

The fifteen years of being a home-based learner and the eight years of communicating with home-based learners across Australia through *Stepping Stones for Home Educators* have proven to me many times over that parents do not have to be certified teachers to be an excellent teacher for their children. I know from my own experience that certified teachers tend to set aside their classroom ways in order to be good teachers in their own home. Instead of being at the front of the pack, organising what and how they will learn, the parent/teacher becomes a true facilitator. The parent/teacher is bringing their full attention, all of their senses to their relationship with the child and making decisions based on their goals as well as the child's interests. The individualised learning program is developed to its fullest potential and with children who trust their parents, this can sometimes be at a very fast pace. The parent/teacher has the added advantage of having inside information about the child and doesn't have to cater for the needs of 25 other children at the same time. This allows plenty of scope for a lifestyle that will develop the child emotionally, spiritually and mentally — a well balanced learning program that is not restricted to the confines of a classroom and schoolyard.

Conscious parenting / teaching requires the blend of the use of the head and the heart. It can be done in isolation or in company, it can be done with a tight budget or with extravagance. The work place is anywhere the parent and child choose. It is a commitment to the study of life on earth and if you can do it with your fullest attention and at your very best level, then you are capable of doing anything! For me, parenting/teaching has expanded my horizons beyond my dreams.

What do I see as some of the essential ingredients for being a good teacher at home? First and foremost, that the parent chooses the position. There's no doubt about it; if the primary caregiver is happy and centred, then so is the rest of the family. The children's attitudes and beliefs are shaped by our responses to different situations in everyday life. If we're centred then we are likely to

handle any conflict or challenge with ease and simplicity. Another reason why home-based learning works best if it is chosen rather than forced upon the adult is because of what happens on another level — the adults take responsibility for their actions. The buck stops with you, and when you know that you behave differently.

When I chose home-based learning for our family, I made a career choice. That choice was to be our family's primary teacher for as long as my services were required or for as long as I could. The first thing I noticed when I made this decision was how differently I walked in our community. I can still recall the sensation. My eyes, although functional for thirty years, had been opened, so too had my ears and my social conscience. I was more aware of child friendly places, I noticed what people were saying about children and themselves and their community, I took note of their skills and talents. I was constantly assessing my community as a learning centre rather than just the place from which to gather food, socialise and be entertained.

**Set lofty goals and feel the joy in being with your children; relate to them as worthy beings, not burdens**

Turning within myself, I considered what qualities I would like to see in our children, what I hope to see in them as adults. Basically, I want to see them being the best person they could possibly be. This means living consciously, honouring their true feelings and being centred in love. As parent and primary teacher, this means that in every conversation with the children, I share my wisdom about the ways of the world. It means truly being with them, talking about life, being involved with them as much as possible, walking with them, sharing in their discoveries; speaking intelligently about their observations and listening attentively to what they say.

It helps to start off with at least a vague idea of your goals. As you become accustomed to your role as parent/teacher, your goals become clearer and with every day that passes, the ways in

which you can reach them become more apparent. Long-term goals help keep one on the path in times of confusion and difficulty. You can't feel lost when you know your purpose.

**Have faith in what you are doing**

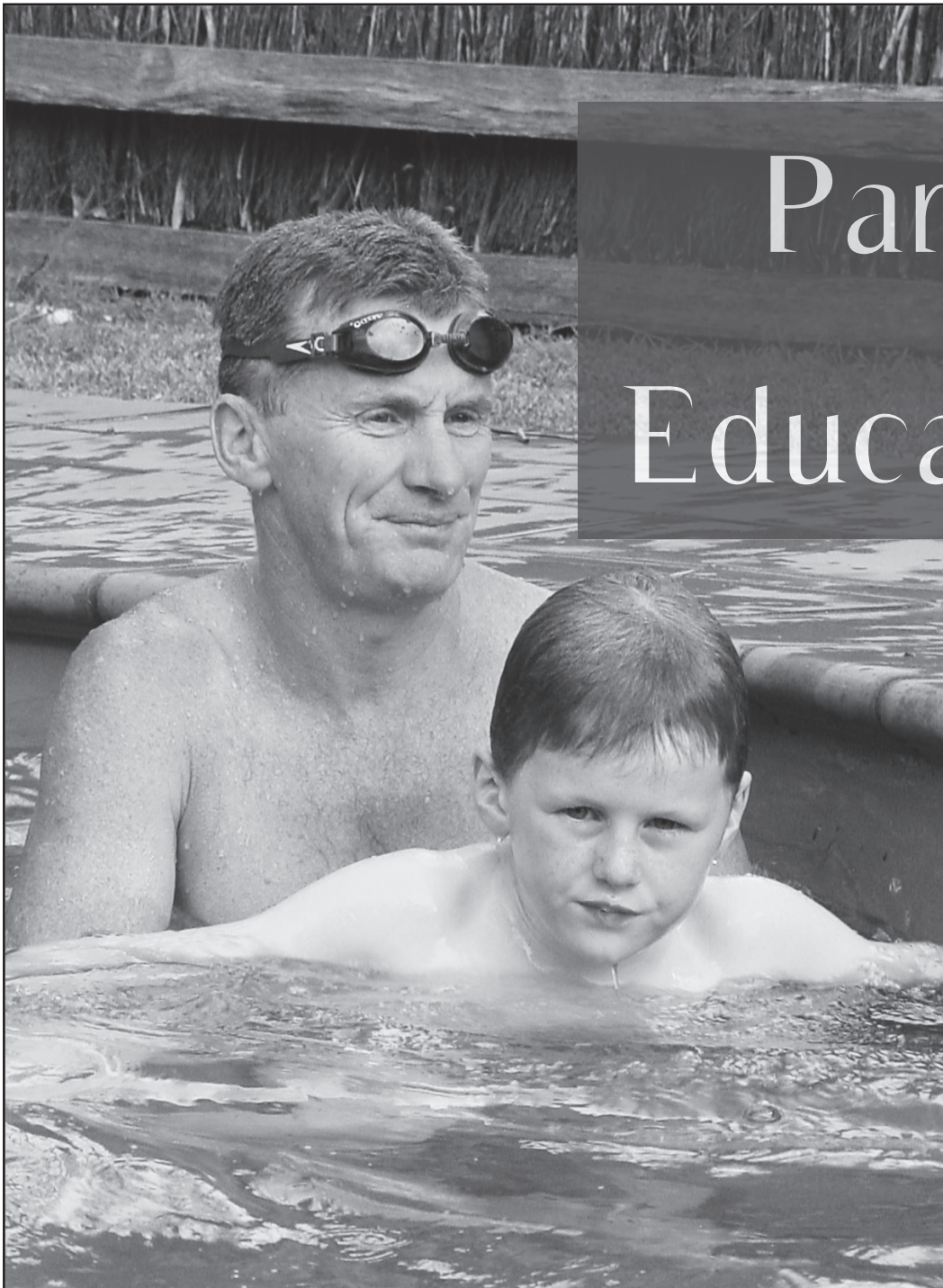
You've got to have faith in yourself. There are so many different ways to live on this planet. Be aware of your fears but don't let them undermine your faith. Comparing yourself to other families will undermine your faith in yourself. You can learn by observing other families but you don't have to be like them. Each family has its own personality.

**Speak from your own experiences**

In speaking with the children, whether they are five or fifteen, I don't have to know all of the facts beforehand. I don't presume to know all the answers. When they were younger it was easy to answer their questions because they were never seeking detailed responses. I only ever gave them as much information as they were asking for. As they've grown older, they are seeking more detailed responses than I can sometimes give. At those times, I stay within my own experiences, sharing what I know and then modelling how we could find out more information. In my role as facilitator, I am modelling how to use their world to get what they want or need. I don't judge myself as stupid or inadequate if I don't know the answers to their questions. I know a lot about some things and very little about other things but what I do know for certain is how to source information. With that particular attitude and skill, I can know anything.

**Accept that you are the learner as well as the teacher**

This leads to another most essential ingredient. When you choose home-based learning, it helps to accept that you are a learner as well as a teacher. The potential to learn so much about ourselves through consciously raising our children is enormous. You will



# Parents as Educators

By  
Grace Chapman

**B**ecoming a parent means emphatic changes in your life whether you are a home-based learner or not. Parenting does not have to be a thankless job that deadens the brain, robbing us of our youth, freedom and finances. It doesn't have to mean the loss of a career either. What it does mean is, being willing to shift our perceptions. As soon as I became a parent, I became our child's first teacher — an instant career change! Parenting is a 24/7 job that requires intelligence, stamina and fitness. Everything about it is challenging and its requirements change almost daily.

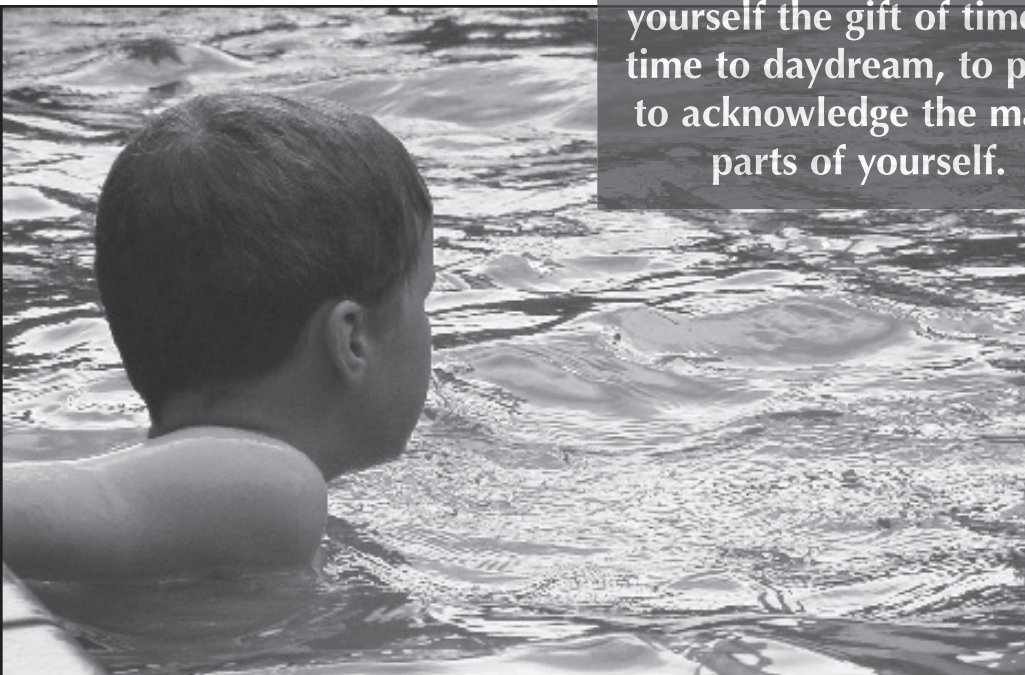
also pick up interesting facts along the way. As adults, parents have the advantage of experience of the world but it doesn't necessarily mean that we understand our personal doubts, fears and insecurities. We don't always know what life's about so when we place ourselves in the position of primary teacher of our children, then we are opening ourselves to opportunities for self-knowledge. Knowledge is power.

the fears, coming to understand the value and need of reading skills in our society, sharing concerns with respectful friends, assessing our relationship with the child and all of our actions leading to this point... all of this helps us to grow. Whatever we decide to do about the situation, we will come to know a lot about our beliefs and values. (Our

come from their and my interests. I was virtually always available for them. I had a couple of rules in place. We read together everyday after lunch and they contributed to household chores. By the time the youngest was seven, three more rules were in place; that they write in their personal diary each day; make music for at least ten minutes a day and do some number study at least three days a week. In her thirteenth year our eldest child expressed a need to be doing more study. She felt, either through a natural trigger or from talking with her friends who go to school, that she should be doing more. I listened without argument to what she felt and thought, then asked her to list what she does in a day. (Lots

— numerous forms of drawing and painting, sewing, cooking, reading, dancing, heaps of physical exercise outdoors, construction etc.) As a result she firstly appreciated just how much she was doing through her everyday living but she decided to add a few extra planned studies. I helped her draw up a timetable as a guide. The upshot of all that is that she appreciates just how naturally creative and productive she is in a day and she also sees that she can plan her experiences. For me as the parent/teacher, my head and heart sing with the joy of knowing that our fifteen-year-old daughter is easing her way into adulthood with a strong sense of well being and purpose.

**Give your child and yourself the gift of time — time to daydream, to plan, to acknowledge the many parts of yourself.**



### **Focus on relationships, the learning of facts will follow**

Up to this point it would seem that most of the learning focus and ingredients required are on a personal emotional level. That is correct and there is sound reason for this. Home-based learning allows for the development of relationships. When we are happy within ourselves, centred, we can do anything. As the children mature, the learning material does become more academic but we still continue to learn about the self through the study material. For example, what if your child is 9 years old and is not yet reading independently? This has caused alarm in many homes. Why doesn't our child read? Where have I gone wrong? What will the neighbours/friends/relatives think? Will he ever be able to read? The academic study is that of reading. The personal study is recognising your fears and doubts and values. Why am I so worried about my child's undeveloped reading skills? Why is being able to read by the time he's nine so crucial? Pursuing

beliefs form our values. They can be changed, based on what we know to be true for ourselves.) This leads straight into another essential ingredient for parents as teachers.

### **Observe and be flexible**

It helps if the parent is flexible and willing to use their observations of their children to guide them in the best way to facilitate the learning. The observations come from spending time with our children and truly enjoying their company from an early age. The time spent will encourage open communication about what interests them. Listening to the children creates a feeling of value and self-worth. They in turn become good listeners, mirroring the ways in which they have been treated. As they mature they will naturally take on more responsibility for planning their learning.

I raised our children using a natural learning approach because that's what suits our family best. That is, I set no lessons but allowed for learning to

### **Allow space for yourself**

Give your child and yourself the gift of time — time to daydream, to plan, to acknowledge the many parts of yourself. You are more than just a parent/teacher. It is crucial to value and allow for those other parts of yourself to shine. Plan to have some time out regularly. It makes you feel fresh. The quickest way to burn-out or to be overwhelmed by your responsibilities is to be out of balance for too long. Your children need time alone to be able to daydream and so do you. Home-based learning does allow for this because you really do have all the time you need to achieve your goals.

You can do it if that's what you choose to do. Get started with what you are familiar with and modify your program as you go. You and your family members will set the pace. Relax, have faith in yourself. It's a lifestyle choice.

