Welcome to the village

It has been said "it takes a village to raise a child". Stepping Stones for Home Educators is the 'village' to which all the members of the Home Education Association of Australia belong.

Welcome to our village! At the heart of our village are our homes. Rich in resources and skills these homes create a vibrant community in which our children are born, grow and thrive. Together our homes form a wonderful village, full of opportunities and support for everyone!

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Contributions:

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### The Marketplace
A warm welcome to all.

Australia and our neighbours have suffered through a tough summer. Many families faced extreme conditions and changed circumstances. The stories told by those who experienced the harsh realities of floods, fires, the terror of Yasi and the devastating Christchurch earthquake, left the rest of us speechless. One cannot put oneself in the place of someone who has lost a home, livelihood, or even a loved one, under such terrifying circumstances. Family and friends remain the main motivation for fighting back. These bonds allow people to stay strong and able to carry on after life-changing, traumatic experiences.

In this issue we bring a bit of autumn colour to the year. We look at eclectic home education, educational news and the benefits of home education. You’ll also find a list of discounted subscriptions available to our members and some ideas for seasonal activities.

Enjoy!

Elsa Raubenheimer
Magazine Editor
magazines@hea.edu.au

HEA Disaster Relief Grants

We have all been touched by the distressing scenes in the media of the disastrous and extensive damage caused by flooding, fires and cyclonic activity experienced by different parts of Australia in recent weeks, many of us indirectly, but some through first-hand experience, either due to watching our own homes or those of family and friends become inundated.

HEA is making grants available to home educating families who have lost everything due to these exceptional weather events.

We are asking HEA members to nominate families who have lost everything including all their home educating materials, books, records, etc. for consideration to receive a one-off payment to go towards rebuilding their collection of home education resources.

To nominate a family please email the full name and address of the family, plus a brief description of the situation to Beverley Paine at publications@hea.edu.au before Monday 14th March 2011.

Alternatively, you can phone 1300 72 99 91 and ask for the details to be passed on to the HEA Committee.

Grants to individual families will be considered at the March HEA Committee meeting.
Dear HEA members

We're off to a flying start for 2011, participating in another year of amazing home education rewards and challenges. Consistently more people are taking up the home education option and having the opportunity to be the major influence in their children's education. That's not to mention the chance to enjoy the close relationships that we develop with our children as a result of home educating. Of course the list of other home education benefits is very long and we all experience unique benefits that reward us and our children.

The true power of education is in the tiny seeds that we plant in our children's minds. The ability to enquire into our surroundings, the ability to self-enquire, self-appreciation and the self-generated love of learning are some keys that provide our children with endless opportunities and possibilities. Each little seed that we plant has the possibility that it may grow into a big oak tree. What new seeds will you plant this week, this month, this year?

We've started building the new HEA website to improve communication and to make it easier for you to find things. We've recently taken on some new subscription discount deals for members and we're looking at other ways we can freshen up the HEA a little. If you have any suggestions, please send them in.

As always, we'd love some more HEA members to come forward and help run the HEA by joining the committee or assisting in one of the roles that keep the HEA operating. If you're able to offer some help, please email me at volunteer@hea.edu.au.

Thank you for being part of the Australian home education community and being a pioneer in the education of your children. An extra special thanks to those of you that contribute time and energy to the running of the HEA and the support of home education in Australia.

Kind regards,
Guy Tebbutt
HEA President

"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."
Malcolm Forbes

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The true power of education is in the tiny seeds that we plant in our children's minds.

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Annual General Meeting

Monday 21 March 2011
by teleconference and in person

For instructions on how to attend or to nominate as a committee member please email Guy Tebbutt president@hea.edu.au before 5pm Friday 12 March 2011.

If you are a current HEA member and would like to support the HEA and home education in Australia now is your opportunity to become a committee member in the largest home education organisation in Australia. We are looking for committee members from all states in Australia.

Committee members make the decisions on behalf of the HEA membership and participate in planning the direction and activities in the HEA. The HEA Constitution http://hea.asn.au/hearules.pdf contains further details about how the Association is administered. Please also read Governance of the HEA: http://hea.asn.au/resources/disp_res.asp?type=4&id=227. For more information regarding the AGM, email president@hea.edu.au.
Want to Help?

The HEA is a volunteer organisation that supports HEA members and home educating families throughout Australia.

Volunteering is good for your health. Studies show those with many social contacts tend to live longer than those who are isolated: people need people. Here’s your chance to improve your health and well being!

We currently have the following vacant roles that need filling to enable the HEA to continue to provide services, support, information and discounts for you and other home educators:

**Insurance Coordinator**
– to maintain and renew HEA insurance policies.

**Advertising Manager**
– to coordinate HEA marketing.

**Resource Directory Coordinator**
– to coordinate the management of the online directories and the production of the annual printed HEA resource directory by HEA volunteers.

If you can help to support the HEA and home educators by filling one of these roles, or if you can help in another way, please email Guy Tebbutt at volunteer@hea.edu.au.

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It is sometimes scary to put your hand up to volunteer and say; "I can do that" (even if you’re not sure what you’re in for) yet it can be extremely rewarding when you can help out and learn. Most volunteer groups need more volunteers. Never think that you won’t be needed or won’t have the skills, as there will always be something you can do, even it's just giving your opinions!

Maaike Johnston

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HEA is keen to begin printing issues of Stepping Stones for Home Educators but we’re short on talent to produce print-ready copy.

We need someone with experience producing documents at the standard expected by commercial printers.

Working knowledge of InDesign or similar desktop publishing programs would be an advantage.

Please email Guy, our Volunteer Coordinator if you are interested:
volunteer@hea.edu.au
Your HEA Committee & Volunteer Team

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**State Support:** if you have a question related to registration, before phoning 1300729199, try one of our state volunteers.

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Karen Stewart
Elsa Raubenheimer
Kathy Lidden
Vacant - volunteer needed
Beverley Paine
Christine McPherson
Vacant - volunteer needed
Sam Pearson
Guy Tebbutt
Guy Tebbutt
Esther Lacoba
Guy Tebbutt
Thank you for another brilliant issue of the magazine. We enjoyed the pictures and poems by the children. I was wondering what other families are using for maths curriculum… What do people think of Mathletics? Is it a comprehensive program or would I need to supplement it with other resources? Keep up the good work!

Catherine

*Ed: Hundreds of our members use Mathletics as they offer a fantastic discount on subscriptions to HEA members. I am sure there are plenty of people willing to write a quick review we can publish in our Winter issue of Stepping Stones—email your comments and critiques to magazines@hea.edu.au by mid-May!*

How can I get back issues of this magazine? I joined the HEA late last year and started homeschooling my two boys, aged 7 and 10, this year after thinking about it off and on for about two years. We would love to know if there are other families in our area (nearest large town is Toowoomba).

Mandy

*Ed: To download and read back issues of the magazine visit [http://hea.asn.au/members/](http://hea.asn.au/members/). You’ll need your password and the email address you used when joining. For a list of contacts in your area visit our online resource directory and click on your state and region: [http://hea.asn.au/resources/default.asp?type=3](http://hea.asn.au/resources/default.asp?type=3) or look up Toowoomba in your copy of the printed Directory.*
Choosing Homeschool Curriculum: Part 2

by Beverley Paine

www.homeschoolaustralia.com

In this article Beverley continues to elaborate on the choices available to home educators as they launch their exploration of some of the many methods and approaches available to them.

In the summer issue we covered some of the major questions you will be asking as you start your home educating journey. What approach you choose will depend on:

- How long you intend to homeschool;
- What you are legally required to teach;
- Your children’s learning styles;
- Your preferred style of learning, teaching and parenting;
- Your children’s personal interests, temperaments and dispositions, talents and abilities;
- Any learning difficulties, differences or special need requirements;
- Your family values and lifestyle choices;
- The quality and nature of the available materials;
- How much support is available to you;
- What you can afford.

Popular homeschooling methods

Home educators enjoy a variety of different approaches to helping their children learn at home and in the community. These range from ‘do-it-yourself’ personalised curriculum development to a ‘school-at-home’ approach.

Part-Time School / Homeschool

Some families are able to negotiate part-time attendance at school for a variety of reasons. This option is not officially available in all states, especially in state/public schools. Private schools may charge a fee. Some schools or programs offer classes in individual subjects. Families cite the negative socialisation aspects of school life as a disadvantage as well as the loss of some homeschooling autonomy. Advantages include an increased sense of belonging and participation in the social life of the community, particularly in small rural towns.

Distance Education

Once available only to remote students through the state school system, distance education is available through private correspondence schools, usually offering a Christian-based curriculum. Strict criteria apply for enrolment in public distance education schools. Enrolled students learn via correspondence or over the internet in a traditional ‘school-at-home’ way, with parents usually marking work which is then sent to be recorded on the student’s portfolio. This approach is often expensive, highly structured and restrictive, requiring families to adhere to a rigid timetable. Certificates are awarded at the completion of school studies. Many families consider this approach during the teenage years as it suits independent self-motivated learners who enjoy goal-setting and are capable of managing their own time.

‘DIY’ Traditional School-at-Home Method

Most homeschooling parents start here, emulating how the child learned at school, or copying how they were taught as a child. This method works well with children who respond positively to order and structure. The homeschooling day is set up using a regular timetable, progress is charted using check-lists and curriculum texts are used in each of the nationally accredited subject areas. This approach usually includes grading and testing, as well as adherence to daily schedules and school terms.

A few well chosen textbooks complement library books to help devise learning activities. Children often work through inexpensive consumable graded student workbooks for maths, grammar and spelling. Unit studies can be added to the mix as well as field trips and excursions to offer a balanced learning program and cater to different learning styles.

Not knowing what curriculum materials to use, how to record or evaluate children’s work are seen as the main disadvantages, although once a homeschooling approach is settled on, and if it suits the children’s
learning styles, families thrive on the flexibility school-at-home allows. An Australian book popular with home educated families that demonstrates how to design your own curriculum is Beverley Paine’s *Getting Started with Home Schooling: Practical Considerations*. Rebecca Rupps’s *Home Learning Year by Year: How to Design a Homeschool Curriculum from Preschool Through to High School* is another excellent resource.

**Packaged Curricula**

These are complete curricula and include everything you need to begin schooling: teacher guides, books, study and revision sheets, tests, answers, activities, report cards, etc. Lessons are provided using online tutorials, CDs or DVDs, or traditional textbooks and student workbooks. Some include pre-testing services to match the curriculum to the child’s educational level. Completed work is mailed to a tutor or assigned teacher who then grades and comments on it and provides a transcript or report at the end of the program. If enrolment is required, it is actually a form of distance education/correspondence school. Check to make sure enrolment is possible in the state or territory in which you live: for example, in Queensland you can either be enrolled in a school or registered as a home educator – not both. Your local home educating authority might not recognise the school as a registered school in their jurisdiction and require you to register as a home educator or apply for exemption from attending school. You can list the curricula on your home education application, but may be asked to include additional resources to obtain registration/exemption status.

Programs can cost as little as $30 per year for a single subject, to between $550 and $1000 for full curriculum packages.

There are also curricula packages available which does not include access to a tutor or teacher. With these, the parent assesses and grades the child’s work and end of term/year certificates are usually not supplied. These are popular because they are less expensive and allow greater flexibility to add other resources and activities.

Many popular curricula include materials written and produced overseas, such as A Beka, Conclara, Calvert School, Oak Meadow, Sonlight, Robinson, ACE (Accelerated Christian Education), Bob Jones University, etc. Some may offer ‘Australian-ised’ versions.

Most of these include study in all subject areas, although it is possible to purchase learning programs for single subjects. Many curriculum suppliers will allow you to purchase one component without buying the whole program. For instance, parents may use Calvert for mathematics, A Beka for science, and Sonlight for literature.

Online programs which include tutoring in individual subjects are becoming very popular and can be cost effective. Popular single subject curricula include Singapore Maths, Diana Waring History-Alive, Mathletics, Reading Eggs, etc. Feedback is immediate with online learning and some programs automatically compile student progress records. Most programs offer the opportunity for group learning situations using blogs, forums, chat rooms and other methods. Computer-based learning needs to be supplemented by physical activities in the traditional subject areas, as well as face-to-face social interaction.

Programs can cost as little as $30 per year for a single subject, to between $550 and $1000 for full curriculum packages. High school curricula are more expensive. If the program you are considering is quoting more than this, take a look at the alternatives and compare the differences. Quality educational materials and tutoring does not come cheap.

Inflexibility and expense are cited as disadvantages, with reassurance and preference for structure, plus access to certificates of completion of studies cited as advantages.

Suppliers of homeschooling curricula are listed in the following directories:

- Mary Pride’s *The Big Book of Home Learning*
- Cathy Duffy’s *100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum*
Curriculum Guides

Curriculum Guides or checklists are an inexpensive alternative to curriculum packages for parents confident that they can create or find activities to help their children learn. These set out in point form the scope and sequence of individual subjects. Most relate to national or state standards, though some may contain content from UK or USA curricula. Parents can create their own curriculum guides by collating the 'contents' of school textbooks. Many home educators download and use the state curriculum framework or syllabus as a guide.

Homeschool Your Child For Free, by LauraMaery Gold and Joan M Zielinski, sets out a comprehensive listing of free online educational resources, including core knowledge, scope and sequence outlines, lesson plans, worksheets, tests, unit studies and so on. The Home Education Association has produced a curriculum guidelines booklet which, together with its resources booklet, offers a starting place for families. Many families have found the HEA’s Emergency Pack very helpful when putting together a curriculum for registration purposes.

Unit Studies

Unit studies begin with a democratically chosen topic or theme, around which a collection of educational activities is built that touch upon learning in all curriculum areas. Often the topic chosen is of high interest to the child making it easier to retain knowledge and skills. Unit studies can be tailored to suit the needs of different age or ability children in the family, with everyone studying the same topic, but different elements and at different levels at the same time. A unit study continues until interest wanes, or projects and activities are completed. Families who use unit studies as their main approach often complete 'lap books', blogs or websites as permanent records of the study.

Documenting progress in each subject area can be daunting and it can take a while to feel confident that you are adequately covering the whole curriculum. Proponents cite how easy it is to home educate children of different ages with this approach. Thousands of unit studies in every area of the curriculum are available online, most for free, as well as in quality educational books available in libraries and bookstores. Parents can prepare their own. This can be time-consuming, but if the children are involved the preparation is a quality educational activity in its own right. The main disadvantage cited is that it may give rise to gaps in the overall education of the child.

Learning Centres

Learning centres are a popular tool for encouraging eventual independent study. For younger children the parent needs to be more involved in setting up the centre as well as helping the children with learning activities. These centres contain all the materials required for completing activities, as well as instructions or 'contracts' to guide the children. You can create learning centres in each of the major curriculum areas – English (a writing corner, reading corner, plus listening 'post'), Maths, Science, etc. Learning centres also work well if you are using a unit studies approach to home education.

Eclectic Approach

Many homeschooling families relax into an ‘eclectic’ approach, selecting the best teaching strategies from various sources, including the different homeschooling approaches. This approach generally builds on individual children’s learning styles and needs as well as the needs of the homeschooling family. It is highly flexible to changes in circumstances and can easily capitalise on learning opportunities as they arise.

It can be done successfully at low cost, drawing on resources both online and within the wider community. Some websites about eclectic homeschooling are www.eclectichomeschool.org and http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/methods/Eclectic.htm

Independent Cooperative Homeschools

As the number of homeschooling families increase support groups grow to serve their social and educational needs. In some metropolitan areas informal 'learning cooperatives' evolve over time or are formally begun. These typically offer classes for groups of children in a range of subject areas to suit the needs of the homeschooling community. Fees are paid to the cooperative or to the individual offering tuitorage. As in a school setting, there are rules to be followed as well as timetables and schedules. Homeschool cooperatives usually require parents to supervise their own children at all times whilst participating in lessons or group activities. Parents are usually required to become involved in the cooperative in a direct way.

More common than homeschool cooperatives are local support groups that offer regular social get-togethers for parents and children in an informal setting, either in a park or playground, or at each others’ homes. Individuals and groups also organise educational excursions to places of interest or employment.

...to be continued!

In the next issue Beverley will describe unschooling, deschooling, natural learning as well as some of the literature based curricula such as Charlotte Mason and Classical Education.

Please tell us what approach or method you use at home and how you came to choose it: magazines@hea.edu.au.
Is your style of homeschooling working?

by Elsa Raubenheimer

My previous article touched on questioning homeschool choices. This time we’ll look at how to measure whether what you’re doing is working, and also at a few simple steps which might just fix problems you’ve discovered. I don’t have all the answers, but I can share what has worked for us.

Measuring happiness

When you question your style of homeschooling or your choice of resources, there is a very accurate measure to use. Is your child happy? Is the child inspired and feverishly trying to find out more about a subject or simply content and peacefully working along? Those are both natural states we experience in our own learning. You know your child and you’ll know if the child is happy.

Something we’ve found is that, apart from obvious reasons such as illness or unavoidable stress, there are two main reasons for a child to be unhappy and not progressing at a natural speed in their learning. One is if the work is too difficult or too much and another is if the work is not challenging or stimulating enough. There are easy ways to fix these issues.

Pare down and simplify

What do you do if your child is overwhelmed by the amount or complexity of work and exhausted in trying to keep up? This should be obvious, but often when we’ve bought an expensive curriculum we simply do not want to skip any little bit of detail. Get real, people! That is a big box of materials and one small to medium child. Which is more precious to you? Do you really want to break a spirit that young, and lose what could have been an enthusiastic mathematician through an avalanche of worksheets? She’ll probably be fine if she did a fifth of the exercises. Repetition is for when one does not understand something, so do not destroy souls with repetition of things they have mastered and which no longer hold magic.

Do you wear yourself and the rest of the family out driving from activity to activity? You, too, need to be happy and healthy for the rest of the family to function. What am I saying? If the homeschool parent is worn out, the whole family malfunctions! If you’re finding it all too much, chances are the child has given up hope of managing what you’ve lined up. More is not necessarily better! In fact, more is most often simply too much.

You are not depriving a child if you cut down on activities. If a child is musical, by all means let him take an extra class here and there, but if one day he blames you for not allowing him to play the bagpipes on top of the other three instruments, swimming lessons and scouts... well, he can always work through it in therapy!

Embroider and broaden

There is also the other side of the coin. Sometimes we pick easier work for a child on purpose. It is hard to watch children struggle and good to see that they accomplish some work easily. Yet you’ll find that it is not in human nature always to want it easy. Even the most cautious of us are programmed to want a challenge and to test ourselves just a little bit.

If all of your child’s work is of such a standard that he can simply cruise along, he will become frustrated and that is one of the main reasons children get moody and difficult to handle.

There is no reason to throw out what you’re doing though. If it is not possible to upgrade to a different level, have a look at the material and see how you can make it more interesting. Can you devise a project, with the child’s input, to challenge him and embroider further? If there is already a spark of interest but the set work does not provide sufficient depth, set up a web quest or library research project so that he can dig much deeper into the subject.

Cross-curricular links also work very well to provide interest. When studying the geography of Europe, for example, one can embroider by focussing on a specific country, or broaden the field by studying the music/food/languages of many countries. This method works well for any age group.

Work on intuition

Well, you won’t hear that in school! Yet I’ve found following my gut instinct a very accurate way of keeping our homeschooling on track. While things are humming along nicely, a lot of learning occurs. When they are not, the learning taking place tends to be of the negative kind.

Trust your intuition and watch your children carefully to see if they are happy. That has worked for us for many years and still does. Above all, enjoy the time you have together.

(The article above first appeared as a guest post in The Hows and Whys of Homeschooling, a blog by Steven Horwich, author of the Connect the Thoughts curriculum. It appears with Steven’s permission.)
It’s alright, I’m just kidding... sort of. We all know home education has many benefits – flexible and individualised learning, reduced exposure to peer pressure and bullying, academic success, being able to become socialised in the real world, strong family relationships – and that list isn’t exhaustive.

And yet, like all communities, we too have our problems and our flaws. Not the same old “the children must be socialised” or the “are you qualified?” or the “is it legal?” objections that are raised by people ignorant of home education and the many ways it can work.

The problems with homeschooling are things we don’t even discuss amongst ourselves most of the time, things we sometimes struggle with alone, thinking “it must be me; I’m not doing this right”. Things we may fail to anticipate or observe.

Like socialising. No, I didn’t mean to type socialisation. There’s a difference and we all know what it is. Although we co-op and run classes and groups and excursions and workshops and meet up at the park, the tough fact is that most of our children’s potential friends are sitting in a classroom from 9 to 3. And while most of our children can find friends to connect with – if not through homeschool activities, then through church or other community groups – a significant minority do not. It’s a complaint you most often hear on online forums, where a degree of anonymity applies. Not that I’m suggesting school would do a better job for the lonelier or more isolated of our children; but if as a community we acknowledged this difficult and emotional aspect of homeschooling experience, surely we would be a step closer to working out ways to support all home educated students with their social needs.

Diversity is another topic not much discussed amongst us. How well does our homeschool community reflect our wider community? Do we homeschool alongside those of other cultural backgrounds? Do people of other religions or of no religion at all feel comfortable in our company? Do we reflect a range of socio-economic circumstances? Or are our communities somewhat closed to “others”? These are questions worth thinking about by us – we who see the value in home education and might properly wish to extend that value to others in our wider community.

Economic disadvantage is the issue that I personally find most troubling. It falls into two parts. Firstly, our children are disadvantaged in that, whilst being legally home educated, they are the only students in the country who receive no funding. This must directly affect how diverse our homeschool world is, as discussed above, and puts a strain on homeschooling families that other families are not required to bear.

Secondly, the primary homeschooling “teacher” – usually but not always the mother – is at a significant financial disadvantage which becomes greater the longer she continues to homeschool full-time. We’ve all heard about how difficult it is for mothers who take a year or so off while their baby is young and the troubles they may have re-establishing their careers and compensating for lost earnings and superannuation. For homeschooling parents you can magnify that a considerable amount. Sure, right now you may have a plan. You may have a spouse who can increase his or her earnings to cover yours. And almost all of us are experts at making do. My concern is what happens when the plan derails – when health, a job or a partner himself is lost? When a separation or divorce occurs? When you try to return to work and find you’re considered too old?

We spend a lot of time obsessing about curriculum. Maybe we...

Melissa lives in Sydney and homeschools Noah (7), Lizzie (11) and Emily (13). She is happy to discuss these issues and others on her blog http://throughthewardrobe-musings-melissa.blogspot.com/
should be spending some of that time planning for us – how we can re-train, combine work and home education and establish life plans that can deal with the unexpected. Or we should work together to create homeschool-friendly ways to support (mostly) women who are out of the workforce for an extended time. Or lobby for student funding, which would help free up the family budget to make adequate provisions for us, or for cancellation of a home educator’s higher education debt, which waits for her when she resumes paid work.

Yes, we homeschool because we value the individual and the family; but we live in the world, not apart from it. Perhaps, amongst ourselves and away from the ears of the ignorant, we can start talking and planning and working to support ourselves as a community and as part of that larger world.

FAQ: Help!

“Just wondering if anyone can give me some advice on how to actually "do" home education. Let me clarify... I spend a lot of time researching, talking and generally getting bogged down in intellectual stuff. I am not so great on the actual "doing" of anything.” Noni

I can relate to Noni’s problem. For a long time I was a lot like Rimmer, a character from Red Dwarf, a novel and TV series written by Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, who needed to pass an examination to further his career on the mining spaceship. He neatly wrote out very organised study schedules, so much so that he never actually had time to do the study required and thus kept failing the exam, much to his chagrin. My life was littered with well organised and clearly articulated but unfulfilled plans. At some time though, we have to stop and address the real problem, that of avoidance. For me this meant asking myself some hard questions, such as “why was I sabotaging my attempts to do what I wanted?” The answer was related to fear. Since childhood I had been afraid of failing, of not being ‘good enough’ and the high standards I set myself meant that I was never satisfied. I used to quit while in the planning stage, although to me it didn’t look like quitting, just ‘shifting direction’. I would con myself that I wasn’t doing it right and start again, usually using new or ‘better’ different tactics or resources. Instead of doing anything productive I spent my time judging myself.

I’m not going to blame myself entirely for this self-defeating habit. As a child and into my late teens my experience as a school student reinforced this nonsense. More time is spent in schools planning, organising and going over what is supposed to happen in the lesson than actually studying! And as a ten-year-old I had worked out that I could get a better grade by making my work ‘pretty’. I was one of those ‘neat and tidy’ students that had learned how to play the ‘education’ game to my advantage. The amount of thought and effort I put into planning and presenting my work seemed more important than the content. As an adult student I’ve also noticed this tendency.

My advice to Noni is to stop planning and thinking about what you need to do. Instead sit down with your children and ‘be’ with them. Play with them. It could be anything: playing with their toys, a board or card game, or simply being silly making up crazy songs or stories. Take them for a walk. Go shopping. Spend some time wandering along the local creek. Take sketch books and draw what you see. Talk about those things. Notice things that look odd. Ask open ended questions that don’t need answers straight away.

Then, when the children are tucked up in bed after you have read them ten picture books or three chapters from their favourite author, snuggle down on the sofa with a cuppa and a blank page in your notebook. Write down the remarkable things your children said. Somewhere on the page jot down, perhaps in a different colour, your thoughts about what you think your children learned that they didn’t know before. By doing this simple fifteen minute exercise you are creating a permanent record of your homeschooling ‘plan’. The more you do it the more obvious the ‘plan’ hidden in the patterns of words on the pages in your notebook become. Seasoned home educators call it ‘retrospective planning’. Over time you should slowly get control over the conditioned need in you to draw up tidy, organised plans so that you have more time to play and learn!

Please send your questions for our FAQ: Help! Column to Beverley publications@hea.edu.au. Beverley shares her 25 years of home educating experience through her friendly, on-topic Yahoo Group http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HomeschoolAustraliaFAQ/
Homeschooling Benefits
by Michelle Morrow

It’s been 14 years since I first heard about homeschooling. The benefits that I saw in homeschooling all those years ago are now a reality. As the years have marched on I have continued to see the list of benefits expand.

Each one of these benefits is a subject in itself. Whole books have been written about this topic. If you want to read more about the benefits of homeschooling two books that I recommend are:

✓ Things we wish we had known by Bill & Diana Waring.
  In this book 50 homeschool veterans share about the benefits of homeschooling and what they wish they had known when they first started. This is an inspirational book.
✓ The Successful Homeschool Family Handbook by Ray and Dorothy Moore (formerly called Homeschool Burnout).
  This book is a classic. It was the first book I read on homeschooling and at the end of the book I was a convert.

Let me share with you my homeschooling benefits list.

Spiritual Benefits
✓ More time to disciple my children.
✓ More time to read spiritual books with my children.
✓ I am the primary influence on the spiritual development of my child.
✓ My child is nurtured in a positive spiritual environment.

Child Benefits
✓ Balanced children.
✓ Children work at own developmental pace.
✓ Good self-esteem and high self-worth.
✓ Self motivated attitude.
✓ Time to pursue interests.
✓ Independent learners.

Academic Benefits
✓ Bright children.
✓ Individual tuition.
✓ Choice in educational curriculum.
✓ No homework dictated by external power.
✓ Produce a love of learning and a sense of wonder.
✓ Continuity of education.
✓ Avoid teaching to the test.

Family Benefits
✓ Lots and lots of family time.
✓ Developing a family culture.
✓ Family learning adventures.
✓ Family closeness.
✓ Healthy eating.
✓ Positive socialisation often with other families and not fixed to a specific age group.
✓ Flexibility to follow own routines and schedules.
✓ Less family stress as you organise the workload.

Mother Benefits
✓ Confidence in educational environment.
✓ Improve own learning (I have really enjoyed this part. It has been an unexpected bonus).
✓ You get to know your children well. You develop strong ties.
✓ You have time for your children.

Financial Benefits
✓ It’s cheaper than private school.
✓ Tailor education to suit budget.
✓ Travel in off-peak times.
✓ Accommodation is not dictated by proximity to school.

Michelle Morrow has 4 children and has been homeschooling for 10 years. On her website, Homeschooling Down Under http://www.homeschoolingdownunder.com/, she shares ideas, teaching tips and resources for the homeschool journey. Her blog, Enduring Prize http://www.enduringprize.com/, tells the story of one family’s homeschooling journey Down Under.
My son was diagnosed at the age of 3 with ADHD. He started school in the UK at the age of 4 and from day one we had issues. He was given a Statement of Special Educational Needs which means he was allocated extra support from a teacher aide but this did very little to prevent some of the problems. He was always in trouble and I seemed to spend much of my time at the school or attending various meetings with Special Education personnel or the likes!

We moved to New Zealand when Samuel was 7 and many of the problems continued and at times life was a nightmare. We saw a variety of ‘specialists’ and he was then diagnosed as having Aspergers and as being gifted. Life was a struggle with him, both in and out of school, but I did not want to put him on medication for a variety of reasons. Some people tried to make me feel bad about that decision but in the end the psychologists who were working with us felt that medication would probably not have been a good thing for Samuel anyway because of his complex diagnosis. He did not seem to fit neatly into any one box. He was just known to be different.

We also found that, although he was gifted, he was what has now been termed as ‘twice exceptional’ in that although he is ‘gifted’ he also has a learning disability, namely dysgraphia. Although dysgraphia is similar to dyslexia in its manifestation, he can read brilliantly but struggles to write. All in all he seemed to be one big headache for school!

We tried a variety of schools including both state and private, but in the end I made the decision to ‘homeschool’ when my bright little boy started to become depressed and very angry. I found, and still find, Samuel (although exasperating at times) a ray of sunshine and I could not stand back and watch him suffer for being a square peg that just was not going to fit into that round hole!

We had to apply for an exemption from school in New Zealand, which is very much like the process here. It is funny though how I had talked to some people who had children who were not known problems and their exemptions took far longer to obtain than ours. I feel the education system let out a huge sigh of relief when we went it alone! It was the best decision I have ever made. We have been homeschooling now for five years and in that time we have not seen one single ‘specialist’. We do not use labels much at all anymore. My son is simply ‘Samuel’ who, I feel, has a bright future.

We followed various forms of homeschooling from unschooling to eclectic and are now doing correspondence courses. Samuel was accelerated a year and so he is now starting Year 12 at the age of fifteen. He was also accepted into the Headstart Programme at Sunshine Coast University where he has completed one paper in Software Engineering obtaining a High Distinction. He is to complete a further paper this semester.

He also is a valued member of our local Surf Club and was awarded the title of Champion Lifesaver of Queensland in the Under 14 age group. He attends the local woodworking club and the wonderful people there have shown him the skills of woodturning, so he is able to make the most beautiful things in wood. He belongs to a chess club and is a member of the local swim squad.

He is, and knows he is, a valued member of society which, unfortunately, whilst at school he was not always made to feel. I was once
told by a headmaster that my son was a possible Columbine Kid! I never for one moment thought that of my child and it just showed that school is definitely not the right environment for everyone. In fact it can be quite damaging for some. Homeschooling enabled me to build my son’s self-esteem and focus on his strengths rather than his weaknesses.

I became interested in education when Samuel was little and worked as a teacher’s aide both in the UK and New Zealand. I completed a degree in the UK and a further Graduate Diploma in Teaching whilst in NZ. I worked full-time as a primary school teacher before taking Samuel out of school and that job helped me with my decision. I saw that although there are many brilliant teachers, many of them have no training and little understanding of ‘special needs’, let alone funding within the school to help these children! I knew that no one else was going to have the insight and determination that I had when it came to educating my child.

At first because of my training I really did ‘school at home’ which basically meant I followed the structure of a mainstream school day. This was disastrous. My son, and many with ADHD, hyper focus and when he is working on something just wants not to be disturbed and to keep working on it. What ‘deep learning’ we were able to achieve in this way! No 45 minutes of literacy followed by 45 minutes of numeracy for us. We did whole days of numeracy or computing or whatever Samuel was interested in. I felt that with him having an interest in the topic half the battle was won. If he was interested in how quantum physics worked then that is what we would study and I would somehow manage to incorporate literacy, maths, history or whatever we felt was important at that time into that topic. We had fun! Something that was lacking for Samuel whilst in school. If Samuel wanted a break, we had a break and went for a walk or did something else to let off steam. He did not have to sit there trying his hardest not to fidget or wriggle. He could relax and actually enjoy what he was doing.

I know some people are fearful of homeschooling and also feel that because I am a trained teacher I am somehow more qualified to homeschool. I am not. I was not always a teacher and my training has no bearing on how we homeschool at all. If anything, we do everything differently to how it would be done in school. I became a teacher because of my son and then realised that school was not the best environment for either of us and we could both achieve more going it alone.

I hope that my story encourages others to have a go at homeschooling their child with ‘special needs’, if mainstream school is not working out. It is amazing what you can achieve. Although you might once not have seen any light at the end of the tunnel, you will be amazed at what futures lay ahead for these wonderful young minds with the right support and encouragement! Good luck!

Internet Support Groups
For families homeschooling children on the autistic spectrum: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HENASD/
Special Needs Homeschool: http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/special-needs-homeschool
HE Special is an informative UK site with support group: http://www.he-special.org.uk/
HSSN Yahoo Group: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/special-needs-homeschool/
Children’s Disabilities Information list of support groups: http://www.childrensdisabilities.info/autism/groups-autism-asperger.html
Gifted Families Yahoo Group: http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/giftedfamilies/
Gifted Children Australia support groups links: www.gifted-children.com.au/parent_support_groups

Links to articles
Homeschool Australia list of articles: http://homeschoolaustralia.com/articles/specialneedsindex.html
Homeschooling_Special_Needs.htm
Home education and Aspergers: http://www.hunterhomeed.com/Aspergers.html
Special needs resources for homeschoolers: www.specialneedschool.com/
Parents considering home educating children who have special needs are sometimes asked to attend meetings at the school to discuss various issues, especially socialisation, with concerned staff. In a recent post on the South Australian home education community yahoo group parents had some pertinent advice to a family who found themselves in this position with a hostile principal and teaching staff. Kristin questioned the need for the school to insist on a meeting at all, especially in South Australia where the home education application is assessed by the Education Department and not the school. "It's a bit like asking a butcher how they feel about vegetarian diets", she said.

Several people echoed Michelle's ‘stock answer’ of “Yes, socialisation will be a problem because there are so many homeschool groups that sometimes you do more socialising than schoolwork!” Amanda pointed out that schools can’t and don’t offer the one-on-one instruction and assistance in the classroom and playground and that as homeschooling parents we have the ability to tailor the social opportunities to match our children’s needs: our children are not forced to socialise on a day when we know they won’t cope with it. She pointed out that all it takes is an email or phone call to quickly organise social activities with friends when our children are in the right frame of mind.

Georgina suggested asking the staff about the bullying rates in public schools, particularly of children with special needs. Can they guarantee the child will receive the social skill tutoring and mentoring he or she requires in a safe environment? Or the kind of tailor-made social development program parents can provide from home?

Georgina also recommended not attending the meeting alone, taking an advocate or an experienced friend along. She advised not to agree to anything unless you are happy with it. Politely let the staff know that their advice will be considered and replied to in writing.

Local homeschool networks offer lots of valuable advice on many issues relating to home education and are well worth joining. If you live in SA be sure to join http://groups.yahoo.com/group/home-education-sa/.

I bought Homeschooling the Child With ADD(Or Other Special Needs) two years ago and constantly refer to it to support my decision to homeschool my PDD-nos/ADHD inattentive daughter after trying both public and private schools. Deciding to homeschool was very difficult. I felt lonely and continually tested by my decision to homeschool her but find that this book cheers me on and has helped me choose curriculum. I also recommend Sharon Hensley's book Home Schooling Children with Special Needs for more curriculum suggestions. Karyn P

Also read Cathy Duffy's review for http://cathyduffyreviews.com/testing-special-needs/homeschooling-child-with-add.htm

BOOK REVIEWS

The Well-Adjusted Child
Rachel Gathercole is the mother of three delightful homeschooled children. Her articles have appeared in various national and local publications, including as cover stories in Mothering, Life Learning, and other magazines. To find out more about this much-acclaimed book visit http://www.rachelgathercole.com/.

Although Home Schooling Children with Special Needs approaches home education from a Christian perspective, the author does an amazing job of including very practical information together with inspiring and uplifting viewpoints. The book is compact, and easy to read, yet not simplistic. It discusses a full range of learning differences and how to manage and evaluate the way to find the best learning path for your child. For more information about Sharon Hensley's book Home Schooling Children with Special Needs visit http://avcsbooks.com/shop/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=5_36&products_id=430.
Autumn Activities

by Elsa Raubenheimer

Cover the key learning areas with activities for the season.

SCIENCE & NATURE

Why do leaves change colour in autumn?

Read about the leaf coloration process: [http://www.kidzone.ws/plants/autumn1.htm](http://www.kidzone.ws/plants/autumn1.htm)

Leaf experiment: Choose a tree that changes colour in autumn and place a piece of aluminium foil over a part of leaf before the leaves change colour. Leave it there till the rest of the leaves on that tree have changed colour. Take the foil off and see what has happened.

Count the spots on the ladybird: We assume the ladybird will be sitting on a leaf, so the activity makes it into this category. Not all ladybirds are the same and this site will help you identify some once you've counted their spots. [http://www.ozanimals.com/wildlife/Insect/Ladybirds.html](http://www.ozanimals.com/wildlife/Insect/Ladybirds.html)

ART

Leaf rubbings: Pick several interesting leaves. Put some newspaper down on a table, then place a leaf flat on the newspaper. Put a sheet of tracing paper over the leaf then gently rub a soft pencil or crayon over the leaf till the leaf outline shows through. There's plenty of scope for interesting artwork. Other options: rub several leaves next to each other, then cut the rubbings out and tape them to a string that you can hang up as a room decoration. Or cut out leaf-rubbings and paste individual leaves on brightly coloured cardboard for greeting cards or gift tags. You can even use the leaf-rubbings for wrapping paper. Use your imagination and see what ideas the children come up with during this activity.


MATHEMATICS

Count the spots on the ladybird: See above, under Science & Nature.

Sort by shape: [http://www.meddybemps.com/Leaves/SortByShape.html](http://www.meddybemps.com/Leaves/SortByShape.html)

LOTE

How does one say “leaf” in that language? Find the word for leaf and for tree in as many languages as you can. For little ones three or so would be enough. For older children, let them set their own goals. Here is a place to start: [http://translate.google.com.au/#](http://translate.google.com.au/#)
ENGLISH

The anxious leaf: A story to read

Apple tree: A beautiful tree story

Leaf language: Pick the most beautiful autumn leaf you can find and then write a paragraph describing it in detail. Pick your own style, so it can be dreamy and full of expressive language, or it can be a scientific description. For little ones, an older sibling or parent can be the scribe.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Up in the air: Pick a windy autumn day to play this game. Players have to catch leaves before they touch the ground. One point per leaf caught. Keep it to a ten or twenty minute period. Find a tree that is dropping plenty of leaves to keep this going.

TECHNOLOGY

Sweep the leaves: An online version of the game above! http://www.akidsheart.com/holidays/fall/leafsweep.htm

Make something out of leaves:
http://www.meddybemps.com/Leaves/MakeSomething.html

Munch on a leaf: Use a leaf cookie cutter to make some leaf-shaped biscuits as an autumn treat. If you’re not up to baking, cut leaf shapes out of toast.

Leaf Prints
by Bernie Meyers
Enjoy spending some time wandering and collecting leaves of different types and sizes. You will be printing the veins on the underside of the leaves, so those with really pronounced veins will give a clearer impression than those with soft veins. Leaves with no protruding veins can create interesting shapes without the internal details. I have even successfully used fresh herb leaves, such as sage, to create the most delicate prints.

Imaginative leaf pictures can be created with just a few simple items. This project is suitable for all ages. There are no limits to the simplicity or complexity of what you can produce.

Let your children experiment with the leaves to form pictures. These can be anything from fanciful woodland creatures to bizarre robots or vehicles, imaginary castles, whimsical pixies or simply appealing designs.

First try some test prints with the different types of leaves. You can gently press the leaf (vein-side down) onto a stamp pad, then transfer the leaf onto a sheet of paper.

If you don’t have a stamp pad, make one, using paint on a sponge. Make sure the paint is not too sloppy as the sponge needs to absorb the paint. With some leaves, you can use your finger or hand to press the leaf onto the paper. If the impression is not clear, try using the back of a dessert spoon and rub it gently in a circular motion. If you have a printmaking brayer (roller) you can roll it over the leaf in order to release the ink or paint.

Once you have played around with different leaves, ink, paint, spoons, rollers and other materials you are ready to make the images. Arrange the leaves in the desired design and start printing. It’s worth spending some time and making several pictures because you’ll learn as you work.

You can also use other natural or man-made objects to create printed impressions. Try feathers, seashells, fruit, seed pods and other interesting objects to create some masterpieces.

by Bernie Meyers

**MATERIALS**

- leaves
- ink pad or sponge with paint
- Paper
- spoon or roller (optional)
Micheál McCarthy, an expert in Music Education, has kindly agreed to answer parents’ questions on this topic. If you have further questions, please send them in and we’ll ask Micheál to answer them in a future issue.

Q: What is the ideal age to start playing an instrument?
A: Some children will take to instrumental music from a very early age (given the right teacher and teaching approach). Certain teaching methods are aimed at the teaching of children from as young as 3. However, instrumental training often begins around the age of 6, 7 or 8. There are instruments that may be better suited to children aged 9-11, due to the physical demands of the instruments in question. Parents will often well have a sense for when their child is going to be ready/not ready for training on a musical instrument.

Q: Should one bother with music theory before the age of ten?
A: It has been my experience that children who are introduced to music theory before this age find sight reading more natural. In my program I introduce children to certain “introductory” theoretical concepts when they are aged 6-8. This foundation work, allied with core musicianship skills (pitch, rhythm, structure, form, improvisation and gross-motor skills development), then allows them to learn to read and write quickly and easily. It is a process of discovery learning (at least this is how I approach it). We introduce abstract concepts in ways that younger children can manage; they can manipulate symbols without needing to know their abstract basis. When they are older (9-11), they can be introduced to the abstract concepts underpinning the system of music notation. And (as in the case of Kodály and other forms of training) children can “read” and “write” music using simpler forms of symbols from quite a young age.

Q: What is the best instrument for beginner musicians?
A: There is no simple answer to that question. Children who can play (or at least visualize) the piano often find it easier to grasp more advanced theoretical concepts, as it is graphically clear, so it is a terrific thing for any musician to be able to play piano (even if it is not to a very high level). Stringed instruments are terrific in that they require the child to listen in an acute way, thus training the child’s musical “ear”. Certain instruments are more accessible for younger children, and some instruments are more suited to older students. Of course, the voice is an instrument that can be used from a very young age – singing is terribly important in the training of a young musician, and (ideally) this starts in the home. Often, you will find that a child becomes attached to the idea of playing a particular instrument, and this can often be a sign that they will cope with the rigour required in forming a routine of daily practice.

Q: Our whole family is tone deaf. Is there any point in organising music education for my children?
A: I have never come across anyone who is truly “tone deaf”. There are many people who have never been taught how to pitch correctly, but I believe that they can learn, given the right teaching. Many talented children emerge from families with no history in music. Musical talent is partly genetic, partly something that is cultivated through careful nurturing. Zoltán Kodály once said that “music education should begin 9 months before the child is born”… he later went on to rephrase it in saying “9 months before the mother is born”. Again, singing in the home is the ideal place to start.

Q: Are there particular benefits to playing in a group/band/orchestra?
A: There are many skills that need to be cultivated in a young musician. Some of these skills are learned through instrumental training, some through singing, some through music classes, and other through ensemble development, such as participation in an orchestra or band. Making music with others provides the musician with the opportunity to interact, share ideas and listen while training skills such as the finer points of intonation, blend, balance, listening and following others. It also provides the opportunity to learn a wide range of musical repertoire.

Q: My son is interested in playing the tuba but we think it is just a whim. Should we indulge him?
A: I would take such interest seriously, but the parent
and the child have to be prepared to commit to regular practice. If the child shows a strong interest in the instrument, then it is a good sign. If parents are not sure that the child will really be prepared to do the work involved, then they could/should introduce the child to music in a broader context, such as through musicianship training. Children will find instrumental training easier if they already possess a strong sense of pitch and rhythm – that is where musicianship training comes in.

Q: I’ve heard that music tuition helps with Maths skills? Is that true?

A: There have been many studies which show that musical training leads to improved maths skills. There are many articles on this topic – here is one: http://serendip.brynmarw.edu/exchange/node/1869
It seems to me that it is not music per se, but the form of music training that leads to improved maths skill. For example, when a child is engaged in a complex musical task, using both sides of the brain, they are developing skills which will later assist them in learning languages, mathematics and sciences. In my music classes, children will be developing skills such as reading, writing, listening, dictation, memorization, improvisation, left/right and gross-motor skills, structure/form, all in the one activity. This goes far beyond simply ‘listening’ to music; it is involved, complex activity, and it is no wonder then that it trains the child to use both sides of the brain for other tasks later in life. Creative mathematicians, chemists and physicists use both sides of the brain; these skills can be trained from a young age through music.

Q: Would you recommend that a six-year old joins a choir? I think it is too young, but my daughter is very keen.

A: In our children’s choir, children start at the age of 5, and some children will even come along when younger. This is an important time in a child’s life when it comes to music, as it is the age when many children first learn to sing in tune. Leaving it until later can make it much harder for the child to learn. So if it were my choir, I would say yes.

Q: My daughter was given a violin by her aunt and feels obliged to play it. It is driving us up the wall! Any suggestions?

A: Personally, I would bring the child to some classes where she could develop her musicianship skills to an appropriate level (e.g. pitch and rhythm skills).

Joyful Noise

As a kid I watched every Shirley Temple movie at least once! I loved musicals and longed to dance like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, especially the tap dancing. Why this passion didn’t translate into dance lessons is a mystery. Perhaps my parents didn’t take me seriously, or perhaps I danced in my head and kept my love for its energy and exuberance a secret.

Laurel Schmidt, the author of Seven Times Smarter, 50 Activities, Games, and Projects to Develop the Seven Intelligences of Your Child believes the attraction of children to tap dancing is the noise: “Tapping is supremely kinaesthetic. Intense sensations arrive through the joints and muscles, amplified with a range of sharp, scratchy sounds.” (page 43) She suggests a simple way to encourage children to have a go at tap dancing - “happy feet” - is to hand them a pair of old boots or shoes, a few coins, a tube of heavy duty glue and let them work out how to arrange the coins to get the best sound. All they need then is a nice hard surface to tap against; the garage floor, playground, old wooden or lino floor that has seen it’s best days.

Let them work out their own rhythms or find some suitable music. If the noise is all a bit too much for you, rather than discourage the children, find something to do a long way from those tapping feet! Dancing is probably the easiest and most enjoyable way to stay fit. According to Laurel, the physical gains include "strength, endurance, flexibility, balance, dexterity, coordination, expressiveness, and good reflexes". For children with a tendency to gain weight, dancing is a great way to burn excess calories. Australia ‘s Tap Dogs popularised tap dancing. Riverdance glamorised another form of tap. Both are extremely energetic and a lot of fun.
Friends recently organised a natural dyeing day, inspired by India Flint’s book, Eco Colour: Botanical Dyes for Beautiful Textiles. It was, as you may imagine, a riot of hue and texture!

Three different kinds of dyeing were on offer. One involved colouring pieces of felt with turmeric paste, red tandoori food colouring paste and other vibrant food colours.

The second involved laying pressed flowers and leaves on a wet silk scarf, rolling it up, tying it, and leaving it submerged in water (with added coffee grounds/onion skins/whatever you wish) in a jar for a month. The botanical items leave a print on the fabric, although the results of ours weren’t very noticeable.

A more immediate and obvious effect can be achieved using a technique India Flint calls hapa-zome – literally ‘leaf-dye’ in Japanese – which involves laying down cardboard, then cloth of fairly dense weave, then flowers and leaves, then the cloth again, and hitting these layers with a mallet, causing a print of the plants to be caught on the fabric.

The third kind of dyeing we tried involved boiling and straining various botanical items to create different dyebaths – marigolds, bracken, apple branches, rhododendrons, eucalyptus leaves, etc. We each brought one dyebath on the day. My job was the marigolds, and I picked pretty much every single one of these flowers we had in the garden to fill a big saucepan!

On the day, we heated the dyebaths on an outdoor fire and threw in various pieces of felt and other fabric. The longer you leave the fabric in the dye, the deeper the hue. These natural dyes created a beautiful muted colour palette.

A few different mordants were used in these dyebaths to facilitate the fixing of the dye to the fibre. Rita Buchanan, in her book A Weaver’s Garden: Growing Plants for Natural Dyes and Fibers, includes some helpful information about the pH of various dyebaths and the chemical formulas of different mordants and their effects (p 66-70). For older children, the numerous chemical reactions and outcomes of dyeing could be an interesting course of science-related study.

The challenge now is to create something with our dyed fabric!

More information:


You can find many lists of natural dyes online, but this is one: http://www.pioneerthinking.com/naturaldyes.html
An explanation of various mordants and the principles of natural dyeing can be found here: http://www.aurorasilk.com/info/natural-dying.shtml
Here’s a lab version of this activity! http://www.creative-chemistry.org.uk/activities/dyeing.htm
You can buy various scarves, shawls, fabric and dyes from Beautiful Silks, based in Fitzroy, Melbourne. (Online store: www.beautifulsilks.com) They also run workshops.
Collecting Leaves

Thomas, aged six, learns about plants.

“Plants feel different.”

A natural gardener from an early age, Thomas never hesitated to do activities that involved exploring our garden. All the children were actively involved in growing trees from seeds, caring for them and planting them as Trees For Life volunteers. I feel proud as I drive past thriving plantations of native trees in our district that my children grew and nurtured from tiny seeds.

One day Thomas asked if he could collect some leaves from our garden. The activity took well over an hour as we explored and talked about all the different leaf shapes as he picked them — he wanted to get them all! He arranged them in his Science Scrapbook and I helped him cover them with clear adhesive contact sheets. Although collected 17 years ago the collection remains in excellent condition!

April, aged five, learns about plants.

PLANT USES
What do people use plants for?
What do animals use plants for?

How does your family learn history?

In this International Year of Chemistry, we would like to hear from home educated students who have studied famous chemists or replicated simple but ground-breaking chemistry experiments from the past.

Please send to Elsa at magazines@hea.com.au
Home education offers us the opportunity to integrate learning rather than separate our children’s lives into ‘education’ and ‘living’.

Down on the Village Farm is dedicated to sharing how we help our children learn about the basic necessities of life: celebrating learning about plants and animals, our environment, gardening and growing food, providing shelter and protection for ourselves and our animal friends.

We’d love to hear from you and your children. Stories about projects you have done, lesson plans to share with others, drawings and paintings about your garden, pets and homes.

**Submission deadlines:**
- End April for the Winter 2011 Issue
- End July for the Spring 2011 Issue
- End October for the Summer 2012 Issue

All submissions to Elsa at magazines@hea.edu.au

*Tree of Life*

watercolour by
Bernie Meyers
When you think of a forest in autumn, what comes to mind? Perhaps you think about trees turning gold and red and brown, and losing their leaves to prepare for winter? It is the classic autumn picture. Yet, in many of Australia’s forests, autumn is all about green rather than red and gold. Autumn is about new leaves rather than old ones. And in special parts of Eastern Australia, autumn means ultimate life.

We live in a dry continent. Vast portions of Australia are desert or semi-desert. But in some unique parts of our east coast, rain, rich soil and warm temperatures combine to support the ultimate forest community – rainforest. Tropical rainforest occurs in the far north east of Queensland, between Townsville and Cooktown. Subtropical rainforest occurs in isolated pockets from Mackay in Central Queensland, to the Barrington Tops on the Central East of NSW. Though rainforests once covered larger areas of the country, they are now rare and special places. If the total area of tropical and subtropical rainforest in Australia was combined, it would cover only 0.13% of the country. This is roughly the size of the Sydney basin.

Subtropical and tropical rainforests are examples of what scientists call ‘climax communities’. They exist in areas where conditions favour ultimate plant growth. And these conditions are at their peak in the months of March and April – Australia’s autumn. In some rainforest ‘hot-spots’, the rainfall figures are staggering. Australia’s wettest towns are Babinda and Tully, in NE Queensland, and they average more than 4,200mm of rain every year, much of it in autumn. Mullumbimby and Dorrigo, both in NE NSW, average over 2,000mm per year, making them the wettest place in the state. Again, much of this rain falls in the autumn months. These localities are home to magnificent rainforests.

So are these warm, wet rainforests important? They are for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are rare, beautiful and unique places in a continent as dry as ours. They are also home to more than half of all the plant species found in Australia. That’s right; in an area only a little larger than metropolitan Sydney live more than half of all Australia’s plant species. Many of these plants, such as the popular Macadamia nut, are edible and some even have uses as medicines. The tropical and subtropical rainforests are also home to thousands of animal species, many still to be named by science. Some rare and beautiful
animals, such as the Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo, Southern Cassowary and a number of unique wallabies and possums live only in these forests. There is still much to be discovered.

Thankfully, almost all of the surviving tropical and subtropical rainforest areas in Australia are now located in National Parks and World Heritage Areas. This means they will be protected for future generations. It also means you can visit them and experience the ultimate life that is a rainforest. Though perhaps it might be best not to visit in autumn – unless you like a lot of rain!

**Visit a Rainforest**

Some of the best and most beautiful rainforests are easily accessible to visitors. You can click the list below to find out more about these magnificent places...

- Daintree National Park – north of Cairns Qld
- Mossman Gorge – north of Cairns Qld
- Tully Gorge National Park – south of Cairns Qld
- Lake Barrine – west of Cairns Qld
- Eungella National Park – west of Mackay Qld
- Lamington National Park – west of the Gold Coast Qld
- Nightcap National Park – near Lismore NSW
- Dorrigo National Park – west of Coffs Harbour NSW

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**The Willow Tree's Daughter**

*by Pamela Freeman*

**Reviewed by Emily, age 7**

This story tells of a girl named Betony who has two friends, Clover and Basil. She is only part human because her mother is a willow tree. I liked this book because she has lots of adventures such as meeting a unicorn, and because she is a princess who doesn’t want to be a princess. This book is exciting. You might like to read this book if you like adventures.

Read about the author: [http://www.pamelafreemanbooks.com/](http://www.pamelafreemanbooks.com/)
Growing Food

by Belinda Moore

Bel lives with her husband and their six children in tropical far north Queensland. On their farm they learn, love, grow, create and also run their home-based business spiralgarden.com.au.

Where does our food come from? I wonder if many people know or care... There’s an international revolution promoting local food, which is very exciting and radical. How can that be so when only a couple of generations ago local food was considered to be a typical diet? When compared with the bright and loud fast food advertising, the locavore’s advocacy seems but a whisper. It’s up to us to provide the balance and teach our young that nature sustains life.

It is vitally important that our children have access to fresh, wholesome, affordable and tasty food. The freshest food is local food. Food from the earth, not wrapped in plastic from a store. The most local is our own backyard, a window box or a school or community garden.

Children need to know their food, be connected to it. An edible garden provides more than understanding about ecology and meaningful work - it has the capacity to introduce new flavours, encourage healthy snacking, bring children into the kitchen and the family back to the table. Home growing is as much about culture as nutrition.

There are many books in the library and informative websites describing how to create your own vegetable plot. Food plants can also be planted amongst ornamentals in existing gardens. A basic, no-dig garden in a sunny but sheltered spot can be set up in a couple of hours and produce food in a matter of weeks.

Potted gardens are fast and ideal for those renting, living in small spaces, with changeable weather or just starting out. You can use regular plant pots – often available through Freecycle or other recycling solutions. Polystyrene or waxed boxes, in which produce is transported, or other re-useable containers from around your home are also suitable.

Even if you start with a sprouting jar on the kitchen bench, children will observe and be involved with the production of their food. From there you might progress to other creative ways to fit home growing into your lifestyle.

Ideal first foods to grow include peas and beans, cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, radish, herbs, salad mixes and fruits such as gooseberries and strawberries. Simple varieties, properly cared for, will ensure a quick harvest. This enhances the gardener’s understanding, self-confidence and enjoyment.

Even if you’ve never grown anything before, learn beside your little ones. Sharing this knowledge now could foster a lifelong interest in gardening, a forgotten skill that some day could become vitally important once again.
My niece and her friend came to visit me. They had just completed their HSC. I was amused to learn one of the syllabus requirements for the HSC chemistry was to make mayonnaise as a demonstration of an emulsion.

Need I say, they never actually made the mayonnaise, although the syllabus required them to. They just talked about it and learnt what would happen if they did! It was the perfect opportunity to inspire them about food, so we carried out the ‘experiment’ at my place.

This mayonnaise, not only tastes fantastic, it is very healthy for you. It provides vital enzymes lacking in most of our food and greatly helps in the absorption of vitamins in our salads.

Here is the recipe:

- 1 whole egg
- 1 egg yolk
- a pinch of salt
- 1 teaspoon of mustard
- 3 tablespoons fresh squeezed lime juice
- 1 tablespoon of fresh whey*
- ¾ to 1 cup of extra virgin oil (olive or macadamia or a combination of both)

Place all ingredients except the oil in a blender and blend until combined. Keep the blender running and slowly pour the oil in to the blender. (I have made this many times and I still get a thrill when the mixture emulsifies.)

Leave at room temperature, covered well, for 7 hours before refrigerating.

* Fresh whey is easiest obtained by straining a good quality, live cultured, plain yoghurt through a cloth. (It’s the watery liquid: use the solids for cottage cheese.)

Free Online Resources for Chemistry

Chemistry Inquiry is the ‘home of high school chemistry guided inquiry lesson plans’:
http://www.chemistryinquiry.com/

The Science Spot lists dozens of sites with links to chemistry lesson plans:
http://sciencespot.net/Pages/classchemlsn.html

Amazing Chemistry Teacher Resources includes games, puzzles, songs and labs:
http://www.nclark.net/Chemistry#

Smile Program Chemistry Index is a collection of almost 200 single concept lessons:
http://mypages.iit.edu/~smile/cheminde.html

NCHS Chemistry has high quality lessons and material, including PowerPoint presentations:
http://www.unit5.org/chemistry/
After another debilitating period of burn-out I am again looking at ways I can enhance my energy levels and get more out of life. Since mid-December I’ve felt incredibly heavy and lazy, not wanting to do any of my chores, looking for ‘ways out’, wanting to go on holiday or move house, anything to get away from the dull drudgery caused by my grey mood. Half the time I’m close to tears and my family are bewildered by my withdrawal caused by feeling overwhelmed.

How did I get overwhelmed in the first place? It’s easily done if you are an over-achiever, and who among us homeschooling mums and dads aren’t overachievers? We take on paid work, voluntary work, housework, social commitments, pursue personal interests (if we’re lucky) and educate our children at home… and wonder why there aren’t enough hours in each day to get it all done!

So, at the beginning of January I decided to take control. I’m using a chart to map my progress (a tick-sheet no less!) and it is really helping me stay on track. The plan is to change the habits that lead to burn-out, and thus feeling overwhelmed, one by one. After two weeks of relative success I add another habit that needs changing. I’m phrasing them positively, as the desired habit. And to help, instead of setting ‘goals’, I’m focusing on ‘purpose’. Thinking about why I am changing my habits seems less intimidating than not being successful should I end up crossing one or two boxes instead of ticking them.

We probably have all used tick-sheets with our children, either as tools to help them modify their behaviour or for monitoring their educational progress. These tools help to build confidence and to indicate that we are moving in the right direction, that is, where we want to go or be eventually.

I can’t always predict my mood, although when I’m feeling overwhelmed simple little frustrating things can easily way-lay a good start to the day. Over the years I’ve noticed that being physically active first thing in the morning helps to reinforce that good mood and prop it up so that those little things don’t upset me so much. Waking up with a concrete plan to achieve ONE thing on my list (and I keep my list limited to only a few things when I’m feeling down and out) helps me feel positive and getting on and doing that one thing nice and early sets the tone for a successful day.

Most of last year, as I drank the first cuppa of the day I would check my email and networking sites. Often, work would arrive in the emails, adding to the pile already on my desk or in my inbox. Sometimes it would be a couple of hours before I could get away to do that ‘one’ task I’d set myself before having breakfast, doing the chores, spending time with my family or going to sleep! It is too easy to become distracted by this wonderful but terribly invasive information and communication technology. This is the first habit I decided to change and I’m pleased to say it is paying real dividends. I am more relaxed and able to cope better with little (and large) upsets.

Not turning on my computer until later in the morning or even in the afternoon has given me so much more time. Although I haven’t yet mastered the skill of getting stuck into work straight away and still feel tempted to check my emails first, I am less distracted. For the first time I’m actually able to leave even work-related messages or emails unanswered without feeling guilty or pressured.
For years I've counselled home educating parents to turn on the answering machine, turn off the TV and radio and, more recently, to disable chat or instant messaging software, so that they can focus more on helping their children with home educating activities. It's also important not to let social activities and excursions fill the week. Although they definitely satisfy many needs it can be hard to make up the lost time and that's when we begin to feel overwhelmed. Our productivity is severely compromised when it is constantly disrupted. We feel irritated because we can't complete the chores or find time to pursue our personal interests and it is too easy to blame homeschooling. Although I'm not actively homeschooling children any more, my homeschooling networking activities were taking over my life. Instead of examining my habits I started to blame my activities to the point that I started to think about giving them up. How many of us have felt like giving up homeschooling when feeling overwhelmed?

It is important to get a handle on those habits that slowly but surely lead to burn-out. Aim for maintaining a consistent, productive environment. Minimise distractions. Jot a note down to remind you or take care of distractions as they arise in your thoughts. Use your calendar to plan social interactions. Have a (short) list of things you want to achieve each day and focus on why you want to do them. Schedule plenty of breaks throughout the day to go for a stroll in the garden, play a game with the children, stretch and do a few exercises – all of these will help you focus on your task better when you come back to it.

And if you are really feeling low or completely unmotivated, use the ‘just do it’ strategy. Push through the barrier stopping you from doing whatever it is you need to do. I often feel frazzled, having lost all my usual resilience, but remind myself that it's just my mood; it's not tiredness, lack of energy or physical ability stopping me. And a mood can be changed. I spend a moment thinking about my attitude and then the purpose behind the task and draw motivation from that. Once I start working and get in the groove of productivity, I find that it's much easier to continue.

And finally, the one thing that derailed me the most as a homeschooling mum was comparing our homeschooling life with other families or me with other mums. Turn the volume down on your inner critic so that she's not yelling so loudly in your ear. What would she know? Your children, your spouse and your pets love you and, after all, they are the only ones that truly matter, right?

The Importance of Individual Thought

by Dora Sumegi

There are so many thoughts that cross an individual's mind every second that we can never know what we interrupt by talking to another person who seems to be doing nothing. When we are excited about an idea and want to share it with someone nearby, there's a great chance that we cut into their thoughts if they were trying to work out something in their own mind. Everyone has had the experience of a thought just forming, which was gone the next moment because another person entered the scene or spoke to them.

An excellent example of the above provided itself to me, when driving somewhere one day with my daughter. The music was on and I said something to her. She started the song again from the beginning, which I didn't notice. When I said something to her the second time, she asked me not to interrupt, as she was working out the patterns of each instrument playing in the song. It wasn't, of course, visible to an outsider that she was doing something.

I find it ironic that we keep telling our children not to interrupt when they see us talking to someone or we are busy, but we don't realise how many times we interrupt them – their thought process – just because they look like they're not doing anything.

Imagine, for example, if I tried to use this travel time to 'teach' her something useful, related to driving (e.g. 'how long a hundred metres are'). I'd think how smart I was to have come up with such a great lesson and she wouldn't even notice she was learning. I would have deprived her from a very important experience which was not only self-generated but, to her, more useful than learning about road length.

I'm almost certain that even natural learners who take this philosophy very seriously, like myself, fall into the trap of trying to provide information unasked for by their children because, to us, the situation calls for it so we can't refuse it. I know I've done it and seen it happen too. But I'm on the watch. I keep reminding myself that learning happens naturally when the individual is ready for the information.

This, at least to me, crosses out even the idea of using games as a disguise to teach. I'm not at all saying

"We keep telling our children not to interrupt when they see us talking to someone or we are busy, but we don't realise how many times we interrupt them."
that children don't learn by playing. They definitely do. My problem is with the word 'disguise'. It might deceive some children and hide the fact that they are forced to learn because the teacher makes it look like fun, but it is still coercion. And most children can detect this if it doesn't follow their natural interest, because it's artificial.

There is no point in trying as, not much learning will take place, or it will be 'empty knowledge', unless the child is fully engaged in the game by himself, originally arriving at the decision of taking part in the game out of self-interest. Something more important will be lost. Something that the child would naturally have been interested in thinking about if his thoughts hadn't been interrupted in the first place. We need to pay close attention to our children as the risk of dismissing their inner development is very high.

To refer back to my previous example with the driving, I held myself back from presenting my idea then and waited for it to arise naturally. I didn't have to wait long. A couple of months later, driving again (no music 'lesson' this time), my daughter spotted a road sign for a picnic area, which said '300m, left'. She asked me, 'mum, how long is 300m?' (It's obvious that there is no way I could have engaged her in searching for patterns in a song when she felt like looking at road signs!)

Needless to say, I was prepared with the answer, but I had to be wise. An explanation sometimes needs to be very quick, even when it's the child's own question. Why? Because they are in the middle of figuring something out, which they want to keep moving ahead with in their own mind and if we carry on with a long lecture they lose interest in the subject. That is because we are interfering with their line of thought, not because they have a short attention span.

There was also the subject of 'angles' I tried to introduce at the beginning of last year. She didn't even let me get started on it. Then, halfway through the year, she came home from her Tae Kwon Do training and in the middle of her excited account of it, a snippet of her sentence caught my ear. She said, 'we had to hold our legs in the air in a 20° angle from the ground...'. Me (chin-drop): 'How do you know what angles are?' Her (eye-roll): 'I just know, ok?' The proverb that 'when the student is ready the teacher will appear' is so apt for this situation. This proves that children (just like adults) learn everything in time. Their thought, not 'school standard' time.

I notice how important it is for a person not to have the flow of their thoughts interrupted. Of course that is not possible all the time, as interacting with other people brings on new, useful thoughts as well. But most schoolchildren's thoughts are interrupted 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, plus during after-school activities. School is distraction. How do I know? I was 'schooled' and 12 years of my childhood (that's basically most of childhood!) was lost. I'm slowly getting it back now that I home educate my daughter, naturally.

I can still remember, although vaguely, that I used to have my own train of thoughts. That's what teachers call 'daydreaming'. In my opinion, they are the ones who dream, or imagine that they can force every child to think about the same subject at the same time. I used to feel stupid and found it really hard to memorise things I wasn't interested in. On the other hand, I had lots of creative ideas and a clear, logical mind, which used to puzzle my dad. He would shake his head and say, 'I don't understand. How can you have such bad grades with a head like this?' Then, after a while, he put it all down to laziness. He could think of no other reason.

Well, there was one and I found it. After I finished school, I engaged in several courses and workshops out of interest and had no trouble with learning whatsoever. The reason? I followed my curiosity, my passion which had all arisen from paying close attention to my own thoughts. Interest, is the result of curiosity and no one can stop a person who's curious about something from learning. But curiosity cannot be forced either, it can only be self-induced. And yes, most times it's the 'daydreaming' that does it.

They say that 'your home is where your heart is'. I believe that in learning, your thought is where your heart is. Just follow it, it's only natural.

Dora Sumegi is a single mum from Far North Queensland, who has been home-schooling her daughter for five years with the support of some wonderful friends. Dora works part time and is fortunate to have a job she can take her daughter to and which allows her to do some work at home. Their approach is Natural Learning or Unschooling.
MORE USEFUL TRICKS FOR STUDENTS USING GOOGLE

by Peter Lilienfeld

Here are some more useful tools to use while searching for information on the web, using the Google search engine (www.google.com.au in Australia).

TRANSLATION

(http://translate.google.com.au/#, or simply type “google translation” in the Google box.) This is a fascinating tool, and could be particularly useful if your penpal writes to you in Slovenian or Icelandic. Google Translate provides a translation as you type. OK, it does make hilarious bloopers, particularly when idiomatic language is used, but bearing in mind the complexities of language translation, it does remarkably well.

This facility translates from and to about 60 languages, and has a facility for detecting the source language (which works most of the time). Only two of the languages are from Africa (Swahili and Afrikaans). A voice button allows you to hear how the translation is pronounced in the target language.

BOOK SEARCH

Go to Google Books at http://books.google.com.au/ and in the search box, type in the title, author or ISBN number of a book that you are looking for. If the book exists anywhere, Google is likely to find it. In many cases, particularly where the book is out of copyright, you will be able to read some or even all of the content.

DEFINITION

The Google definitions tool provides you with extensive online dictionary definitions and other information for English words, and less extensive dictionary information in 28 other languages. Just type in “definition” and the word you are looking for. It also works when you add a colon after “definition”. For example, if you type “definition eschew” Google comes back with a list of definitions from various websites. You still have to pick a reputable source, but it makes the job easier.

FIND IMAGES

Looking for images to illustrate a project? You can find plenty with the Google image search facility. Go on the Google search page, type in your search term (“dog” for example) and click the images link in the top left-hand corner. When using images from the internet, always honour copyright requirements.

GOOGLE SCHOLAR

(http://scholar.google.com.au/ or type “google scholar” into the Google box.) This can be a valuable resource for more advanced research, when you are looking for academic and research information on a particular subject. Note, though, that Google will tell you where to find the information, but in many instances the information is not freely available without further ado.
Homeschooling to me used to mean that whenever I got home from work the kids were always there. If I had a day off they were there. I really didn’t have a lot to do with their education, but since leaving full time work due to injury I get more of a feel of what it really means to be a homeschooling dad.

Initially I thought I had to sit down with the kids doing endless, boring book work, but I am beginning to realise this isn’t what education really means. Education is really just living and doing. The best way to learn something is by doing it. If you need help find someone who can already do it, who can help and is sympathetic to your needs.

My kids come to me all the time asking for help with this project or that, or simply asking questions about all manner of things. I do my best to help them. I do recognise that I am not always sympathetic or tolerant, especially when I am busy with my own work. I think it is important to involve the children with the things that I am doing as well as taking an interest in what they are doing.

I have recently employed Roger to help me with various paid handyman jobs in the local area. I believe paying him an hourly wage helps him to value the work he does.

Roger and I are also studying Personal Computer Repair through a correspondence school and eventually we will start our own business. April and I are rebuilding a car, which she will be able to use when she learns to drive. Together we have assembled the major components and hope to have it up and running soon.

Thomas and I are slowly building a petrol-driven go-cart, and I have helped him build his cubby house. At the moment we are all busy building a workshop and games room, and the children are learning to competently use power tools and...
Are you happy with how your children turned out?

Yes, definitely. I enjoy the closeness and familiarity that I have with my kids, now aged 20, 24 and 26. I feel our relationship is one of friendship, rather than parent to child and vice versa. I find that I can learn as much, probably more, from them as they can from me.

Is there anything you would change about how you home educated your children?

I feel like I could have involved them more in my day-to-day life and hence spent more time with them when they were growing instead of rushing around doing everything myself. In spite of this I am amazed at the range of skills they picked up, especially their ‘give it a go’ attitude – everything is worth a try. This is something I didn’t consciously teach them.

How involved were you in the day-to-day actual homeschooling of your children?

Very little; Beverley was the organiser and main instigator of homeschooling activities. She planned everything and I was happy to help out when asked, especially doing science experiments and projects such as building models, electronics, etc. We did a lot of leisure activities together as a family and the children helped out occasionally with our building and gardening projects.

What advice would you give to homeschooling dads just starting out on this adventure?

Keep an open mind. Understand that everything your child does is educational. Don’t lecture; work from where the child is at, build on what he understands and use language and concepts he can grasp easily at whatever stage he is at. Don’t assume you can’t learn from your children. Really listen to them and be genuinely interested in what they are doing. Try not to take over but be a helper. You can’t teach anyone anything but you can help them learn.
"A great sense of self-worth comes from sharing important experiences with good friends."

What's On Around the Country

Please forward your news and information to Elsa:
news@hea.edu.au.

Volunteers required for roster for home education table at the Adelaide Education Expo 28 and 29 May 2011. Please email Beverley contact@beverleypaine.com if you can help.

Adelaide Education Expo
28 and 29 May 2011

With free entry, the Education Expo is an ideal fact-finding excursion for families wanting to find out about education choices in South Australia. It presents an excellent opportunity for us to let parents know that home education is a legal and successful option.

Through the national Home Education Association, Beverley Paine has booked a 1.2m table and is organising information and frequently asked questions leaflets to hand out. She has a small band of volunteers willing to talk to parents and answer their questions and is looking for more help to fill the roster so that volunteers can also spend some time looking around the Expo at the many educational resources that will be featured.

We're hoping to have two people rostered together for a couple of hours at a time. Children are not permitted to volunteer at the table but are welcome to attend the Expo. There is a stage and bookings for timeslots are being taken for a performance program – if anyone wants to organise a performance by home-educated students, please let Beverley know.

For more information about the Expo, visit www.edexpo.info.

Home Education in the News

Summaries of news items that may be of interest to Australian home educators from a variety of sources.


Recent entries include:

View a brief excerpt of the Celebration Youth Choir's inaugural concert (four of the students are home educated): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMWwwaBi26i

Watch an interesting TED talk by a young home educated student, discusses what is wrong with our food and his plans to become an organic farmer: http://www.ted.com/talks/birke_baehr_what_s_wrong_with_our_food_system.html

Home education in California. Whilst other US states have strict homeschool registration regulations, Californian home educating families have it easier. http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/education/schooled/article_fec2051a-04ca-11e0-b4ce-001cc4c03286.html?mode=story


The case for learning at home and in small, cooperative learning environments includes freedom of choice and students' individual rates of development. Read more: http://www.sierrasun.com/article/20101206/NEWS/101209931/1066&ParentProfile=1051

Choosing to educate at home: This widely-published opinion piece by freelance journalist Ainslie MacGibbon attracted many comments. The Sydney Morning Herald.

We welcome your contributions to this regular column on the HEA website. Please send to: news@hea.edu.au.
Homeschooling Team wins National Championship

The 2010 Australian FIRST Lego League (FLL) National Championship has been won by a team of home-schooled children from Wollongong NSW. Their achievement earns them the honour of representing Australia at the 2011 FLL Open European Championship in The Netherlands.

For the uninitiated, the FLL is a science and robotics tournament, run by FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) and held in over 50 countries each year. Teams of children aged 9-16 are given 8 weeks to attempt the following while adhering to the FLL’s guiding principles which include Teamwork, Friendly Competition, and Gracious Professionalism™:

a) **Robot Challenge:** Design, build, and program an autonomous Robot using LEGO® MINDSTORMS® technology, scoring points in a two and a half minute match. Matches consist of a standard set series of challenges incorporating the current year's theme.

b) **Research Project:** Identify a real world problem within the year’s FLL theme, and conduct an original research project on a potential solution or improvement. This solution must be presented to the community and every effort taken to see it become reality.

c) **Technology and Engineering:** Show a high level of skill and understanding of the technological and engineering principles used in robot design.

d) **Teamwork:** Complete a teamwork exercise and show a high standard of teamwork through the tournament.

The 2010 Sydney Regional/National Tournament was held on December 4th at Macquarie University. Over 50 teams, including Australian State Champions and representatives from New Zealand attended.

"Project Bucephalus" (named for the warhorse of Alexander the Great) was a group of nine Wollongong homeschoolers, aged 9-15, who entered the FLL as a "rookie" team, completely unaware of what they were getting themselves into. They worked hard during the preparation period, hoping merely that they wouldn’t embarrass themselves on the day - no one was more surprised than they when the team started doing WELL, let alone started winning! Despite their inexperience they stood equal with veteran teams with intimidating (to us) skills.

Of course the intimidation is greatly reduced when your opponents do things like sit down with you directly after they faced you in the Robot Challenge Grand Final (results still unannounced) and then chat away, comparing notes, swapping robot design tips, and laughing about the day until the trophies were awarded. To us, the atmosphere of camaraderie and enthusiasm was present the entire day.

Project Bucephalus came home with three trophies - 2nd place in the Sydney Championship, 1st place National Robot Performance Award, and the National Championship itself. The team also won a "People's Choice" award for their research project - a smart phone application for diabetics that could wirelessly interface with an insulin pump and take a lot of the hard work out of monitoring and managing the disease.


As a group we wholeheartedly recommend the FLL to any homeschooling group that is able to muster the tournament minimum of three team members. It can be hard work, and it can sometimes be intense - but in a good way. In our experience, the other teams go out of their way to be friendly, and show the FLL-trademarked "Gracious Professionalism". Above all, it's FUN.

(For more information, check out [http://respectlovelearning.blogspot.com/2010/12/about-journey.html](http://respectlovelearning.blogspot.com/2010/12/about-journey.html) for a mother-side view of the event!)

Fundraising will be running continually as we try to raise the money to send our team to the Netherlands. Any good ideas from the homeschooling community would be greatly appreciated!

Andrew Clark
"Project Bucephalus" Coach
Camp With Wings

Have you ever had an experience so amazing you were lost for words? Before I attended Camp with Wings I couldn’t have told you that I had. Well, maybe I could have, after half an hour and a good deal of racking my memory. But that’s not the point! True awesome experiences stick with you. They sit right there in your mind, they stay at the side of your everyday life waiting for their moment, the moment when you say: “Wow, yeah, that happened”.

A review by Lexi Smith (19 years, Pennant Hills, NSW)

Camp with Wings transforms my outlook; reaffirms my goals and blasts me into a new stratosphere of my life. This seems always to happen in the blink of an eye. One moment, I’m boarding a bus with 30 or so other Home Ed teens and the next, I’m back in my life, tired, happy and complete.

“Wow,” I think to myself. “So how did that happen?”

Wait, let me start at the beginning.

Camp with Wings starts every year in January and lasts a week. All the staff, junior staff and teens go off on a bus to somewhere gorgeous with cabins, a hall and a kitchen that Sue Belfitt (our amazing cook) inhabits along with her amazing kitchen hands. They cook up some of the most delicious fresh food I’ve ever tasted.

The next week consists of workshops put on by us, the campers. Every camper has an opportunity to share something they love with others. This year I did jelly making, one year I did poetry. Activities are structured into blocks, before and after lunch with at least two different things happening at once so you always have a choice.

There is ‘Well-being Time’, so named because everyone can do whatever they need to take care of themselves, whether it be resting or attending guided relaxation or just chilling out. At night we have drama games and bush dances and talent shows.

The best thing about Camp with Wings talent shows is that they are entirely friendly, uncompetitive affairs. The first year I went to camp I was terrified at the thought of getting up in front of other people and sharing my poetry. But I saw the way everyone clapped and cheered enthusiastically every time, no matter what. It felt just like a group of good friends sharing and laughing together. So I took a chance and performed my poetry and it was actually quite an awesome experience. It’s not every day I get a group of people clapping and cheering over my words. People came up to me afterwards to tell me how much they liked it. It kind of blew my mind. Compliments? For me? People told me they wanted me to share more. I’ve done so ever since.

Things sprout at camp. Ideas blossom. Friendships bloom. There are, all of a sudden, about 30 separate people to talk to. There is space everyday to get up and do things and talk the day away. So much of what makes camp isn’t about the structured time; it’s the space between them. The chance to have that deep and meaningful conversation down by the campfire or play that huge game of Frisbee out on the field, or go up to that person you haven’t spoken to before and say, “Hey, how’s it going?”

This comes to the heart of what I think camp is. It’s a place to grow. To be. To say: “Why not? Why not be that person I want to be? What do I have to be afraid of?” The answer, for me, is always found on the last night of camp. Every year, we have an intention circle. We all start outside the hall, holding hands and singing. We close our eyes and sing, and are led inside and we sit in a circle and everyone goes round, one by one and says “This year I am going to...”

And I sit there listening to all the cool things everyone else is going to do and I’m racking my brains and thinking, hey, actually, what am I going to do this year? And there’s something very powerful there, I think. It’s not what I want, or what I like, but what I do. What am I, me, with all my wondrous opportunities in life going to do with myself, starting now? And when my turn comes around and I say it out loud. It makes it real. It makes it happen.

The New Year doesn’t start until I’ve been to camp. So when I come home and I wash my clothes and bundle up the suitcase and put it away, I feel like I’ve finally started. I’m growing up, just a bit more every year. I’m more complete, more myself.

I have amazing experiences now. I have them every year at Camp with Wings.

Interested?

Please visit the website for more information: www.campwithwings.org
January 2012 Southend Camp, Millicent SA
Each year home educating families enjoy the stunning beachside environment at Southend. The caravan park—http://www.southendcaravanpark.com.au/—is surrounded by bushland, with the beach just over the sand dunes.
Price, $8 per person per night (based on 2011 price).
Facilities: Toilets (showers available from nearby caravan park for $3 per person if required.)
Booking inquiries:
Stephanie, thankyou4@bigpond.com.au

Unschooling Conference
http://www.unschoolingretreat.com
Friday 28th Oct - Tuesday 1st Nov 2011
Airlie Beach, QLD, Australia
International Speakers
The Martin Family, Wendy Priesnitz and our home grown Beverley Paine plus many more.

HEA Courses and Workshops
If you have a group that has a minimum of four participants interested in having an HEA FAQ talk, Introduction To Homeschooling Course or HEA Comprehensive Home Education Course in your area, we may be able to arrange a speaker to travel to your area, plus help with cost of venue.
Email admin@hea.edu.au.

Organise an Afternoon with Beverley Paine in June / July
Beverley Paine will be visiting the east coast between Sydney and Brisbane and is willing to speak at an afternoon workshop or full day seminar if your group can organise a venue and run the event. Email publications@hea.edu.au to discuss possible dates.

Home Education Camps
Interested in camping with other homeschoolers, or camping on other families’ properties or welcoming homeschooling families to camp at your place? The Yahoo group aussiehomeschoolcampers will help you stay in touch!
Please email details of camps to news@hea.edu.au.

Southend Camp SA 2012

A place to get support and information
NHN is a dedicated, password-protected online conferencing room. Connect in real time with other Homeschoolers, with webcam, audio and text chat. A sensational opportunity for geographically isolated families to connect and stay in touch nationwide. Use the room to chat with like-minded homeschoolers.

2011 Annual Cost only $10 per family.
ALL times are Melbourne times.
Join in for some or all of the scheduled times.
Online Conference Sessions coming in 2011
Join NHN to get more details.
See http://www.rainbowdivas.com/NHN.html for details on sessions. Join NHN Yahoo Group to access room and password details:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NationalHomeschoolNetwork/
NOTE: You will need to provide the requested information to become a member.

Home Education Camps
Interested in camping with other homeschoolers, or camping on other families’ properties or welcoming homeschooling families to camp at your place? The Yahoo group aussiehomeschoolcampers will help you stay in touch!
Please email details of camps to news@hea.edu.au.

National Homeschool Network
http://www.rainbowdivas.com/
Conference and workshop program includes Beverley Paine and Glenda Jackson among others. Bring a family activity to share for CampFest. Supervised outdoor physical activities for children. Swimming pool, access to Lake Hume, jumping pillow, playground, tennis courts, table tennis, quiz night, concert, disco and more.
Borders Star Gazing Astronomy Night.

Home Education Camps
Interested in camping with other homeschoolers, or camping on other families’ properties or welcoming homeschooling families to camp at your place? The Yahoo group aussiehomeschoolcampers will help you stay in touch!
Please email details of camps to news@hea.edu.au.
HEA Member Discount Subscriptions

The HEA’s been working hard to add some benefits for our members. This week we’re happy to inform you that the HEA has acquired some more subscription discounts for members. Here’s a list of the subscriptions on which you can get discounts and special deals by being a HEA member in 2011:

**ABC READING EGGS**
You can register your children for the ABC Reading Eggs online program for $19.98 per child, discounted from the normal $79.95. To find out more about the Reading Eggs program, visit [http://www.readingeggs.com.au/](http://www.readingeggs.com.au/).
To access the ABC Reading Eggs discount, go to [http://readingeggs.com.au/contact_us](http://readingeggs.com.au/contact_us), click on the parent link, complete the contact form and be sure to include your HEA membership number.

**GRID CLUB**
You can register your children for the Grid Club online learning system and receive a 50% discount off the normal price. To find out more about Grid Club visit [http://www.gridclub.com](http://www.gridclub.com). To access this discount, email Tere Latimer at admin@hea.edu.au.

**HAPPY SCIENTIST**
You can subscribe to The Happy Scientist and receive a 65% discount. To find out more about The Happy Scientist visit [http://thehappyscientist.com/](http://thehappyscientist.com/). To access your discount, email Tere Latimer at admin@hea.edu.au.

**HOTMATHS**
You can register your children for the Hotmaths online interactive maths for $28 per child, discounted from the normal $79.95. To find out more about Hotmaths visit [http://www.hotmaths.com.au/](http://www.hotmaths.com.au/). To access this discount email Esther Lacoba at hotmaths@hea.edu.au.

**MATHLETICS AND SPELLODROME**
You can register your children for 12 months with Mathletics online program for $30 per child, which is a huge saving from the normal $99. You can then also register for Spelldrome through your Mathletics account for $15 instead of the normal $45. For more information about Mathletics, visit the website [http://www.mathletics.com.au/](http://www.mathletics.com.au/).

**MATH MAMMOTH**
You can purchase Math Mammoth downloadable curriculum and receive a 20% discount off the normal price. To find out more about Math Mammoth visit [http://www.mathmammoth.com](http://www.mathmammoth.com). To access this discount, email Tere Latimer at admin@hea.edu.au.

**SKWIRK**
You can register your children for the Skwirk interactive online learning program and receive a 15% discount of the normal price. To find out more about the Skwirk program visit [http://www.skwirk.com.au/](http://www.skwirk.com.au/). To access the Skwirk discount email Tere Latimer at admin@hea.edu.au.

**STUDY LADDER**
You can register your family for the Study Ladder online learning program for 18 months for the price of a 12 month subscription. Study Ladder normally costs $88 per family for 12 months. This deals equates to a discounted price of $58.67 for 12 months. For more information about Study Ladder visit [http://www.studyladder.com.au/](http://www.studyladder.com.au/).
To access, register online with Study Ladder [https://www.studyladder.com.au/sign-up/parent-step-1](https://www.studyladder.com.au/sign-up/parent-step-1) for the 12 month subscription. Then contact them with your name and HEA membership number and ask for the free 6 months extension to be added to your subscription.

Hoping you can squeeze great value from these discounts!

If you have any suggestions for good subscriptions that would benefit our members or would like to help us assist home educators in other ways, please contact Maaike Johnston at subscriptions@hea.edu.au.
Help HEA help our members...

If you know of a business or educational resource that might consider offering HEA members a discount please contact secretary@hea.asn.au

Working from home and running a small business? Why not advertise it to other HEA members through our Market Place pages? To find out how, email Elsa at magazines@hea.edu.au

Downunder Literature

http://www.downunderlit.com/

English & handwriting resources introduce classic literature, rich in cultural heritage, and help teach the basics, with a distinct “downunder” flavour.