Home Schooling with the Support of Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE): Another Potential Educational Pathway in your Pocket
What Areas Will Be Covered

(1) The Study Where the Information Comes From
(2) Limited Research on How Parents Deal with Home Schooling of their Children with Disabilities
(3) Background of SIDE
(4) How two families dealt with home schooling their children with an ASD with the support of SIDE
(5) Explanation of the Home Based Learning Network (HBLN) by Hayley Ayers-Findlay (President)
(6) Questions & SIDE materials (examples).
(1) Where the Information Comes From

A constructivist grounded theory and autoethnographic study investigating how WA parents deal with the education of their child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) over time.
Study Details

- Conducted from 2005 – 2010 (GSE/UWA)
- 6 WA families from diverse backgrounds / metro regions / different stages
- Idiosyncratic ASD profile
- ‘Seeking progressive educational fit’ emerged as overriding social process (gaining, maintaining and creating)
- to maximize the progress of their child in all areas (unreliable - ever changing educational contexts)
- After EI 6 began mainstream 4 compelled to leave
Parents remove their children with disabilities from regular schools and home school because:

- ongoing negative socialisation
- failure to understand or accommodate child’s academic and social profile over time
- child and family experience too much unhappiness, anxiety, depression and stress
- traumatic experiences during which a ‘crisis point’ can be reached

(McDonald, 2010, Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Reilly, 2007; Rosendorff, 2007.)
How WA Parents Deal with the Home Schooling of their Children with Disabilities

- 9 Perth families over one year
- Parents experience a three stage process of ‘progressive modification’:
  1. Draw upon readily-available resources
  2. Draw upon support networks in a systematic fashion
  3. Proceed with confidence on the basis of having a set of principles for establishing a workable pattern of home schooling individualised for each circumstance
- Individualised instruction through ‘trial and error’ according to child’s abilities, interests, social needs and pace of learning (Reilly, 2007)
- Both families’ experiences echoed the research (unreliable inclusive practice, ‘crisis point’, individualised instruction) (McDonald, 2010)
Family 1

- Experienced unreliable inclusive practice over time at 3 state mainstream, primary schools
- Reached ‘crisis point’ when child expressed suicidal thoughts
- Organised her own individualised program by researching home schooling:
  - Focused on areas of interest
  - Accommodated learning difficulties (dysgraphia)
  - Expanded the curriculum – academic and life / social skills, health and sport (walking, biking, swimming), life skills (cooking, washing etc.) and interacting with the community (library, shopping etc.)
  - Gained academic program from SIDE
Family 2

- Experienced successful ‘inclusive’ private primary mainstream schooling
- Experienced continuous difficulties in two mainstream high schooling contexts (public and private)
- Reached ‘crisis point’ when physically assaulted on school bus
- Suffered too much emotional trauma and psychological damage
- Contacted HBLN and SIDE about home schooling
- Created individualised program through SIDE (academic) and HBLN (sport, recreational, excursions etc.)
How Families Deal with the Home Schooling of their Child with an ASD

Coping Research

- Vulnerable population - stress, depression and anxiety
- High attrition rates (esp. high school)
- Family sometimes isolated

Present Study (only two families)

- Created flexible educational ‘fit’ for child with an ASD over time to ensure progress
- Reduced stress on child with an ASD substantially
- Added another layer of responsibility onto family unit
- Exacerbated pre-existing imbalance of attention
- Mother’s comment

(Bromley et al., 2004; Gray, 2002a, 2006; McDonald, 2010)
The only problem with it is that it is a double-edged sword because then you take it all on and then it is your responsibility and you don’t have time for the other parts of your life. And I have found by taking on board everything with regard to Kim and doing home schooling and all the rest of it I am quite emotionally drained all of the time.
Seeking External Support

Families sought external support initially through:

- extended family (respite, cooking etc.)
- home schooling networks (HBLN)
- hired tutors

And during high school years,

- The Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE).
(3) SIDE Background

- Correspondence School established 1918 originally to provide schooling to WA rural areas
- SIDE – Leederville Primary & Secondary Schools, 5 Schools of the Air (SOTAs), 2 Indian Ocean Schools (Christmas & Cocos), School of Instrumental Music
- Services approx. 2500 students (primary & secondary) & offers a wide range of subjects.
- Service students – geographically isolated / illness / disability / G & T / those travelling / overseas postings / displaced / incarcerated / students at educational risk / curriculum options etc.
- Can individualise education: IEPs / flexible pace / curriculum / workload etc. (Lopes, 2009)
SIDE Requirements

- Entry requirements (family tutor, documented disability & a track record of inability to attend mainstream school)

- Family’s situation must support the ability to home school (unpaid, other children etc.)
How two families dealt with the process of homeschooling their children with an ASD with the support of SIDE

- Family supported by SIDE psychologist (initially & advocated throughout)
- Gained flexible programming and pace (organised around individual emotional and learning needs, interests and comfort level)
- Accessed a wide range of high school courses (WSA & TEE)
- Gained one-on-one support from appropriately trained teachers
- Given courses in booklet form (highly organised, visual in nature)
- Maintained personal contact with subject teachers by email, phone & visits
- Mothers’ comments
The teacher very quickly worked out what Paul’s strengths and weaknesses were and also he was cognisant of the fact that Paul’s father had recently left home and one of Paul’s interests was public transport. He thought it would be good for Paul to increase his independence by coming to SIDE a couple of times a week and to go on the train. And the first time Paul got on the train by himself without me I was standing on the platform with a mobile phone in my hand and the teacher was standing at the platform in Leederville with a mobile in his hand. I said, ‘He’ll be there in eight minutes’. As soon as he got there he rang me and said, ‘He’s here and we are just walking to SIDE now’. Now he only had to do that twice, wait for Paul at the station and after that Paul said to the teacher, ‘I’m independent enough to walk up to SIDE on my own, you don’t need to come and meet me at the station.'
Mother’s Comment

The SIDE way of learning has also suited Kim very well. The SIDE booklets have allowed him to read over sections of his course repeatedly if he needs to do so. He can also ring his teacher on selected days of the week. He knows exactly when all work is due because SIDE prints a yearly timetable indicating due dates for all assignments and tests. He gets on very well with his teachers and does not have to compete with other students for their attention. He also does not have to negotiate difficult adolescent relationships so that he can survive his secondary schooling. We have found that it is a myth that successful high school relationships are a forerunner to successful adult relationships. Our son is much more capable of being accepted in an adult environment than he would ever be in an adolescent environment. This has been borne out in his successful work experience placement at SIDE.
Benefits of SIDE

- Created/maintained educational ‘fit’ (highly flexible) to suit individual profile & progress over time
- Increased independence and self esteem
- Allowed social skills to be practised in supported, supervised adult environments (SIDE, work experience)
- Developed open and trusting relationships among the staff, students and parents (team approach)
- Worked together to organise tailor-made flexible learning programs
- Provided parental support and respite
- Mother’s Comment (McDonald, 2010)
Mother’s Comment

Paul caught the train twice a week, walked up to SIDE crossed at the lights and did lessons with the teacher, had lunch there and then came home after that. So, that was really good for me because that gave me my break. I was able to have a bit of time to myself and also know that he was in really good hands.
Student Outcomes (Family 1)

- Left SIDE age 16 - TAFE retail industry course for students with disabilities (Cert. 1 in Retail Operations)
- Successfully employed at supermarket chain
- Presently looking for paid work but successfully involved in voluntary work with children and dogs
Student Outcomes (Family 2)

- Achieved secondary graduation (modified academic and structured workplace learning program)
- Secured school-based traineeship at the local library (TAFE Cert. II in Library Studies)
- Nominated student who eventually won:
  - a Council Improved Access Award.
  - a District Vocational Education and Training Award (special needs category).
  - a National Australian Vocational Student Prize worth $2,000 (open category).
Student Outcomes (Family 2)

- Successfully completed mainstream:
  - TAFE Cert. III in Multimedia.
  - TAFE Cert. IV and Diploma in Computer Game Design.

- Presently completing mainstream TAFE Advanced Diploma in Animation

- Looking into job prospects / alternative educational pathways
Recommendations

- Parents have access to a government-funded home schooling consultant at the beginning (crisis point) and during home schooling:
  - Home schooling structures (including SIDE)
  - Links to home schooling organisations (HBLN)
  - Teaching techniques
  - Resources

- Fund parents to help defray costs - compelled to home school because of failure of the formal schooling system

(McDonald, 2010; Reilly, 2007)
Recommendations

- Relax entrance requirements of SIDE
- Increase home schooling research (students with an ASD)
- Disseminate information on Home Schooling (SIDE, HBLN etc.) to parents of children with an ASD.
- Provide Choice - all viable and reliable educational options available to suit individual circumstances over time (mainstream, segregated school sites, home schooling)

(McDonald, 2010; Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Reilly, 2007)


Lopes, E. (2009) *The Western Australian Schools of Isolated and Distance Education: Background, functions and issues (Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy Thesis)*. University of Western Australia, Perth.


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