you want to stay and be part of our system. And our solution to that was, fine, we'll go find a better way (C5, 238–242, 259–263, 266–269, 271–274).

Another couple saw their quiet 10-year-old son traumatised at school, due to ongoing bullying. Because the matter was not resolved at school, they withdrew their son and commenced home education. They described this experience.

> Mother: Our eldest son was in a Christian school and he really liked it, and then because he was a quiet sort of boy, he started experiencing trauma in school.
>
> Father: What was happening in the school was, he was getting picked on a lot, and bullied a lot, by people. Because he is a very intelligent person, and so he was picked on as the geek. And so,
>
> Mother: And that hasn't changed,
>
> Father: No, [laughter] and he is still [as an adult] very intelligent and he is still a geek. He was picked on a lot at school, till one time where it just got so bad, he actually ran away from school and he ran home and the police, the whole thing
>
> Mother: Looking for him
>
> Father: And he turned up at home, he just evidently walked under the road, through the pipes and made his way home so that's when we decided just to try this for a while (I5, 33–35, 63–65, 67–76).

A home-educating mother, who was a trained teacher, saw many examples of negative social behaviour in traditional schooling. Her view was that this negative social behaviour was, in her experience, entrenched in her school's culture. She described her experiences in this way:

> I could see that the moment you walked into school, everyone told you what was normal here. You would have so many people tell you what's wrong with

> you. So you automatically, your self-esteem was challenged. And they tell you, you know, your ears are too big, or whatever it is that supposedly is wrong with you, and in reality that's not an issue. So I saw lots of bullying at school and I saw how teachers cannot deal with it and the school doesn't deal with it, because it just doesn't, and I don't think it can. It makes noises about it. And I just felt that socially, that the child is better off away from all those negative influences. And they could, we could, at least, be free that we put good influences in our lives (C3, 51–59).

Her husband is a social worker, operating in the area of child protection and truancy. He spoke about how their daughter's health dramatically improved when they removed her from her socially stressful school environment and commenced home education. The sudden, positive changes in his daughter's health alleviated his fears about their commencing home education. As mentioned by other parents, this mother observed that their daughter's confidence, which had been lost during her four years at school, returned, after they commenced home education.

> Father: Interestingly enough, within a few days [of commencing home education], we took on the role as, active in the role as nurturers and protectors; we took her away from the stressful situation. We suddenly found we had a healthy, happy child again. And we thought, well okay, okay. And so immediately, after a few days, all of my concerns and fears and qualms were completely squashed (C3, 201–205).

> Mother: It was like we regained a confident child that had been a … yeah she'd been stripped of confidence in those few years, from pre-school and grades one, two and three. (C3, 213–214)

Further to the developmental aspect of the role of teacher, parents saw that home education gave them a unique opportunity to assist in the development of any particular talents and special interests that their children may have. Various parents expressed intent upon: "helping them achieve their goals and whatever their talents are, helping them in that direction" (C6, 89–90); and to "support, nurture, encourage their God-given ability" (C1, 17). They referred often to encouraging their children in areas of giftedness such as academics or sport. One father described this aspect of his role as teacher.

> I saw my role as someone who would ask the kids to do the best that they could. To draw them out, they all have different characteristics … we eventually realised that we were trying to individually encourage them to their own talents. (C3, 496–497, 546–547)

The parents also demonstrated a strong future perspective as they described their experiences as home educators. This was particularly evident when they considered their child's current interests and possible future career path. Being aware of their child's abilities and talents, and of their likes and dislikes, parents were oriented to their children's outcomes after home education. They assisted their children in obtaining short-term work experience and part-time employment, during their home education years. They also assisted their children with entry into traineeships, full-time employment, TAFE Colleges and universities after home education.

The spiritual aspect of the child's development was also identified as important in the role of the teacher. Parents, as teachers, saw themselves as spiritual mentors to their children. One mother described how important this was to her family's education.

> The other thing, of course we never touched on, was the spiritual side. That was a big part … Well I think that was a very, quite significant thing, because although you do have Christian schools, where you teach the children about Christ, we had the great advantage of being able to teach them and show them, you know, how to pray and Bible study, things like that. So encouraging them in the whole Christian walk, as best we could. (C3, 552–559)

Many parents saw that they had a responsibility to portray their spiritual values to their children, by their example in daily living. Because their children were with them in close proximity for most of each day, they saw that being an example was an important component to their children's education. A father explained his view on being an example of spiritual values:

> If I'm the role model, the male role model, then I've got to ensure that my own life reminds them of Christ and his values. How does it happen? I think that just in everything that happens around the family. (I7, 14–16)

While these parents were aware that their role as spiritual mentors was one of example, there were other components to this role that included having conversations about spiritual issues, teaching the children about God, existence, truth, values and the Bible. They also taught their children to cultivate faith in God, to rely upon Him and to pray.

The developmental aspect of the role of teacher for home educators described the ways these parents saw themselves as guiding the development of their children in both general and in specific terms. One of the most specific ways in which home

educators assisted in the development of their children was in the area of their academic development, which will be highlighted in the following section.

4.8.2.1(8) The role of Teacher – The pedagogical aspect

The pedagogical aspect of the role of teacher refers to the experiences home-educating parents had as they helped their children to learn. One would expect that the role of an academic teacher would be the most obvious role that a home-educating parent would fulfil. Parents expressed their academic teaching role in many different ways. In this section, reference is made to both the formal and informal practices of the role of teacher.

4.8.2.1(9) Formal pedagogical aspect

Parents described an array of formal educational practices, including references to: academic content, teaching styles, rekindling a love of learning, the flexible use of time, teaching children in different grade levels, choice of curriculum, teaching life skills, extracurricular subjects and the idea of best practice.

Parents referred to academic content and academic subjects as a key focus as they taught their children. One couple explained how they approached their teaching, highlighting their emphasis on literacy and their flexible teaching style, which allowed the child to pursue their path of interest in learning as well as to focus upon learning things that are of practical use. They referred to several formal pedagogical features in their home education such as literacy, numeracy, comprehension, science and mathematics, in the following manner:

> Mother: Well my role, I felt that my role was to first of all be there for the child in the academic sense to explain and also to have them question me and say, “Well, I don't understand this.” and we'd go over that again
>
> And I felt that I — I did the best I could, to provide opportunity for them to feel secure, for them to get educated (laughs). Actually to receive the three R’s as opposed to not receiving it. Or maybe, receiving a botchy job. Ahm, so I made sure that they, they all gobbled up literature. They all read very quickly, and they loved reading and writing, Maree was brilliant at writing, some days she’d write all day. That’s all that she’d want to do. And I’d just say, and go, “Why should I stop her?” Why should I compartmentalise if she is loving, if she is loving this. Well I thought go for it. And she, was writing wonderfully. Well I’ve got books and books downstairs of her beautiful work, she was into horses

> and honestly, her writing was fantastic, she writes poetry and I think, let her go, she loves reading.
>
> Like I could have them doing some work in the day and Paul came home at night, he could then maybe do with them, maybe a bit of science and maths with them at night.
>
> Father: I think it [his educational role] is a bit different, I think it complements it. It, Ellie started this process off and ah I was reluctant at first, but within days, I was converted because I saw the evidence myself. And ahm, after that, I found that I had a role to broaden out their education in various ways. And one aspect of that was to give them elements of practical information that they wouldn't have time to get out of school. (C3, 31–33, 394–403, 303–305, 416–420)

Another mother who had a classical educational background in literature and languages saw academic content as a major focus for her and her husband. As a home educator of nine years experience, she placed a strong emphasis on critical thinking, particularly with respect to analysis and the evaluation of ideas. She referred to literacy, numeracy and classical literature as key features in her teaching.

> It was mainly about giving them a high standard of literacy and numeracy. I think that would be my summation of it.
>
> Another motivation for me was to teach my children to think critically, logically and critically. To examine the world around them and what they read and saw. Ahm, compare it to a set of standards that I taught, the Lord's standards, the Word of God. But also just to look at the quality, whether it was simply rubbish or whether it was something that would be well written or well argued and therefore merited further consideration or whether something was a complete load of junk, was copied from someone, or trivialised something out of context, and just to look at … to learn to think for themselves, and examine other people's ideas or things that people said or wrote and decide whether they were worthwhile pursuing. And that was an important part of what I … exposing them to the world would allow them to do that. And discussing with them, right and wrong, every day, once they looked at everyday things, and school work. Whereas, at school, whether something is right or wrong, is often not discussed, when they read something or do something. It's just given something, and they're supposed to accept it, as it is. And I felt that it was not necessary for them to accept everything that was given to them. That they were to look at it for themselves and determine whether it was right and whether it was quality material. (I12, 28–30; 318–333)

Parents placed emphasis upon different aspects of their teaching styles. Another mother described how patience, persistence and experimenting with different teaching methods helped both her in her role as a teacher and her son as a learner. When discussing a time when one of her sons was having some difficulty with an academic topic, she was asked how she achieved a learning breakthrough with him.

> [Laughs] With a lot of, ahm we spent a lot of time with him. We went through all of the, you know, like we just, ahm reinforced all the sounds, a lot of patience, I guess. Yes, so as I was learning as a teacher, about patience, and just persevering with him, that's come across into my personal life.
>
> Yeah, he's sometimes very, he sometimes, and the simplest of things with him, ahm, when say like a new maths concept, we'll just go over it and over it and over it, and he does not understand it. But at some point in time, it's like something clicks, or the cogs start working and it's "Oh, I see it now!" So that, just that persevering and patience and, and keeping on, and also, ahm, you know, as, as we go on, you learn new ways to try to, well, God helps you, to see different ways of approaching things. So you come at it from different aspects. You come across it from a different look at things. My husband always says, you know, God's really big on lateral thinking. And I think he helps us to see things laterally, as well (I1, 214–217, 223–231).

In similar manner, a grandmother, whose teaching style included patience and persistence, described the joy she experienced in assisting her grandson with a learning breakthrough.

> When I went through it with him, and I made sure he knew his spelling, I made sure he knew what he was doing etc. And it was just a couple of months later, and he was doing his work and he said, "Grandma, I think I've got brains after all! I thought I, I thought I was, there was something wrong and I just couldn't do this." (*laughs*) He said, "I think I've got brains after all!" And it just all became, — whooo!
>
> And he said, "I just feel so good, because I'm doing my schoolwork now, and I know what I'm doing." And so, it was just, — that was beautiful to me. Because he thought, and I didn't know he thought, … that he didn't have any brains, because he couldn't do it. And just sitting beside him, getting him to do it … "Oooh — I think I've got brains!" And he said, "I just feel so good. I feel like I've done something. I don't feel as if I am guilty all of the time. Because he was supposed to do his school work but he didn't know anyway, didn't know what he was doing. But he got it done. But now he knows he's got to do it and yeah. (C4, 587–600)

Many parents referred to an emphasis upon their children understanding their work, as part of their teaching style. One single parent mother, who had been home educating her son, for one year, highlighted her emphasis on ensuring that he understood his work, rather than just complete it for the sake of getting it done. Understanding was an especially poignant issue for this mother, as her son has Asperger's syndrome and associated learning difficulties.

> Mother: "Oh well, I believe I'm there to help him understand his work. To encourage him to want to learn and obviously to help him learn and also to help him see the value in what he's learning. (I6, 9–11)
>
> Interviewer: You've said about encouraging him, what do you mean by that?

> Mother: Ahm well, encouraging in, I know sometimes the children they just want to get their work done and be done with it. But you need also to make sure that he understands what he's learning and that he wants to learn more about it, or that he wants to do the work that's there, not just get the work over and done with and go. (I6, 17–22)

With understanding as a focus for this mother, she organised the teaching week according to what her son understood or did not understand.

> Ahm, well he can at first get the work done that he quite understands. And then we will sit down and go through it each day to have a look at what he's done, and make sure he does understand it. Then normally, Thursdays and Fridays we'll sit down and work together on his work because there's a few things he doesn't understand. So we'll sit down those days and we'll work through them together. (I6, 51–55)

The role of teacher can be particularly complex when teaching children with disabilities. This mother described her teaching style as modelling around her son's way of learning. This meant that she would adapt her approach to fit with the way he could learn.

> It's [her role] definitely a lot of teaching John, and again like I said to you, where we put things into visual perspective, John really needs that. Because a lot of John's ways of thinking, we need to model around some of those things. And in the fact of the English, with the reading, not all rules apply to the reading, and he found that very, very difficult. He couldn't understand if the you know, magic "e" applied there, why it didn't apply here. (I6, 241–246)

She further described how home education allowed her to tailor her son's education to meet his learning needs. She did not believe that a school-based education would have given him the same learning opportunities. She believed that her love for her son was the main motivator of her teaching style, and that this love-motivated teaching style would not be reduplicated outside of her teaching relationship with her son.

> I think that I bring understanding to him. I bring the PACEs. I bring no pressure, that he can feel relaxed and he doesn't need to understand the first time. I also feel that he feels comfortable enough that he can ask me questions. Yeah and just the love to it. Just that I really want him to do well and I really want him to have that education and that understanding to make him a better person.
>
> Well I'm only doing all this because I love him so much, that I want him to have a total understanding, like everything, that goes on around him. And the fact that I didn't feel ahm that the Education Department was able to help us, ahm, I felt I as a parent, with the help of ACA [her home education support

> group] of course, you could do a much better job. I wouldn't have thought of it, if I didn't love him enough and wanted to help him.
>
> I teach him as much as I can. I help him as much as I can. And I hope that, you know, that I help him to enjoy learning as much as I can (I6, 350–354, 359–363, 373–374).

Some parents indicated that their students had lost a love of learning while at school. For these parents, one task they assumed was to assist their children to rekindle a love for learning. One father described this role.

> I wanted to pull him out of that [school system], and work out a better way for him to rekindle the passion, the fire for learning; put a fire back in him that made him want to learn. The ultimate goal of any teacher is to reach inside their students and turn on that switch that makes them desire to learn. (C5, 319–322)

Similarly, a mother, as mentioned earlier, saw that one of her major tasks as teacher involved not only restoring her relationship with her sixteen year old son, but also to help him regain his love of learning, which was lost while he was at school. She saw that her task was to restore that love

> I guess at that we've always seen our role as wanting the … doing the best for our children, and we were really frustrated in fulfilling that. And when we saw that with the aid of home schooling, we were able to fulfil that role again, and have a friendship with our son again, which we'd always had, and also have the role of seeing him grow, and enjoy study again, was wonderful to us. (C7, 367–371)

While the formal aspect of this role usually included the practice of everyday teaching, parents also had extraordinary teaching experiences such as learning breakthroughs, meeting the special needs of children with disabilities and remediating gaps in learning or bad attitudes to learning, as part or their teaching experience.

Because home education allows for a flexible use of time, parents were able to gain advantages relevant to their children's education. By this they meant their formal academic learning could be dealt with at their children's ability rate of learning, rather than at the rate determined by a school administrator as expressed in a daily, term or annual school timetable. Parents saw that the flexibility of the learning time frame in home education provided advantages for gifted and talented learners, average learners as well as students with learning disabilities.

One mother discussed the importance of the timing between the child's learning readiness and their learning experiences. She also placed importance upon her personalised contact with her child, at the most appropriate time, during the learning experience, to enhance the child's learning experience. She noted that home education allowed her children to ask questions and to explore answers in detail at the time when they were most interested in the topic, rather than having a teacher ask the questions that were of interest to the teacher, at a group level, in the time frame that was determined by the teacher, the school syllabus and its timetable.

> Yes because with a smaller ratio [teacher to child], what you can do is, is understand when children are in a position where they're wanting to learn. You can strike while the iron is hot. So during the period of time when a child is asking questions and wanting to know about things, the smaller your ratio the greater your ability to be able to work with those windows of opportunity. Whereas when there is a big group, windows of opportunity come at different times for every child and have to be structured on an hourly or half hourly basis, whether or not a child's window was open at that time or not. To a certain extent, home schooling still has the need, the structure, so I'm not trying to throw the baby out with the bathwater but it's possible to change the times of subjects if there is a greater interest in one subject than another or to offer opportunity for other windows of the interest that are there; to provide greater learning experiences and to help a child to enjoy learning. (I4, 140–151)

A father described the importance of being available to his children, providing time to involve with them in daily activities and the pursuit of personal interests.

> … a father needs to provide his time, outside his work, to again just to see how things are going, and also to again, be there to support in any way when he is at home. The children need to know that the father is there to you know, ask questions, "Can you do this? Can you put this in? Can I go here? Can I have a go at doing this?" Ahm Pat was interested in photography so we tried to help him out with a camera, and ahm, you know, just all of those little issues, that's all about providing (C1, 264–269).

During her interview, a home-educating grandmother discussed the possibility of her death, and that her time with her grandchildren may be limited. She stressed the importance of the intentional provision of herself and her time as a resource for her grandchildren, in this manner:

> And now I think, well if that *(her death)* does happen, I'll always think, 'What have I left behind?' And so, that, to me, is more important than, … that's life. To me, that's life. Whatever I can put into the children under me, is more important to me than anything else (C4, 741–744).

The provision of time and the ongoing attendance of a parent / grandparent to the home educated child's upbringing were deemed to be a crucial factor in the view of home educators.

Teaching children of different ages and grade levels brought specific challenges to parents in larger families. One mother described some of her experiences of combining the formal teaching of three of her children aged 16, 12 and 6 as well as dealing with 3 preschool aged children. She would sometimes call on the assistance of her own mother, when dealing with the younger children. She found that moving between academic grade levels was both interesting and that it developed her as a teacher.

> Ahm, the two little ones ahm, they need looking after, and caring for. But we sort of try to incorporate them too. Like, when, ahm John did his ABCs [a learning to read program], ahm, Lindon, who was not like pre-school age then, but still keen, he joined in and he would try to say the sounds and learn, you know, as we went along as well, and he would join in the craft activities, so we all sort of like, do the craft activities and ahm sports activities and things together.
>
> Yes, so, and that's part of being a family though, as well. And it's learning to interact, with older people and younger people, and sometimes grandma might come over, and sometimes she'll take, perhaps the little ones out the back, which is good for me, because then I can sort of spend some extra one on one time with one of the others or what, you know, whatever's needed to be done for that day, or ahm sometimes she'll join in a group thing as well.
>
> But the difference in what's required, you know, from the baby, to teaching somebody algebra or something, it's, it's interesting going from one to another.
>
> How you did something with one child, you can think, well, I can improve on that, and then, you can do maybe better, or differently, depending on the personality of the child, which, schools don't accommodate for, the, you know, the unique personality of the children. Ahm but we can, I can adjust for that.
>
> I'm growing as a person, yes, and a teacher. Absolutely. (I1, 82–87, 91–96, 139–140, 169–172, 177)

Similarly, a couple, who had home educated for ten years were faced with the challenge of teaching a pre-schooler, a middle school student and a senior student simultaneously. In the following quotation they described the husband's thrill of teaching their youngest child to read, whilst also home educating their 16 year old son who was in Year 11, and a 14 year old daughter (who is not mentioned in this quotation), who had chronic fatigue syndrome.

> Mother: And you [to the father] were thrilled to bits when you taught her to read.
>
> Father: Yes.
>
> Interviewer: So you taught her to read?
>
> Father: Yes, using ACA curriculum.
>
> Mother: Because that daunted Len. Because the year that Chris started [with home schooling] Elise [their youngest daughter] was in a state preschool, and we had a roundtable conference and we all decided that we would home school Elise. And Len [the father] being the primary educator, and it frightened Len, that teaching Elise to read.
>
> Mother: Because reading is so important and he was thrilled to bits to see her grow, and she got her certificate, her ABCs and she could read. And now Elise can read anything, and Len needs to be proud of that. Yes she can just pick up an article or a book and she can say out amazing words. (C7, 36–52)

Addressing multiple academic levels across a number of children, at the same time, was a common feature for home educators as they experienced the role of teacher.

Curriculum choice was a critical factor for these parents. They had chosen to use the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum as a core part of their educational program. This curriculum is a structured program extending from Prep to Year 12, with a self-instructional, mastery-based learning approach. The curriculum's flexible methodology allows the student to work at their own academic ability level, irrespective of chronological age and it also allows the student to learn at their own rate of progress, rather than being constrained by a teacher's timetable or by the rate of fellow students in a class.

Comprised of the core subjects of Mathematics, English, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) and Science with many elective subjects, this curriculum allowed these parents to effectively manage the education of different siblings who were studying at varying grade levels, at the same time. One couple stated that this curriculum allowed their children to pursue an appropriate academic pathway, and that its structure and built-in learning tools allayed their fear that they would not be able to successfully teach their children at home.

> Father: And of course the ACE curriculum makes it easy, because all you have to do is follow the work, the tests are built in. The instructions are all there. It is not as if you have to reinvent the wheel all the time, so that to me… And I know that there are lots of other curricula available, and other people use different

> curriculum I know that, but I just think that it would be such a greater amount of work if you were using a curriculum other than ACE.
>
> Mother: I think because Elise was our fifth child, and the others were so much older, we found it a bit scary because we were taking on …it would make her like an only child she was being educated at home by herself and we found it scary being responsible for her learning, and ACE suited us because it had goals built in. Their goal was high academic achievement for her and that suited us. And that meant it was far less scary than we thought. (C7, 68–80)

Parents also accessed other texts and many varied educational experiences as part of their family's educational program. However, textbooks and curriculum materials formed only a part of their children's formal educational experience.

Practical life skills also featured in the formal academic programs of these families. One mother, while referring to the academic, spiritual and emotional aspects of her family's education, placed a strong emphasis upon teaching her children to develop practical life skills, such as budgeting, in order to be successful in their future lives.

> Okay, so there was the spiritual, the academic, which is a big part, with the PACEs, emotional, the relationships, and then, ahm, probably too, teaching the children about budgeting, you know, because now that they've got jobs, I feel that's like another role that I play, or we both play together, to teach them how to live within their means. (C6, 383–386)

The teaching of practical life skills was clearly seen by parents as a key component of their educational programs.

In their endeavours to provide different learning experiences, parents usually referred to the need to provide learning experiences beyond conventional academic learning. They often viewed these experiences as extracurricular activities. They emphasised the importance of the content of this learning as well as the fact that the contexts of this learning were often outside the family home. Extra curricular activities that this group of parents brought to home education included:

1. art and handicrafts, such as cross stitch, paper cutting, drawing, decoupage, embroidery, knitting, long stitch, papier mache, plaster work, sewing
2. courses of study outside the home, such as TAFE college courses
3. dramatic arts interests, such as drama lessons, drama recitals, poetry recitals, speech lessons;

4. entrepreneurial interests, such as commencing small businesses and cottage industries
5. information technology
6. musical interests, which included Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) syllabuses, choirs, instruction in various musical instruments such as flute, guitar, piano, violin, presenting musicals, singing lessons, timbrel groups and participating in or attending musicals
7. social activities, such as Boys and Girls Brigades, church activities, home educators' outings, picnics and youth groups
8. special interest activities, such as astronomy, gardening, inviting guest experts on a topic into the home to teach, learning to handle money and photography
9. sports such as camping, cricket, fishing, football, inline hockey, ice hockey, ice skating, mountain bike riding, netball, rock climbing, roller skating, ten pin bowling and walking
10. travel interests, including domestic and international travel and missions trips.

Parents saw that part of their teaching role was to provide the best educational experience for their children. One mother expressed this responsibility this way:

> Interviewer: Well, okay, well if you were going to summarise your role as a home-educating mum in a sentence or two, what would you say?
>
> Mother: Ahm, to do the very best that I can for my child. … Well, I teach him as much as I can. I help him as much as I can. And I hope that, you know, that I help him to enjoy learning as much as I can (I6, 365–368, 373–374).

Various parents sought to improve their teaching practice by different means. One mother completed a teaching degree, during her home education experience, as part of her pursuit of best practice. Others referred to classroom teachers for advice. Another mother felt that part of her development as a teacher included the review and improvement of her teaching practice as she refined the lessons she did with her older children, later with her younger children, as they too, grew older and progressed through the academic grade levels.

> So, it's good. And certainly, as you go down, and as we're sort of, ahm, getting more and more into the, well more children into the home schooling, ahm, you

> know, how you did something with one child, you can think, well, I can improve on that, and then, you can do maybe better, or differently, depending on the personality of the child, which, schools don't accommodate for, the, you know, the unique personality of the children. Ahm but we can, I can adjust for that. … Well, because I am his mother, I love him dearly. I love him more than probably anybody else apart from his father and certainly, God before us, but, I mean, a teacher, whilst they may develop an affection for the child, never has that motherly love for the child, so it doesn't have the same, real yearning for them to do the best that they can, to do, to become all that they can be. (I1, 167-172, 277–281)

The formal aspect of the role of teacher, required intentionality with respect to education in the home, however, parents were also intentional about the informal aspect of their family's educational practice.

4.8.2.1(10) Informal pedagogical aspect

The role of academic teacher was not only viewed in terms of the formal teaching of academic subjects; the role was also seen to have a significant informal aspect. The informal aspect of the role of teacher involved informal learning through conversation, by having real life learning experiences in the real world, by children observing parental example and by the involvement of fathers in their children's daily routines and education. It is important to note that for most of these parents, this focus on teaching and learning was usually placed in the context of real life experiences and spiritual awareness.

Part of the informal learning process involved parents purposefully or informally conversing with their children. One father who had been home educating for 14 years stated "I find that it's interesting now that I've always been able to talk to my kids. We've related well. But now, they can give me advice, and I listen" (I3, 285–286). A grandmother referred to her husband's informal conversations as a vital part of their grandchildren's upbringing:

> But he doesn't realise that when he takes, he doesn't realise that when he takes the children with him, he is talking to them all of the time. … With those trees out there, I think Sarah and Sam, … the little hedge, I think Sarah and Sam were planting those. "This is how you plant, this is how you plant it." Do this and do that. He is constantly talking to them. He doesn't realise how much of a teacher he is. When he is doing the bees, when he is doing the bees. (C4, 872–880)

This grandmother mentioned one important aspect of informal teaching when she referred to her husband not realising how worthwhile the activity actually is. In her

view, informal teaching may occur without either the parent or the child realising that teaching or learning is taking place, as it may occur any time and it follows no planned educational agenda.

Real life learning experiences in the real world, not necessarily related to formal school curriculum are important to these parents. They reported using a wide variety of learning experiences for their children. Many were critical of the normal school-based learning practice that restricted much of a child's learning time to 12 years in a classroom setting, devoid of real world experiences. They stated that there were many more natural contexts and social settings that would provide for rich learning experiences. One father described his and his wife's idea of education, which included their children learning about business and wealth creation and exposure to international cultures. They located their business in an office at home so that their children could learn about finance and business. In this way, they saw their children receiving "two educations":

> It's also been one of your reasons to be working from here. It's not so much to get them just to have money but because we wanted them to consider that making money wasn't everything. That they would learn the opportunity of having to juggle study and getting money… They're getting two educations aren't they? They're getting their ABC's but they're also getting this ability to watch how business runs, how it works. That's something that's sort of, just homeschooling does, it makes them a lot more aware of our business (I5 271-274; 291-294).

For these parents, home education gave their family the freedom to teach and learn in the ordinary setting of their everyday lives, unpunctuated by the restriction of 12 years of institutionalised formal schooling.

One father had helped his teenage son to follow his personal interests as an informal part of his education. This resulted in providing an income for him. The father saw that this informal, real life learning activity may be of assistance to his son, in his future life as an adult.

> Pat, he's more interested in computer graphics, and at one time he was interested in, ahm, buying up, buying old cassette players and selling them, doing them up, repairing and that. So we'd go to the markets together, and buy things on the cheap, and he would clean them up, and he would sell them and make a little bit of pocket money, so I've got to be there to support them, when they're going, when they have certain desires and interests. I've just got to be

> there to help them, yeah you've just got to help them. Ultimately, we are to help our children fulfil their calling and their destiny, as they grow (C1, 56–63).

One couple described their role of providing many different learning experiences for their son. The father is an advisor to a government minister. His work required frequent travelling around the state of Queensland. His wife and son accompanied him on many of these trips. The couple intentionally sought for experiences in the community during these trips to broaden their son's education.

> Father: My other role then is to give him as many experiences as different and as varied as we can find. For him to learn more about what else is available in life, rather than be limited by the box.
>
> Mother: Yeah, outsourcing. Looking for opportunities to outsource whatever we need, wherever we need it. Yes, I've been finding, picking and finding.
>
> Father: It's the ultimate teacher. The ultimate teacher is looking for every opportunity that the environment and the community teaches you. (C5, 136–139, 208–212).

Thus, variation of real life experiences, whether they were of ordinary life or whether they were extraordinary experiences, such as in this family's experience, comprised the informal component of the teaching role.

A mother with nine years experience as a home educator, emphasised the importance of providing a variety of real life educational experiences for her children, which were not achievable in a classroom setting. She stated:

> That by being home, I could enjoy life with my children as they were doing a wide variety of things that they would never have the opportunity to do at school. My role was the sort of day to day, teacher of that. (I2, 18–20).

Drawing upon her "rich childhood" experiences, she described in detail, her search for similar varied informal learning opportunities in the real world, for her children. These included exploring urban and coastal settings, art galleries and museums; and experiencing sports and other social settings:

> Okay. Well, it was — I had a very rich childhood, and I wanted to ensure the same for my children. We went out a lot. We went, we would, part of education, I felt, was going to the beach, and looking in rock pools, and for things and learning about the world around you. It was playing a lot of sport and learning how to get along with people in a team. It was going to art galleries, going to museums. But also just experiencing going out with play groups and really a rich variety of friendships and activities, we would go on train rides and we

> would go on bus rides, just for the sake of doing those things because I wanted them to see a lot, do a lot, … and enjoy it, with me, as a family. Now I've been blessed with a rich ahm, you know, young life. And I just wanted to, them to see and, have an opportunity to see a wide variety of things and to see what wonderful things there are out there, to see and do. And people to meet and places to go. (I12, 110–120)

Similarly, a father expressed how he wanted his three children to have diverse educational experiences in the real world, with real world examples, rather than their education being restricted to textbook examples as presented in a classroom.

> I just thought it was important for them to do real things in the real world and not on their behinds all day, reading about something in a book, where they say, you know, the measurement of a building. Well go and measure it! … We wanted to give them a whole experience and to get them to think about what they were doing, think about what happens around them and you know, to analyse it and look at it from different viewpoints, interact with it. (C3, 433–436, 488–490).

Parents situated informal teaching and learning experiences in different settings, by visiting places of interest and of educational importance, by visiting interesting people or experts in a particular field or attending lectures on topics of interest. Some also placed an emphasis on connecting with people who had disabilities, as an important part of their informal curriculum.

They referred to many varied informal learning experiences for their children, including activities such as: beekeeping and honey production, gardening, witnessing the birth of animals, keeping poultry, working with timber, chopping wood, working in businesses, visiting or working on job sites, international trips with mission teams, allocating extended dedicated time to problem solving, educational trips, meeting with experts in various fields of interest and preparing meals.

Parents also mentioned that home education included their children experiencing challenging social settings such as handling finances, experiencing conflict resolution, illness, death and household management. A grandmother explained the importance of providing real life experiences as, "it's giving them [the children] that, outside of the PACE [formal curriculum], common sense experience of life" (C4, 915–916).

It was not merely the initial exposure to the experience that was seen to be important to the learning process. Parents saw that their children needed to discuss and reflect

upon these real life experiences and to apply what they were learning to every day life. One mother described this practical aspect of her children's education in this way:

> I think when they go to school, you're not aware of what they're learning that day. And when they're at home you can know exactly what they're learning and you can follow it through ahm into again, you can apply it in everyday life, because you are aware of what they've just learned, or you're aware of perhaps even the words that they are learning, you can point them out to them and you can help them even at the shops, when they've got to pick something, you can help them to choose it, by reading and finding out what it is, so it's not just a nine till three thing that they do at school, it's all the time, yeah. (I6, 381–388)

Another mother stated that, as home educators, she and her husband had broadened the life experience of their youngest daughter in a way that her older children, who were not home educated, had not experienced.

> Taking those opportunities and just making the most of them because you simply, our older children [who were not home educated] simply didn't have some of the things Elise's had. (C7, 229–230)

Parental example presented a challenging aspect to these parents. They realised that their lives were on display all day to their children. Parents frequently spoke of this informal parental teaching role, as being an example to their children. They particularly referred to the ongoing example of how they conducted their family life and marriages. They were aware that they were constantly on display to their children. These parents saw that they were, in their children's eyes, the default role models for living life.

> Mother: Well, in a nutshell, I suppose that we're modelling life to them. (I10, 231)
>
> Another mother: Once again, I think one of the biggest things we do as parents is teach by example. So I guess, if we exemplify our willing or wanting to live life to the full and that they would see that and they follow that example. As I've experienced over the last seventeen years of being a mum and that seems to be the way of it, we are led by example. (I1, 482–486)
>
> A father: 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, 309–311)

Fathers were often recognised as having a distinct role of bringing fun and play to their family's educational experience. Bringing play, variety and humour into the

daily home setting was deemed to be a necessity to the home educational setting. One home-educating father of three young children saw the need to bring recreation and humour to the family's home education. He was intentional about this aspect of his role and often introduced it upon arriving home from work. He described it in the following way: "It's definitely my role to tease the children. [laughter] Someone has to do it ... Oh just a real sense of humour I guess. And you see that in the kids, especially Nessie" (I13, 233; 237–238).

Similarly, another father felt that by playing with his children, he could bring variety to his children's day and give his wife a much-needed break.

> When I come home, and it may be because I have come home so I'm not as familiar, but I'm more the fun element to the kids. … but I think that's important, to come home, and to give Holly a break, and really play with the kids. (C6, 467–468, 473–474)

This informal light-hearted aspect of the teaching role often involved fathers in a different form of educational activity. Many fathers also mentioned that they saw their teaching role as being quite different from that of their wives. They often taught different subjects to their wives, and they saw their attitudes and teaching manner were often different to those of their wives. In this way, they sought to bring diversity into the family's educational program.

When couples were interviewed, they referred to themselves in the role of teacher. A brief description of how couples viewed their experiences of that role follows.

4.8.2.1(11) Teacher — Insights from the couple interviews

The responses from the couple interviews are integrated into the above focus or theme of the teacher role. However, as indicated in Chapter three, there were some distinctives which emerged from the interviews, when subjects referred to "we" in the role of teachers, which are worth mentioning briefly as they demonstrate the value of interviewing couples as well as individuals.

In the role of teacher, couple respondents referred to their provision of teaching and learning opportunities, shaping their children's education, character development and facilitating their children's social development and assisting their entry into future tertiary study and career paths. As with the individual interviewees, there was much

emphasis on providing varied learning opportunities in their home environment and in the real world, rather than in a classroom. Some couple respondents expressed concern that some of their children were behind academically, while others saw the need to focus upon academic, emotional or spiritual development and the attaining of independence and responsibility depending upon their children's needs. These couple-focussed experiences of the role of teacher presented variation which enriched the data set of that role.

Having described what was in focus, it is now appropriate to look at the context of the focussed theme. When home educators held the role of teacher as the theme in the focus of their awareness, it is important to realise that their experience of that role did not occur in isolation. It was embedded in a context or a background, known to phenomenographers as the thematic field and the margin of awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). These will be described in the next section.

4.8.2.2 Structural aspect: Background of the Teacher's role — The thematic field

The thematic field of a person's awareness includes that which is directly relevant to the theme or focus of awareness, but which is not in focus (Cope, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997). The thematic field of a person's awareness is the immediate context that surrounds what the person has in focus, at the time. When home educators were aware of themselves in the role of teacher, they experienced this role in the wider context of their home education experience. This context included their other three parent roles of learner, partner and pioneer. Thus, when the role of teacher was in the parents' focus, the other three roles of learner, partner and pioneer receded to the background of their awareness, to the thematic field of the parents' awareness. The other backgrounded roles provided a setting for the role that was currently in focus. Thus, a parent who was experiencing the role of teacher may have been aware that his or her teaching experience may have their learning, partnering or pioneering roles in the background of their awareness of their teaching. The parent's focus upon being a teacher was set in the wider home educational context of the thematic field, which included being a learner, partner or pioneer.

While focussed on their roles as teacher, parents often referred to how they needed to learn new things in order to teach, or how their partnership with their spouse greatly assisted with their teaching role. Below is an example of how a mother saw that her teaching role was complemented by her partnership with her husband. Their organisational approach took the stress out of her teaching role.

> Like I could have them doing some work in the day and Paul came home at night, he could then maybe do with them, maybe a bit of science and maths with them at night. And it wasn't a strain. It flowed, and our days were much more peaceful. And flowed in a pleasant fashion, and actually, all of the stress went out of the day. (C3, 303–307)

In this example, the parent's role of teacher was in focus, while in the context of the partnership between spouses. The parental educational partnership was the context that enabled the teaching to take place.

The thematic field of a teacher was constituted by the other three parent roles that were coexistent with the theme or focussed role. As parents experienced their role as teachers, the other three roles receded to the background of the parents' awareness in the thematic field. Beyond the thematic field of awareness lay a broader and more general context of awareness in the person's margin of awareness.

4.8.2.3 Structural aspect: Background of the Teacher's role — The margin

The margin of a person's awareness provides a wider, backgrounded context to that which is in focus, than that of the thematic field. It is much broader than the theme and the thematic field, yet it coexists with the theme in focus and the thematic field of the role. It may be somewhat relevant to that which is in focus, but it is not directly related to it. The theme and the thematic field of the teacher were set in the margin, which included the wider context of the parents' past experiences of teaching. These past experiences, whether positive or negative, included the parents' observation of their own teachers when they were at school, and what they experienced in classes and in the playground. These experiences, though not directly related to their experience as a teacher of their own children, have contributed to their experience of teaching in general and could be seen as being formative of their current view of themselves as teachers of their own children, and are thus part of the margin of the category of teacher.

One mother referred to her own education and her teachers as greatly influencing her role as a teacher of her own children.

> Ahm, my own educational background was very classical, they call it classical. I was blessed with a really good school with teachers who had read widely, and seen quite a bit of the world. Even though they came from a generation of women who had, there were no men after the First World War. Most of them were single, because the men had died. There was a whole generation that went into teaching, very, very well educated women. And I, all my English teachers exposed me to a compulsory reading of many classical writers, ahm, Robert Louis Stephenson, Charles Dickens, Shakespeare, all those sort of great writers, in large quantities. And I was taught French and had to do Latin … So I wanted to do the same for my children, because I saw that none of this was taught in school. (I12, 337–344; 354–355)

Another example of this wider context backgrounding of the role of teacher was given by a father who had been bullied when he was at school. His son, who had disabilities, also experienced school bullying and this had negatively affected his son's love of learning. In his role as teacher, the father stated that he was concerned that his son no longer enjoyed learning. The father's past schooling experiences provided an historical context to the decision to home educate. In the role of teacher the parents decided to remove their son from school, and to educate him themselves.

> You can tell we've had a really poor experience in schooling. Continuously, I talk to adults and one out of a thousand adults that I talk to will tell me they had a fun experience at school. Most of them have struggled. And I didn't want that for my son. You can learn so much better if your mind is not absorbed with struggle and surviving with getting away from the bullies or becoming one, to survive. I became one at school to survive. And I didn't want that for my son. … And, uhm, interestingly, because all of that junk that happened to me, I found that I could see that stuff happening to Daniel in the playground. So, I didn't want that for him in the long term. I wanted to pull him out of that, and work out a better way for him to rekindle the passion, the fire, for learning; put a fire back in him that made him want to learn. The ultimate goal of any teacher, is to reach inside their students and turn on that switch that makes them desire to learn. (C5, 263–269, 317–322)

Other past experiences of parents also contributed to their view of teaching. The home educators' own parents' parenting behaviours, whether positive or negative, contributed to their parenting styles. These home-educating parents incorporated what they had learned from their parents' parenting into their role of teacher. In some cases this influence went beyond the parent's parents, to the parents of a friend. One grandmother was influenced to home educate because her friend's mother home educated her children.

> Interviewer: Please tell us about your background.
>
> Grandmother: Well, I guess as a child I grew up with a little friend, whose mother taught them. In those days, they kept them strictly inside during school time.
>
> Interviewer: Was that in the city or the country?
>
> Grandmother: It was at Clayfield, yes, Clayfield. And I always thought, and I hated school, myself. So I thought, when I grow up and have children, … I always intended to home school my children. (C4, 9–18)

There was also a wider context beyond the immediate and extended family setting that contributed to the margin of awareness of the role of teacher. These parents lived in communities that usually expected that teaching a child during the compulsory school attendance ages was a job for professionals. The wider community assumed that teaching was not a job for untrained parents. One home-educating father was told by friends that he would not be able to educate his sons at home because he did not know anything about teaching. He was told, "You don't know what you're doing. You have to be educated, and … teachers" (I5, 114–115). This expectation in their communities placed pressure upon home-educating parents, as teachers. It often gave them a sense of them having to explain themselves to others and to justify what they were doing, and in particular, to explain that they were not disadvantaging their children. The background of the parents' awareness as a teacher, as described in the thematic field and the margin of awareness, provided the context for their focussed role.

4.8.3 Dimensions of variation

The category of teacher included three dimensions of variation which, while they appeared in other categories, had distinct characteristics for this category. Figure 18 illustrates these dimensions of variation and highlights the category of teacher, in the outcome space.

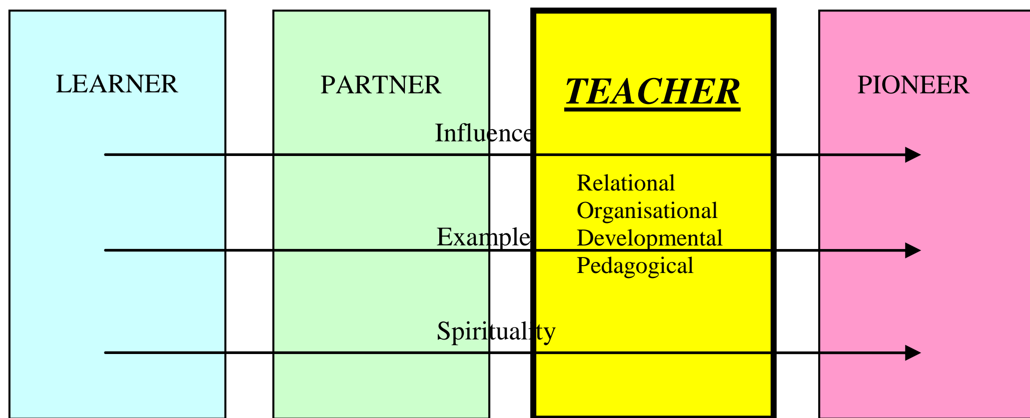

Figure 18: The category of Teacher and the Dimensions of Variation.

4.8.3.1 Educational influence

The dimension of parental educational influence is evident 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 process of home education. This influence was not, however, confined to formal pedagogical activity; it also included informal daily living in the family context.

The influence of the parent as teacher was based upon their parent-child relationship. Thus, the influence was trans-generational, with the beneficiaries of this influence being the children who were the focus of their teaching role. In this way, the dimension of variation of educational influence found a wider audience in the category of teacher, than it does in the category of learner and partner.

Parental educational influence was deemed to be a major advantage of home education by the parents. They saw that the transfer of educational influence from the state and various institutions to parents in the family context, brought benefits to their children. Home educators aspired to being the primary influence in facilitating the development of their children, and in providing the pedagogy and nurture for their children. The creation and maintenance of greater parental educational influence was foundational to why parents chose to home educate and to why they continued to do so.

4.8.3.2 Example

The dimension of example was strongly on the minds of parents as they described their teaching role. They saw that they were always on display as a role model to their children. One mother described it this way:

> Once again, I think one of the biggest things we do as parents, is teach by example. So I guess, if we exemplify our willing or wanting to live life to the full and that they would see that and they follow that example. (I1, 482–484)

A father gave his view of his experience of being an example, stating, “I see more my role as being one that’s more of a leading influence and an exemplar in point” (C6, 33–34). He gave the examples of not smoking cigarettes and of setting a financial budget in place, as illustrations of how he believed that he and his wife had to be consistent examples to their children.

> They’ve got to see in us what we teach, what they’ve been taught, and otherwise, sort of, it’s a bit like, ahm, “Don’t smoke” and then put a cigarette in their hand. And the opposite is true, if you teach your child, this is how you budget, but they don’t see that in your life, the chances are their not going to budget. So, yeah, it’s fairly important. (C6, 411–415)

One father indicated his desire to impart his ethics to his son by the example of his own life.

> I show Daniel [his son] by my ethics, by my ethos to work, by my ability to do the things I must do to make the family safe, to bring in an income that allows me to fix the [Unclear], but also to be the head of the house and that’s the role model, I think that I’m showing Daniel, by my actions, not so much by talking to him. Sure, I’ve got to teach him about them sometimes and talk about them and talk about certain things, but I think, ahm it’s a bit like Christianity really, if you live it, the role model’s there. (C5, 122–128)

The dimension of example was viewed as critical to the teaching role of parents. The teacher aspect of the dimension of variation of example differs from the way this dimension appears in the prior two categories of learner and partner. In the prior two categories the dimension of example refers to single specific characteristics of the parent’s life that is an example to the children. In the category of teacher, the parents were aware that their whole life was on display to their children. Thus, in the view of these parents, the content of the example in the category of teacher is all encompassing.

4.8.3.3 Spirituality

The dimension of spirituality was strongly evident in the role of teacher. Parents often saw their primary teaching role as that of a spiritual mentor. One father made the spiritual aspect of his teaching clear:

> We had the great advantage of being able to teach them and show them, you know how to pray and Bible study, things like that. So encouraging them in the whole Christian walk, as best we could. … Something that had been really important, like, I like literature. And I think that there is real power in telling wonderful stories. And there's great spiritual learning. (C3, 557–559; 602–603)

A mother quoted a verse from the Bible and stated that her view was to teach God's commands during the daily educational activities.

> Well, I'm really not sure, that a top the verse from Deuteronomy six, chapter six verse seven. "You shall teach them diligently to your children," sort of like the, the commands of God. "And you shall talk to them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." And to me, that implies that you have to be with your children twenty four seven, in order to do that (I12, 36–40).

The dimension of spirituality in this category of teacher demonstrates an expanding theme across the family. While the dimension of spirituality pertained to the individual parent in the category of learner and it pertained to the parent couple in the category of partner, in the category of teacher this dimension is expanded to create direct outcomes for the children of the family. These parents saw that being a teacher and their practice of teaching has a spiritual dimension that is integral to the education of their children.

4.9 Category 4: The home-educating parent as a Pioneer

In this category of description, home educators saw themselves in the role of pioneer. This role has both a referential and structural aspect that denotes the meaning of the role. Figure 19 indicates the category of pioneer in the diagram of the outcome space, highlighting the elements of the focused theme in this category.

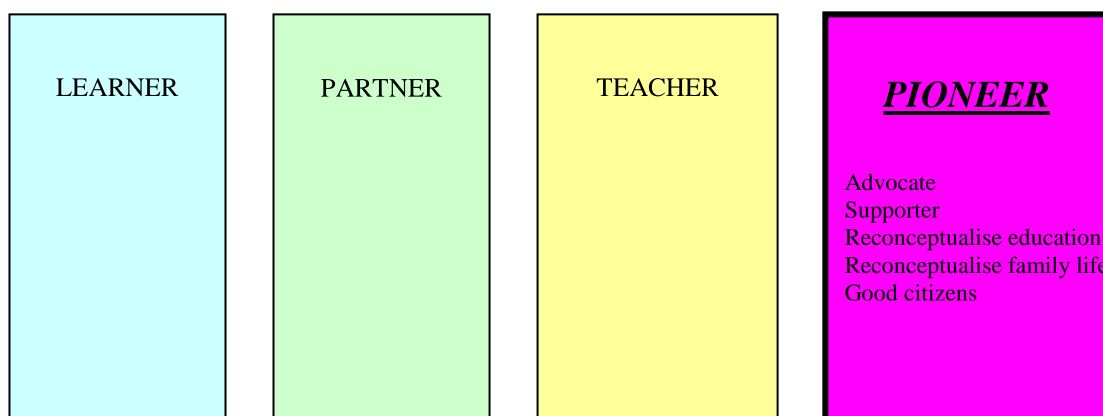

Figure 19: The category of Pioneer in the Outcome Space.

4.9.1 Category of Pioneer — Referential aspect

The category of pioneer described how home-educating parents experienced their role as educational pioneers, with respect to their practice of home education. The referential aspect of this category of description is a description of the meaning of the role of pioneer. In this category, parents saw themselves as bringing positive changes not only to their families but also to their communities.

Home educators have assumed the role of pioneer because their chosen pedagogy is very different from currently established, educational theory and practice in their communities. Their educational choice has challenged personal, parental, pedagogical and community norms. Because they were involved in a form of education that is so different from the educational norm, home educators saw themselves as agents of change.

By virtue of their engagement in a growing alternative pedagogy, home educators are bringing change to society. In a changing world, where education has mostly become

the business of large bureaucratic institutions, separate from the family, the act of being a home educator informs and challenges popular beliefs and theories about education, parenting and families. It particularly presents challenges to educational and political leaders in established institutions.

The parents in this study saw themselves as part of a movement that involves them in a different approach to both education and to everyday family lifestyle. They were aware that their role in this alternative educational movement challenged conventional thinking on education and thus carried the potential to bring change to education. In particular, home educators bring a new perspective to the development of the concepts of parents as educators, the home as an educational site and the situating of education in real world experiences. Some mentioned that one down side to being agents of educational change was that they could be misunderstood or even opposed by people in their communities. They were, however, optimistic that their pioneering educational engagement would bring positive change to their communities.

This focus makes home educators, their families and their educational choice a platform for instigating change. When focussed upon themselves as pioneers, the parents' primary focus was not on their other home-educating roles of learner, partner and teacher. These co-existed simultaneously with what is focal, but in the background of their awareness. Rather, they focussed upon how they and their educational choice was so different from the educational norms of their communities. In this role, home educators focussed upon how others, beyond their families could benefit through their participation in home education. They saw that as pioneers, they were facilitating the growth of the home education movement in local communities and beyond.

4.9.2 Category of Pioneer — Structural aspect: Focus and background

In this section the structural aspect of the category of pioneer is described in terms of the theme, thematic field and margin of the pioneer's awareness. The theme of awareness is that which parents had in focus as they experienced the role of pioneer. The thematic field and the margin of awareness were backgrounded during that

experience. The structure of the pioneer's awareness is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 20.

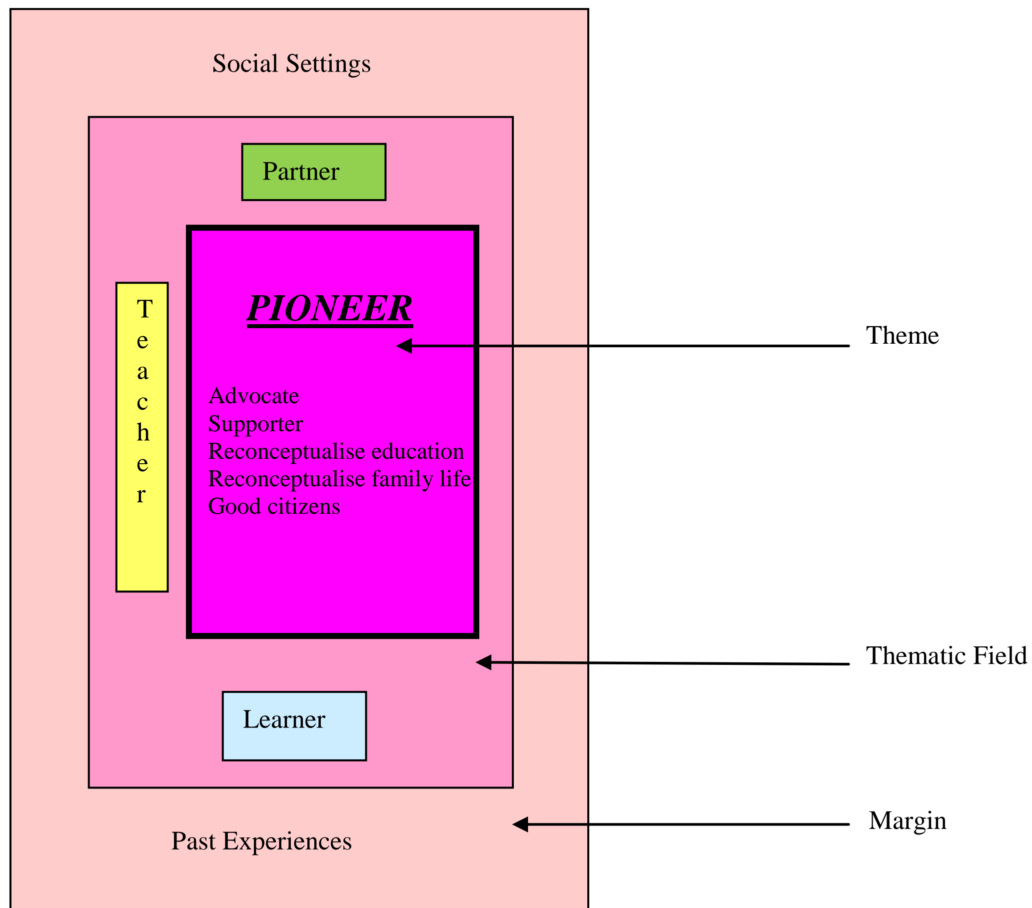

Figure 20: Structure of Awareness of Pioneer.

4.9.2.1 Structural aspect: Focus of the Pioneer's role — The theme

In the role of pioneer, parents focussed upon how their experience as a home educator brought various changes to their communities. As parents described their role as pioneers they referred to the following elements of the focussed role: (1) being an advocate for home education, (2) providing support to fellow home educators, (3) reconceptualising education, (4) reconceptualising family life, and (5) producing good citizens. These are different aspects of the theme of this category of description. A detailed description of the theme of the role of pioneer, as organised by the elements of the theme follows.

4.9.2.1(1) Advocating for home education

Respondents saw that home education had brought positive changes to their families. Having experienced benefits from home education, parents promoted it to their friends and acquaintances. A mother, who had home educated her two daughters for eight years, related how, as an advocate for home education, her influence had prompted her friends to commence home education.

> But I'm actually getting to the point where I can help other people start home schooling … just last year, four of my friends who were totally dead set against home schooling, all started home schooling in one year [laughs]. It's like… well… and [her friends] have all come and said "Help" at different stages and, to be quite frank it's something that I've prayed for many, many years with these particular ladies, that they would see the positives of home schooling and now it's like, well, thank you [laughs]. (I8, 203–204, 210–215)

Thus, home educators were bringing change to the community by promoting their pedagogy to their friend and acquaintances. This grass roots word-of-mouth promotion may well have been contributing to the current rapid growth of the home education movement in Australia.

4.9.2.1(2) Supporting other home educators

Relative to helping parents commence home education is the role of supporting current home educators. As an experienced home educator, the same mother indicated that other parents often contact her for assistance. She described her experience of parents seeking her help.

> "Ah, ring Tracey, she can help" — it's like, oops, okay. [laughs], not that I need anything else to do but anyway, so yeah, I get phone calls from people saying, "I've just started home schooling can you help me?" I say "I'll try".
>
> But I'm actually getting to the point where I can help other people start home schooling, or with problems that might arise in home schooling. (I8, 198–200, 203–204)

Several mothers expressed enthusiasm to support other mothers in home education. One mother found that aspect of the pioneering role personally fulfilling and described it this way:

> The young mothers will come to me and ask for ideas and help, I know they do with Deslie too. Mrs. Smith, she has been ringing me now weekly for help with

> their Jonathan anyway, I have really enjoyed that. Because I felt that I can help her. … And I thought well isn't that good because I have a role that actually I enjoy and I think that it is a God-given role and well we all, older men can encourage younger men and older mums can encourage younger mums and I think that's really valuable. And I enjoy that role. (C7, 490–499)

With parents willingly taking on the role of assisting other home educators, support networks and collaborative groups become established around experienced practitioners.

This support was not restricted to experienced educators helping other parents. One father described how he helped children in other families in his regional support group. He referred to the encouragement he had been giving to a young man from a single parent family, who attends his home education activity group.

> I am also starting to get involved in helping some single parent families. Well, again it is part of who I am. I don't live, well I try not to live just to please myself. I live to help other young men. For example, in our home school group, it's the chess board. I'll just elaborate on that. Pulling the chess board out to me doesn't necessarily mean a big thing, but I am currently pulling the chess board out with a young fellow that sort of wouldn't talk. I've taken an interest in him, and he's enjoying that and coming out of himself in the group. (I7, 110–116)

As experienced home educators assist novice home educators, the home education movement is developing self-sustaining support mechanisms that are likely to contribute to its growth and its own decentralised infrastructure.

4.9.2.1(3) Reconceptualising education

These parents saw both the advantages and disadvantages of being educational pioneers. The advantages of home education included its flexibility and new forms of learning whilst the disadvantages included the loneliness and alienation of doing something so different, personal doubts about whether it would work and dealing with educational authorities.

Reconceptualising education in their communities made these families different. They brought an alternative view of education to their families and to their wider communities. One father saw current schooling practices as separating education from real life and that such practices presented a limited view of education. His view of education was that it had to be part of a real life experience.

> We believe education really isn't just something you learn, it's something you experience. A total concept and they go off there [to school], they come back, because when they come back, they are still learning, but it's sort of separated too much, I mean (I5, 319–321).

Some of the practices which this father and his wife incorporated into their children's education were significantly different from current practices in schools. Their form of education linked the children's learning to their family's business life. While the family used a formal course of academic learning, real world educational experiences were integrated into their educational program and included both their children's exposure to the father's business and to domestic and international travel. The father also made another important distinction between home education and traditional schooling in that he felt that it was important to include their children in decision-making about their family's education.

> Home schooling is a total corporate thing, because the child is now part of the decision-making process, the whole process as well. While we do our own little things and make sure it all happens, they also take part in it and are geared to doing certain things because that's part of the concept of it you know, if you agree to it, put the onus on them. This is where everybody has their part to play. They're not just now the student and we're the teachers they have a say and we're all working together and they're talking about it. It's more proactive. (I5, 309–315).

This father's view that education should be linked to real world experiences would appear to be vastly different from the traditional form of education practised in classrooms and schools by the majority of Australians.

Similarly, another couple's view of education was to not restrict learning to a room in a school, but rather to take every opportunity to immerse the child in real life experiences in the community.

> Father: The other thing is, I want to show Daniel [his son], while he is home schooling that a flexible approach to learning is probably the greatest thing to learn. To learn in very different environments is probably a good thing. Instead of being stuck in a schoolroom, he can be with me, travelling around, seeing what I do in the real world. … It's the ultimate teacher. The ultimate teacher is looking for every opportunity that the environment and the community teaches you.
>
> Sarah: Making the most of whatever's given. (C5, 17–21, 211–214)

Another father expressed how he viewed home education as being different from traditional schooling. He saw schooling as a recently developed phenomenon, which

was assumed by most people to be the only way for a child to be educated. He said that a return to the family as an educational base could be a good thing.

> I don't know, I just think it's comfortable, I think it's scriptural; I think it is the way it needs to be. I don't think most people sit down and think about schools, they think that schools just always existed. You'd know what I mean. But I believe that, you know, years ago there weren't many schools. And then a lot of the schools were started by Christian organisations. Till the states got into it. But people just seem to get that schools, this is what my father did, and my grandfather did and my great-great-grandfather did, but they don't really look at it, but you only go back five generations and my grandfather probably never went to school, probably only go back four generations. Schools weren't everywhere all the time. They didn't always exist, the day? You know, and, like so much of the world today just says, "Oh well, it's normal, just send your kids to school". Well, 200 years ago, the first settlers in Australia, there was probably very little schooling, they used to educate their kids at home. That's where it was done. Scripturally, that's where it was done, in the home. I know they taught them at the synagogues and things like that in the days of the Bible. But basic schooling I would have believed would have been in the home. And that's got its good and its bad, I suppose it depends on what the home is like. (I3, 214–229)

Bringing positive change to the community was viewed as an important role of home educators. Connecting their children's education to real world experiences and removing some of the restraints of the classroom, the curriculum and the institution of schooling, were positive reconceptualisations of education for these parents, when they compared their home education experience to that of traditional schooling.

Thus, home educators saw that their educational practice was bringing positive changes to the traditional concept of education, in their local and wider communities. One mother expressed her desire that she and her family contribute positively to the wider community: "And also being a part of a community that was going to be an addition to the community at large, instead of taking from the community" (I10, 81–82). These families saw themselves as pioneering an alternative form of education. Their view was that the current form of traditional schooling often had presented their children with unnecessary drawbacks and that home education seemed to redress or alleviate several of these. They were hopeful that their view of education would bring fresh ideas and positive changes to education.

However, as mentioned earlier, the parents were also aware of the negative aspects associated with reconceptualising the educational status quo. These included feelings

of loneliness and alienation, doubts within the family and, for some, the possible threat of legal sanctions.

The parents in the study were aware that being involved in an emerging educational phenomenon could often be a lonely business. After eight years in home education, one mother described the loneliness of being different from the majority in her community. She also felt the weight of the responsibility of educating her two daughters, especially when the family commenced home education.

> At the beginning it was really tough, because where we lived, there was nobody around that we knew that home-schooled. There was nobody that was there to help. So I suppose when you first start if you're by yourself, it's a big shock. Because you're not used to the way things go, especially the way the world tells you that you're supposed to send your kids to school and do all this sort of stuff. When you home school, well the buck stops here. Ooops, so if you make a mistake well you just have to learn to live with it and deal with it, learn from it and move on. (I8, 191–197)

While this new responsibility was daunting to her as a novice home educator, she persisted with educating her daughters and now, as an experienced home educator, she was confident that she had made a good choice.

Because home education is not mainstream and well understood in the general community, home educators have often encountered unexpected opposition. One mother who is a trained teacher and who had home educated her three children for 15 years, described how her home education drew criticism from friends and acquaintances.

> And people came to me and said, "Oh you're taking your child away from the rough and tumble of life and they'll never learn to come to grips with difficulties", and, you know, difficult people whatever. But that's not true because I wouldn't say that I, my husband, my cousins and my friends are devoid of difficulties. Everyone presents difficulties. There are always problems and conflicts, some worse than others. I mean, people seemed to think that I was creating a perfect world. So I thought well, knowing my world is imperfect, but I wanted, I want to at least, you know, Christians used to get on my back about this as well. (C3, 59–66)

> A lady from our church bowled up to me and said, we weren't good buddies, you know we knew each other, we were quite friendly and everything. And she bowled up and she said, "I've heard that you are home schooling your children". And I said, "Yes". And she told me I am sheltering and closeting my child. She'd never learn to be an independent spirit. And what I've ended up with, is somebody who's terrifyingly independent. (C3, 338–343)

A father of four felt ostracised by people “in schools”, as he and his wife considered home education for their children seven years earlier.

> And when we made the decision it was very hard too. It wasn’t just something where you’d just say, “I'm going to do homeschooling!” You know? [laughter] You have to weigh it up and you talk to everybody. If you talk to people in schools, they just basically ostracise you and call you names and everything, “ irresponsible parents” [laughter] you know, “You don't know what you’re doing”. “You have to be educated, and … teachers.” So I mean it’s not a decision which we made sort of overnight. It was something we investigated. We tried, we talked to different families. So I see that as my role. So I sort of got the information and had to make that decision. (I5, 110–117)

Home educators can encounter doubts and fears from within their families. For example, one father, who is a social worker, reflected on his doubts and fears as he and his wife commenced home education. His wife was committed to home education as a way to relieve their eight year old daughter’s fear of school and stress-related illness; whereas he was unsure when they first began. He expressed his doubts this way.

> But, it was already strange, and I started thinking, well how is she [his daughter] going to ever interact with anyone? If she was sort of locked away from the school set-up, because school was supposed to supply all of your needs. (C3, 197–199)

His fears were relieved when the symptoms of stress-related illness left his daughter after a few days of home education.

> Interestingly enough, within a few days, we took on the role as, active in the role as nurturers and protectors, we took her away from the stressful situation. We suddenly found we had a healthy, happy child again. And we thought, well okay, okay. And so immediately, after a few days, all of my concerns and fears and qualms were completely squashed. (C3, 201–204)

Despite his initial concerns, the father had become comfortable with home education because of the benefits he perceived that it brought to his daughter. As a result, both parents became equally committed to their decision to home educate.

Reconceptualising education brought one couple into conflict with educational authorities, during the early years of home schooling. They had chosen to not register their children as home schoolers because they believed that they were fully responsible for their education, rather than the state. They described how their educational choice had brought risk and threat to their family. Not only did they

experience a degree of personal uncertainty about home education, but they had to endure the threat of possible legal action from the Minister of Education in Queensland. They were also faced with expressions of concern from professional educators and other acquaintances, who were not supportive of their educational choice.

> Father: I think that was their [provider of curriculum] first year in Australia.
>
> Mother: It was just the beginning.
>
> Interviewer: What year would that have been?
>
> Mother: Ahm, it was about 25 years ago. Would that be about right?
>
> Father: It would be more than that.
>
> Mother: No, it wasn't, because the twins are thirty now. So it was about 24, 25 years ago.
>
> Interviewer: That was when you started home schooling your own children?
>
> Father: Yes.
>
> Mother: Yes, so they were only there [in school] for a short time the next year, I joined ACA, and struggled with it, to begin with, there wasn't a lot of outside … I was still a bit worried, " What's the government going to do?" I'd written to the Minister for Education, I think at the time, Lynne … something, I can't remember who it was, but anyway, I said I had taken my children out of the school and, blah, blah. And I got a letter back, [it said] "Put them back in". And I thought, "Oh, I can't get any help from them [the Education Department]". So, I just filed that, and just kept going, just hoping that God would keep it covered, and that I would be able to do it [to home educate]. And then we bumped into Preston's old Sunday School teacher, who was the deputy head, over at Toombul one time, shopping. She said, "Oh what are you doing?" I said, "I'm teaching". And she didn't cause any trouble for me, she didn't say anything, so that was good. And we just went on from there till they were about 16, I think and they went into, because of the work and everything, I did find it difficult, I wasn't the perfect home schooler, but it didn't, they [her children] never had any trouble getting work or … they went through college. One got a diploma in early childhood training. (C4, 63–94)

One father highlighted the clandestine nature of his experience as a pioneering home educator. He was aware that, because his children were of compulsory school attendance age and that he had not enrolled them in a school, the children could be legally viewed as being truant from school. He described this as being "underground", stating, "Yes, so you start to realise that there are, you don't have to be locked into the system. There's underground ways of doing it" (C7, 460–461).

Because of their practice of civil disobedience to the State's compulsory school attendance laws and, in some cases, their refusal to obey a clear directive from the Minister for Education, these parents faced the threat of prosecution. This placed great pressure on them. However, their belief in their right to choose their children's mode of education was sufficiently strong to enable them to home educate their children, despite real concerns about threats from legal and educational bureaucracies.

Thus, these families reconceptualised education, in that they made their family a full time educational community and expanded the commonly accepted syllabus-based concept of education to include much broader experiences, situated in real life settings. In the process of pioneering, while they had sought to connect their children to real-life settings in the community, they had sometimes felt alienation from within their communities and had even faced the threat of legal sanction.

4.9.2.1(4) Reconceptualising family life

Home educators also saw themselves as having brought a new model of family life to their communities. The traditional view of education in Australia is that the child and the child's education are separate from the day-to-day life of the family. One father saw that the schooling model of education had fragmented his family, sending family members into different directions, whereas home education had brought his family back together and had allowed stronger relationships to develop.

> Mum's not going off to her job or her community work, and the children aren't heading off to their various schools and their various classrooms. That fragmentation disappears. And there's a reunification process happens. It happened to us, so that Les said to us after a month or so, that something like, "Peter is my brother and I've been living with him for the past eleven years, and I'm just getting to know him."
>
> And I put that down to the fragmentation of the family. They weren't really having relationship. They might have been living in the same house with the same parents but brother to brother, there was no sibling relationship. Now that was just to let something that sticks in my mind. So there was a reunification happening. (I9 110-120)

This father saw that his family was reconceptualising family life.

These parents saw their family as a bona fide learning community. They saw family life as productively educative, and not merely as an incidental support service to their child’s school-based education. One mother described the way home education had brought family life and education together as “everything all put together”.

> [Laughs] Yeah, home schooling I suppose for me, is everything all put together. It isn’t just the lessons, it’s not … education. It’s a whole lifestyle thing, because the girls are with you all the time, or, my girls are with us all the time, and they’ll need something and so, okay I’ll go and sit with them and talk with them through something, but still got to go and, do the housework, or I've still got to do the washing or do the cooking and, we can turn that into education as well, which is great, ‘cause the girls will then come into the kitchen, and they’ll learn how to cook this, or they’ll learn how to wash up properly or that sort of thing. So it's not just education. It’s everything. It’s a whole lifestyle thing. (I8, 43–50)

From this perspective, home education allowed family life to be viewed as comprehensive when compared to non home-educating families.

One father identified a distinct contrast between the common view of the relationship between traditional schooling and family life and home education and family life. He and his wife saw that the everyday life experiences of his family were a vital component of his children’s education. When referring to this family based component, and how they each participate in it, he described it this way: “it’s not structured, it’s not part of any curriculum, it’s just part of life and we see that as very important (C7, 151–152).

One father, who was an advisor to a state government minister, described how his family/work lifestyle was part of his educational practice for his son, Daniel. Daniel’s education was the family’s lifestyle.

> Instead of being stuck in a schoolroom, he can be with me, travelling around, seeing what I do in the real world. So, finish his work, and come down and then watch me, what, ahm, for example, there’s something coming up in the next three days. I’m going down to a [name withheld] conference. So Daniel will finish his work in the morning, and then he’ll come down and watch what I do with the Minister, and see me do my presentation notes and how I deal with that and the work I’ve got to do. I see that as my role, to be a role model for him, and then to create a safe and sound environment for him to be doing his work. (C5, 20–26)

Home education enabled parents to weave their child’s education into their whole family lifestyle, and conversely, it allowed the family’s lifestyle to be an integral part

of the child's education. It was family life, inclusive of the child's education. Thus, for these parents, home education not only presented a different view of education, it also presented a different view of family life and its function in society.

4.9.2.1(5) Producing good citizens

Respondents often took the view that they were contributing to society by producing good citizens. Parents maintained that the quality of the child's upbringing was dependent upon the energies that they invested into their home education. They saw that this investment would provide a good education and that it could create good character traits and stability in their children. This could, in turn, produce a good citizen, who could make a positive contribution to society. Ultimately, the parents felt that seeing their children become good citizens, would be a valuable social by-product of the time and nurture that they put into raising and educating them. One father described his view of how home education would help his children become good citizens this way:

> The whole reason for educating children and disciplining children is so in the future they'll be good citizens or, you know, have a nice life. So it's just being able to input into their lives. (I5, 185–187)

A mother also saw her role as contributing to a better society by influencing her children to be good citizens.

> Well we'd always been, always have been, parents who have seen our role as aiming for our children that they are of use to God and of use to society. And Chris went through about six months [in high school] where he was a very unhappy and angry young man. … home education has helped us fulfil the role we talked about years ago about making our children of use to God and of use to society. And that is helping us isn't it?" (C7, 340–342, 420–422)

One father saw that his children needed to look beyond Australia in terms of contributing to the community. He felt that sending his children on overseas trips would help them to develop benevolent attitudes towards people in other cultures and in less affluent circumstances. He and his wife had sent them on a number of philanthropic trips to Vanuatu, The Solomon Islands, Malaysia, Africa and the US. He stated:

> We just wanted them to have a greater appreciation of what they could do within the world scenario … to think beyond the immediate locality. (I5, 233–235; 236–237)

These parents saw that producing good citizens would contribute positive outcomes to the community. One mother saw this citizen-shaping role as “the main thing”.

> And also being a part of a community that was going to be an addition to the community at large, instead of taking from the community. … I think that’s the main thing. I think that ahm, you know, Patrick and I really wanted our children to achieve, not for the sake of achieving, but to influence their world. (I10, 81–83, 85–87)

These home educators saw themselves as establishing alternative education, which would not only benefit their own families, but would develop their children to be good citizens, contributing to others in the broader community.

The category of pioneer is evident as a role experienced by home-educating parents. They saw that their educational choice had enabled them to bring change to their families, their friends, to current educational norms and to their society’s view of family.

When couples were interviewed, they referred to themselves in the role of pioneer. A brief description of how couples viewed their experiences of that role follows.

4.9.2.1(6) Pioneer — Insights from the couple interviews

The responses from the couple interviews are integrated into the above focus or theme of the pioneer role. However, as indicated in Chapter three, there were some distinctives that emerged from the interviews, when subjects referred to “we” in the role of pioneer, which are worth mentioning briefly as they demonstrate the value of interviewing couples as well as individuals.

In the role of pioneer, the couple respondents interacted with friends and other home educators as advocates for home education and supporters of home educators within expanding home education social networks. When it came to interpreting legal matters surrounding home schooling, couples addressed these matters together. Couples also shared a vision of their child contributing usefully to society, as an

adult, in the future. These couple-focussed experiences of the role of pioneer presented variation which enriched the data set of that role.

Having described what was in focus, it is now appropriate to look at the context of the focussed theme. When home educators held the role of pioneer as the theme in the focus of their awareness, their experience of that role did not occur in isolation. It was embedded in a context or a background, known as the thematic field and the margin of awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). These are described in the next section.

4.9.2.2 Structural aspect: Background of the Pioneer's role — The thematic field

The thematic field of a person's awareness includes that which is directly relevant to the theme or focus of awareness, but which is not in focus (Cope, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997). It is the immediate context that surrounds what the person has in the focus of awareness, at that time. When home educators were aware of themselves in the role of pioneer, they experienced this role in the wider context of their home education experience. This context included their other three parent roles of learner, partner and teacher. Thus, when the role of pioneer was in the parents' focus, the other three roles of learner, partner and teacher receded to the background of their awareness, to the thematic field of the parents' awareness. The other backgrounded roles provided a setting for the role that was currently in focus. Thus, a parent who was experiencing the role of pioneer may have realised that his or her pioneering experience was be set in the context of their learning, partnering or teaching roles. The parent's focus upon being a pioneer was set in the wider home educational context of the thematic field, which included being a learner, partner or teacher.

One family, when describing their pioneering experience of operating contrary to the legal requirements of the *Education Act*, in the early days of home education in Queensland, set their story in the context of their partnership and their desire to teach their children. Thus, their focussed role of pioneer was set in the context of the roles of partner and teacher.

Dissatisfied with their daughters' school based education, the family, left their Brisbane home to move "out to the country" in order to qualify for the distance requirement of the Queensland Government's correspondence course. They were sufficiently committed to finding a means of education, with which they would be satisfied, that they were prepared to relocate their family. After one unsatisfactory move, they abandoned that educational course, moved back to the suburbs of Brisbane and sought another curriculum. They successfully approached the Education Department for permission to home educate their children, deliberately omitting to fill in the distance requirements on the application form, as they no longer qualified, due to their relocation to the suburbs of Brisbane. They then home educated their daughters. Later, the parents received a letter from the Minister for Education, requiring them to send their children back to school. The parents refused to do so, ignoring the Minister's directive.

These parents operated as pioneers in the early days of home education. The context for their actions was educational, as the reasoning for their pioneering activities was that they were not satisfied with the education their children were receiving at school or with the government's correspondence course and they were seeking an alternative educational solution. Thus, while the parents were focussed upon a pioneering role, that role was contextualised in the role of teacher. They described this journey from educational dissatisfaction into an unknown field of educational uncertainty, in this way:

> Grandmother: And so we went out to the country, wanting to bring them up in the country, thinking, if we got far enough away from school, we could do …
>
> Grandfather: The government correspondence.
>
> Grandmother: Yeah the government correspondence, yes. And you had to be so far from everywhere. Well we weren't that far from everywhere, we just ahm, left that line [on the application form] blank. … Now we went down to [name of a town], probably when the youngest was about six and the older two had started the government correspondence and the younger two hadn't started yet because I didn't know what I was going to do. I could put them into school at [name of a school]. And going there probably for about 12 months, the older two, and I put the two little ones, the twins, in grade one. And they were there for three months, and they hated it. So … I can't leave them there [laughs] because everything was … And I didn't know what I was going to do here, and so I just said to Preston, 'Look darling you go up and get them out [of the school], and I'll see what I can do about their education.' And I was just praying, 'Lord, what am I going to do? I had them home, and I had certain

> school books from, still had a lot of work from the government correspondence. I thought what am I going to do? I'll use this, but I'll only get so far with it, and I looked up the phone book, the Yellow Pages, and I saw [A Christian Curriculum organisation], I'd never heard of this before. And I thought, 'Wow, there might be something!' and I went over to [location], and they were just starting there, and they had all of their benches and they had all the PACEs along there, and I got the work there. (C4, 19–56)

These parents home educated their daughters in a clandestine manner, until they finished their formal education. They experienced the stress of being alone in their educational endeavour and also the continual stress of not knowing whether they would face legal sanctions because they had not complied with the compulsory school attendance requirements of the *Education Act*. In this example the themed parent role of pioneer was contextualised in the backgrounded roles of partner and teacher in the thematic field.

The thematic field of the role of pioneer was contextualised by the other three parent roles and coexistent with the theme or focussed role. As parents experience their role as pioneer, the other three roles recede to the background of the parents' awareness in the thematic field. Beyond the thematic field of awareness lay a broader and more general context of awareness in the margin of a person's awareness.

4.9.2.3 Structural Aspect: Background of the Pioneer's role — The Margin

The margin of a person's awareness provides a wider, backgrounded context to that which is in focus, than that of the thematic field. It is broader than the theme and the thematic field. The margin of awareness coexists with the theme in focus and the thematic field of the role. It may be somewhat relevant to that which is in focus, but it is not directly related to it. The theme and the thematic field of the pioneer were set in the wider context of the current social setting in which the parents found themselves. The broad context for the parent who was focussed upon their role of pioneer was a community that was unfamiliar with home education. This wider context included the social settings of their extended families and their other social and community groups.

The parents also saw themselves as living in a community that often viewed their educational choice as curious and worthy of attention. In some instances home education was viewed as counter cultural and could attract criticism or opposition.

Such criticism could set a backgrounded context in the parents' awareness. One mother related how she was once confronted by an acquaintance, who was critical of her choice to home educate. She stated that being faced with such criticism was part of a price to pay for choosing home education.

> But there has been a cost, but the other side of the coin is that we have felt right with this. And I'll just tell you, it's amazing how I remembered this. A lady from our church bowled up to me and said, we weren't good buddies, you know, we knew each other, we were quite friendly and everything. And she bowled up and she said, "I've heard that you are home schooling your children". And I said, "Yes". And she told me I am sheltering and closeting my child. She'd never learn to be an independent spirit. And what I've ended up with, is somebody [her daughter as an adult] who's terrifyingly independent. (C3, 336–343)

As mentioned, parents were also aware that their educational choice may not be fully approved by legal authorities, or that home education had been viewed by some authorities as a form of truancy. This social setting had caused some parents to be worried about legal sanctions against them. Because of this, some families took a covert approach to home education. The background of the parents' awareness as a pioneer, as described in the thematic field and the margin of awareness, provided the context for their focussed role.

4.9.3 Dimensions of Variation

The category of pioneer included three dimensions of variation, which while they appeared in other categories, had distinct characteristics for this category. Figure 21 illustrates these dimensions of variation and highlights the category of pioneer, in the outcome space.

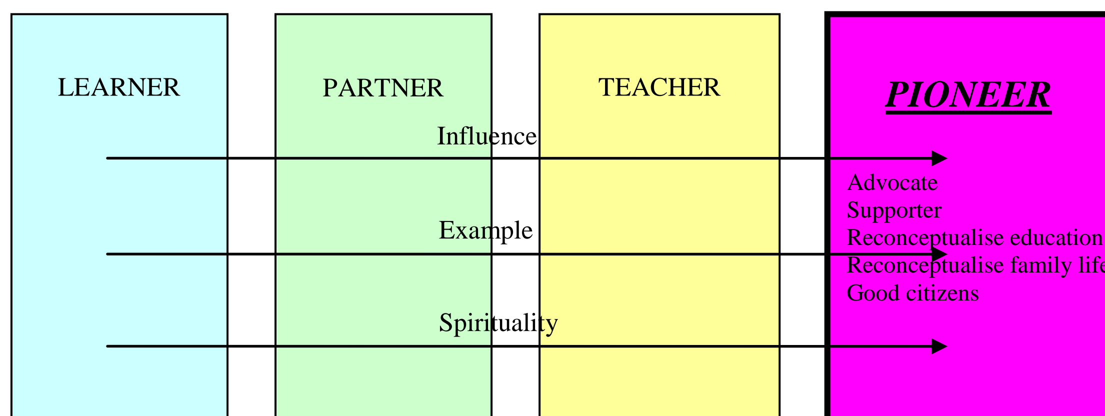

Figure 21: The Category of Pioneer and the Dimensions of Variation.

4.9.3.1 Educational influence

In the role of Pioneer, home educators become influential in the wider community as they practised a different pedagogy and lifestyle. They saw themselves as influencing others in the wider community as they advocated for home education to non-home educators; as they supported other home educators; as they brought challenges to society's conventional views about education and family; and as they sought to raise good citizens for the future.

The dimension of influence in the role of pioneer applied most significantly to the way that home educating parents saw how they brought change to their local and wider communities. While the influence of the pioneer was relevant to the self as a learner, to one's spouse as a partner and it could be directed to children as their teacher, the parents in this study directed their influence, in the role of pioneer, quite significantly towards the wider community. At this point, the influence of the home educator extended beyond the home educator's family to other families, to

educational authorities and to policy makers. Given that both state and federal governments are changing laws for home educators, it would be true to say that the influence of home educators is extending far beyond their families and friends. Furthermore, these parents saw that their influence extends beyond this time, into the future, as their home-educated children enter adulthood and negotiate their future lives as adults.

The dimension of influence in the category of pioneer differs from how it was expressed in the other three categories, in that the influence of the parent home educator as a pioneer, extended beyond the family into the wider community. Thus this theme of educational influence has expanded across each category of description to the unlimited sector of the wider community, in the category of description of pioneer.

4.9.3.2 Example

Because home education is an emerging phenomenon, its practitioners become examples to the community. Home educators had become examples, demonstrating a different pedagogy and family lifestyle to their communities. Because the movement is growing, it seems that the examples these families portray, have been attractive to some other families, who, in turn, have become home-educating families.

This dimension of variation of example in the category of description of pioneer, differed from its expression in the prior three categories of learner, partner and teacher. In this category, the parents and their educational choice became examples of different models of an educational approach and of a way of life for families, to the wider community; whereas, in the prior categories of description, the dimension of example only pertained to members of the parents' families.

4.9.3.3 Spirituality

As a pioneer, home educators saw that their choice to home educate was a result of providential leading. One father who had commenced home educating his children in the mid 1990s described this experience.

> And that’s why we did it. And we feel we were led to home school. We didn’t have a big row [disagreement] with the state education system, we didn’t have a major falling out with a headmaster, we didn’t think, “Oh this is all wrong, what shall we do?” We didn’t have kids running off the rails, you know, like we didn’t have to go to a crisis to have to suddenly say, “Let’s change and go home schooling”. But I do believe we were led (I3, 75–80)

Many home educators viewed their education as a spiritual enterprise. They saw that their pioneering focus brought with it, not only cognitive and social benefits but also spiritual benefits. The changes initiated by these pioneers were thought to bring greater spiritual benefits to the wider community. Contributing spiritually to the community was considered to be a natural extension of the benefits of their own spiritual values and experiences.

In this way the dimension of spirituality in the category of pioneer differed from the way it was expressed in the other three categories, as this expression of spirituality was directed beyond the nuclear family, to the wider community.

4.10 Chapter summary

This description of the study’s findings indicates the qualitatively different ways in which home-educating parents experience their roles as they educate their own children. This chapter has described the four categories of description of learner, partner, teacher and pioneer in detail, with special treatment of the referential and structural aspects of each category and their dimensions of variation of educational influence, example and spirituality. Several important issues have emerged from the findings of this study. The following chapter provides a discussion of some of these issues.

Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The thesis thus far has provided an account of the research questions, the research context and the research approach and methodology in light of the substantive literature to which it relates. In turn, it has presented the findings of the study as an outcome space. This chapter provides a discussion of the study's findings and and how they relate to the relevant literature.

This phenomenographic study of the roles of parent home educators found four categories of description of parent roles. These categories are:

1. the home-educating parent in the role of a learner
2. the home-educating parent in the role of a partner
3. the home-educating parent in the role of a teacher
4. the home-educating parent in the role of a pioneer.

The role of learner focussed on the personal development of the parent as an educator; role of partner focussed on the development of the educational partnership between the parents and or significant others, so as to support the family's educational endeavour; the role of teacher focussed on how the parent facilitated the learning and development of the child; and the role of pioneer focussed on how the parent contributed to the development of the wider community. In addition, these categories of description were both linked and differentiated by key themes or dimensions of variation. These key themes are the dimensions of influence, providing an example and spirituality. The categories of description and their dimensions of variation capture the phenomenon of the roles of home-educating parents. This is the outcome space of the study.

This study is significant as it provides a view of home-educating parents as stakeholders in education. As bona fide educators, their various roles dynamically impact themselves, their marriages, where applicable, their children and the wider community. The study is also significant because it redresses the paucity of

Australian home education research literature. By examining home education from the standpoint of parents, the study illuminates the phenomenon from the perspective of participants operating *in situ*. As such, it provides empirical evidence to inform government policy in an era when governments are reviewing and creating policies about home schooling and about distance education, yet with little or no evidence from home educators, themselves.

Moreover, the study presents home education as situated, socio-cultural learning, in life changing roles within real world settings. Each of the categories of description is now discussed in relation to the literature and in the light of the home education movement.

5.1.1 The home-educating parent as a learner

The study indicated that parents saw themselves as having learned a suite of new things in their endeavour to become home educators and to then maintain their roles as home educators. The key elements included learning about: (1) home education; (2) education in general; (3) their children; (4) academic content; and (5) spirituality.

This category may come as no surprise to home educators. Barratt-Peacock (1997) defined the home-educating family as a community of learning practice with the implicit belief that parents as well as children are learning. Safran (2008) also affirmed that learning is embedded in the parent's practice of home educating. For Safran (2008), such learning processes mark a change in the identity of home-educating parents, as they commence and continue in their communities of learning practice. Thomas and Pattinson (2008) indicate that many home-educating parents are learning academic content with their children, and that this practice contributes to the way in which home-educated children learn. However, the finding that home-educating parents operate in the role of learner indicates that the learning is more than learning about academic content. It includes learning about home education, about education in general, about their children's individual characteristics and educational needs and about spirituality.

Associated with the role of learner, is the process of personal learning and change. These parents are willing to try new things. They are looking to new knowledge,

skills and applications in their communities of learning practice. This learning role can be transformational, as parents indicated that learning about home education had clearly changed both them and their familes. Flynn and Lemay (1999) argued that everyday life roles pervasively impact human experience and are, therefore, life-defining. Safran (2008) argued that home education brings significant change to the identity of parents in view of the socio-cultural setting of home education. Thus, the role of learner places parents on a path of change. This study, in concurring with the findings of Flynn and Lemay (1999) and those of Safran (2008), presents five elements in the role of the home educator as a learner, which contribute to this identity change.

As noted, the elements addressed in the role of learner are: home education, education in general, their children, academic content and spirituality. The study showed that these elements are pursued by the home educators, as learners, in order to equip them to become and to continue as home educators. The role involves the ongoing pursuit of learning. While the role of parent affords the home educator the responsibility to care for their children, in a general sense, the home educator's role of learner directs them to specific, long-term learning about pedagogy in order to achieve the family's educational outcomes.

The home educator's role as a learner reflects similarities and differences that are evident in learning roles embraced by teachers in schools. While a teacher in school can be dedicated to learning about education in general, children in general, specific academic content and spirituality, the application of the home educator's learning in this study was directed towards their own children, who are in their care for many years. The home educator's course of learning is self-directed and tailored to a targeted audience — that is, the learner's children, within the home. Where there are several children in a family, the parent's learning may be directed to individual child differences. The home educator's learning experience becomes a tailored, self-directed course of learning which both develops the parent and equips the parent to educate his or her children.

Symbolic interactionist role theory describes roles as socially negotiated shared norms between individuals which are developed according to needs (Biddle, 1986). This model of role theory informs the development of the home educating role of

learner, indicating the interaction of the parent with others on his or her learning journey. Parents stated that they attended lectures and seminars, consulted with home educators and professional educators, experts in specialist fields, read books, surfed the internet and observed their children, as they equipped themselves to educate their children. This level of interaction with various sectors of the community assisted in forming parents' conceptions of their role as learners. Flynn and LeMay (1999) posited that roles can pervasively impact human experience and may be life-defining. The findings of this study would support that view, as parents stated that they had to research the field of education extensively, prior to commencing home education and subsequently, they have had to continue learning in order to progress their family's educational endeavours. In effect, home educators in the role of learners, have extended their personal learning journey for the duration of their children's education. During this period of learning, they interact widely with various sectors of their communities, to shape their identities as learners.

In summary, in the role of learner, the home educating parent experiences a self-directed, child-focussed course of learning about education, which has immediate application to the family's educational endeavour. This learning process brings change to the parent, resulting in a new type of educator, a home educator.

5.1.2 The home-educating parent as a partner

In this category, parents saw themselves as a member of an educational partnership that provided a context for home education. The quality of this partnership was a product of the relationship between the parents and was characterised by a negotiated division of labour.

The notion of a couple as a home-educational partnership has not been widely addressed in the literature. This study, however, has found that the home educator's role of partner is a key to the establishment and maintaining of the home education enterprise. The partnership is the context for decisions that are made regarding such things as: which partner generates income for the family or what educational roles each parent takes in home education. Also, parents regularly referred to each other as sources of encouragement, creativity and strength in the home education venture.

The study thus provides evidence of the significance of the educational partnership of home educators and of the roles of the parents in the partnership.

The findings of the study suggest that there is a high degree of negotiation and cooperation in the partnerships of home educators. In terms of symbolic interactionist role theory, where people create their roles through shared meanings according to the requirements of their circumstances (Biddle, 1986; Flynn & Lemay, 1999), the interaction of both home educating parents within the cultural setting of their everday lives, created and developed the meanings of their partnership roles according to the requirements of the circumstances of the time.

In a time when families are no longer held together by law, tradition or financial necessity, couples must have regard for the needs and desires of the other, when developing an enduring relationship, demonstrating increased negotiation and cooperation (Adema & Whiteford, 2008; Baxter & Gray, 2008; Smart & Neale, 1999). Rather than pursuing individual goals in marriage, home educators have created an educational partnership, an educational option that has imputed significant responsibilities to both partners. Home-educator partnerships usually emanate from their marriages, in which both partners take negotiated roles and pursue a shared vision of child rearing and education.

Safran (2008) highlighted two characteristics of home-educating parents: (1) they share in the joint enterprise of home educating their children; and (2) they engage in and develop a shared discourse. This research supports Safran's findings as applied to the context of a parental educational partnership. This study found that the educational partnering roles of mothers and fathers were foundational to the family's educational enterprise, and that these parents discussed and planned strategies for advancing their educational enterprise. This finding resonates with Barratt-Peacock's (1997) zones of home education activity. He nominated the zone of activity within the family as the intimate zone, and the wider social circles as the proximate and remote zones.

The couples in this study shared the joint enterprise of educating their children (Safran, 2008), as they divided tasks between themselves and clearly indicated a shared repertoire of stories, experiences and labels. In this sense, this study indicates

that the partnership between two home-educating parents is a close working relationship, operative in what Barratt-Peacock (1997) named the home education family's intimate zone. This educational partnership provides the leadership of what Barratt-Peacock (1997, 2003) defined as the home educating family's community of learning practice. Such a role would significantly contribute to the identity of each partner, as argued by Safran (2008). While not denying Safran's (2008) findings that the wider home education community provides a context for the formation of the identity of home educators, this study suggests that the educational partnership among home educators is critical to influencing the partner's identity.

Parents in the study noted that the relationship with their spouse was strengthened by home education. The degree of cooperation, communication and planning toward a common goal required by home education was deemed to be positive. Parents also indicated that the quality of their relationship impacted their home education. It appeared for these parents that home education impacted their relationship and their relationship affected their family's education. These findings concur with the literature around family relationships. Mansfield (2005) linked the quality of a parental relationship to the quality of the parenting of children and Amato (2004) noted consistent research findings that children raised by parents who are happy and contented have the best chance of developing into competent adults. Furthermore, the shared activities of the home educator's partnership involve many of the qualities which researchers (Silberberg, 2001; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985) have observed in strong families around the world, including: communication, togetherness, sharing activities, affection, support, acceptance, commitment and resilience (Silberberg, 2001). It may be argued that, in some cases, the shared activities and attributes required of home educators may strengthen the resiliency of some parental relationships and thus improve family life. In turn, a strong family life has been demonstrated (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003) to be a significant contributing factor to the academic achievement of children. These findings about parents, in general, support the view that the role of home educators, as partners operating in a cooperative way, is supportive of the development of children.

This is not to say that home education necessarily enhances marriage. One could envisage the opposite being true for some. Neither was there evidence that single

parent families did not and could not home educate because there is only one parent present. However, the role of a home-educating partner may be reflective of a good relationship in many home-educating families, which, in turn, is likely to enhance the development of children. While, the home education literature does not examine the partnership aspect of home educating parents, this study brings attention to the home educational partnership as a vital foundation for the whole educational enterprise. In doing so, it makes an important contribution to the literature.

In summary, in the role of partner, the home educating parent experiences a partnership of negotiated activities based on a relationship targeting the commencement and maintenance of the family's educational endeavour. It usually produces a close partner to partner working relationship, resulting in a new type of educational administration, a family-based educational administration.

5.1.3 The home-educating parent as a teacher

Home educators, when focussed upon their role as teacher, facilitate the learning and general development of the child. The parents' view of themselves in the role of teacher can be represented as four key elements: (1) the relational aspect, where the teaching role is predicated upon their relationship with their children; (2) the organisational aspect, where the teacher role relies upon the parents organising their lives to provide the environment and the resources conducive to the education of their children; (3) the developmental aspect, where the role of teacher involves parents facilitating the development of their child towards both tangible and intangible aspects of maturation; and (4) the pedagogical aspect, where the role features the element of teaching the child as a home educator. These four aspects of the role of teacher are now discussed.

5.1.3.1 Relational aspect

A home-educating parent is a teacher who teaches in a family setting rather than in a conventional school. Like all parenting, it is done in the context of their child's life. Teaching is part of parenting. Home-educating parents extend their teaching role into their child's life, further than most parents, without the interruption of schooling.

This study of home educator roles found a clear and frequent reference by parent home educators, to the pedagogical connection between the parent and child by virtue of their familial relationship. The work of Henderson and Mapp (2002) and Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) demonstrated that for parents whose children attend traditional schooling, their interaction with their children's academic programs, promoted their children's academic achievement. The same results were not achieved if other adults interacted with the children. This study went beyond that of Henderson and Mapp (2002) as it looked at parents as the main educators of their children and it indicated that one factor present in the relationship between parents and their children is an educational factor.

Desforges and Abouchaar's (2003) extensive review of parenting and educational literature similarly found that at-home parenting has a significant impact upon the academic performance of school children. It found that stable parenting in the family home possesses a unique educative quality. These review findings indicating the academic advantages to children from families with stable at-home parenting, support the findings of the study that parent home educators view their roles as contributing positively to their children's education.

One mother of seven, a home educator of 13 years experience, succinctly stated it this way: "I believe every mum is a teacher of their children, right from day one, of course. You're teaching them little things you don't realise" (C1, 118–119). This statement highlights the view of the home educators in this study that, for them, teaching is part of parenting.

Parents saw their existing, long-term relationship with their children, with unique biological, psychological, contextual and spiritual connections, as being a key pedagogical advantage to teaching their children. They juxtaposed this with schooling's short-term, distanced and less familiar relationships between students and teachers. The experience of combining parenting with a child's education was seen by these home educators to bring unique advantages to the child's education, which are difficult to emulate by alternative means.

A key finding of the study was that parents saw their familial connection, vested interests and parental love as derived from their mother-child and father-child

relationships, as being unique relational contributors to their educational enterprise and which distinguished home education from traditional pedagogy. This relational aspect of the home educator's role of teacher is emblematic of a highly personalized form of education, enacted uniquely within the relationship between the parent and child. In short, the parent-child relationship is inclusive of significant educational qualities.

5.1.3.2 Organisational aspect

The organisational aspect of the home educator's role of teacher is well represented in the literature. Researchers have explored how home educators manage their families and their environments academically, in order to educate their children at home (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Danaher, 2001; Fortune-Wood, 2005; Lowe & Thomas, 2002; Meighan, 2001b; Reilly, 2004; Reilly, Chapman, & O'Donoghue, 2002; Simich, 1998; Thomas, 1998; Thomas & Pattinson, 2007).

In line with these studies, this study of home educator roles, found that a key organisational aspect of home education is that the family organises its lifestyle and educational practice in tandem rather than in competition. Rather than having to fit family life around daily, term and annual school timetables, home educators have opted for synchronicity between family life and education. They can organise their family's education program to suit various time frames. One family synchronised their mornings with the timetable of their family's business so that the children could socialise with the staff during their breaks. In another family, both parents worked in paid employment. The father worked at home and the mother had part-time morning work outside of the home. They organised their daily educational program so that the mother could participate in some formal instruction of the children during the afternoons. The flexibility of the home educators' time allowed other innovations, such as families being able to travel together and still do formal lessons, and organising holidays to take advantage of cheaper low season costs during school terms.

Families were also able to organise their education programs to accommodate the special health and education needs of their children. Parents gave examples where their children had educational and/or health problems, such as attention deficit

disorder and chronic fatigue syndrome, and they found that they had the flexibility to adjust their educational programs accordingly. If pressed by a child's illness, they could cut short a lesson, rather than forcing the child to participate when no longer able to do so. The flexibility of home education allowed parents to organise the family's educational program to meet the needs of the individual child and in the light of the family's daily routine. In short, the organisational aspect of the role of teacher is conducive to education tailored to the needs of the student and of the family.

5.1.3.3 Developmental aspect

The developmental aspect of the role of teacher also emerged in this study. Within the context of home education, the parents were able to share to a greater degree than most, the development of their child through many stages of life. This developmental view included pregnancy, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. This long-term involvement features an extended time frame beyond that of a schoolteacher's involvement with a student or a class group. In contrast to a home educator, a schoolteacher may oversee a group of children, for around five hours per day in the case of primary teachers and, in the case of secondary teachers, for 40 minutes per day, for about 200 days, in the space of one year. The teacher-student relationship is then usually terminated by the end of the academic year, in anticipation of a new teacher-student relationship the next year. Socio-cultural researchers have found that parents are appropriate mediators of their children's development (Portes, 1991; Portes & Vandeboncoeur, 2003; Wood, 1999) and parents in this study saw themselves as such, through all stages of their children's development until they become independent of their parents.

The developmental aspects to which home educators referred included: raising and caring for children; mediating life skills; motivating, nurturing and encouraging the development of various skills and talents as well as the physical, social and spiritual development of their children. This study indicated that home educators are responsible, on a full time, daily basis, for the care and development of the child to a far greater breadth and depth of development than any other adult.

5.1.3.4 Pedagogical aspect

The pedagogical aspect of the role of teacher is one of direct involvement by the parent in the child's education. Home educators do not view parents as onlookers and parenting as an adjunct to their child's education; nor do they see education as an activity that is conducted separate to parents. Rather, these home educators saw themselves as active participants in their children's education.

The parents did not define the role of teacher in the commonly accepted model of a paid professional who teaches academic content and skills, in an educational institution, such as a school. They viewed the role of teacher in a distinctly different way, which, while inclusive of the teaching of traditional academic subjects, also included a variety of conceptions of their experiences of being a teacher, which would normally be seen as outside of the experience of a teacher in school. The major factor overarching these varied pedagogical experiences was the relational and cultural context in which they operated. This highlights the socio-cultural context of the role of the home-educating teacher as distinct from that of school-based teaching.

These parents presented 86 different conceptions of their roles as home educators, 54 of which specifically addressed teaching. They presented a broad view of the role of teacher. These aspects of the role of teacher are more than references to the transfer of knowledge or of academic content. Their conception of a home educator as teacher provided insight into the relational organisational, developmental and pedagogical aspects of what it takes to educate a child.

Because of the advent and development of institutionalised education in the Western world, the word "teacher" is commonly associated with professionals teaching in an educational institution. However, the word "teach" implies to help or cause to learn, and this meaning can be inclusive of, but also applied to a much wider group than professional educators in formal institutions of learning. This study indicated that home educators applied a much wider, less formal, family-based, real life context to the meaning of the word "teacher", which was also inclusive of formal academic teaching. The parents in this study viewed the commonly held concept of a teacher as a carer of large groups of unrelated age-peers, who instructs them for a limited period

most days, in an educational institution, as a limited view of the role of teacher. Their view of a teacher differed greatly from the traditional view.

The home educator's view of the role of teacher was that a teacher facilitates the development of the whole child through the various stages of development and in a majority of their experiences. Their view of the role of teacher was organised around a personalised whole-of-the child pedagogy. This broader view of the role of a teacher is another key finding of this study. In this sense, this study is a reminder that the commonly held notion of "teacher" may be limited. If one is to listen to the voice of many educational reformers (Adcock, 2000, 2001; Mintz & Ricci, 2010; Taylor-Gatto, 2007b; Teese & Polesel, 2003), the home educator's definition of the word "teacher", with its relational focus and personalised pedagogy, may positively inform new definitions of the role of teacher and its associated practices.

Some Australian studies have examined the way in which home-educating families have approached educational practice. They have looked at learning practices involving programed learning, students studying from text books, researching online, visiting libraries, student directed learning, conversational learning, natural learning approaches and home education for students with disabilities. (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Brosnan, 1991; Danaher, 2001; Habibullah, 2001; Honeybone, 2000; Lampe, 1988; Reilly, Chapman & O'Donohue, 2002; Simich, 1998; Trevaskis, 2005; Thomas, 1998). This study has taken a unique approach to understanding the pedagogy of home education, in that it has focused upon parents' experiences of their roles as home educators and, in so doing, has discovered a descriptive framework that can assist in the understanding of such activities.

As with other parent home educator roles, symbolic interactionist role theory (Biddle, 1986; Flynn & Lemay, 1999) assists with the understanding of the pedagogical aspect of the role of teacher. The findings of the study posit that the role of teacher is mostly developed through interaction between the parent and the children who are being taught. Parents found that the flexibility of home education allowed for their role as teacher to develop according to the educational needs of the child and of their families. The pedagogical aspect of the role was also informed by interaction with other home educators in a shared community network and by interaction with the wider educational community as home educators responded to

the formal requirements of the state academic syllabus. In addition, the role was informed informally, as parents mediated their children's learning in a process of interacting with their local communities.

In summary, in the role of teacher, the home educating parent facilitates formal and informal educational experiences, in a real life setting, which are tailored to the needs of the individual child. This teaching process is based upon a close parent to child relationship, which can develop a new type of learner, contextualised in the real world.

5.1.4 The home-educating parent as a pioneer

The fourth role of home-educating parents described in the outcome space is that of pioneer. This role reflects the out-of-the-ordinary practice of home education. By virtue of their educational practice, home-educating parents challenge conventionally accepted views of education and family life. The key elements of this role are home educators: (1) advocating for home education; (2) supporting other home educators; (3) reconceptualising education; (4) reconceptualising family life; and (5) seeking to produce good citizens.

In this study, parents in the role of pioneer, who have (1) advocated for home education have promoted the growth of the movement, by talking to their friends and others, who are interested, about home education. Those who (2) support other home educators have been integral in creating the home education networks across the state. The parents who saw themselves as operating in these two elements of the role of pioneer were predominantly experienced home educators. Their experience in home education gave them the confidence to assist others to commence or continue home education.

The role of pioneer also bears the element of (3) reconceptualising education. This element highlights the inescapable feature of home education, that is, its departure from the educational norm. Home education reconceptualises education in terms of its relationships, its location and its educational experiences.

First, home education is predicated upon familial relationships, in this sense home educators saw themselves as educational pioneers, reconceptualising education.

These educational relationships are long term in that they are based upon the parents' marriage relationships and their relationships with their children, for as long as they home educate. The familial relationships are usually deep, based upon love, good will and vested interest for success. They involve shared history, values, culture and experiences. The relationships usually include shared genetic, biological, psychological, historical and spiritual factors. Implementing education based on this type of relationship makes these parents innovators.

Second, home educators saw themselves as pioneering a reconceptualisation of education by situating it in the real world. The location of home education is different from the educational norm in that it is conducted in the real world in and around the home and in the wider community. Marton and Booth (1997) commented on the value of reality in relation to learning. They highlighted a problem with formal schooling in that it removes learning from the reality of a real world setting. They state:

> It appears that learning that has lasting effects is always about *reality*, or about something that is experienced as *real* in some sense. The problem however, is that although the social practice of schooling is experienced as real, it is far from always obvious that the content of schooling is experienced as being about the "real" world — the cultural, social, physical world in which the learner lives. (p. 156)

Marton and Booth (1997) argued that the disconnect between learning in schooling and what takes place in the real world, may explain why students understand phenomena in ways irrelevant to the real world. They gave an example of a student's textbook explanation of photosynthesis in terms of gases and the production of carbohydrates as juxtaposed with an adult's post-schooling realisation that the textbook meaning for photosynthesis actually meant that plants in the real world produce their own food.Findings in this study concur with Marton and Booth's (1997) comments, who saw the value of having real life learning experiences, in the lived-in world.

While the home educators in the study acknowledged the value of information (that may be found in textbooks and reference material), they saw their educational role as connecting the child's learning experiences more closely with their lived-in world.

Because they are free to pursue education in real life settings rather in conventional schools, home educators viewed themselves as pioneers in education.

The third reconceptualised aspect of education is linked to the preceding point, but is also distinct. Home education enables students to learn experientially, in the real world, as well as from text books. While they do learn from books and similar resources, home-educated students are also free to experience what they learn, in locations relevant to what they learn. They are also able to learn in time frames that suit their learning experiences rather than being restricted by imposed schedules. For most of these home-educating parents, the locus of their children's learning, whether formal or informal was ordinary life experiences. Davies (2003, 2009) observed that home-educated students learn in the context of ordinary life and he argued that home educators' educational curriculum should be organised around ordinary life, rather than around a classroom-based syllabus.

Thus, a further key finding of the study is that home educators viewed themselves as able to enact flexible, individualised pedagogies, relevant to the real world. Whilst individualised flexible education methods have been advocated over three decades by Australian educators (Beare, 2010; Caldwell, 2006; Kennedy, 2004; Klohr, 2004; Loader, 2007), with little change occurring, home educators have found and developed one expression of such pedagogies. Ironically, unhindered by systemic constraints, home educators are practising pedagogies espoused within this rhetoric; yet; as pioneers, they face opposition from institutions that idealise these same pedagogies (Carter & Winch, 2001, McFarlane, 2003, 2004, 2006). As pioneers, home educators saw themselves as able to achieve a flexible form of education, tailored to and experienced by individuals in the lived-in world.

The pioneer role also included the element of (4) reconceptualising the family as an educational site. The family is not generally considered as the focal educational site for children of compulsory school attendance age. Home education recognises and extends the educational value of the family. When family becomes the site of education, the study found that roles of family members change; the layout of homes change as families make adjustments in their homes for the many activities that will occur as part of their educational program; time schedules change to accommodate formal learning, extracurricular activities and to accommodate special educational or

health needs, or holidays and, as mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, relationships deepen. The parents in this study indicated that they have experienced deeper spousal relationships, better parent–child relationships and better sibling relationships within their families.

The final element of the role of pioneer is that parents saw themselves as (5) developing "good citizens" (I5, 186) within their community. To date, there is no empirical evidence that home education is producing good citizens in Australia, nor is there any clear definition of what is a good citizen. However, it does demonstrate a benevolent intention and civic-mindedness by home educators toward their communities.

In terms of symbolic interactionist role theory, home educators have developed the role of pioneer as they interacted with their friends and acquaintances, informing them about home education and supporting those who were home educating. Interaction with governments and policy makers has also developed their roles as educational pioneers. Whilst some parents sought to avoid the scrutiny of authorities, it is evident that other home educators have become agents of change, as they have interacted with governments to effect legislative changes concerning home education. Both those who avoid contact with authorities and those who contact them, have their pioneering role informed in some way. However, the interaction between home educators and their children in the daily routines of home education has developed their role of pioneer on an ongoing basis. As they practice home education in their homes, home educators are reconceptualising the traditional views of education and family life. The interaction between parents, their children and their wider communities develops home educators in their role as educational pioneers with the effect of bringing change to their communities.

In summary, in the role of pioneer, the home educating parent experiences a new educational lifestyle. This lifestyle prompts the parent to relate differently to both the family and the wider community, ultimately producing a new participant on the educational landscape of a socially just and equitable society.

Table 12 is a summary of the experiences, features and outcomes of the roles of parent home educators as described in this section.

Table 12: Summary of the Experiences, Features and Outcomes of Parent Roles

ROLE	EXPERIENCE OF THE ROLE	FEATURES OF THE ROLE	OUTCOME OF THE ROLE
Learner	A self-directed child-focussed course of learning, with immediate application	Learning changes parent's identity	A new type of educator
Partner	A partnership of negotiated activities based on a relationship, targeting the commencement and maintenance of the family's educational enterprise.	Close partner-partner relationship	A new form of educational administration
Teacher	Creating formal and informal educational experiences in a real life setting, tailored to the needs of the individual child.	Close parent-child relationship	A contextualised learner in the real world
Pioneer	New educational lifestyle	Relate to family and the world differently	New participant on the educational landscape

5.1.5 The dimensions of variation

The three dimensions of variation to emerge in this study are the dimensions of (1) influence, (2) providing example and (3) spirituality. The dimensions describe educational features that home educators stated were vital to the education of their children and that were pervasive of their roles. While the categories of description demonstrate the differences between the roles of home educators, the dimensions of variation represent a second type of variation within the outcome space, which in turn displays (1) an intentionality to activate educational influence across all categories; (2) parents as examples, whether intentionally or unintentionally; and (3) a spiritual motivation among parents.

5.1.5.1 The dimension of influence

Home educators saw themselves as influencing others in order to bring educational change. This applied to themselves as individuals, to their spouses, to their children

and to the wider community. They viewed their influence as potentially transformational for those who are influenced.

In particular, the influence of parents toward their children was seen to deliver educational and developmental outcomes that are broader than those delivered by traditional schooling. This is not to imply that school teachers do not have influence, upon the general development of their pupils. The difference between the influence of home educators and school teachers is that, home educators are able to direct their influence to their children as individuals throughout the whole day and over the course of the student's childhood and teenage years. This seems to be their major priority. They reported that while academic learning is a priority, their intentional focus was influencing the development of the child as a whole. By way of contrast, the required priority of a school teacher, as indicated by the state-prescribed syllabus (Queensland Government, 2008), is the academic teaching of students, which usually occurs in a group, comprised, mostly of age peers.

The dimension of influence was intentionally applied by parents in the process of home education. It has been a key finding of the study, having been referred to as a theme by many parents and throughout all categories. It was seen by them to be markedly different to the influence of a teacher in a classroom in school. This dimension of the educational influence of parents deserves further research.

5.1.5.2 The dimension of example

As a result of their chosen educational pathway, home educators also saw themselves as educational examples in their roles as learners, partners and teachers, where their lives are on display to their children and, as pioneers, they are examples to the wider community. When viewed as an example of a learner and a partner, they are modelling what they deem to be positive attributes of an adult as a learner, as a person who can cooperate with others and as a marriage partner. As a teacher, parents saw that their life is an example, from which their children learn life's lessons. As a pioneer, they were aware of their children and the wider community seeing them as examples of democratic freedom, able to pursue alternative pathways of thinking to society's status quo and that being different from the status quo, is acceptable in a democratic society. Their educational choice also provided an

example to others in the community, who may be considering an alternative form of education. Their example indicates to such people that education does not have to be a one-size-fits-all institutionalised experience.

Vygotskyian (1997) and neo-Vygotskyian socio-cultural theory (Kozulin, 2003; Rogoff, 1990, 1995, 2003) resonates with this dimension of variation. As parents are examples and role models to their children, they become primary mediators in facilitating their development. This parental role of example assists children to progress through the zone of proximal development, moving from the immature to the mature. Parents mediate children's use of psychological tools as well as demonstrating and scaffolding both formal and informal learning, in real life settings. This study demonstrates that home educators, as scaffolders of learning, operate within the socio-cultural context of real-life experience.

Whilst Thomas (1998) indicated that life is too complex for every aspect of a home educated child's development to be mediated in Vygotskyian terms, and that children are able to also learn independently, the mediator and exemplar aspects of parent home educator roles, nonetheless, are critical to the pedagogy of home education. The dimension of example is pervasive throughout the data, indicating the importance of this aspect of home education, and is a key finding in this study, being found across all home educator roles.

5.1.5.2 The dimension of spirituality

Finally, the dimension of spirituality indicates a motivation that many home-educating parents have as learners, partners, teachers and pioneers. They possess a sense of a higher purpose and calling in their practice of home education. In many cases, but not all, they saw the educating of their children as a God-led spiritual journey. This spiritual awareness motivated them to grow as learners, to develop and maintain their partnership, to teach their children about the spiritual dimension of life and to pass on the things they have learned about spirituality to others. For some parents, this spiritual dimension was the major motivating factor to commence and to continue home education.

As with the other dimensions of variation, this dimension of spirituality is to be found throughout the data and across the four home educator roles, and for this study, is a key finding. Whilst spirituality is not a new feature in home education, this study has highlighted how this dimension is relevant to the roles of many home educators.

These dimensions of variation give a deeper insight into what permeates the roles of home-educating parents. They highlight key features of the way these parents experience their roles.

5.2 The Roles in the context of parents' lives

In light of the study's findings in relation to the roles of parent home educators, role theory provides a conceptual framework to address the home educator roles in relation to the complexity of the parents' broader lives. The application of the findings of the study to Merton's (1957) work concerning roles and their role-sets, as outlined in Chapter 2 is now presented in Figure 22.

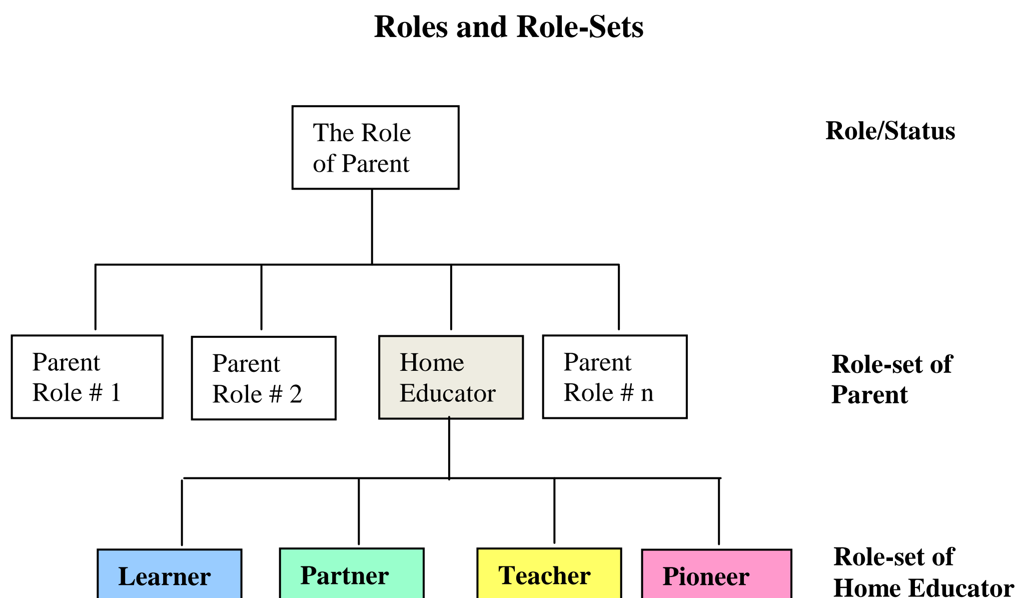

Figure 22: Application of Merton's (1957) model to the study's findings

The study's findings indicated that the role-set of a parent home educator is comprised of the roles of learner, partner, teacher and pioneer. These roles are noted at the base of the diagram. This role-set is informed by the outcome space of the

study. It is one of several other role-sets which may be derived from other roles which the parents also occupy. This aspect of role theory demonstrates how the derived roles of home educators exist within the complexity of the primary role of being a parent who also home educates his or her children.

5.3 Challenges to home educators

The purpose of the study was to discover the roles which parents experienced as home educators. It was beyond the limits of the study to provide a comprehensive description of all aspects of the experiences of home educators or of home education. Beyond the focus of the study, there were other aspects of parent experiences as home educators, which were part of the margin of their awareness, thus contributing to the background of the study. Some of these experiences included challenges associated with home education. These will now be mentioned briefly.

Home educators face challenges from outside the home education community and challenges from within the practice of home education. The challenges which home educators face from those outside of their ranks are described in Chapter 2. These include issues such as: the tensions over the rights of parents and of the state to be responsible for the education of home educated children and criticisms voiced over their academic and social development. However, home educators also face tensions arising from within the practice of home education. These include the difficulties which home educators experience, such as: the financial challenges of home education; daily challenges in the home, such as a lack of confidence over personal shortcomings as a teacher (McDowell, 2000) and the occasions when the educational activities seem to be a chore (Green, 2006 a & b). These internal tensions will now be discussed briefly.

The financial challenges of being a home educating family are mostly inherent to this form of education. Because one parent usually becomes the full-time educator, and the other engages in full-time employment, these families largely allocate themselves to a single income and, thus, to a lower socio-economic demographic status than their contempories. This educationally derived single income status was touched on, by some in the study's interviews. Romanowski (2001) also referred to this status issue, suggesting that the lower financial capabiliy of home education families could

present a problem to the quality of education provided due to under resourcing, whilst he also admitted that schools face the same challenges of limited budgeting, albeit on a larger scale.

Whilst parents acknowledged their status as single income families, most noted that they were providing good curriculum and extra curricular activities for their children's education. Because these families demonstrate an unusual commitment to their children's education, even to the point of absorbing comparative financial disadvantage, it may well be that they take adequate steps in resourcing their children's education, which may, in part, address Romanowski's criticism about access to appropriate educational resources. Distance educators are one sector of home educators who are able to access the resource base of a school, including educational materials and teaching expertise. Also, the literature does indicate that home schoolers seem also able to access educational resources beyond their family's limited means.

Further, some spiritually minded parents also mentioned how being on a lower income had become a positive faith-building experience. Whilst a lower income status was not deemed to be desirable, these families were able to allocate a transcendent value to it.

The issue of the lower financial status of home educators did not seem to concern parents when considering educational outcomes. However, it was mentioned with respect to financial status, budgeting and the prospects of promotion of the employed parent. The financial status of home educating families meant that the decision to home educate attracted some outcomes, not so palatable, which would cause families to carefully consider whether they should commence home education.

The second internal tension of home educators involved concerns associated with the practice of home education. They included issues such as a lack of confidence as a teacher and concerns about getting housework done, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (McDowell, 1999, 2000; Green, 2006 a & b). Green's (2006 a & b) study of distance education families found that some home educating mothers often felt pressure in dividing their attention between academic work and domestic tasks, sometimes relegating academic work to the status of yet another chore. Conversely, Thomas and

Pattison (2007) found home educators who were not worried about their children's progress or their educational outcomes. Evidently, there are divergent positions about these concerns. The parents in this study occasionally referred to stressful situations; such as the initial shock of being responsible for the child's education, or a sense of alienation from the wider community because of their educational choice, however, there was no dominant concern among the parents about the home educator's lifestyle. If anything, these parents concurred with Thomas and Pattison's (2007) view and McDowell's (2000) summation, that home educating mothers believe that home education has a positive impact on their families and themselves.

Because these factors are not in the focus of this study of parent conceptions of their roles, they are not highlighted. However, because the challenges from outside home education and the tensions from within do contribute to the context of the roles experienced by home educators, it is appropriate to mention them and to note that further research into these topics would be valuable.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a discussion of key issues emerging from the findings of the study and with particular reference to the relevant literature. Discussion of the findings as presented in the categories of description, their elements and the dimensions of variation led to further understandings of the educational aspects of the roles of home educators. The chapter has also identified some limitations of the study and some challenges to home educators, not necessarily directly pertaining to their roles, but which contribute to their socio-cultural context. The following chapter presents the conclusion of the study and suggests a range of topics, arising from the study, which would be of value for future research.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key contributions of the study, as well as a consideration of the study's key implications. It refers to the new framework which the study provides for further research into home educating parents, and it confirms that these parents see themselves as bona fide educators. The chapter also highlights how the study contributes to both the educational and methodological literature, as well as opening up questions for future research.

The purpose of the study was to examine the roles of home-educating parents, from the perspective of the parents themselves. It addressed the question: *What are the roles of parents who home educate their children?*

Given that home education is a minority educational practice, little is known of it in the traditional educational community, among policy-makers and in the wider community. In particular, there has been a paucity of knowledge of home education from the perspective of home educators, within both the academic literature and in the wider community.

This study provides a privileged gaze into the conceptions of home educators about themselves and their roles. As home education continues to grow in popularity as a viable educational choice for Australian parents, and as policy makers seek to legislate in and around this approach to education, this study makes a timely contribution to the field. It acknowledges that home-educating parents are *bona fide* educators and that their views can be taken seriously.

6.2 Key contributions of the study

A key contribution of this study is that it provides a conceptual framework for the home educational roles played by home-educating parents. This framework incorporates four categories representing how home-educating parents see their roles as learners, partners, teachers and pioneers as they educate their children. The study

indicates that parents undergo a process of personal development through multi-focussed learning. Most intentionally cooperate and negotiate to develop a relationship with their spouse that goes beyond regular marital issues to heightened responsibility for the education of children. Also, these parents educate their own children and communicate to their community about their pedagogy. The outcome space of the study presents the conceptions that home educators have of themselves. This, in turn, provides insights which the home education community may find applicable to and which may assist others who seek to understand this community of educators.

A second key finding of this study is that home-educating parents view their roles, predominantly through the lens of the education and development of their children. They saw themselves in the role of learner as being instrumental in their commencement and continuation of home education. The role of partner was focussed on establishing and maintaining their family's educational infrastructure. The role of teacher facilitated the children's education and the role of pioneer was aimed at promoting a new form of education from which these parents believed their children and the wider community would derive benefit. While reasons for choosing home education and their choice of pedagogical methods may have varied, a constant among home educators is their vested interest in the education and development of their children. Their focus on their children's education as indicated in the study suggests that these parents have qualities that make them educators and that they apply those qualities in their educational roles. The study indicates that the parents acting in their various roles, initiate and advance their children's education and they also advance the home education movement. Without this parent educational factor, home education would not exist.

The study points to an educational factor, characteristically found in parents, as indicated in Chapter 2 and referred to by John Dewey (1915) as well as contemporary educational theorists (Dinham & Scott, 2007; Scott & Dinham, 2005; Walker, 2008, 2009). Whilst this educational factor, termed the parental educational dynamic, is not the sole domain of parents who home educate, the study suggests that it is accessed by home educators as they conduct their children's education. The point of this study is that home educators are using the parental educational dynamic

and applying it full time to the education of their children. Their learning fuels it, their partnering gives it structure, their teaching expresses it and their pioneering communicates it to their communities. In addition to contributing a conceptual framework for understanding home educating parents and the elucidation of the parental educational dynamic, the study also contributes to the broader educational literature.

6.2.1 Contribution to the research literature

The study contributes to the research literature by examining, in detail, parents' views of their home education roles. However, it also touches on a number of issues related to parents and education that may inform five areas of interest including: parents and parenting; teacher–student relationships in schools; leadership in schools; educational curriculum and teaching practices. While not an exhaustive study of parent roles, it opens the opportunity for further research into the pedagogical aspect of home education and provides a framework for further examination of these parent roles.

In the first place, the study contributes to the literature that describes parents and parenting, with home-educating parents in the study, seen as bona fide educators, who possess and can access an educational quality characteristic of parents, defined earlier as the parental educational dynamic. The view that parents have educational qualities is supported by educational theorists (Dinham & Scott, 2007; Scott & Dinham, 2005; Walker, 2008, 2009). In this sense, this study may contribute to the general parenting literature, as it opens up the question of the educational roles that all parents may be able to play.

Second, the study contributes to the corpus of literature around teaching in schools in that it describes characteristics of home-educating teachers that may be relevant to conventional classroom settings. In particular, the nexus between good parenting practices and pedagogy, as evident in the study, may shed light on teacher/pupil relationships in school and on parent/child relationships in areas such as homework. Scott and Dinham (2005) and Walker (2008, 2009) argued that parents have educational qualities as part of their capacity as parents and that teachers in schools

could improve student experiences, by adopting and adapting good parenting attributes to their teaching.

Third, the study also contributes to the literature on educational leadership. Using the similar arguments to how good parenting can inform teaching, Dinham and Scott (2007) pressed the case that authoritative parenting, as described by Baumrind (1965, 1966,1991), with its high degree of responsiveness and demand, could inform educational leadership in schools.

The study may inform a fourth area of educational literature, that which deals with curriculum. It provides one example of how socio-cultural theory can be applied to curriculum. The study emphasises a wider view of curriculum experiences than do traditional school-based versions. A feature of the home educator's role of teacher is the provision of real life educational experiences. While home educators may include syllabus-driven pedagogy in their education programs, they also take education into real life experiences in the lived-in world. This study demonstrates one way in which education meaningfully connects students and their education to the real world. Their education can be "… about the real world — the cultural, social, physical world in which the learner lives" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.156).

Finally, the study informs the literature around pedagogy. A distinct feature of the home educator's role of teacher was the provision of personalised education, which these parents saw as academically and developmentally advantageous to their children. Most schools enact pedagogy within large groups and, as such, they can preclude a personalised approach to education, irrespective of the quality of the teacher and teaching. In schools where the pedagogy is organised around the individual student, this study is particularly relevant. Schools are also organised around fixed time frames (Queensland Government, 2007), whereas home educators are able to operate in flexible time frames. This study presents a challenge to different systems of learning, ultimately presenting one way to achieve personalised pedagogy. While there is much rhetoric (MCEETYA, 2008) about individualised education in the literature, the dominant system supports group pedagogy rather than that which is individualised or personalised.

6.3 Methodological contribution

In addition to the contribution to the literature around parenting, schooling and curriculum, the study also provides a contribution to the methodology related to phenomenography. Firstly, it provides a description of how the phenomenographic analysis was conducted. Akerlind (2005a) stated there is a paucity of such description. This study makes a contribution to enhance the literature describing phenomenographic analysis in phenomenographic studies.

Second, the study explored a variation in the interviews. Initially, the interview stage of this study was designed to elicit responses about the interviewee's experiences of the phenomenon. As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the pilot interview phase, individual interviewees occasionally responded not as an individual parent or spouse, but as part of a couple, using the plural pronouns "we" or "us", instead of the singular pronouns "I" and "me". Upon realising that home educators experienced their roles both as an individual and as a member of a couple, and after consultation with phenomenographers, including personal communications with pioneer phenomenographer, Professor Ference Marton, I changed the format of the phenomenographic interview. The change involved interviewing 14 parents as couples in 7 couple interviews and 13 parents as individuals, rather than interviewing all 27 parents as individuals in separate interviews. Marton (Professor F. Marton, personal communications, Dec 30, 2005; Jan 7, 2006) viewed that the couple entity was a natural unit for the purposes of this study and so encouraged this change to the study's interviews. While phenomenographic interviews have been conducted with couples previously, this has not been done with home educators. The expression of mothers and fathers as individuals and also as couples in the home education movement highlighted the importance of not only individual parents acting in their home educational roles, but also as a couple entity acting as a unit.

6.3.1 Discussion of individual and couple interviews

The specific interviewing of couples together brought a different dimension to the data. It recognised that subjects in a research project may have multiple identities and that, if these multiple identities are relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, they ought be recognised and accommodated in a manner appropriate to the

methodological approach. From a phenomenographic standpoint that recognises difference, differentiating entities in an interview (as the individual entity and the couple entity) is appropriate. Though originally unintended when designing the interviews, this variation, which was subsequently introduced into the interview procedure, maximised the opportunity for variation.

Phenomenography seeks variation in ways of experiencing a phenomenon. In this study home educators as individuals experienced their roles in certain ways and home educators in couples experienced their roles in ways that sometimes were similar to the responses of individuals and, at other times, were distinctly representative of the couple entity. It may be methodologically interesting to design a phenomenographic study of home educators, in which individual responses and couple responses are compared.

Analysis of the couple responses enriched the interview data. It cannot be inferred that if all interviews were done on an individual basis, the responses would have been different. Most likely, individual respondents would have used the plural pronouns "we" and "us" in an individual interview. However, the point here is that they did use the plural pronouns, obviously identifying a third or couple entity, apart from the father and mother. It was, therefore, incumbent, in the interests of pursuing research methods which would be faithful to the research approach, that this third entity, the couple entity, be recognised in the data gathering and analysis processes.

This adjustment to the method would not have detracted from the individuals' responses, as there were sufficient individual interviews in their own right, to satisfy what phenomenographers accept as a sufficient sample size. Also, respondents in the couple interviews answered both as individuals and as members of couples. They were never asked to respond as a couple. Thus, it would be fair to assume that the change in method did not reduce the responses of the parents as individuals. Rather, the change may have enhanced the responses, as individuals had the opportunity to respond in a different way as a member of a couple.

In phenomenographic data analysis, the focus is removed from specific respondents in an interview. Just as there is no emphasis on any individual in the outcomes of a phenomenographic analysis, there was no emphasis on any couple. The data set was

mined and analysed for variation of experiences rather than for the experiences of individuals or couples. Thus, interviewing couples added an appropriate methodological innovation to the phenomenographic approach for this study of home educator roles.

6.4 Implications for future research

The findings of the study suggest other topics for further research into home education. These topics include: the educational factor associated with parenting; the similarities and differences between home educators as teachers and classroom teachers; the way the relationship between home educating spouses affects home education; the way single parent home eduators develop their family's education; the differences between the roles of home educators who are home schoolers and distance educators and the differences between home educators who use a structured format and those who do not. These topics will now be briefly discussed.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, a key finding of the study has been the educational quality that parents bring to home education. This is referred to within the thesis, as the parental educational dynamic (PED). This quality, extant in parents, in general, and in home educators, in particular, is an important quality that deserves further research. Educational theorists (Dinham & Scott, 2007; Scott & Dinham, 2005; Walker, 2008, 2009) have suggested that such an educational quality in parenting could be understood and harnessed to improve school-based experiences of students and educational leaders. To understand the parental educational dynamic to a greater extent and for school communities to access it purposefully, may be illuminating both for home educators, policy makers and the wider community.

Furthermore, the study has indicated that the roles of home educators, in some ways, are similar to some of the roles of classroom teachers. Both types of teachers must learn about pedagogy and academic content, albeit by diverse means, as school teachers are professionally trained at universities, whilst home educators usually learn, in situ, as needs arise. Both are members of educational partnerships to achieve educational outcomes, one partnership is institutionalised within the structure of the school and the other within the structure of the home. A third similarity is that both also seek to teach children. Teachers are focussed toward teaching large groups of

age-peers, whilst home educators direct their attention to their children, who may be of varying ages. However, there are also differences between home educators and classroom teachers. One of the most marked differences is the length and depth of relationship between a parent and child and between a teacher and pupil and how this difference in relationship can produce different pedagogy. Other differences include the teacher-student ratios, variations in flexibility over what is to be learned, time constraints and the degree of informal learning and conversation. Future research could explore these similarities and differences and their impact on educational outcomes.

Home educating one's children is a responsibility that requires consideration of not only the children, but, in the case of dual parent families, consideration of the home educator's spouse and their relationship. Home education usually relies upon the parents' relationship for success. Research into the relationship between home-educating parents and how this supports home education, would be valuable to the home-educating community. Associated with this idea, an important area for research into home educators would be an examination of single parent families and how they approach home education. Giving research attention to parents as the foundation of home education, whether from dual parent families or single parent families, could contribute positively to a significant gap in the home education literature.

This study sought to explore the roles of parent home educators in general. The phenomenographic requirement to seek diversity of experiences was best served by incorporating both home schoolers and distance educators into the study. Further research into this topic of parent roles would be a beneficial addition to the home education literature. One avenue to pursue would be an examination of the differences between the ways home schoolers and distance educators experience their roles as home educators. Another area of interest would be to explore the difference in the ways that parents who use a structured approach to home education and those who are natural learners, experience their roles as home educators.

6.5 Recommendation

Given that the key finding of this study centres upon the parents' view that they are *bona fide* educators with clear educational roles, the key recommendation would be that this view be taken seriously in the community. Home educators should be considered as practitioners of an alternate educational form and the practice of home education should be acknowledged as a significant minority education modality.

In order to achieve appropriate recognition, I would recommend that policy makers instigate protocols to consult parent home educators when legislation and regulations are to be enacted, which directly impact home education. In the past, specifically in Queensland in 2003 and Victoria in 2006, attempts to consult home educators about changes to home schooling and distance education were superficial and changes to the Education Acts in both states were enacted with seemingly little reference to the submissions of home educators. Similarly, the *Commonwealth Education Act 2001* introduced significant changes to distance education with virtually no consultation of distance educators. This study presents the genuine claims of home educators, and these ought to be respected by policy makers.

Another way to grow a culture of respect for home educators and home education would be to see more published papers and research articles on home education topics in peer reviewed education journals. The immediate outcome of this process would be that the education community and the wider community would become more familiar with home education, which may, in turn, reduce misunderstandings and unnecessary concerns. The growth of the home education literature may assist to relieve concerns among professional educators and some policy makers around the vexed matters of who is responsible for the education of home educated children, and whether these children achieve appropriate academic and socialisation outcomes. Such growth would also assist home educators to better understand themselves and their educational practice.

6.6 Conclusion

The study is set in a distinct socio-cultural context, the home and its environs as the site for the full time education of children, who are of compulsory school age. The

reemergence of home education in Australia has accompanied the departure of many families from Australia’s government school sector since the 1970s. Home education grew in Australia at the same time that non-government schooling experienced significant growth. Rather than reproducing non-government schooling, home educators opted out of on-campus schooling. In doing so, these families chose to become intentional communities of learning practice. In this sense the choice to home educate could be seen as causing a metamorphosis of the family.

In order to facilitate educational choice, home educators had to take their parenting knowledge and skills beyond the known, to a level unfamiliar to many parents – they had to become primarily responsible for the education of their children. In achieving the educational metamorphosis of their families, parents have embraced new roles with new dimensions, yet with clear focus — the education and development of their children.

These new roles have produced outcomes for the parents as individuals in that they experience profound change to their identity and derive a sense of personal development and satisfaction. Most work together with their spouses in new ways that produce the family educational endeavour to which they aspire. They facilitate a relationally based form of education that incorporates whole-child development, situated in a real-life socio-cultural setting. Also, these roles have provided and will continue to provide stimulus to the growing home education movement and further change to the broader communitiy.

Home education has produced new social-cultural identities and new forms of social reproduction. These identities primarily include parents as educators, children as their students and families as communities of learning practice. Further, parents are also advocating for the growth of a reemerging grass roots educational movement, as an expression of parent choice in a democratic society.

The roles discovered in the course of this study highlight the educational aspect of home-educating parents, as an extended feature of parenting in general. In this chapter, I have used the term parental educational dynamic (PED) to describe this educative quality in parents and their parenting, locating it, in this study, within the context of parents who home educate.

The study has situated this group of parents, not at the periphery of a child's education, as is often the case for parents with children in traditional schooling, but as parents who are at the centre of their children's education. They are the main active facilitators of the family's educational endeavour. As such, the examination of the way in which they experience their roles is conceptually sound, of practical use and democratically appropriate in liberal, pluralistic societies.

This study has focussed on the views home educators have about their experiences of their roles. It has sought a parent-centred understanding of the phenomenon, rather than seeking to impose preset theories or speculations about the phenomenon. It is anticipated that this parent-centred approach will assist those who are interested in learning more about home education. Those who take an inquiring approach to home education and a listening approach to home educators may glean new insights into the field of education and the field of home education.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Home Educators' Survey

1. Your Residential Location *(Circle the correct response)*

City Regional town Rural Town Remote *(more than 25kms from town)*

2. Number of parents in the home. One Two

3. Main formal educator. Mother Father

4. Main formal home educator's <u>highest</u> level of formal academic achievement.

School - year / grade e.g. Year 9, 10, 12 etc Year _______or …

(Circle the correct response) College Certificate College Diploma or …

University Degree: Bachelor Masters Doctorate

5. Other home educating parent's <u>highest</u> level of formal academic achievement.

School - year / grade e.g. Year 9, 10, 12 etc Year _______or …

(Circle the correct response) College Certificate College Diploma or …

University Degree: Bachelor Masters Doctorate

(Circle the correct response)

6. Is the main formal educator a trained teacher? Yes No

7. Is the other parent a trained teacher? Yes No

<u>Income</u>

8. Main formal educator is in paid employment Full time Part time No time

9. The other parent is in paid employment Full time Part time No time

Taxable Income Range *(do not include pensions, government payments etc)*

10. Main formal educator

$0; $1-$19,999; $20,000-$34,999; $35,000-$49,999; $50,000-$64,999; $65,000+

11. Other parent

$0; $1-$19,999; $20,000-$34,999; $35,000-$49,999; $50,000-$64,999; $65,000+

Pensioners only to answer items 12 & 13

12. Main formal educator Full pension Part pension

13. Other parent Full pension Part pension

14. Number of years your family has done home education ______

15. Total number of children in your family ______

16. Number of children who were or are being home educated ______

17. Ages of children, now, who are not home educated _________________

18. Ages of children, who are currently home educated _________________

19. Religious belief — Mother: Important Not that important

20. Religious belief — Father: Important Not that important

21. Religious affiliation/denomination *(if applicable)* _________________

22 School the child / children attended in the past: *(Circle the correct response below)*

State school Catholic school Christian school

Other private school Never attended school

Interview Request Section

If you are willing to do a taped interview with Terry Harding about your perceptions of your role as a home educating parent(s) would you kindly provide the following details:

Name of parent(s) (preferably both parents)____________________________

Address____

Phone no.____

All details will be kept strictly confidential. Results will be available to all participants at the end of the project. Thank you for your valuable contribution to the home education movement.

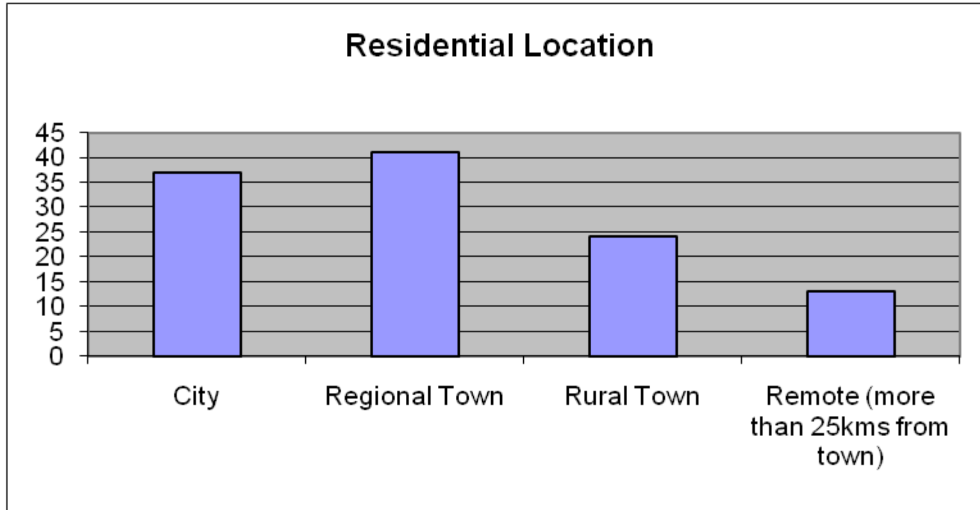
THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. PLEASE RETURN IT TO:

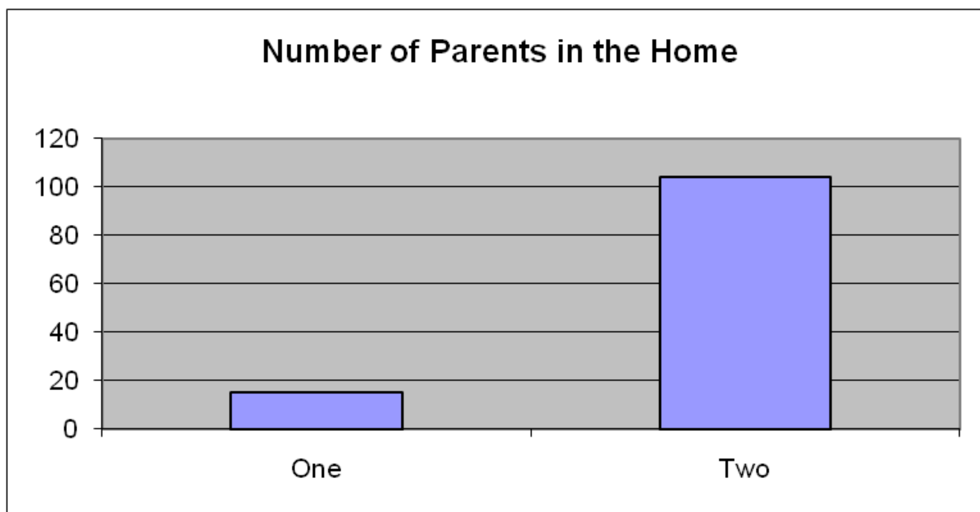
Terry Harding, PO Box 5677, Brendale QLD 4500

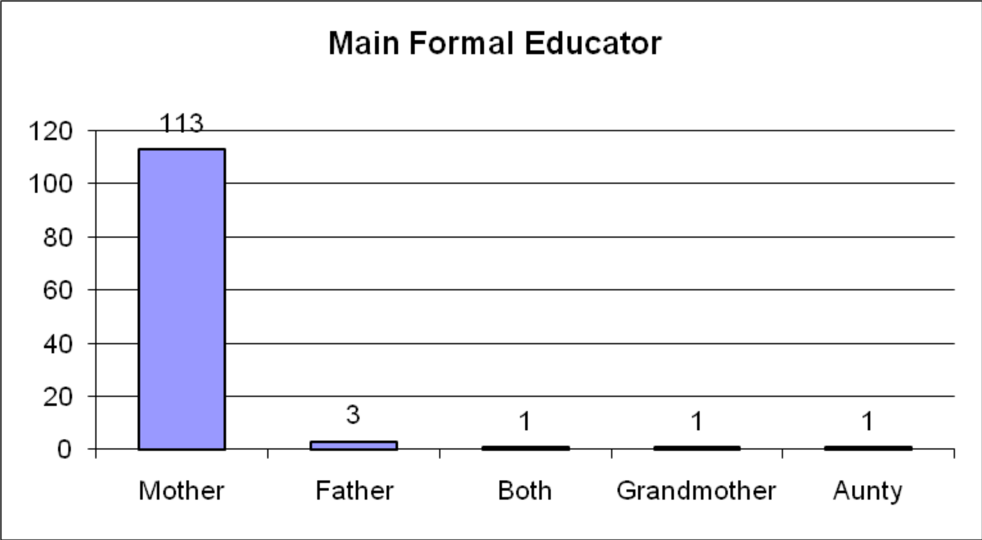
Appendix B

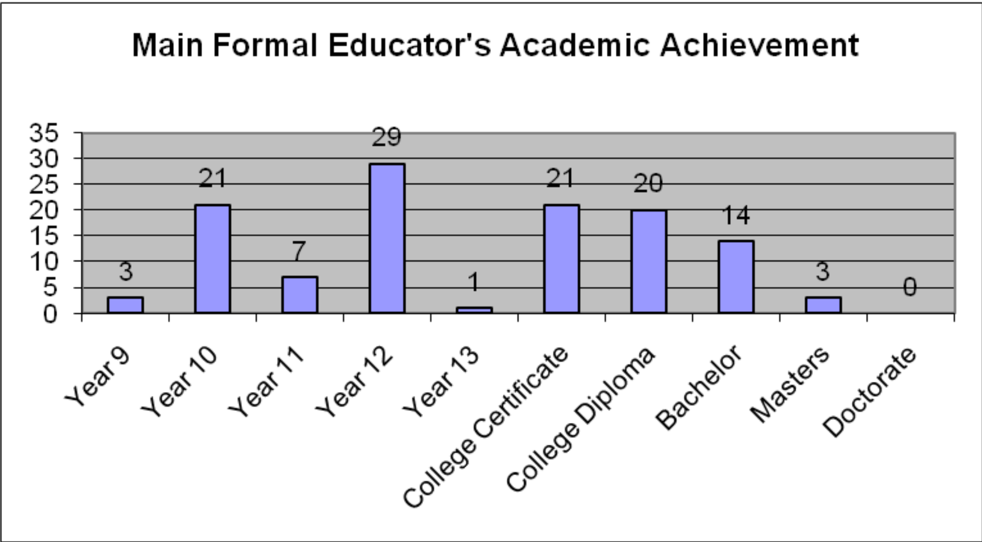
Results of the Home Educators' Survey

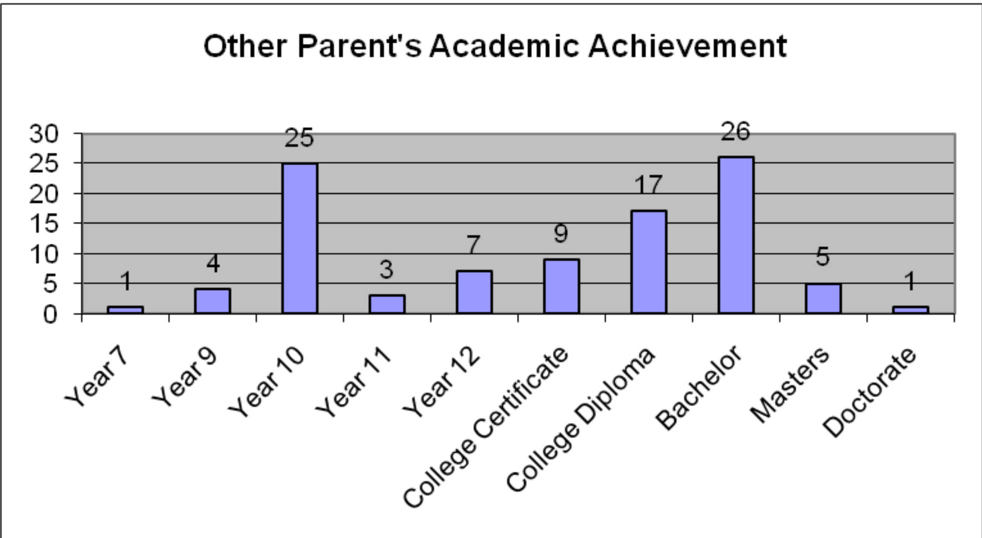
These responses are from 119 families who were originally surveyed. Interviewees for this study were selected from this sample.

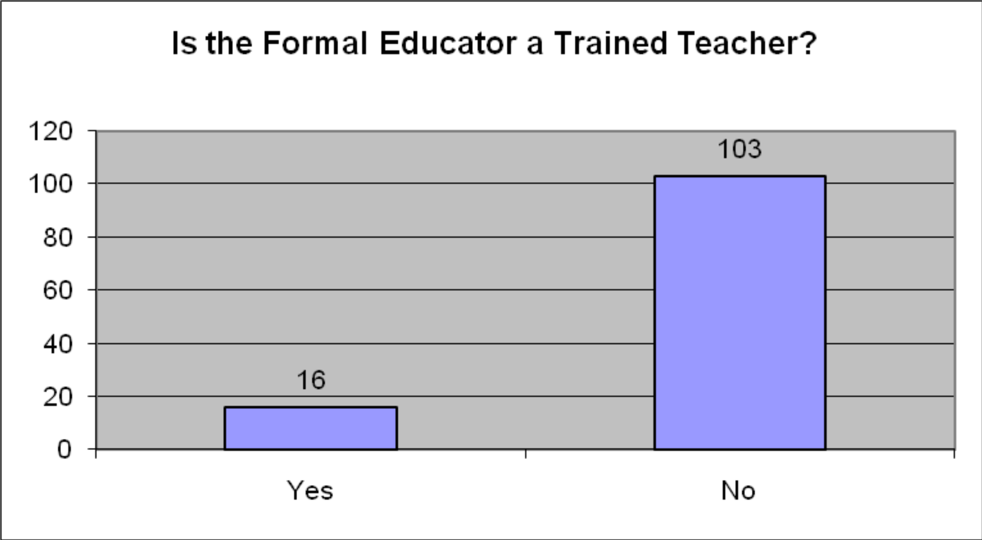


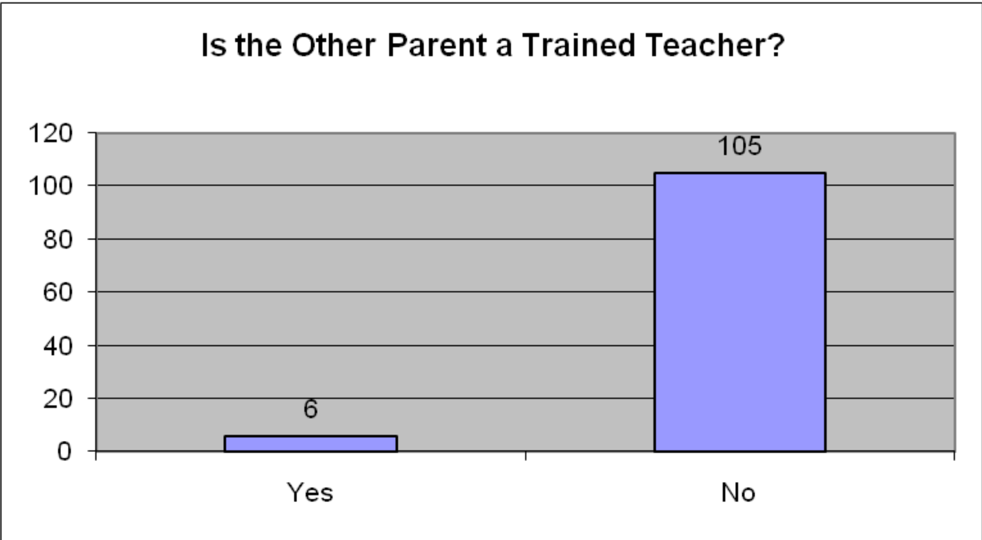


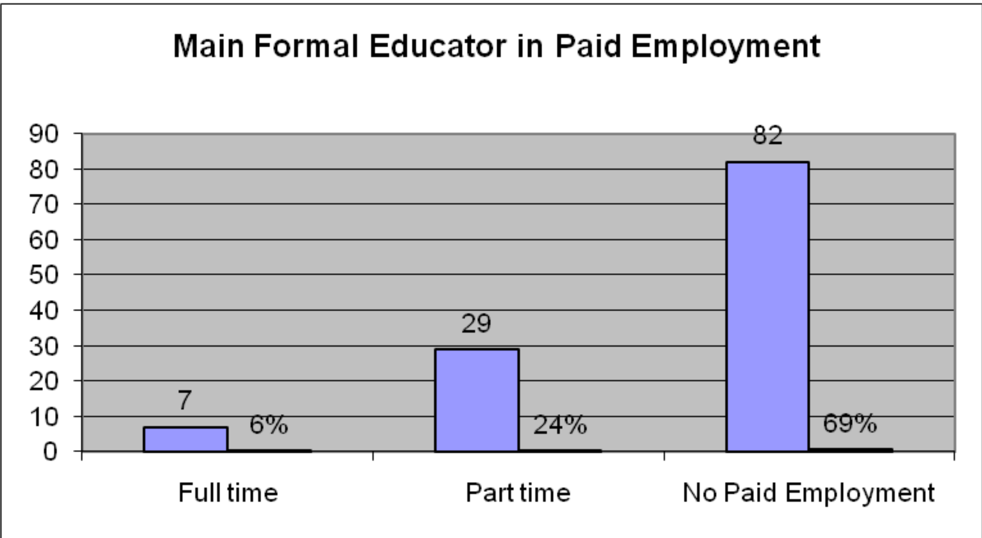

Main Formal Educator
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
113
3
1
1
1
Mother
Father
Both
Grandmother
Aunty

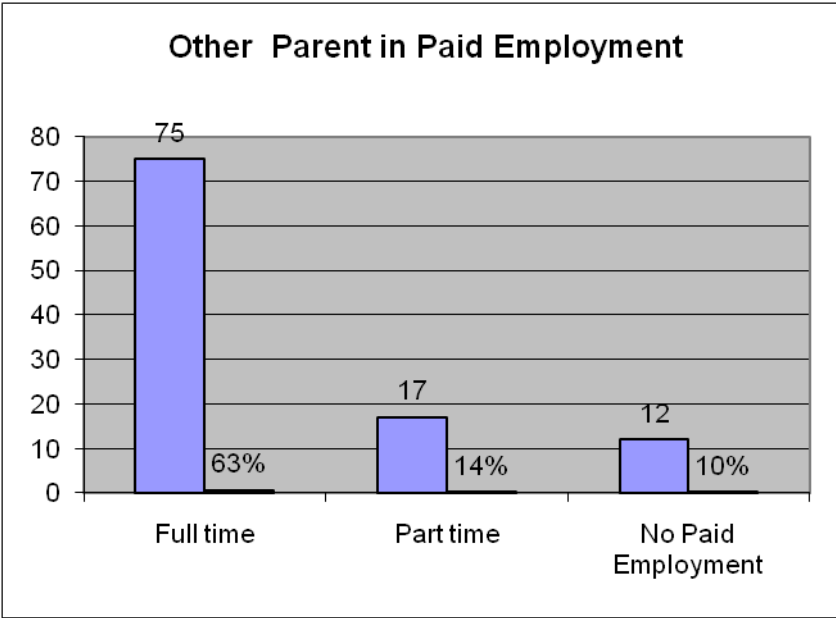

Main Formal Educator's Academic Achievement
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
3
21
7
29
1
21
20
14
3
0
Year 9
Year 10
Year 11
Year 12
Year 13
College Certificate
College Diploma
Bachelor
Masters
Doctorate

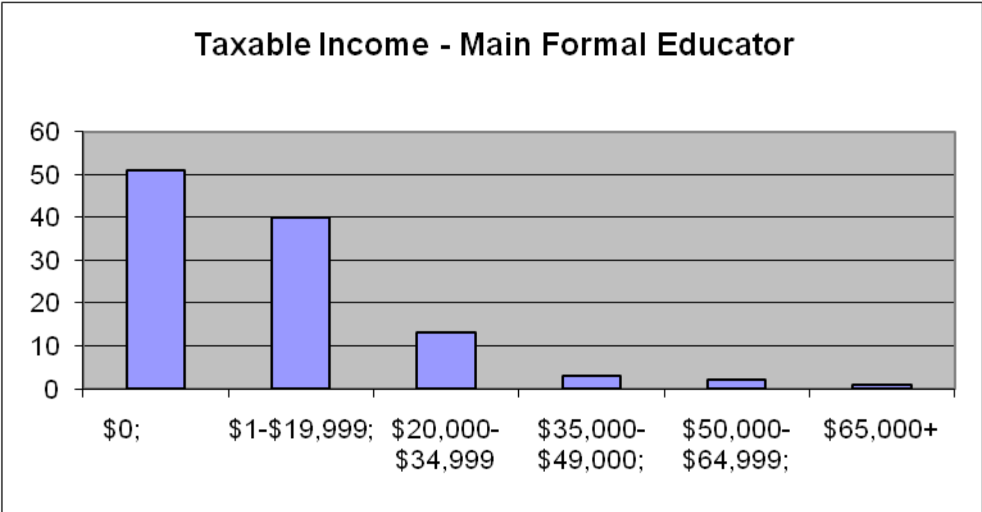

Other Parent's Academic Achievement
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1
4
25
3
7
9
17
26
5
1
Year 7
Year 9
Year 10
Year 11
Year 12
College Certificate
College Diploma
Bachelor
Masters
Doctorate

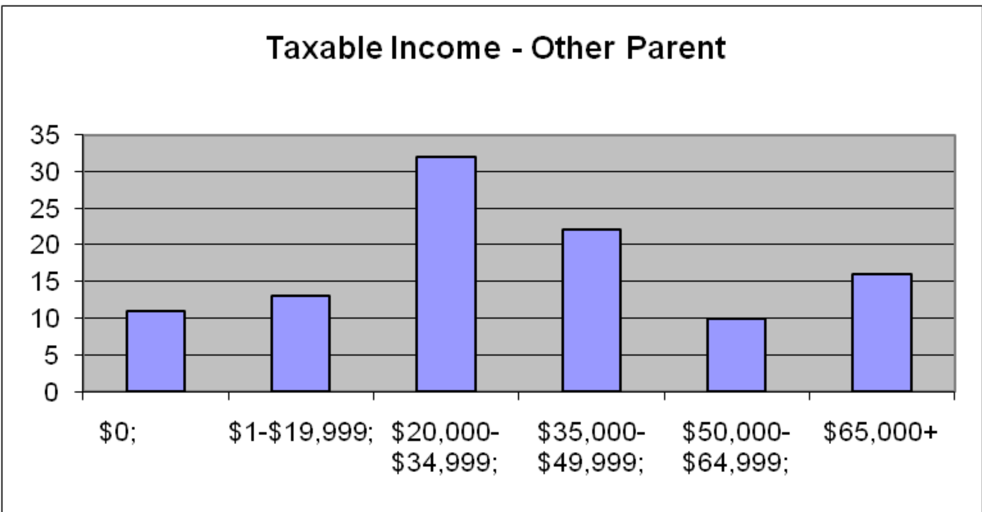

Is the Formal Educator a Trained Teacher?
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
103
16
Yes
No

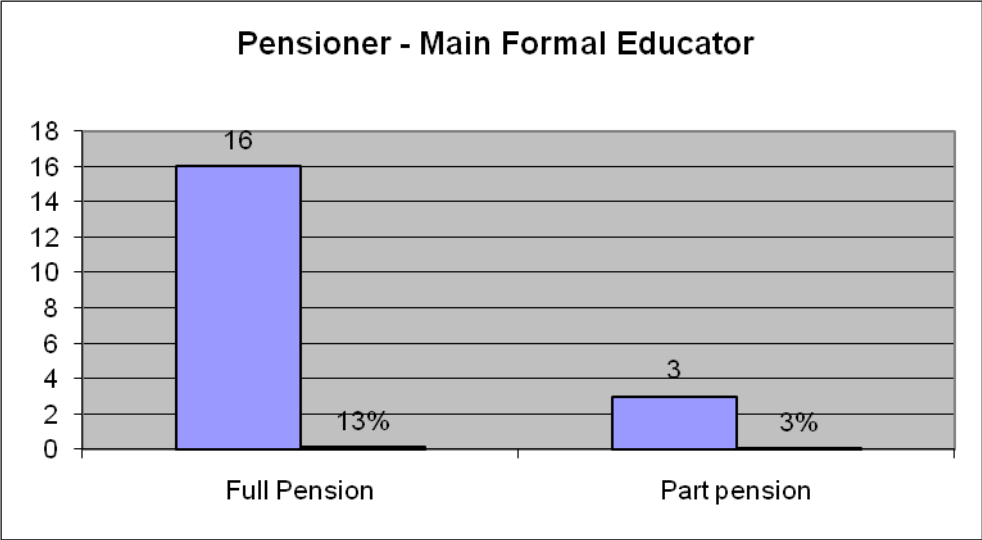

Is the Other Parent a Trained Teacher?
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
105
6
Yes
No

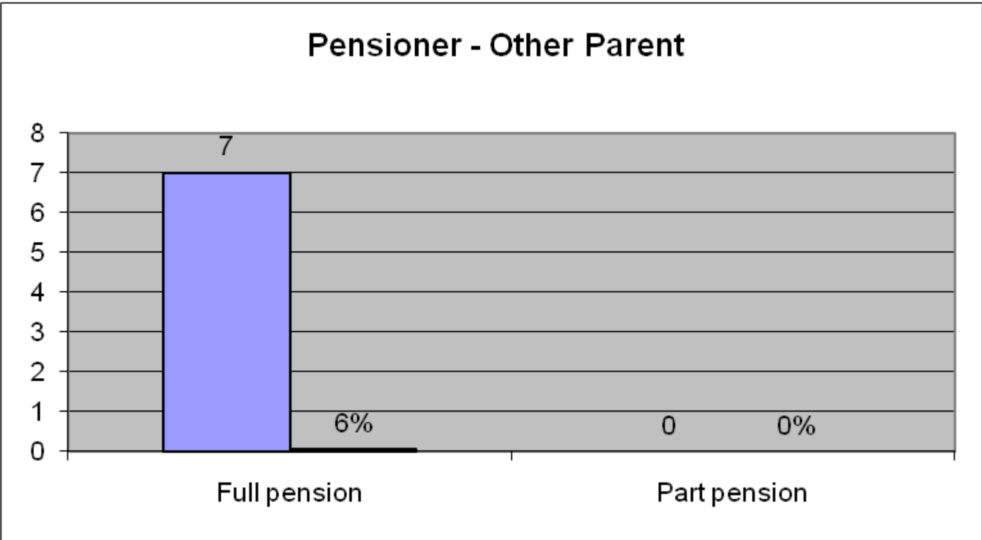

Main Formal Educator in Paid Employment
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
7
6%
29
24%
82
69%
Full time
Part time
No Paid Employment

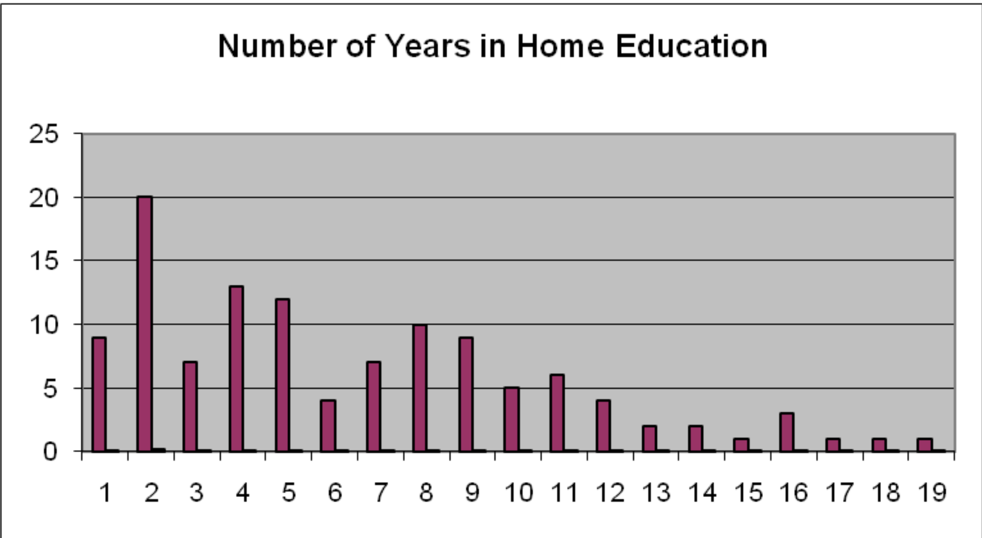

Other Parent in Paid Employment
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
75
63%
17
14%
12
10%
Full time
Part time
No Paid Employment

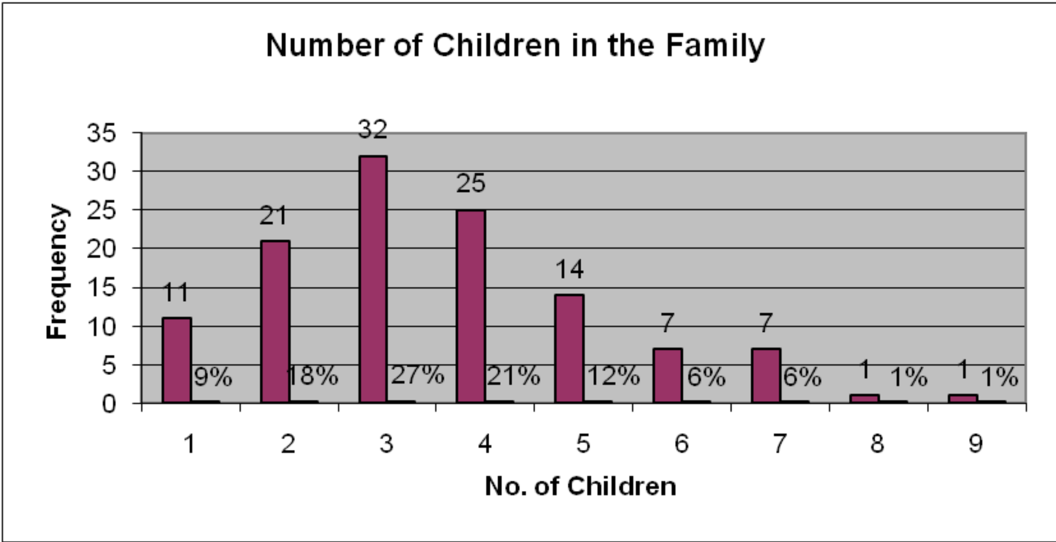

Taxable Income - Main Formal Educator
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
$0;
$1-$19,999;
$20,000-$34,999
$35,000-$49,000;
$50,000-$64,999;
$65,000+

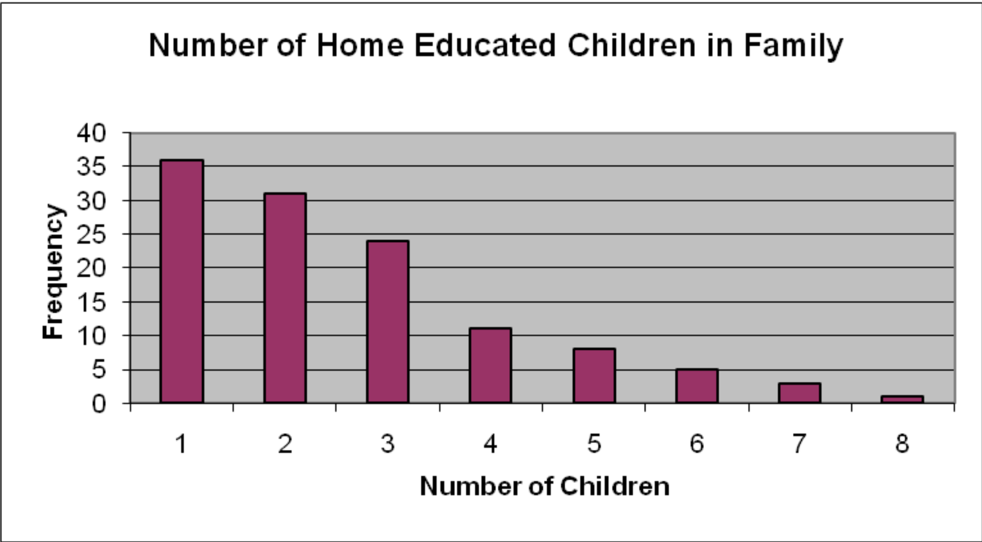

Taxable Income - Other Parent
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
$0;
$1-$19,999;
$20,000-$34,999;
$35,000-$49,999;
$50,000-$64,999;
$65,000+

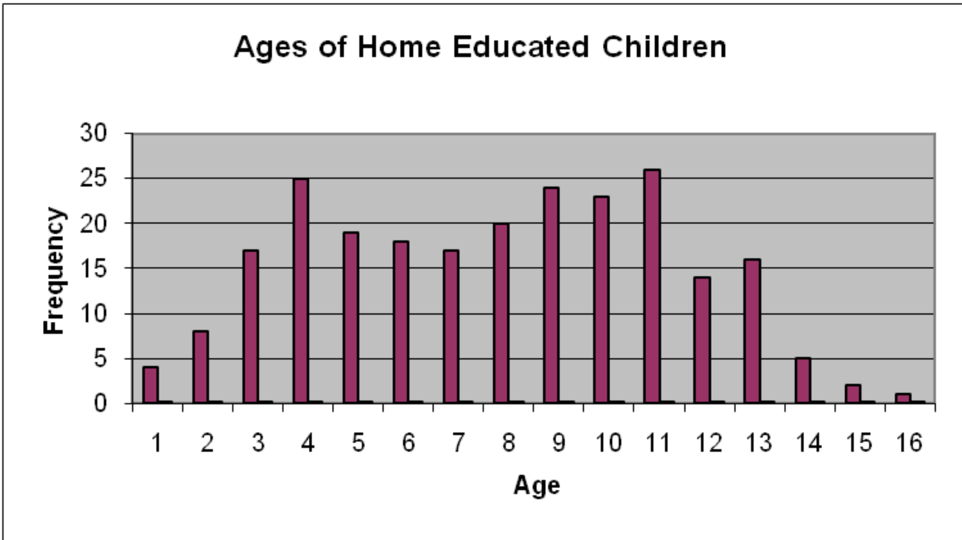

Pensioner - Main Formal Educator
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
16
13%
3
3%
Full Pension
Part pension

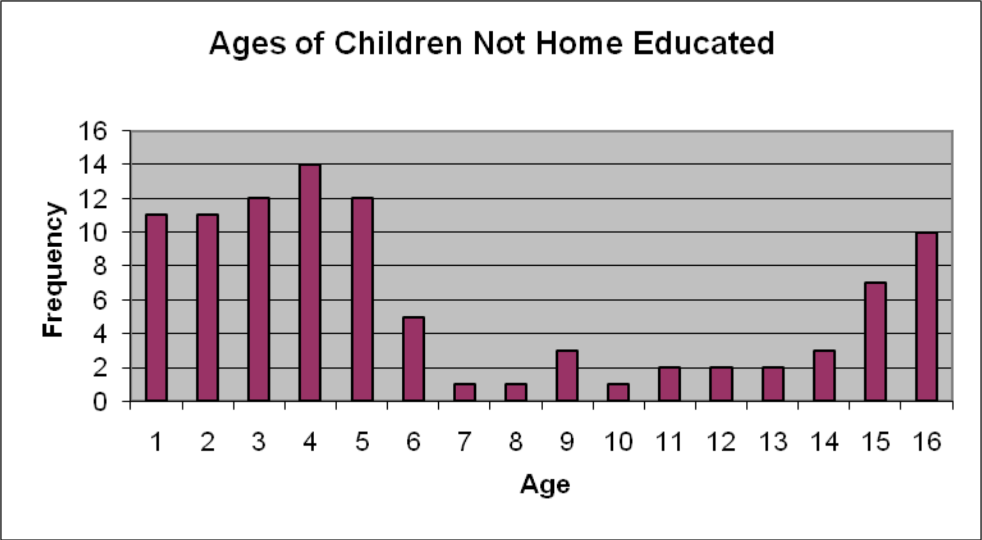

Pensioner - Other Parent
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
7
6%
0
0%
Full pension
Part pension

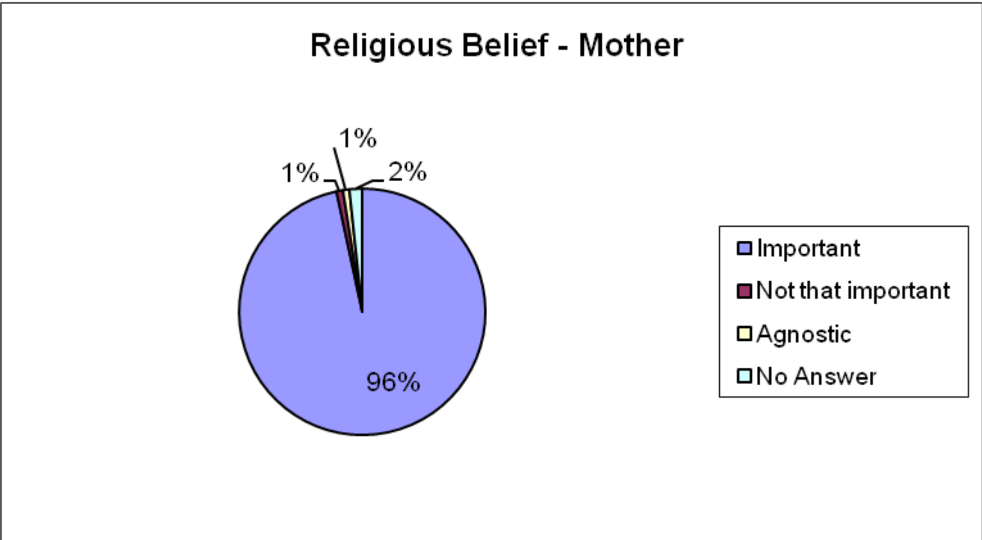

Number of Years in Home Education
25
20
15
10
5
0
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19


Number of Children in the Family
Frequency
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
11
9%
21
18%
32
27%
25
21%
14
12%
7
6%
7
6%
1
1%
1
1%
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
No. of Children


Number of Home Educated Children in Family
Frequency
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Number of Children


Ages of Home Educated Children
Frequency
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
Age


Ages of Children Not Home Educated
Frequency
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
Age


Religious Belief - Mother
1%
1%
2%
96%
Important
Not that important
Agnostic
No Answer

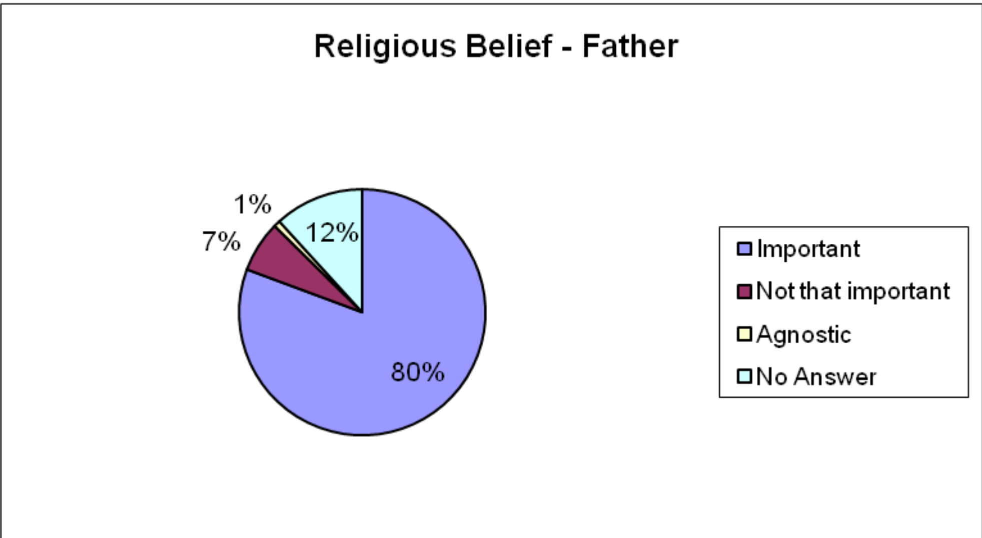

Religious Belief - Father
1%
7%
12%
80%
Important
Not that important
Agnostic
No Answer

Table AB.1: Religious Affiliation of Participants

Religious affiliation	
Agnostic	1
Anglican	3
Apostolic	1
Assemblies of God	15
Baptist	13
Brethren	1
Christian — Home Church	1
Christian — No Denomination	27
Christian Life Churches Int.	1
Church of Christ	4
Full Gospel	1
Independent Baptist	1
Jehovah Witness	1
Lutheran	3
Mormon	2
Pentecostal	11
Presbyterian	4
Reach Out for Christ	1
Roman Catholic	3
Russian Orthodox	1
Salvation Army	2
Seven Day Adventist	8
Spiritual Church	1
Uniting Church	1
Wesleyan Methodist	1
No Answer	10
Total	**118**

Appendix C

Ethical Clearance

From: Wendy Heffernan [w.heffernan@qut.edu.au]
Sent: Friday, 6 May 2005 11:08 AM
To: Terry Harding
Subject: Ethical Clearance — 2964H
Dear Terry

I write further to the response received in relation to ethical clearance for your project, "A study of the functions of parents who home school their children" (QUT Ref No 2964H).

On behalf of the Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee, I wish to advise that your response has addressed the additional information required for ethical clearance.

Consequently, you are authorised to immediately commence your project on this basis.

The decision is subject to ratification at the 14 June 2005 meeting of UHREC. I will only contact you again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns in regard to the clearance.

The University requires its researchers to comply with:

- the University's research ethics arrangements and the QUT Code of Conduct for Research;
- the standard conditions of ethical clearance;
- any additional conditions prescribed by the UHREC;
- any relevant State / Territory or Commonwealth legislation;
- the policies and guidelines issued by the NHMRC and AVCC (including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*).

Please do not hesitate to contact me further if you have any queries regarding this matter.

Regards
Wendy

University Human Research Ethics Committee
Information in relation to ethical clearance

What is the duration of my ethical clearance?

The ethical clearance awarded to your project is valid for three years commencing from 6 May 2005. Recruitment, consent and data collection / experimentation cannot be conducted outside the duration of the ethical clearance for your project.

Please note that a progress report is required annually on 6 May or on completion of your project (whichever is earlier). You will be issued a reminder around the time this report is due. The progress report proforma can be located under Forms on the University Research Ethics webpage.

Extensions to the duration of your ethical clearance within the 3–5 year limit must be made in writing and will be considered by the Chair under executive powers. Extensions beyond 5 years must be sought under a renewal application.

Standard conditions of approval
The University's standard conditions of approval require the research team to:

1. conduct the project in accordance with University policy, NHMRC / AVCC guidelines and regulations, and the provisions of any relevant State / Territory or Commonwealth regulations or legislation;

2. respond to the requests and instructions of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC)

3. advise the Research Ethics Officer immediately if any complaints are made, or expressions of concern are raised, in relation to the project;

4. suspend or modify the project if the risks to participants are found to be disproportionate to the benefits, and immediately advise the Research Ethics Officer of this action;

5. stop any involvement of any participant if continuation of the research may be harmful to that person, and immediately advise the Research Ethics Officer of this action;

6. advise the Research Ethics Officer of any unforeseen development or events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project;

7. report on the progress of the approved project at least annually, or at intervals determined by the Committee;

8. (where the research is publicly or privately funded) publish the results of the project is such a way to permit scrutiny and contribute to public knowledge; and

9. ensure that the results of the research are made available to the participants.

Modifying your ethical clearance

The University has an expedited mechanism for the approval of minor modifications to an ethical clearance (this includes changes to the research team, subject pool, testing instruments, etc). In practice this mechanism enables researchers to conduct a number of projects under the same ethical clearance.

Any proposed modification to the project or variation to the ethical clearance must be reported immediately to the Committee (via the Research Ethics Officer), and cannot be implemented until the Chief Investigator has been notified of the Committee's approval for the change / variation.

Requests for changes / variations should be made in writing to the Research Ethics Officer. Minor changes (changes to the subject pool, the use of an additional instrument, etc) will be assessed on a case by case basis and interim approval may be granted subject to ratification at the subsequent meeting of the Committee.

It generally takes 5-10 days to process and notify the Chief Investigator of the outcome of a request for a minor change / variation.

Major changes to your project must also be made in writing and will be considered by the UHREC. Depending upon the nature of your request, you may be asked to submit a new application form for your project.

Audits
All active ethical clearances are subject to random audit by the UHREC, which will include the review of the signed consent forms for participants, whether any modifications / variations to the project have been approved, and the data storage arrangements.

Wendy Heffernan
Research Ethics Officer
Office of Research
O Block Podium
Gardens Point Campus
Tel: 07 3864 2340
Fax: 07 3864 1304
CRICOS No 00213J